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Author Dave Clemence

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RECAPTURE

A
CLEMENCE DANE
OMNIBUS

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To the dear memory
of
ARTHUR CHARLES ASHTOM
these books of his daughter are dedicated

He sought not his own

THE WRITER'S PARTNER

THE artist, particularly the "decorator and colourman in words/" regards all other professional men and women with a certain greenish envy. They are free. They do their work as they choose, accountable only to their professional equals, subjected to the grumbles but never to the criticisms of their customers. But the artist has a partner.

The artist has a partner, who, though he would not venture to criticise the plumber's dealings with the waste pipe in the bathroom, never hesitates after one good hearty stare or ten minutes' uneasy attention to say exactly what he thinks of an Epstein bas-relief, a work by Stravinsky, or the 'prophetic' books of William Blake. Indeed, in the case of the writer, his partner even insists that he should choose the writer's subjects for him: he demands that they should be of 'universal interest': in other words, deal with one aspect or another of the writer's partner and his affairs.

He is generally obeyed. Seldom does the conscientious writer venture to discuss his own affairs, the problem of his double personality or the tricks of his exacting trade. This timidity perhaps accounts for another sad fact, the fact that most writers of books become in time reviewers of books. They say that they do it for their pockets' sake; but we may guess that they really do it to restore their

own morale. For only when they review may they desert the universal subject, their partner, for their own subject, the technique of writing. Then, and then only, will their partner the reading public listen to them with the same unquestioning respect which it accords its politician or its plumber.

And indeed it is easy to sound learned when a writer is speaking of subjects that are part of his necessary stock-in-trade, to listeners whose trades have nothing to do with literature. Such listeners are not old-established inhabitants, but occasional tourists and pleasure-seekers in the country of letters. Such holiday-makers are easily satisfied. The writer-reviewer may adorn a tale for them without feeling that he has committed any deadly sin against the craft. They have come to spend the day and to be shown round, and he shows them round:

"Is this the actual Grotto of the Belle Dame sans Merci?"

"Certainly. Here she wept and sighed full sore, and the entrance fee is two shillings cloth or three and sixpence leather-bound."

They pay their fee and in they go: and what they find in the elfin grot, glamour or mildew, is after all their own affair. The reviewer's job is finished when the tourist has been conducted to an alleged entrance into fairyland. But if Thomas Rhymer comes wandering by during one of these allocutions, will the writer-turned-reviewer be quite so glib? Will he not rather hastily retire to his study, to his inkpot and his own familiar pen, thanking the Muses that his real job is writing, not criticism, and that his partner is not his esteemed fellow-writer but his despised and unruly reader, that he is no specialist after all, but a happy empiricist, allowed to

expatiate on any subject he pleases so long as he satisfies not his rival but his partner, his public?

But what are his universal subjects? Every human being is worth hearing, for instance, when he talks of love. Cophetua's opinion of love is not by the dot of an "i" more valuable than that of his beggar-maid. Again, every human being is intensely interesting when he talks truthfully about his own attitude to money: and every man is interesting when he discusses women, and every woman has a right to express herself on the subject of men. There must even be some subject on which every writer, irrespective of personal achievement, has a right to speak. When can Shakespeare listen with respect to the opinions of Martin Tupper? On what subject will Edgar Wallace value a tip from Jeremy Taylor? When Louisa Alcott slips her arm through Sappho's as they wander through the asphodel, what subject are they discussing? They are talking shop, of course; but what kind of shop?

It seems to me that all shop is really indirect or direct discussion of the writer's partner, his Gentle Reader, his audience. The writer knows himself truly only when he looks into his public's eye. "Show me a man's friends and I'll tell you what he is"—might have been first said of the writer; for the most revealing fact about any writer is his following of readers. A man's friends, a writer's readers, are the mirror of Rabesquat. "For," says Meredith somewhere in his "Shaving of Shagpat," "when Rabesquat, the queen of illusions, called for her mirror, her servant brought in one hand a sack, in the other a tray."

"So he emptied the contents of the sack on the surface

of the tray; surely they were human eyes. And the Queen flung aside her tresses and stood over them. The youth saw her smile at them and assume tender and taunting manners before them, killing glances, till in each of the eyes there was a sparkle. Then she flung back her head as one that feedeth on a mighty triumph, exclaiming, "Yet am I Rabesqurat: wide is my sovereignty." But later, when the illusion of her beauty was dispelled, she was shown, like Duessa, for the horror that she was. Then the sackful of eyes saw the sight and sickened, rolling their whites."

The writer, who is of necessity the servant of illusion, cannot escape the reflection of this mirror, though he may find his image, in his lifetime at any rate, often enough and strangely enough distorted therein. Yet this mirror of reader's eyes is, in the long run, fairly reliable. It is at any rate a mirror to be found in every writer's study, labelled "Not to be taken away." Nor can the writer escape the reflection in his partner's eyes by turning his back and talking shop with his fellow writers. For shop may be the discussion of how the writer does his job; but the proof that he has done it remains with the reader.

Yet the gentle reader usually knows nothing about the writer's shop, and cares less. Indeed, I do not know whether it irritates the writer more to have the reader pretending to talk his shop, or to have the reader repeating placidly and for the hundred thousandth time the imperishable Shut-Sesame of the layman: "I don't know anything about Art; but I do know what I like."

But though the writer feels more strongly than he can express that his partner, the reader, should read and not be heard, yet that conviction does not prevent him from

trying to talk his partner's shop in his turn, For the writer knows well enough that while the public can do very well without reading any one of his productions, he will do very ill if the public does not read them. He knows that not only does he earn his bread and butter by constraining the reader to attend to him, but that (all bread and butter considerations apart) he is enabled to write at all only through his knowledge of his partner's character and ways of thought. He suspects, too, that, his partner being Everyman, and he but the member of a small gipsyish tribe, he, the writer, is always at a disadvantage. He has to write of every man and yet conform to the rules of his art. (For though every writer may claim to make his own rules, yet, having made them, he abides by them.) But what rules govern Everyman? We torment him and he heeds us not: we neglect him and suddenly his arm is in ours: and never do we know which way round it will be. He is an artless child, whose mystery no writer has ever wholly fathomed. He is a fool and a god, this other self of ours, our partner, our public.

Now, since our whole concern is with him, since we live by portraying him and his world, since our aim is either to amuse him or interest him, persuade, chasten, elevate, inspire, degrade, bemuse, tickle or enchant, and since he knows this, there should be an eternal spring of peace between us.

But is that the case? Far from it. Rather is there a perpetual quarrel. We seldom approve of him at all, and he seldom approves of us before we are dead. Then, indeed, his epithets are impeccable, and he bestows them with justice and discrimination. He is quite ready to shift the word "genius" from the tombstone of Hayley

to the tombstone of Blake once they both are safely coffined, and agrees placidly and cheerfully that starved Chatterton was indeed a marvellous boy. But the best he can do for the living when he is in a good temper is the adjective "clever": he loves calling his partner "a clever writer." And when that clever writer is restive under the salute he abandons the courtesies for expressions of true opinion—"highbrows," "scribblers," "loafers," "these writers," "Bohemians," "artistic temperaments," "people who don't know what an honest day's work means"—such are his favourite bestowals. And the writer, in return, remembers his Swift and ponders once more the advice to the young poet:

"Every genius seems to ride upon mankind like Pyrrhus on his elephant: and the way to have the absolute ascendant of your resty nag, and to keep your seat, is, at your first mounting, to afford him the whip and spurs plentifully: after which, you may travel the rest of the day with great alacrity. Once kick the world, and the world and you will live together at a reasonable good understanding. . . . A young bully begins with killing his man: and a young poet must show his wit as the other his courage, by cutting, and slashing, and laying about him, and banging mankind."

And so the writer bang. He calls his partner a Philistine, a No-eyes, a Caliban, a Man with a Muck-rake, and tells him that his brother-in-law is haberdasher to Mr. Spurgeon, and cries in the drawing-rooms, "O God, O Montreal." Indeed such exchanges of compliments were common long before the drawing-rooms. You may remember the flowery little compliment

Bishop Bury paid the female public of his day. It did not care for books, and so the books inveigh against—

"That biped beast," who "always jealous of the love of us, and never to be appeased with a frown abuses, and reviles us with bitter words, declaring us alone of all the furniture of the house to be unnecessary: and complaining that we are useless for any household purpose, and advises that we should speedily be converted into rich caps, sendal and silk and twice dyed purple, robes and furs, wool and linen, and indeed not without reason if she could see into our inmost hearts, if she had listened to our inmost counsels, or only heard the twenty-fifth chapter of Ecclesiasticus with understanding ears—"

and the passage in particular, no doubt, which runs—

"Give not water an outlet,
Neither to a wicked woman freedom of speech:
If she go not as thou would'st have her,
Cut her off——"

So much for the writer's point of view when he has well and truly lost his temper with his partner, the reader. But it is clear by the very bitterness of the book's complaints that they were conscious of the fact that the public, even the female public, had the upper hand: "If she could see! If she had listened!" The books are as resentfully conscious of their helplessness as if they were ghosts. And in a sense what else are they? What life have they till their partner lets them live? There is a charming anecdote in President Jacks' "All Men are

Ghosts,"in which is related the troubles of a group of spirits whose enjoyment of death is completely ruined by the fact that the house in which they live is haunted by that terrifying creature, a real live human being. They are shown sitting nervously round the fire, glancing over their shoulders now and again, fearful that he will appear; and, worse still, sit down through one of them. They discuss him in whispers and some of them pretend not to believe in him, and some say he is a mere thought form. Then one starts up and cries: "By heaven, the thing is there," and a young ghost of athletic build and truculent disposition whips a phantom revolver out of his unsubstantial pocket and fires six shots at the intruder; who does, indeed, feel a vague twinge at the impact, "like the sudden awakening of a buried sorrow."

Just such an uncomfortable flesh-and-blood creature to word-spinners and dream-druggists is the writer's partner, co-owner with him of the house of literature. Yet he, in his turn, is, I think, a little afraid of the writers; he looks on them as ghosts in his house of life, incredible creatures who think things that never occur to him, and say things that he would rather leave unsaid; mar-plots who are always insisting that there may be heaven, there must be hell, and will not for one moment be satisfied with his "Meanwhile there is our earth here. Well!"

But then it is so seldom "well" with the writer, at any rate materially, at any rate in the beginning of his creative years. That fact should be allowed to account for a good deal of the bitterness and the banging. A writer must live: and his livelihood is his public; yet the writer who is being for ever adjured by his paymasters of Grub Street and Paternoster Row "to give the public what it wants,"

may easily be driven to regard that partnership with the horror of a race-horse condemned to a dust-cart. And even when the writer escapes the hack-work, he may well fear to say, "I study my public," lest it be translated, "I sell my soul." But when even the hack-work is denied him, when no one will give him sixpence for his soul,, what then? What can a Chatterton do in self-defence but treat his partner, his public, with the same derision with which it treats him. It calls him "sullen and gloomy," and his work "stuff": it opines that "when he should have made a fortune he might indulge himself with the studies consonant to his inclinations." What can a young and starving god cry in answer but "literary grocers!" and "cully-mully puffs!"?

Out of such beginnings of poverty and neglect has grown, surely, this tradition (for it is an obstinate tradition), that the public is no more than the Magic-Ass in Grimm, and that the writer is its legal owner. He is to lay a cloth before it, and say "Brickle-brit," and at once the beast will open its mouth and let out a piece of gold and a bray; and the artist picks up the gold, but still considers the provider an ass. And when the writer is a mere apprentice who forgets the magic word or uses the wrong one so that the beast brays at him, but lets fall no gold pieces, then are any words bad enough for the ass? No indeed! Bang! Thwack! For the rule holds from generation to generation—laugh at the patient beast if he likes your stuff, and abuse him if he doesn't. Yes, even Shakespeare had his Whistlerish moments when he flung his pot of paint into the public's face. Is there not a laugh or at any rate a humorous concession to lollipop-loving children in "As You Like it"? Is not "What you will!"

Whistler, indeed, comes right out into the open with his—

"Triumphantly they cry . . . remember the 'one touch of nature' that makes the whole world kin.

"True indeed. But let not the unwary jauntily suppose that Shakespeare herewith hands him his passport to Paradise and thus permits him speech among the chosen. Rather, learn that, in this very sentence, he is condemned to remain without—to continue with the common."

And this flout is surpassed in turn by the nip which John Gay gave his public at the end of the "Beggar's Opera." Says the Player:

"Honest friend, I hope you don't intend that Macheath shall really be executed? . . . The catastrophe is manifestly wrong. For an opera must end happily."

The Beggar:

"Your objection, sir, is very just. . . . You rabble there, run and cry a reprieve!"

Over here in England, indeed, our producers delicately disguise the deliberate taunt by staging the play in the Dresden China country. But in the version played in Germany recently the adapters were bolder. For they dress Macheath in the clothes of the modern city rat, and gave him surroundings crazy but real, real as the slums and as sordid as sin. Having hunted their Macheath-Everyman in and out of every bolt-hole of misery, having trapped him and displayed him gibbering with terror

behind the bars of the trap, having dragged him from the trap to the gallows, having put the actual noose about his neck and begun to haul upon it, at that point they turned contemptuously to the audience and cried, not in words, but with every gesture of the players, every groan of the jazz that had supplanted eighteenth century tunes:

"Had enough? Thought so! You've got to have a happy ending, haven't you, poor dears? We know and you know, and we know that you know, that in real life this Everyman would be hanged. But you couldn't stand as big a dose of truth as that, could you? Well, don't worry! We'll fake up a ridiculous reprieve for Macheath and end with a dance. Does that please you? Of course it does. That's all right then. Eat up your chocolates and run home!"

It is a marvel that any public endured so peaceably such superb, such savage insolence. Surely no writer has a right to despise his partner so brutally, so to abhor in him his human griefs, scorn his brain's flow. For such scorn is dangerous. "On what I hate I feed not" is a proud saying; but ask those writers, great and little, who have preached too often from that text, concerning the end. Ask Rimbaud or Thomson, ask Nietzsche, ask Swift if the end be not a starvation? It takes a Shakespeare to survive writing "Timon of Athens." Indeed, the reader might almost fall into the belief that Shakespeare is lashing himself as well as Timon when he makes Apemantus declare:

"The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends."

For the last plays, with their evening beauty, their

touching Lear-like submission to new ways and new wants of a new age (do they not foreshadow the coming of the novel?), are surely a gracious recognition of the partnership that in "Timon" was all but severed. It is impossible not to feel that "Cymbeline," "A Winter's Tale" and "The Tempest" were especially written for "the middle of humanity."

But even as I think and feel this, I remember that I have heard wiser lips than mine dispose of the whole idea of a partnership between writer and reader as so much moonshine and cobwebbery. I remember in particular how a distinguished novelist of my acquaintance came down to lunch one day after a hard morning's work, and beamingly reported that his novel was complete at last.

"Why," said I, meaning no harm, "who's been reading it between now and yesterday?"

"Nobody," said he. "I tell you I've only this morning written the last word."

"Then," said I, "how can you call it complete? Finished, if you like; but a book is not complete, surely, until somebody has read it."

And indeed it seemed to me to be such a truism that I was as much amazed as interested to discover that he was outraged by such a notion. And this was his view, given in brief, for the argument lasted the length of his visit and recurs whenever we meet. That the audience, he said the reader, the, as it were, witness of the book, is a purely accidental by-product of a literary creation.

He argued that:

"The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to
heaven;

And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name."

"Nevertheless, from beginning to end of the process, no one," he said, "but the poet is concerned in it. When the poet, having given airy nothing its local habitation and its name, lays aside his pen, or says, 'I have done all I can,' and comes down to lunch, at that moment his poem, his play or his novel is complete. It may never be read by any reader; it may in the next ten minutes be destroyed by any of the Lord's weapons, from a flash of lightning to a housemaid: nevertheless it has had existence just as the North Pole has had existence long before an expedition discovered it.

"For," he finished, "though nobody ever knows my book, I know it: I know what its beauties and its uglinesses are: it has its life and its recognition from me. Nobody, after all, will ever know it as I do: so that you are even more crassly wrong than you seemed at first: for it becomes clearer than ever as we continue to discuss the subject, that instead of only beginning to live when the reader's eye regards it, at that moment the work actually begins to die. What the reader sees is not the eternal idea, but a local habitation of the idea—a prison, rather, which confines and in time will stifle the idea. Every new reader helps to hasten that death, that putrefaction of the imagination which Blake symbolizes in the changes of Urizen; till, by the time a century of readers have passed the contents of the book through their minds, it has become a mere fossil of itself. The idea, the living creature, taken from its own element, the writer's

mind, has long since expired from incessant handling. Consider in proof," he said, "the fate of such flowers as 'Lucy Gray,' or 'Tyger, Tyger,' slowly dying of much reprinting in children's primers. Has 'Toll for the Brave,' has 'Gray's Elegy,' has 'To be or not to be,' has the 'Quality of Mercy' speech escaped the deadening effect of incessant quotation by the writer's partner? Has even The Lord's Prayer altogether escaped? Confess," he said, "that touching destroys bloom, that strangeness is still a part of beauty, that to name a fairy's name is to give the signal for its evanishment! Confess that day by day and century by century the reader killeth that which the writer once made alive!"

It was a good argument, and almost it persuaded me; but it ignored one point. It ignored the fact that the creator, when in his private and soundproof study he contemplates his finished work and like the Lord before him finds it good, he has at that moment ceased to be a writer—he has gone into partnership with himself: he has become, indeed during the whole process of writing he has been his own reader, his own critic, his own public. When Kipling's journalist luxuriously re-reads at breakfast his own immortal account of the Gubby written overnight for that immoral ha'penny "The Bun," and cries out in ecstasy, "What a genius I was yesterday!" he is speaking, not as a writer, but as the writer's partner. Indeed, I imagine that few writers are untouched by that same spasm of humorous awe when they contemplate a printed and bound volume of their own work. They may not cry, "What a genius I was yesterday!" but surely they murmur, "Did I write all that? How ever did I write all that? What a marvellous energy I had!" and end sadly, "It's all gone, of course. I couldn't do it now." Indeed I

have observed that no one is more helplessly and humbly mere reader than a really fine writer when his eye is not actually rolling.

Nor do our very gods escape the double *role*. Philip-drunk hurls his defiance at Time and Chance and faithless human memory:

"Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme."

But Philip-sober knows that the best in this kind are but shadows, that New Place is better to live in than cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces and that it is much more sensible to leave money for a monument in Stratford Church than to worry about the power of the rhyme that will be engraved upon it. Everyman's rhyme—

"Good friend, for Jesus sake forbear—"

does well enough for Philip-sober.

But when we speak of the writer's partner we mean, after all, a great deal more than Philip-sober. The title of this paper should be, indeed, [£]the writer's partners.' For in studying a man's work, it is necessary to complete enjoyment not only to acknowledge the partnership, but to identify the particular member of the public, who, during this or that work, sat at his side.

I am not speaking, of course, of the obvious fact that the writer uses his partner, his public, as his model. I am speaking of a closer partnership than this. I suggest that the reader or the audience does actually have his creative share in the work done, that it is necessary that he should be present in the writer's study, sometimes at

his elbow whispering in his ear, sometimes at the other side of the writing-table dumbly asserting his presence, sometimes a Svengali reducing his partner to a mere writing-machine, sometimes no more than a Dora Spenslowe holding the pens. But he must be there; he must be visualized and realized, so that he may be consulted.

For writing is, after all, talking—talking on paper. You cannot talk without a listener, and there are few listeners who do not interrupt a story to ask questions, to make comments. And even if the writer contrives to keep his neighbour quiet while he does the talking, still he must first find out if he and his neighbour use a common tongue. It's no good quoting Japanese to a Cockney: to get his effect the writer hastily translates the phrase into the nearest Cockney equivalent. But if he is talking to a Cockney and an Oxford man, instinctively he revises his original translation, puts it into a form of speech acceptable to both. But if in his audience there is not only a Cockney and an Oxford man, but also a duchess and a Devon squire and an actor, and a cook and a child and a scholar who can read Japanese, then once more his translation must be re-shaped. For all these minds rush into partnership with the writer, all their varying forms of expression clamour for consideration. If the writer can preserve the truth of his translation from the Japanese of his own mind and yet convey that truth to all these minds, then, I suppose, he is the great writer, the writer with universal appeal. Anyone can write for one partner; every genuine love-letter is literature; but to translate the phrases of his own spirit into words that satisfy a whole people—that is matter for a Shakespeare, whose partner was a Mr. W. H— or a dark lady or a queen or a scold or a handful of actors; but whose

partner also was the Elizabethan age.

But of course it is never fair to quote Shakespeare. Perhaps it is unfair to quote even the dramatists; for it is so obvious that no playwright can afford to dot an "i" or cross a "t" without finding out what his audience's reaction will be, any more than a speaker can afford to embark upon his theme without preliminaries which will enable him to test the pitch of the hall, the quality of the lighting, and discover by the occasional rustle and flutter of a programme, or shifting of a chair, which are the sympathetic patches in the hall and which the potential coughers with trains to catch. Every speaker knows that though he may be too short-sighted to recognize any face in his audience, yet, in the first few moments he has instinctively sought and identified in that sea of pink and grey the friendly blurs that he relies on to help him through the ordeal of continued speech. Every speaker knows, too, how suddenly he will feel in his audience a quiver of hostility or an irradiation of understanding. The speaker feels it as clearly as the bather swimming into a cold or warm streak of water: and instantly in response he rephrases his sentence, re-clothes his idea, skips his dangerous paragraph, or, bracing himself to the task, directs all that he possesses in the way of will-power, force, persuasion, humour, or, if that fails, sheer audacity, upon the danger-zone, in order to conciliate, ensnare, overcome and draw across to him the rebels against his will: for well he knows that without their active co-operation in what he is saying he might as well save his breath to cool his porridge.

And if the speaker (who is the writer in the easiest stage of his job) must never forego this intense awareness of the audience, how much more does the playwright need

to be aware of it! He cannot depend, as the speaker can, on the guidance of his partner's actual presence; the contact is at second-hand. He must delegate his ideas and his persuasions to his actor, who, on the other hand, is far less free than the speaker. He has personality, but his tongue is bridled: he must abide by his party. He, of course, must be equally alive to the friendly and the hostile elements in the audience, must learn to know, so swiftly, from which brains the silent questions are coming, from which the derision, where there is indifference, where there is enthusiasm, where there is dislike. And he will know. Instinctively he modifies the treatment of a part in response to the changing desires of changing audiences: he will play for laughs one night, for tears another: he will emphasize the subtleties or the strengths of the principal situations at will, once he has laid his hand upon the pulse of the house. But these modifications are hair-fine: often enough only a professional who knew the play well would be aware of them. In the main the actor has to rely, not on his own sense of the house, but on his playwright's original prevision. If he has not budgeted for all emergencies, has not imaginatively seen his audience on Monday night and on Saturday matinee, in St. James's Theatre or on Brighton Pier, then his partner, the actor, will know it and his partner the audience will know it and both will resent it with fury. How dare any playwright say, "What I have written I have written." He may delibit,"ately flout his audience: that is another matter: that is his personal risk; but not unless he has visualized his partner's reaction to the flout. Only truth stings. If the playwright tries to cheek his partner before he understands him his play won't be an exploding

bomb, but a pricked bubble.

Now if the playwright, in spite of his helper, his flesh and blood player, needs so badly the close companionship of his partner during the writing of his play, does not the novelist need it still more—the novelist who has nothing to help him establish contact but black marks on white paper? He, more than all other writers, should welcome his partner as a good ghost. And, indeed, in the past, the reader has been thus welcomed: or met, at worst, with that flood of invective which is as complimentary as welcome. Hate or love, the writers, our fathers never dreamed of denying the reader his place in the workroom. Art for art's sake to Elizabethans, to Georgians, to Victorians, at any rate to early Victorians, would be a phrase more strange than true. And these writers did more than reserve a place for the reader in the study: an occasional call was not enough for them. They went out into the highways and hedges, and compelled their partner to come in: and once in they would begin by sitting down and explaining to him in detail what they were going to do and why they were going to do it: and even then break off every half chapter or so to argue a point of taste, or apologize for the eccentricities of one of the characters. And, at the finish, they would thank him for his attention and his interest, and arrange for a fresh sitting on the morrow before they wished him a civil good-day. Sometimes, indeed, they were downright arbitrary in their insistence on his co-operation. The late Victorian aesthete may cry: "It is indeed high time we cast aside the weary weight of responsibility and co-partnership"—not so the Elizabethan story-teller. Do you remember how Robert Greene collars his partner, drags him into the writing-room, bumps him into a chair

and dares him to stir until he has helped Greene to compose the *Life and Death of Ned Browne*.

"And for Ned Browne ... he was a man infamous for his bad course of life, and well known about London. . . . But at last he leapt at a daisy for his loose kind of life; and therefore imagine you now see him in his own person, standing in a great bay window with a halter about his neck, ready to be hanged."

"Therefore imagine!" Inky Greene, his hot hand clutching his partner's collar, stands over him, shaking him into attention? "Therefore imagine!"

And Swift and Defoe buttonholed the reader as implacably as an Ancient Mariner: and Fielding has his comfortable pauses to discuss with a chuckle his own methods and opinions: and isn't Jane Austen smiling at her partner when she stops for a moment in the writing of *Mansfield Park*, and stretching her cramped fingers exclaims:

"Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery¹ I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can."

As for Thackeray, he and his partner play a series of cricket matches with the story for ball, and the entire British public fielding:

"I throw out these questions for the intelligent reader to answer."

"Dear brethren, let us tremble before these august portals."

"Our surprised story now finds itself for a moment

among very famous events and personages, and hanging on to the skirts of history."

"I hope the reader has much too good an opinion of Colonel and Mrs. Crawley to suppose that they would ever have dreamed of paying a visit to so remote a district as Bloomsbury."

"Ladies, are you aware that the great Pitt lived in Baker Street? What would your grandmothers not have given to be asked to Lady Hester's parties in that now decayed mansion?—I have dined in it—*moi qui vous park:*"

But Thackeray was a townsman and a wit: he had the talker's gift. Now Charlotte Bronte, on the other hand, was a shy woman. You would think that she at any rate, might prefer to keep her study inviolate. Yet Jane Eyre's last chapter begins, "Reader, I married him!" Which goes to show that though elsewhere Charlotte Bronte calls her partner "a vague personification," he was yet a phantasm trusted and beloved.

Dickens, indeed, so well understood his public, so identified himself with it, that when he wanted, as he often did, to make it drunk, drunk with pity or indignation or horror, he not infrequently got drunk with it, and in the mood would create a Little Nell or drown a Quilp not only in the Thames, but in blank verse:

"It toyed and sported with its ghastly freight,
Now bruising it against the shiny piles,
Now hiding it in mud or long rank grass."

Yes, the writer's partner could actually be too strong, even for Dickens. I confess that I like to see him thus asserting himself, for a change, instead of cowering as he

usually does under "Therefore imagine!" and recently he has asserted himself to some purpose.

Years ago one would have said that the partnership was in no healthy state: that there was no show of love or hate between the partners, but on either side indifference. At times indeed it seemed as if the writer were not only trying to do without his partner, but also trying to do without himself. Little novels floated in and out of the bookshops like little worlds that existed in an air, a time, and a space of their own. And the more these little worlds professed atheism, the better pleased the gods who created them appeared to be. The more carefully a book was written, the more exquisite its polish, the less did it betray the personality which created it, the less was the reader allowed to share in the creation. Even to-day certain literary cliques appear to regard the reader's show of interest in the book he is to buy as an impertinence. For in comes the old-fashioned hungry reader, whistling his favourite tune:

"When I was in the low country,
When I was in the low country,
What slices of pudding and pieces of bread
My mother gave me when I was in need"—

and, rapping on the counter:

"I should like to buy a loaf of bread, please," says the reader.

"Don't stock it," returns the writer, yawning. "But I can let you have some Chinese birds' nests."

"Are they equally nourishing?" asks the reader, timidly.

"I don't know, I'm sure," says the writer, "but they're Chinese. Take 'em or leave 'em."

The reader leaves them. He goes elsewhere for what he wants, and the "regrettable fashion for long novels," as a hurried critic calls it, has been the result. For he knows what he wants, this "middle of humanity." A lady sakf once of *Alps and Sanctuaries* that she could hear Butler talking to her all the time: and Butler said that no criticism of his books had ever pleased him better. It is that communication between himself and his writer which the reader needs. To the writer who will re-establish such communication he confides his real longing, which is for a story, a good story, a good long story. He adds pathetically that he doesn't mind how well it is written so long as the story is there. But if he cannot have his story and his welcome, he will go elsewhere for it. If his partner becomes too remote for him, then he will join up with those young vulgarians, the modern shocker-writer and the modern film-writer, who are as anxious to please him as once his old partner used to be. For indeed, he concludes, he was good enough for Shakespeare once, and then he mutters something absurd about the end of Hamlet being written especially for him.

•Absurd it is: but, like many absurdities, true. For if you put aside the major miracle, which is the creation of the scene at all, then you are struck at once by a minor miracle, the miracle of the fact that the writer, at such a moment of creative imagining, had time to think for his partner, to realize his state of mind and put into the mouths of his players words which, while they express all that the writer wants them to express, also say for the

audience that which, by this time, the different parts of it passionately desire to have said.

There will always be some few to whom any words at all at such a moment are sacrilege. For them the line is breathed, "The rest is silence." There will be many whose keen but easier sympathy demands instant expression. For them Horatio speaks—"Good-night, sweet prince." There remains the large part of the audience who have been moved by a gallant tale well told; but who see no more than that the sight is dismal: and for them the ambassador speaks; while for each and all speaks Fortinbras, saying that the play is over but that life goes on, and that it is time to go home to life again:

" Take up the bodies! Bid the soldiers shoot."

There is some phrase or other about the gift of writing that Goethe puts into the mouth of Tasso. He makes him rejoice that—While Everyman gropes dumbly through the dark, some god gives to a writer the power of saying how he suffers.

But when the writer says this, he speaks for his partner as well as for himself; and his partner tells him the half of what he must say.

Regiment of Women

A NOVEL

CHAPTER I

THE school secretary pattered down the long corridor and turned into a class-room.

The room was a big one. There were old-fashioned casement windows and distempered walls; the modern desks, ranged in double rows, were small and shallow, scarred, and incredibly inky. In the window-seats stood an over-populous fish-bowl, two trays of silkworms, and a row of experimental jam-pots. There were pictures on the walls—*The Infant Samuel* was paired with *Cherry Ripe*, and Alfred, in the costume of Robin Hood, conscientiously ignored a neat row of halfpenny buns. The form was obviously a low one.

Through the opening door came the hive-like hum of a school at work, but the room was empty, save for a mistress sitting at the raised desk, idle, hands folded, ominously patient. A thin woman, undeveloped, sallow-skinned, with a sensitive mouth, and one eyes that were bold and shining.

They narrowed curiously at sight of the new-comer, but she was greeted with sufficient courtesy.

"Yes, Miss Vigers?"

Henrietta Vigers was spare, precise, with pale, twitching eyes and a high voice. Her manner was self-sufficient, her speech deliberate and unnecessarily correct: her effect was the colourless obstinacy of an elderly mule. She stared about her inquisitively.

"Miss Hartill, I am looking for Milly Fiske. Her mother has telephoned—Where is the class? I can't be mistaken. It's a quarter to one. You take the Lower Third from twelve-fifteen, don't you?"

"Yes," said Clare Hartill.

"Well, but—where is it?" The secretary frowned suspiciously. She was instinctively hostile to what she did not understand.

"I don't know," said Clare sweetly.

Henrietta gaped. Clare, justly annoyed as she was, could not but be grateful to the occasion for providing her with amusement. She enjoyed baiting Henrietta.

"I should have thought you could tell me. Don't you control the time-table? I only know"—her anger rose again—"that I have been waiting here since a quarter past twelve. I have waited quite long enough, I think. I am going home. Perhaps you will be good enough to enquire into the matter,"

"¹¹ But haven't you been to look for them?" began Henrietta perplexedly.

"No," said Clare. "I don't, you know. I expect people to come to me. And I don't like wasting my time." Then, with a change of tone, "Really, Miss Vigors, I don't know whose fault it is, but it has no business to happen. The class knows perfectly well that it is due here. You must see that I can't run about looking for it."

"Of course, of course!" Henrietta was taken aback. "But I assure you that it's nothing to do with me. I have rearranged nothing. Let me see—who takes them before you?"

Clare shrugged her shoulders.

"How should I know? I hardly have time for my own classes——"

Henrietta broke in excitedly.

"It's Miss Durand! I might have known. Miss Durand, naturally. Miss Hartill, I will see to the matter at once. It shall not happen again. I will speak to Miss Marsham. I might have known."

"Miss Durand?" Clare's annoyance vanished. She looked interested and a trifle amused. "That tall girl with the yellow hair? I've heard about her. I haven't spoken to her yet, but the children approve, don't they?" She laughed pointedly and Henrietta flushed. "I rather like the look of her."

"Do you?" Henrietta smiled sourly. "I can't agree. A most unsuitable person. Miss Marsham engaged her without consulting me—or you either, I suppose? The niece or daughter or something, of an old mistress. I wonder you didn't hear—but of course you were away the first fortnight. A terrible young woman—boisterous—undignified—a bad influence on the children!"

Clare's eyes **narrowed again.**

"Are you sure? The junior classes are working quite as well as usual—better indeed. I've been surprised. Of course, to-day——"

"To-day is an example. She has detained them, I suppose. It has happened before—five minutes here—ten there—every one is complaining. Really—I shall speak to Miss Marsham."

"Of course, if that's the case, you had better," said Clare, rather impatiently, as she moved towards the door. She regretted the impulse that had induced her to explain matters to Miss Vigers. If it did not suit her (Dignity to go in search of her errant pupils, still less did it accord with a complaint to the fidgety secretary. She should have managed the affair for herself. However—it could not be helped. . . . Henrietta Vigers was looking important. . . . Henrietta Vigers would enjoy baiting the new-comer—what was her name—Durand? Miss Durand would submit, she supposed. Henrietta was a petty tyrant to the younger mistresses, and Clare Hartill was very much aware of the fact. But the younger mistresses did not interest her; she was no more than idly contemptuous of their flabbiness. Why on earth had none of them appealed to the head mistress? But the new assistant was a spirited-looking creature. . . . Clare had noticed her keen nostrils—nothing sheepish there. . . . And Henrietta disliked her—distinctly a point in her favour. . . . Clare suspected that trouble might yet arise. . . . She paused uncertainly. Even now she might herself interfere. . . . But Miss Durand had certainly had no right to detain Clare's class. . . . It was gross carelessness, if not impertinence. . . . Let her fight it out with Miss Vigers. . . . Nevertheless—she wished her luck. . . .

With another glance at her watch, and a cool little nod to her colleague, she left the class-room, and was shortly setting out for her walk home.

Henrietta looked after her with an angry shrug.

For the hundredth time she assured herself that she was submitting positively for the last time to the dictates of Clare Hartill; that such usurpation was not to be borne. . . . Who, after all, had been Authority's right hand for the last twenty years? Certainly not Clare Hartill. . . . Why, she could recall Clare's first term, a bare eight years ago! She had disliked her less in those days; had respected her as a woman who knew her business. . . . The school had been going through a lean year, with Miss Marsham, the head mistress, seriously ill; with

a weak staff, and girls growing riotous and indolent. So lean a year, indeed, that Henrietta, left in charge, had one day taken a train and her troubles to Bournemouth, and poured them out to Authority's bath-chair. And Edith Marsham, the old war-horse, had frowned and nodded, and chuckled, and sent her home again, no wiser than she came. But a letter had come for her later, and the bearer had been a quiet, any-aged woman with disquieting eyes. They had summed Henrietta up, and Henrietta had resented it. The new assistant, given, according to instructions, a free hand, had gone about her business, asking no advice. But there had certainly followed a peaceful six months. Then had come speech-day and Henrietta's world had turned upside down. She had not known such a speech-day for years. Complacent parents had listened to amazingly efficient performances—the guest of honour had enjoyed herself with obvious, naive surprise: there had been the bomb-shell of the lists. Henrietta had nothing to do with the examinations, but she knew such a standard had not been reached for many a long term. And the head mistress, restored and rubicund, had alluded to her, Henrietta's, vice-regency in a neat little speech. She had received felicitations, and was beginning, albeit confusedly, to persuade herself that the stirring of the pie had been indeed due to her own forefinger, when the guests left, and she had that disturbing little interview with her principal.

Edith Marsham had greeted her vigorously. She was still in her prime then, old as she was. She had another six years before senility, striking late, struck heavily.

"Well—what do you think of her, eh? I hope you were a good girl—did as she told you?"

Henrietta had flushed, resenting it that Miss Marsham, certainly a head mistress of forty years' standing, should, as she aged, treat her staff more and more as if it were but a degree removed from the Upper Sixth. The younger women might like it, but it did not accord with Henrietta's notions of her own dignity. She was devoutly thankful that Miss Marsham reserved her freedom for private interviews; had, in public at least, the grand manner. Yet she had a respect for her; knew her dimly for a notable dame, who could have coerced a recalcitrant cabinet as easily as she bullied the school staff.

She had rubbed her hands together, shrewd eyes a-twinkle.

" I knew what I was doing ! How long have you been with me, Henrietta] Twelve years, eh ? Ah, well, it's longer ago than that. Let me see—she's twenty-eight now, Clare Hartill—and she left me at sixteen. A responsibility, a great responsibility. An orphan—too much money. A difficult child—I spent a lot of time on her, and prayer too, my dear. Well, I don't regret it now. When I met her at Bournemouth that day—oh, I wasn't pleased with you, Henrietta ! It has taken me forty years to build up my school, and I can't be ill two months, but—• Well, I made up my mind. I found her at a loose end. I talked to her. She'll take plain speaking from me. I told her she'd had enough of operas and art schools, and literary societies (she's been running round Europe for the last ten years). I told her my difficulty—I told her to come back to me and do a little honest work. Of course she wouldn't hear of it."

" Then how did you persuade Miss Hartill ? "

But Henrietta, raising prim brows, had but drawn a chuckle from the old woman.

" How many types of school-girl have you met, Henrietta ? Here, under me ? "

Henrietta fidgeted. The question was an offence. It was not in her department. She had no note of it in her memorandum books.

" Really—I can hardly tell you—blondes and brunettes, do you mean ? No two girls are quite the same, are they ? "

But Miss Marsham had not attended.

" Just two—that's my experience. The girl from whom you get work by telling her you are sure she can do it—and the girl from whom you get work by telling her you are sure she can't You'll soon find out which I told Clare Hartill. And now, understand this, Henrietta. There are to be no dissensions. I want Clare Hartill to stay. If she gets engrossed in the work, she will. She won't interfere with you, you'll find. She's too lazy. Get on with her if you can."

But Henrietta had not got on with her, had resented fiercely Miss Marsham's preferential treatment of the new-comer. That Miss Marsham was obviously wise in her generation did not appease her *amour propre*. She knew that where she had failed, Clare had been uncannily successful. Yet Clare was not aggressively efficient: indeed it was a grievance that she was so apparently casual, so gracefully indifferent. But, as if it

were a matter of course, she did whatever she set out to do so much better, so much more graphically than it had ever been done before, that inevitably she attracted disciples. But Henrietta's grievance went deeper. She denied her any vestige of personal charm, and at the same time insisted fiercely that she was an unscrupulous woman, in that she used her personal charm to accomplish her aims : her aims, hi Henrietta's eyes, being the ousting of the secretary from her position of trust and possible succession to the headship. Henrietta did not realize that it was herself, far more than Clare, who was jeopardizing that position. Though there was no system of prefecture among the staff, she had come to consider herself responsible for the junior mistresses, encouraging them to bring complaints to her, rather than to the head of the school. Old Miss Marsham, little as she liked relaxing her hold on the reins, dreaded, as old age must, the tussle that would inevitably follow any insistence on her prerogatives, and had acquiesced; yet with reservations. Had one of the younger mistresses rebelled and carried her grievance to the higher court, Miss Vigers' eyes might have been opened; but as yet no one had challenged her self-assumed supremacy. Clare, who might have done so, cared little who supervised the boarders or was supreme in the matter of timetable and commissariat. Her interest lay in the actual work, in the characters and possibilities of the workers. There she brooked no interference, and Henrietta attempted little, for when she did she was neatly and completely routed.

But the more chary Henrietta grew of interfering with Clare's activities, the more she realized that it was her duty (she would not have said pleasure) to supervise the younger women. She had a gift that was almost genius of appearing among them at awkward moments. If a child were proving refractory and victory hanging in the balance, Miss Vigers would surely choose that moment to knock at the class-room door, arid, politely refusing to inconvenience the embarrassed novice, wait, all-observant, until the scene ended, before explaining her errand. Later in the day the young mistress would be button-holed, and the i's and t's off her errors of judgment dotted and crossed. Those who would not submit to tutelage she contrived to render so uncomfortable that, sooner or later, they retired in favour of temperaments more sheeplike or more thick-skinned.

To Alwynne Durand, at present under grave suspicion of

tampering with Clare Hartill's literature class, she had been from the first inimical. She had been engaged without Henrietta's sanction; she was young, and pretty, and already ridiculously popular. And there was the affair of the nickname. Alwynne had certainly looked out of place at the mistresses' table, on the day of her arrival, with her yellow hair and green gown—'like a daffodil stuck into a bunch of everlastings,' as an early adorer had described her. The phrase had appealed and spread, and within a week she was *Daffy* to the school; but her popularity among her colleagues had not been heightened by rumours of the collective nickname the contrast with their junior had evoked. Her obvious shyness and desire to please were, however, sufficiently disarming, and her first days had not been made too difficult for her by any save Henrietta. But Henrietta was sure she was incompetent—called to witness her joyous, casual manner, her unorthodox methods, her way of submerging the mistress in the fellow-creature. She had labelled her undisciplined—which Alwynne certainly was—lax and undignified; had prophesied that she would be unable to maintain order; had been annoyed to find that, inspiring neither fear nor awe, she was yet quite capable of making herself respected. Alwynne's jolliness never seemed to expose her to familiarities, ready as she was to join in the laugh against herself when, new to the ways of the school, she outraged Media, or reduced Persia to hysterical giggles. She was soon reckoned up by the shrewd children as 'mad, but a perfect dear,' and she managed to make her governance so enjoyable that it would have been considered bad form, as well as bad policy, to make her unconventionally an excuse for ragging. She had, indeed, easily assimilated the school atmosphere. She was humble and anxious to learn, had no notions of her own importance. But she was quick-tempered, and though she could be meek and grateful to experience backed by good manners, she reared at patronage. Inevitably she made mistakes, the mistakes of her age and temperament, but common sense and good humour saved her from any serious blunders.

Miss Vigers had, nevertheless, noted each insignificant slip, and carried the tale, less insignificant in bulk, in her mind, ready to produce at a favourable opportunity.

And now the opportunity had arisen. Miss Hartill had delivered Miss Durand into her hand. Miss Hartill, she was glad to note, had not shown any interest in the new-comer. . . .

Miss Hartill had a way of taking any one young and attractive under her protection. . . . That it was with Miss Hartill that the girl had come into conflict, however, did away with any need of caution. . . . Miss Durand needed putting in her place. . . . Henrietta, in all speed, would reconduct her thither.

CHAPTER II

Miss VIGERS hurried along to the Upper Third class-room. She straightened her jersey, and patted her netted hair as she went, much in the manner of a countryman squaring for a fight, opened the door, after a tap so rudimentary as to be inaudible to those within, and entered aggressively, the light of battle in her eye.

To her amazement and annoyance her entry was entirely unnoticed. The entire class had deserted its desks and was clustered round the rostrum, where Alwynne Durand, looking hushed and excited and prettier than a school-mistress had any business to be, was talking fast and eagerly. She had a little stick in her hand which she was using as a conductor's baton, emphasising with it the points of the story she was evidently telling. A map and some portraits were pinned to the black-board beside her, and the children's heads were grouped, three and four together, over pictures apparently taken from the open portfolio lying before her on the desk. But their eyes were on Miss Durand, and the varying yet intent attitudes gave the collective effect of an audience at a melodrama. They were obviously and breathlessly interested, and the occasional quick crackle of question and answer merely accentuated the tension. Once, as Alwynne paused a moment, her stick hovering uncertainly over the map, a child, with a little wriggle of impatience, piped up—

"We'll find it afterwards. Oh, go on, Miss Durand! Please, go on!"

And Alwynne, equally absorbed, went on and the class hung upon her words.

The listener was outraged. Children were to be allowed to give orders—to leave their places—to be obviously and hugely enjoying themselves—in school hours—and the whole pack of them due elsewhere! She had never witnessed so disgraceful a scene.

Her dry precision shivered at Alwynne's comscating adjectives. (It is not to be denied that Alwynne, at that period of her career, was lax and lavish in speech, altogether too fond of conceits and superlatives.) She cut aridly into the lecture.

"Miss Durand ! Are you aware of the time ? "

Alwynne jumped, and the class jumped with her.

It was curious to watch that which but a moment before had been one absorbed, collective personality suddenly disintegrating into Lotties and Maries and Sylvias, shy, curious, impish or indifferent, after their kind. Miss Vigers's presence intimidated : each peeping personality retired, snail-like, into its schoolgirl shell. With a curious yet distinct consciousness of guilt, they edged away from the two women, huddling sheepishly together, watching and waiting, inimical to the disturber of their enjoyment, but distinctly doubtful as to whether 'Daffy,' in the encounter that they knew quite well was imminent, would be able to hold her own.

Bat Miss Durand was self-possessed. She looked down at Miss Vigers from her high seat and gave a natural little laugh.

"Oh, Miss Vigers ! How you startled me ! "

"I'm sorry. I have been endeavouring to attract your attention for some moments. Are you aware of the time ? "

Alwynne glanced at the clock. The hands stood at an impossible hour.

"There ! " she remarked penitently, "it's stopped again ! "

She smiled at the class, all ears and interest.

"One of you children will just have to remind me. Helen ? No, you do the chalks already. Millicent ! " She singled out a dreamy child, who was taking surreptitious advantage of the interruption to pore over the pictures that had slid from the desk to the floor of the rostrum.

"Milly ! Your head's a sieve too ! Will you undertake to remind me ? Each time I have to be reminded—in goes a penny to the mission—and each time you forget to remind me, you do the same. It'll do us both good ! And if we both forget—the rest of the class must pull us up."

The little girl nodded, serious and important.

Alwynne turned to Henrietta.

"Excuse me, Miss Vigers, were you wanting to speak to me ? I'm afraid we're in rather a muddle. Children—pick up those

pictures: at least—Helen and Milly ! Go back to your desks, the rest of you." And then, to Henrietta again, " I suppose the gong will go in a minute ? "

She was being courteous, but she was implying quite clearly that she considered the interruption of her lesson unnecessary.

Henrietta's eyes snapped.

" The twelve-fifteen gong went a long time ago, Miss Durand. It's nearly one. Miss Hartill wishes to know what has happened to her class."

" My hat! " murmured Alwynne, appalled.

It was the most rudimentary murmur—a mere movement of the lips; but Henrietta caught it. Justifiably, she detested slang. She stiffened yet more, but Alwynne was continuing with deprecating gestures.

" This is dreadful! I'm awfully sorry, Miss Vigers, but, you know, we never heard the gong ! Not a sound ! Are you sure it rang? " (This to Henrietta, who never slackened her supervision of the relays of prefects responsible for the ever-punctual gong. But Alwynne had no eye for detail.) She continued agitatedly, unconscious of offence—

"* But of course I must go and explain to Miss Hartill at once. Children—get your things together, and go straight to the Lower Second. I'll come with you. Miss Vigers, I am so sorry—it was entirely my fault, of course, but we none of us heard the gong."

But as she spoke, and the girls, attentive and curious, obediently gathered up their belongings and filed into the passage, the gong, audible enough to any one less absorbed than Alwynne and her class had been, boomed for its last time that morning, the prolonged boom that was the signal for the day-girls to go home. The children dispersed hurriedly, and Alwynne was left alone with Henrietta.

Alwynne was grave—distinctly distressed.

" I must go and explain to Miss Hartill at once," she repeated, making for the door.

" You needn't trouble yourself," Henrietta called after her.

" Miss Hartill went home half-an-hour ago."

The irrepressible note of gratification in her voice startled Alwynne. She turned and faced her.

" I don't understand ! You said she was waiting."

" When I left her, she had been waiting over half-an-hour. she told me that she should do so no longer. Miss Hartill is

not accustomed to be kept waiting while the junior mistresses amuse themselves."

Alwynne raised her eyebrows and regarded her carefully.

"Did Miss Hartill ask you to tell me that? Are you her messenger?" she asked blandly.

The last sentence had enlightened her, at any rate, as to Miss Vigers's personal attitude to herself. She was perfectly aware that she had been guilty of gross carelessness; that, if Miss Hartill chose, she could make it a serious matter for her; but for the moment her apprehensive regrets, as well as her profound sense of the apology due to the formidable Bliss Hartill, were shrivelled in the white heat of her anger at the tone Henrietta Vigers was permitting herself. She was as much hurt as horrified by the revelation of an antipathy she had been unconscious of exciting; it was her first experience of gratuitous ill-will. She rebelled hotly, incapable of analysing her emotion, indifferent to the probable consequences of a defiance of the older woman, but passionately resolved that she would not allow any one alive to be rude to her.

And Henrietta, amazed at the veiled rebuke of her manner, also lost her temper.

"Miss Hartill and I were overwhelmed by such an occurrence. Do you realize what you are doing, Miss Durand? You keep the children away from their lesson—you alter the school timetable to suit your convenience—without a remark, or warning, or apology."

"I've told you already that I didn't hear the gong," interrupted Alwynne, between courtesy and impatience. She was trying hard to control herself.

"That is nonsense. Everybody hears the gong. You didn't choose to hear it, I suppose. Anyhow, I feel it my duty to tell you that such behaviour will not be tolerated, Miss Durand, in this, or any school. It is not your place to make innovations. I was horrified just now when I came in. The class-room littered about with pictures and papers—the children not in their places—allowed to interrupt and argue. I never heard of such a thing."

Alwynne's chin went up.

"Excuse me, Miss Vigers, but I hardly see that it is your business to criticize my way of teaching."

"I am speaking to you for your own good," said Henrietta.

"That is kind of you; but if you speak to me in such a tone, you cannot expect me to listen."

Henrietta hesitated,

" Miss Durand, you are new to the school——"

" That gives you no right to be rude to me ! "

Henrietta took a step towards her.

" Rude ? And you ? I consider you insolent. Ever since you came to the school you have been impossible. You go your own way, teach in your own way——"

" I do as I'm told," said Alwynne sharply.

" In your own way. You neither ask nor take advice——"

" At any late, Miss Marsham is satisfied with me—she told me so last Meek." She felt it undignified to be justifying herself, but she feared that silent contempt would be lost on Miss Vigers. *Alto*, such an attitude was not easy to Alwynne; she had a tongue; when she was angry, the brutal effectiveness of Billingsgate must always tempt her.

Henrietta countered coldly—

" I am sorry that I shall be obliged to undeceive her; that is, unless you apologize——"

" To Miss Hartill ? Certainly ! I intend to. I hope I know when I'm in the wrong."

" To me——"

" To you ? " cried Alwynne, with a little high-pitched laugh.

" If you will tell me what for ? "

" In Miss Marsham's absence I take her place," began Henrietta.

" Miss Hartill, I was told, did that."

" You are mistaken. The younger mistresses come to me for orders."

" I shall be the exception, then. I am not a housemaid. Will you let me get to my desk, please, Miss Vigers ? I want my books."

She brushed past Henrietta, cheeks flaming, chin in air, and opened her desk.

The secretary, for all her anger, hesitated uncertainly. She was unused to opposition, and had been accustomed to allow herself a greater licence of speech than she knew. Alwynne's instant resentment, for all its crude young insolence, was, she realized, to some extent justified. She had, she knew, exceeded her powers, but she had not stopped to consider whether Alwynne would know that she had done so, or, knowing, have the courage to act upon that knowledge. She had been staggered by the girl's swift counter-attack and was soon wishing that she had

left her alone; but she had gone too far to retreat with dignity; also, she had by no means regained control of her temper.

"I can only report you to Miss Marsham," she remarked lamely, to Alwynne's back.

Alwynne turned.

"You needn't trouble. If Miss Hartill doesn't, I shall go to her myself."

"You?" said Henrietta uneasily.

"Why," cried Alwynne, flaming out at her, "d'you think I'm afraid of you? D'you think I am going to stand this sort of thing? I know I was careless, and I'm sorry. I'm going straight down to Miss Hartill to tell her so. And if she slangs me—it's all right. And if Miss Marsham slangs me—it's all right. She's the head of the school. But I won't be slanged by you. You are rude and interfering and I shall tell Miss Marsham so."

Shaking with indignation, she slammed down the lid of her desk: and with her head held high, and a dignity that a friendly word would have dissolved into tears, walked out of the classroom.

CHAPTER III

ALWYNNB DUBAND was quite aware that she was an arrant coward. The cronies of her not remote school-days would have exclaimed at the label, have cited this or that memorable audacity in confutation, but Alwynne herself knew better. When her impulsiveness had jockeyed her into an uncomfortable situation, pure pride could always be trusted to sustain her, straighten her shoulders and sharpen her wits; but she triumphed with shaking knees. Alwynne, touchy with the touchiness of eighteen, was bound to fling down her glove before a Henrietta Vigers, and be ostentatiously ready to face cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music. But Alwynne, half-an-hour later, on her way to Miss Hartill and her overdue apology, was bound also to be feeling more like a naughty schoolgirl than a mistress of six weeks' standing has any business to feel, to be uneasily wondering what she should say, how she should say it, and why on earth she had been fool enough to get herself into the mess.

If it had been any one but Miss Hartill, with whom she had not exchanged five words, but whom she had heard discussed, nevertheless, from every conceivable and inconceivable point of view, with that accompanying profusion of anecdote of which only schoolgirl memory, so traditional as well as personal, is capable.

Miss Marsham, she had been given to understand, might be head mistress, but Miss Hartill was Miss Hartill. Alwynne, accustomed as she was to the cults of a boarding-school, had ended by growing exceedingly curious. Yet when Miss Hartill had returned, a week or two late, to her post, Alwynne could not, as she phrased it, for the life of her see what all the fuss was about. Miss Hartill was ordinary enough. Alwynne had looked up one morning, from an obscure corner of the Common-room, at the sound of a clicking latch, had had an impression of a tall woman, harshly outlined by the white panelled door,

against which she leaned lazily as she quizzed the roomful of women. Alwynne told herself that she was not at all impressed. . . . This the Miss Hartill of a hundred legends? This the Olympian to whom three-fourths of the school said its prayers? Who had split the staff into an enthusiastic majority and a minority that concealed its dislike? Queer! Alwynne, shrugging her shoulders over the intricacies of a school's enthusiasms, had leaned back in her chair to watch, between amusement and contempt, the commotion that had broken out. There was a babble of welcome, a cross-fire of question and answer. And then, over the heads of the little group that had gathered about the door, a pair of keen, roving eyes had settled on herself, coolly appraising. Alwynne had been annoyed with herself for flushing under the stare. She had a swift impression of being summed up, all raw and youthful and ambitious as she was, her attitude of unwilling curiosity detected, expected even. There had been a flicker of a smile, amused, faintly insolent. . . .

But it had all been merest impression. Miss Hartill, who had been, indeed, surrounded, inaccessible, from the instant of her entrance until the prayer bell rang, did not look her way a second time. But the impression had remained, and Alwynne, obscure in her newness and her corner, found herself reconsidering this Miss Hartill, more roused than she would confess. If she were not the Hypatia-Helen of the class-rooms, she was none the less a personality! Whether Alwynne would like her was another matter.

Alwynne, in the next few days, had not come into direct contact with Miss Hartill. She had noticed, however, a certain stirring of the school atmosphere, a something of briskness and tension that affected her pleasantly. The children, she supposed, were getting into their stride. . . . But she began to see that the classes chiefly affected were the classes with which Miss Hartill had most to do, that the mistresses, too, were working with unusual energy, and that Miss Vigors was less in evidence than heretofore; that, in short, Miss Hartill's return was making a difference. Insensibly she slipped into the fashion of being slightly in awe of her—was daily and undeniably relieved that her work had as yet escaped the swift eyes and lazy criticism. But she was also aware that she would be distinctly gratified if Miss Hartill should at any time express satisfaction with her and her efforts. Miss Hartill was certainly interesting. She had wondered if she should ever get to know her; had hoped so.

And now Napoleon Buonaparte and a stopped *clack* had between them managed the business for her effectually. She was going to know Miss Hartill—a justifiably, and, according to Miss Vigers, excessively indignant Miss Hartill. She looked forward without enthusiasm to that acquaintance. She did not know what she should say to Miss Hartill. . . . But Miss Hartill would do the talking, she imagined. . . . She was extremely sorry for herself as she knocked at Miss Hartill's door.

The maid left her stranded in the hall, and she waited, uncomfortably conscious of voices in the next room.

"Brand? But *I* don't know any——Drand! Oh, Durand! What an extraordinary time to——All right Bagot. No. Lunch as usual."

The maid slipped across the hall again to her kitchen as Miss Hartill came forward, polite, unsmiling. She did not offer her hand, but stood waiting for Alwynne to deliver herself of her errand.

But Alwynne was embarrassed. The exordium she had so carefully prepared during her walk was eluding her. It had been easy to arrange the conversation beforehand, but Miss Hartill in the flesh was disconcerting. She jumbled her opening sentences, flushed, floundered, and was silent. Ensued a pause.

Clare surveyed her visitor quizzically, enjoying her discomfort. Alwynne was at her prettiest at a disadvantage. She had an air of shedding eight of her eighteen years, of recognizing in her opponent a long-lost nurse.

Clare repressed a chuckle.

"Try again, Miss Durand," she said solemnly.

"I came," said Alwynne blankly. "You see, I came——•" She paused again.

"Yes, I think I see that," said Clare, as one enlightened.

Alwynne eyed her dubiously. There might or might not have been a twinkle in her colleague's eye. She took heart of grace and began again.

"Miss Hartill, I'm awfully sorry! It was me—I, I mean, I kept the girls. I didn't hear the gong. Really and truly I didn't. Honestly, it was an accident. I thought I ought to coine and apologize. Truly, I'm most awfully sorry, quite apart from avoiding getting into a row. Because I've got into that already."

Clare's lips twitched. Alwynne was built on generous lines. She had a good carriage, could enter a room effectively, Clare

had not been unaware of her secure manner. Her present collapse was the more amusing. Clare was beginning to guess that what Miss Durand did, she did wholeheartedly.

"I expect you're simply wild with me. Miss Vigers said you would be," said Alwynne hopelessly.

"Miss Vigers ought to know," said Clare.

There was another pause.

"I'm frightfully sorry," said Alwynne suggestively.

"Are you, Miss Durand?"

"I mean, apart from upsetting you, I'm so savage with myself. One doesn't exactly enjoy making a fool of oneself, does one, Miss Hartill? You know how it feels. And it's my first post, and I did mean to do it well, and I've only been here six weeks, and I'm in a row with three people already."

"How—three?" said Clare with interest.

"Well—there's you——"

"*I think we're settling that," said Clare, with her sudden smile.

"Are we?" Alwynne looked up so warily that Clare laughed outright

"But the other two, Miss Durand—the other two? This grows interesting."

"Well, you see," Alwynne expanded, "I had an awful row with Miss Vigers—and she's sure to tell Miss Marsham. I suppose I was rude, but she did make me so mad. I don't see that it was her business to come and slang me before my class."

"My class," corrected Clare.

"I wouldn't have minded you," said Alwynne, lifting ingenuous eyes.

"I'm flattered," murmured Clare.

"Well—you would have understood," said Alwynne with conviction. "But Miss Vigers—I ask you, Miss Hartill, what would be the use of talking about Napoleon to Miss Vigers?"

"I give it up," said Clare promptly.

"There you are!" Alwynne waved her hand triumphantly.

"But, excuse me"—Clare was elaborately respectful—"has Napoleon any traceable connection with the kidnapping of my class?"

"*Oh, I thought I explained." Alwynne plunged into her story. "You see, I was giving them Elocution—they're learning the *Incident in the French Camp*—you know?"

Clare nodded.

" Well, I thought they were rather more wooden than usual, and I found out that they knew practically nothing about Napoleon ! Marengo—Talleyrand—never heard of 'em ! Waterloo, and that he behaved badly to his wife—that's all they knew ! "

" The English in a nutshell ! " murmured Clare.

" So, of course, I told them all about him, and his life, and tit-bits like the Sevres tea-things, and Madame Sans-gene. They loved it. Arid I was showing them pictures and I suppose we got absorbed. You can't help it with Napoleon, somehow. Oh, Miss Hartill, doesn't it seem crazy, though, to keep those children at Latin exercises, and the exports of Lower Tooting, arid Bills of Attainder in the reign of Queen Anno, before they know about things like Napoleon, and Homer, and the Panama Canal ? Wouldn't you rather know about the life of Buddha than the war of Jenkins's ear ? Not that I ever got to the Georges myself ! Oh, it makes me so wild ! It's like stuffing them with pea-nuts, when one has got a basket of peaches on one's arm. It isn't education ! It's goose-cramming ! I can't explain properly what I mean. I expect you think I'm a fool ! "

^{4<} An enthusiast. It's much the same," said Clare absently. " You'll get over it." Then, with a twinkle : " lieform's an excellent thing, of course—but why annex my class to experiment with ? "

Alwynne defervesced.

There was an unhappy pause.

" You know, I'm most awfully sorry," said Alwynne at lost, as one making a brilliant and original contribution to the discussion.

A piercing shriek from the kitchen interrupted them. Alwynne jumped, but Clare was undisturbed.

" It's only Bagot. She's always having accidents. But she's an excellent cook. After all, what's a shilling's worth of crockery a week compared with a good cook ? But to return to Napoleon and the Lower Third——"

" You don't think she's hurt herself ? " Alwynne ventured to interrupt. " She did squeal."

Clare looked suddenly concerned.

^{k<} I hope not. I haven't had lunch yet."

She went to the kitchen door, reappearing with a slightly harried air.

" Miss Durand, I wish you'd come here a minute. She's cut her hand. Oh, lavishly ! Most careless ! What is one to do ? I suppose one must bandage it ? "

Her tone of helpless disgust was so genuine that Alwynne was inclined to laugh. So there were circumstances that could be too much even for Miss Hartill ! How reassuring ! And how it warmed the cockles of one's heart to her ! Her lips twitched mischievously as she looked from the disconcerted mistress to the sniffing maid, but she lost no time in stripping off her gloves and setting to work, issuing orders the while that Clare obeyed with a meekness that surprised herself.

" Linen, please, Miss Hartill, or old rags ! It's rather a bad cut." Then, to the maid, " How on earth did you do it ? A tin-opener ? No, no, Miss Hartill ! a duster's no good. An old handkerchief or something." She was achieving complicated effects with a fork and a knotted scarf as she spoke, and Clare, obediently tearing linen into strips, considered her critically. The girl was capable then, as well as amusing. . . . That tourniquet might not be professional, but it was at least effective. . . . The bleeding was stopping. . . . Very good of her to toil over Bagot's unappetizing hand. . . . Clare marvelled at her unconcern, for she was dainty enough in her own person to please even Clare's fastidious eye. Clare supposed that it was a good thing that some people had the nursing instinct. . . . She thanked her stars that she herself had not. . . .

Alwynne, unconscious of scrutiny, put in her final safety-pin, settled the sling and stepped back at last, surveying her handiwork with some pride.

" It'll want a stitch, though. She'd better go to the doctor, I think," she said decisively. " Shall I come with you ? " This to the maid, complacently the centre of attention.

But the maid preferred to fetch her mother. " Her mother lived quite close, miss. If Miss 'Artill could get on——"

" She can't do any cooking with that hand," said Alwynne to Clare, more in decision than appeal, and Clare acquiescing, she fetched hat and coat, manipulated hat-pins, and bundled the girl forth.

She returned to the kitchen to find Miss Hartill, skirts clutched high, eyeing the crowded table with distaste, and prodding with a toasting-fork at the half-prepared meal.

" Isn't it disgusting ? How these people bleed ! I can't stand * mess ! Really, I'm very much obliged to you, Miss

Durand, for seeing to Bagot. I'm no good at that sort of thing. I hate touching people. You don't think it was a bad cut, though?"

"It must have hurt *I*. She won't be able to use her hand for a day or two."

Clare rubbed her nose peevishly. She had a comical air of resenting the necessity for concerning herself with her own domestic arrangements,

"Well, what am I to do? And I loathe charwomen. She might at least have got lunch first!"

"The meat's cooked, anyhow," said Alwynne hopefully, drawing forth a congealing dishful.

Clare shivered.

"Take it away! It's all over Bagot."

"I don't think it is," Alwynne examined it cautiously.

Clare gave her short laugh.

"Anyhow, it doesn't appeal any more. Never mind, Miss Durand, I shall manage—I mustn't keep you."

Alwynne disregarded the hint. She seemed preoccupied.

"There aren't any eggs, I suppose," she ventured diffidently. Clare flung out vague hands.

"Heaven knows! It's Bagot's business. Why?"

"Because," Alwynne had crossed the room and was struggling with a stiff cupboard door, "Elsbeth says I'm a fool at cooking (Elsbeth's my aunt, you know), but I can make omelets——" The door gave suddenly and Alwynne fell forward into the dark pantry. There was a clatter as of scattered bread-pans. She soon emerged, however, floury but serene.

"Yes! There are some! It wouldn't take ten minutes, Miss Hartill. That is—if——" she sought delicately for a tactful phrase: "if you would perhaps like to go away and read. If any one stands about and watches—you know what I mean——"

"Are you proposing to cook my lunch?" Clare demanded.

"Of course, if you don't like omelets," said Alwynne demurely. Clare laughed outright.

"I do—I do. All right, Miss Durand, I'm too hungry to refuse. But I see through it, you know. It's to cry quits!"

Alwynne broke in indignantly—

"It isn't! It's the *amende honorable*—at least, if it doesn't scorch."

"All right, I accept it!" Clare pacified her; then, as she left the kitchen, "Miss Durand?"

" Yes, Miss HartiU ? "

" Are you going to make one for Miss Vigers ? "

Alwynne's face fell.

" I'd forgotten Miss Vigers."

Clare twinkled.

" Perhaps—if it doesn't scorch—I'll see what I can do," she promised her.

The lunch was a success. Alwynne, dishing up, had her hat ordered off her head, and was soon sharing the omelet and marvelling at herself for being where she was, and Clare, for her part, found herself enjoying her visitor as much as her meal.

Clare Hartill led a sufficiently solitary life. She was a woman of feverish friendships and sudden ruptures. Always the cleverest and most restless of her circle, she usually found her affinities as unable to satisfy her demands on their intellect as on their emotions. Disillusionment would be swift and final: Clare never forgave a bore. Gradually it came to pass that intercourse she so carefully fostered with her elder pupils became her absorbing and satisfying interest. She plumed herself on her independence of social amenities, did not guess, would not have admitted, that her pleasure in a chance table companion had its flavour of pathos. It was enough to acknowledge to herself that Alwynne Durand, with her enthusiasms, her incoherencies, and her capacities had certainly caught her difficult fancy. She liked the girl's manner; its compound of shyness and audacity, deference and independence pleased her sophisticated taste. She found her racy and original, and, in the exertion of drawing her out, was herself at her best. A brilliant talker, she chose to listen, and soon heard all there was to hear of Alwynne's short history; of her mother's sister, Elsbeth Loveday (Clare pricked up her ears at the name), who had reared her from babyhood; of her schooldays; her crude young likes and dislikes; her hero-worships and passionate, vague ambitions. Clare knew it all by heart, had heard the tale from more pairs of lips than she could remember, for more years than she cared to count. But Alwynne, nevertheless, told it in a way of her own that appealed to Clare and interested her anew. She told herself that the girl was worth cultivating; and what with apt comments, apter silences, and the half-finished phrases and abrupt noddings of perfect comprehension, contrived to make Alwynne think her the most sympathetic person she had ever had the fortune to meet. Indeed, they pleased each other

BO well that when Alwynne, towards tea-time, made an unwilling move, Clare was as unwilling, for her part, to let her go.

" It was certainly a most excellent omelet," she said, as she sped her from the door. " I suppose you won't come and cook me another to-night ? "

Alwynne took her at her word.

" I will! Of course I will ! Would you like me to, really ? I will ! I'd love to ! "

Clare laughed.

" Oh, I was only in fun. Whatever would your aunt say ? "

" She wouldn't mind," began Alwynne eagerly.

Clare temporized.

" But your work ? Haven't you any work ? "

Alwynne overwhelmed her.

" That's all right ' It isn't much ! I'll sit up. I wish you'd let me. I would love to. You must have some one to cook your supper for you, mustn't you ? "

" Well, of course, if you'd really like to——" Clare hesitated between jest and earnest.

But Alwynne was wholly in earnest.

" I'll come. Thank you very much indeed," said Alwynne, eyes sparkling.

CHAPTER IV

IN the months that followed the eating of the omelet, Alwynne would have agreed that the cynic who said that 'an entirely successful love-affair can only be achieved by foundlings' should have included friendship in his dictum. For relations . . . well, everybody knew what everybody meant when relations were mentioned in that particular tone; and Elsbeth, dearest of maiden aunts, was nevertheless at times aggressively a relation : privileged to wet-blanket enthusiasms.

Elsbeth made, indeed, no stand against the alliance that had sprung mushroom-like into existence; was courteous, in her sweet silent fashion, to Clare Hartill at their occasional meetings; but she remained subtly uninterested. But when, again, had that suppressed and self-effacing personality shown interest in any living thing save Alwynne herself ?

Alwynne, shrugging her shoulders, and ignoring, as youth must, the affectionate prevision that had lapped her all her life, supposed that she must not expect too much of poor, dear Elsbeth. . . . (It was characteristic of their relationship that she never called her guardian 'Aunt.') Elsbeth, darling Elsbeth—but a little limited, perhaps ? Hardly to be expected that she should appreciate a Miss Hartill. . . .

Elsbeth, though Alwynne never guessed it, quite understood what went on in her niece's mind : was resigned to it. She knew that she was not a clever woman. She had been too much occupied, all her life, in smoothing the way for other people, to have had leisure for her own cultivation, physical or mental. Her two years of teaching, in the uncertificated 'eighties, had but served to reveal to herself her ingrained incapacity for government. She had never forgotten the humiliation of those months when Clare Hartill, a pitiless fourteen-year-old, had headed one successful revolt after another against her. It had been an episode; with the advent of Alwynne she had returned to domesticity; but the experience had intensified her innate lack of

self-esteem. There were times when she seriously debated whether, in bringing up her orphaned niece, she were indulging herself at the expense of her duty. She knew quite well, and rejoiced shamefacedly in the knowledge, that Alwynne, her beautiful, brilliant, headstrong girl, could twist the old aunt round her little finger. And that, of course, could not be good for Alwynne.

Alwynne was, to do her justice, extremely fond of her aunt. Till the advent of Clare Hartill, Elsbeth had been the pole-star of her world. All the more disconcerting of Elsbeth, receiver of confidences, therefore, to be so entirely uninterested in the comet that was deflecting Alwynne from her accustomed orbit.

She wondered occasionally what her aunt's history had been. Elsbeth was reticent: never a woman of reminiscences. Her relations were distant ones, whom she rarely mentioned and apparently more rarely missed. Alwynne was the more surprised one breakfast, when, retailing the school's latest scandal, she was interrupted by an exclamation of pleasure.

"Alwymie! The Lumsdens are coming back!" Elsbeth rustled foreign paper delightedly.

Alwynne wrinkled her brows.

"The Lumsdens? Oh—those cousins of yours?"

"Yes. The youngest, Rosemary, only died last year. Don't you remember? They've lived abroad for years on account of her health, and her son Roger always went out to her for his holidays."

"Roger? Is that the velveteen boy in the big album?"

Elsbeth laughed.

"He must be thirty by now. The estate went to him. It was let, you know, and the Great House at Dene—to a school, I believe. They had lost money. And Rosemary was always extravagant. Roger went to America for a time. But still he's well enough off. He came home when his mother died last year, and now, it seems, he's taken a house close to their old home, and settled down as a market-gardener. The Lumsdens are to come and keep house for him. He's very fond of his aunts, I know. Well! To think of seeing Jean and Alicia again after all these years. They want us to come and stay when they've settled down."

"You'll enjoy that?" Alwynne eyed her aunt curiously. Elsbeth's pale cheeks were pink, her faded eyes dreamy. Her unconscious hand was rapping out its tune upon the table-

cloth—the only symptom of excitement that Elsbeth ever showed. "Were you fond of them? Why haven't you ever been to see them, Elsbeth?"

"Time flies. And I certainly can't afford to gad about the Riviera. And there was you, you know. Besides——" she hesitated.

"Besides what?"

Elsbeth did not seem to hear.

"You'll like Dene, Alwynne. Oh, yes, I know it well. I used to stay with them—before the Great House was let. Years ago. And Roger—I hope you'll get on with Roger. I haven't seen him since he was five. A jolly little fellow. And from what Alicia says——"

But Alwynne would not take any interest in Roger. He had a snub nose in the photograph; and besides, she hated men. So dull. As Clare said——Indeed, she wasn't always quoting Clare! She didn't always set up Clare's judgment against Elsbeth's! Elsbeth needn't get huffy! She would like to go down to Dene very much, if Elsbeth wanted to, some time or other.

But when the holidays came and the formal invitation, Alwynne was less amenable.

Why couldn't Elsbeth go alone? Elsbeth couldn't expect her to go and stay with utter strangers. She hated strangers. Besides, there was Clare. (It was 'Clare' and 'Alwynne' by that time.) She and Clare had planned out every day of the holidays. Everything fixed. She really couldn't ask Clare to upset all her arrangements. It wouldn't be fair. Awfully sorry, of course, but why couldn't Alwynne's dear Elsbeth go by herself? She, Alwynne, could keep house. Oh, perfectly well! She wasn't a fool! She wouldn't dream of spoiling Elsbeth's holiday, but Elsbeth must see that there was no need for Alwynne to share it.

But Elsbeth was unusually obstinate. Elsbeth, it appeared, wanted Alwynne with her; wanted to show Alwynne to these old friends, wanted to show these old friends to Alwynne; wouldn't enjoy the visit without Alwynne at her elbow; refused utterly to be convinced of unreasonableness. Alwynne would enjoy the change, the country—didn't Alwynne love the country?—and if she herself, and Alicia, and Jean, were not of Alwynne's generation, there was always Roger! By all accounts Roger was very nice; witness the aunts who adored him.

Alwynne snorted.

She argued the matter mercilessly, length, breadth, depth and back again, and ended, as Elsbeth knew she would, by getting her own way. But Elsbeth did not go to Dene by herself. There she was mulish. Go visiting and leave the housekeeping to AlWynne's tender mercies? Heaven forbid! There was more in housekeeping than dusting a bedroom, making peppermint creams, or wasting four eggs on an omelet.

So Alwynne spent her pleasant holidays in and out of Clare Hartill's pocket and Elsbeth stayed at home. But Elsbeth had learned her lesson. It was many a long day before she again suggested a visit to Dene.

CHAPTER V

ONE of Alwynne's duties was the conduct of a small 'extra' class, consisting of girls, who, for reasons of stupidity, ill-health or defective grounding, fell too far below the average of knowledge in their respective classes. She devoted certain afternoons in the week to coaching them, and was considered to be unusually successful in her methods. She could be extremely patient, and had quaint and unorthodox ways of insinuating facts into her pupils' minds. As she told Elsbeth, she invented their memories for them. She was sufficiently imaginative to realize their difficulties, yet sufficiently young to dream of developing, in due course, all her lame ducks into swans. She was intensely interested in hearing how her coaching had succeeded; her pleasure at an amended place in class was so genuine, her disappointment at a collapse so comically real, yet so devoid of contempt, so tinged with conviction that it was anybody's fault but the culprit's, that either attitude was an incentive to real effort. Like Clare, she did not suffer fools gladly, but unlike Clare, she had not the moral courage to be ruthless. Stupidity seemed as terrible to her as physical deformity; she treated it with the same touch of motherliness, the same instinctive desire to spare it realization of its own unsightliness.

Her rather lovable cowardice brought a mixed reward; she stifled in sick-rooms, yet invalids liked her well; she was frankly envious of Clare's circle of brilliant girls and as inevitably surrounded by inarticulate adorers, who bored her mightily, but whose clumsy affection she was too kind-hearted to suppress.

It had been well for Alwynne, however, that her following was of the duller portion of the school. This Clare could endure, could countenance; such boy-bishopry could not affect her own sovereignty, and her subject's consequence increased her own. But to see Alwynne swaying, however unconsciously, minds of a finer type, would not have been easy for Clare. She had grown very fond of Alwynne; but the sentiment was pro-

prietary; she could derive no pleasure from her that was not personal, and, in its most literal sense, selfish. ' She was unmaternal to the core. She could not see her human property admired by others with any sensation but that of a double jealousy; she was subtly angered that Alwynne could attract, yet was caught herself in the net of those attractions, and unable to endure to watch them spread for any but herself.

Alwynne, quite unconscious of the trait, had at first done herself harm by her unfeigned interest in Clare's circle. It took the elder woman some suspicious weeks to realize that Alwynne lacked completely her own *dompteuse* instinct, her craving for power; that she was as innocent of knowledge of her own charm as unwedded Eve; that her impulse to Clare was an impulse of the freshest, sweetest hero-worship; but the realization came at last, and Clare opened her hungry heart to her, and, warmed by Alwynne's affection, wondered that she had hesitated so long.

Alwynne never guessed that she had been doubted. Clare was proud of her genuine skill as a character reader—had been a little pleased to give Alwynne proof of her penetration when occasion arose; and Alwynne, less trained, less critical, thought her omniscient, and never dreamed that the motives of her obscurest actions, the sources of her most veiled references were not plain to Clare. Secure of comprehension, she went her way; any one in whom Clare was interested must needs attract her: so she took pains to become intimate with Clare's adorers, from a very real sympathy with their appreciation of Clare, whom she no more grudged to them than a priestess would grudge the unveiling of her goddess to the initiate. She received their confidences, learned their secrets, fanned the flame of their enthusiasms. Too lately a schoolgirl herself, too innocent and ignorant to dream of danger, she did her loyal utmost in furtherance of the cult, measuring the artificial and unbalanced emotions she encountered by the rule of her own saner affection, and, in her desire to see her friend appreciated, in all good faith utilized her degree of authority to encourage what an older woman would have recognized and combated as incipient hysteria.

Gradually she became, through her frank sympathy, combined with her slightly indeterminate official position, the intermediary, the interpreter of Clare to the feverish school. Clare herself, her initial distrust over, found this useful. She could afford to be moody, erratic, whimsical; to be extravagant

in her praises and reproofs; to deteriorate, at times, into a caricature of her own bizarre personality, with the comfortable assurance that there was ever a magician in her wake to steady her tottering shrines, mix oil with her vitriol, and prove her pinchbeck gold.

Fatal, this relaxation of effort, to a woman of Clare's type. Love of some sort was vital to her. Of this her surface personality was dimly, ashamedly aware, and would, if challenged, have frigidly denied; but the whole of her larger self knew its need, and saw to it that that need was satisfied. Clare, unconscious, had taught Clare, conscious, that there must be effort—constant, straining effort at cultivation of all her alluring qualities, at concealment of all in her that could repulse—effort that all appearances of complete success must never allow her to relax. She knew well the evanescent character of a school-girl's affection; so well that when her pupils left the school she seldom tried to retain her hold upon them. Their letters would come thick as autumn leaves at first; she rarely answered, or after long intervals; and the letters dwindled and ceased. She knew that, in the nature of things, it must be so, and had no wish to prolong the farewells.

Also, her interest in her correspondents usually died first; to sustain it required their physical nearness. But every new year filled the gaps left by the old, stimulated Clare to fresh exertion.

So the lean years went by. Then came vehement Alwynne—no schoolgirl—yet more youthful and ingenuous than any mistress had right to be, loving with all the discrimination of a fine mind, and all the ardour of an affectionate child. Here was no question of a fleeting devotion that must end as the schooldays ended. Here was love for Clare at last, a widow's cruse to last her for all time. Clare thanked the gods of her unbelief, and, relaxing all effort, settled herself to enjoy to the full the cushioning sense of security; the mock despot of their pleasant, earlier intercourse becoming, as she bound Alwynne ever more closely to her, albeit unconsciously, a very real tyrant indeed.

Yet she had no intention of weakening her hold on any lesser member of her coterie. Alwynne was too ingenuous, too obviously subject through her own free impulse, entirely to satisfy : Clare's love of power had its morbid moments, when a struggling victim, head averted, pleased her. There was never, among

the new-comers, a child, self-absorbed, nonchalant or rebellious, who passed a term unmolested by Miss Hartill. Egoism aroused her curiosity, her suspicion of hidden lands, virgin, ripe for exploration; indifference piqued her; a flung gauntlet she welcomed with frank amusement. She had been a rebel in her own time, and had ever a thrill of sympathy for the mutinies she relentlessly crushed. War, personal war, delighted her; she was a mistress of tactics, and the certainty of eventual victory gave zest to her campaigns. She did not realize that the strain upon her childish opponents was very great. The finer, the more sensitive the character, the more complete the eventual defeat, the more permanent its effects. Clare was pitiless after victory: not till then did she examine into the nature thus enslaved, seldom did she find it worth the trouble of the skirmish. In most cases she gave semi-liberty; enough of smiles to keep the children feverishly at work to please her (the average of achievement in her classes was astounding), and enough of indifference to prevent them from becoming a nuisance. To the few that pleased her fastidious taste, she gave of her best, lavishly, as she had given to Alwynne. There are women to-day, old girls of the school, who owe Clare Hartill the best things of their lives, their wide knowledge, their original ideals, their hopeful futures and happy memories: to whom she was inspiration incarnate. The Clare they remember is not the Clare that Elsbeth knew, that Alwynne learned to know, that Clare herself, one bitter night, faced and blanched at. But which of them had knowledge of the true Clare, who shall say?

In Clare's favourite class was a certain Louise Denny. She was thirteen—nearly three years below the average of the class in age. How far beyond it in all else, not even Clare realized.

Clare had discovered her, as she phrased it, in the limbo of the Lower Third. She had been paying one of her surprise visits to the afternoon 'extra' needlework classes—(the possibility of her occasional appearance, book in hand, was responsible for the school's un-English proficiency in hemming, darning and kindred mysteries), to read aloud to the children carefully edited excerpts from Poe's *Tales*, had forgotten her copy and had been shyly offered another, private property from Louise Denny's desk. Thereon must Alwynne, for a week or two, resign perforce her Lower Third literature classes to Clare,

intent on her blue rose. Louise's compositions had been read— Clare and Alwynne spent a long evening over them, weighing, comparing, discussing. Clare could be exquisitely tender, could keep all-patient vigil over an unfolding mind, provided that the calyx concealed a rare enough blossom. Louise was encouraged, her shyness swept aside, her ideas developed, her knowledge tested; she was fed too, cautiously, on richer and richer food—stray evening lectures, picture galleries with Alwynne, headiest of cicerones; the freedom of the library and long talks with Clare. Finally Clare, bearing down all opposition, transplanted her to the Lower Fifth, containing at that time some brilliantly clever girls. Louise justified her by speedily capturing, and doggedly retaining, the highest place in the class.

Clare was delighted. Her critics—there were some mistresses who vaguely disapproved of the experiment—were refuted, and the class, already needing no spur, outdoing itself in its efforts to compete with the intruder, swept the board at an important public examination.

On the morning of the announcement of results, Clare entered her form-room radiant. It was a low, many-windowed room, with desks ranged single-file along the walls. The class being a email one, the girls were accustomed to sit for their lessons at a large oval table at the upper end of the room. Beside the passage door-way, there was a smaller one, that led into the studio, and was never used by the children. Clare, however, would sometimes enter by it, but so seldom that they invariably forgot to keep watch. Clare enjoyed the occasional view she thus obtained of her unconscious and relaxed subjects, and the piquancy of their uncensored conversation; she enjoyed still more the sudden hush, the crisp thrill, that ran through their groups, when they became aware of her, observant in the doorway.

On the morning in question she had watched them for some little while. Before each girl lay her open exercise-book and school edition of Browning. They were deep in discussion of their work, very eager upon some question. By the empty chair at the head of the table sat Marion Hughes, blonde and placid, a rounded elbow on her neatly written theme, that her neighbour was trying to pull away, to compare with her own well-inked manuscript. This neighbour, one Agatha Middleton, was dark, gaunt, with restless eyes and a restless tongue. She

was old for her fifteen years, and had been original until she discovered the fact, and that her originality appealed to Miss Hartill. Since then she had sedulously imitated her o\vn mannerisms, and was rapidly degenerating into an eccentric. The law of opposites had decreed that the sedate Marion should be her bosom friend. They went up the school together, an incongruous, yet well-suited pair, for they were so unlike that there could be no rivalry. Marion was alternately amused and dazzled by the pyrotechnic Agatha. Agatha's respect for Marion's common sense was pleasantly tempered by a conviction of superior mental agility. Finally, they were united by their common devotion to their form-mistress. Whether it would have occurred to Marion, unprompted, to admire Miss Hartill, is uncertain. Her affections were domestic and calm. But adoration was in the air, and she had not sufficient originality to be unfashionable. She was caught, too, in Agatha's whirlwind emotions, and ended by worshipping Clare conscientiously and sincerely. Clare, on her side, respected her, as she told Alwynne, for her "'painstaking and intelligent stupidity,'" and, recognizing a nature too worthy for neglect, yet too lymphatic to be suitable for experiments, was uniformly kind to her. Agatha, she had revelled in for six weeks, and had since more or less ignored as a bore. Below the pair sat a spectacled student, predestined to scholarships and a junior mistress-ship; opposite, between giggling twins, a vivid little Jewess, whose showy work was due to the same vanity that tied her curls with giant bows, and over-corseted her matured figure. At the foot of the oval, directly opposite Clare's vacant chair, stood Louise, flushed and excited, chanting low-voicedly a snatch of verse.

During a lull in the hubbub Marion called to her down the table—

"How many pages?"

Louise flushed. She was still a little in awe of these elders whom she had outstripped. She rapidly counted the leaves of her essay, and held up both hands, smiling shyly.

Marion exclaimed.

"Ten? You marvel! I only got to seven. I simply didn't understand it. Whatever did you find to say?"

Agatha fell upon the query.

"That's nothing! I've done twenty-two!" she cried triumphantly, and turned to face the shower of comments.

" Miss Hartill will bless you. She said last time that you thought ink and ideas were synonyms."

" Agatha only writes three words to a line, anyway."

They liked her, but she was of the type whose imperiousness provokes snubs.

" Well, I thought I shouldn't get it done under forty—an essay on *The Dark Tower*. It's the beastliest yet. *The Ancient Mariner* was nothing to it. I've made an awful hash—didn't you ? "

" I understood all right when she read it, and explained. It's so absurd not to let one take notes. I've been years at it. Fortunately she said we needn't learn it—Louise and I—with all our extra work." An unimaginative hockey captain fluttered her pages distractedly.

" Oh, but I have ! " Louise looked up quickly.

" Why ? " The hockey captain opened eyes and mouth.

" Oh, I rather wanted to."

The little Jewess giggled.

" ' Dejd ? ' " she murmured. She did not love Clare.

Marion returned to the subject with her usual perseverance.

" Did you understand it, kid ? "

Louise stammered a little.

" When she reads it, and when I say it aloud, I think I do
"It was impossible to write it down."

" Let's see what you have put." Agatha, by a quick movement, possessed herself of Louise's exercise-book. Louise, shy and desperate, strove silently with her neighbours, who, curious, held her back, while Agatha, holding the book at arm's length, recited from it in a high mocking voice.

" *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came*. Description! Description! for three—five—seven pages! You've let yourself go, Louise, Ah, here we are—*The meaning of the poem*. Now we're getting to it. *Shakespeare and Browning may have known all the real history of Childe Roland, the reason of his quest, the secret of the horror of the Tower, but we are left in ignorance. That does not matter, for, as we read, the inner meaning of the terrible poem kills all curiosity. Shuddering we close the book, and pray to God that Childe Roland's journey may never be ours; that for our adventurous souls, knight-erranting through this queer life, there may never come a choice of ways, a turning from the pleasant high-road, to go upon a hideous journey; till, crossing the Plains of*

Loneliness, Fear and Sorrow, we face the Hills of Madness, and enter the Dark Tower of that Despair which is our soul's death. With capital letters galore ! What a sentence ! Here, shut up, you spit-fire ! " Louise had wrenched herself free and flung herself upon Agatha, in a white heat of anger.

" Give it me ! You've no right ! You've no right ! " she gasped. Her shyness had gone, she was blazing with indignation.

Agatha, the book held teasingly out of reach, affected to search for her place. Louise raised her clenched fist desperately.

A cool hand caught her wrist in a firm yet kindly grip. A hush fell on the voluble group and Agatha collapsed into an apologetic nonentity.

Clare, who had entered in her usual noiseless fashion, stood a moment between the combatants, watching the effect of her appearance. Her hand shifted to Louise's bony little shoulder; through the thin blouse she could feel the driven blood pulsing. She did not move till she felt the child regaining comparative calm, when, giving her a gentle push towards her place, she walked slowly to the head of the table and seated herself. The class watched her furtively. It was quite aware that all rules of decorum had been transgressed—that pains and penalties would be in order with any other mistress. But with Miss Hartill there was always glorious uncertainty—and Miss Hartill did not look annoyed. Little gestures began to break the tension and Agatha, relieved, smiled a shade too broadly. Instantly Clare closed with her.

She began blandly—

" Agatha, I thought you could read aloud better than that. You are not doing your work justice. Pass me your essay."

" It's Louise's," said Agatha helplessly.

" Ah, I see. And you kindly read it to us for her? It's a pity you didn't understand what you read—but an excuse, of course. Louise must not expect too much."

Agatha flung up her head angrily.

" Oh, I understood it all right. I thought it was silly."

" You did ? Read me your own."

" Now ? "

" Certainly."

Now Clare, as she corrected and commented upon the weekly essays, did occasionally, if the mood took her, read extracts, humorous chiefly, therefrom; but it had never been customary for a pupil to read her own work aloud. Agatha had the pioneer

spirit—but she was no fool. She comprehended that, with Clare inimical, she could climb no higher than the pillory. She fell back upon the tradition of the school.

"Oh, Miss Hartill—I can't!"

"Why not?"

"No one ever does——"

Clare waited.

Agatha protested redly, her fear of ridicule outweighing her fear of Clare.

"Miss Hartill, I simply couldn't. Before everybody—all this tosh—I mean all this stuff I wrote. It's a written essay. I couldn't make it sound right aloud."

Clare waited.

"It's not good enough, Miss Hartill. Honestly! And we never have. You've never made us. I couldn't."

Clare waited.

Agatha twisted her hands uneasily. The schoolgirl shyness that is physical misery was upon her.

"I—don't want to, Miss Hartill. I can't. It's not fair to have one's stuff—to be laughed at—to be——" She subsided just in time.

The class sat, breathless, all eyes on Clare.

And Clare waited; waited till defiance faded to unease—unease to helplessness, till the girl, overborne by the utter silence, gave way, and dropping her eyes to her exercise, fluttering its pages in angry embarrassment, finally, with a giggle of pure nervousness, embarked on the opening sentence.

Clare cut through the clustering adjectives.

"Stand up, please."

Resistance was over. She rose sullenly.

She had been proud of her essay, had worked at it sincerely, knew its periods by heart. But her pleasure in it was destroyed, as completely, she realized, as she had destroyed that of little Louise. More—for Louise had found a champion. That, she recognized jealously. Unjust! Her essay was no worse, read soberly—yet she was forced to render it ridiculous. She read a couple of pages in hurried jerks, stumbling over the illegibilities of her own handwriting, baulked by Clare's interpolations. She heard her own voice, high-pitched and out of control, perverting her meaning, felt the laden sentences breaking up into chaos on her lips. In her flurry she pronounced familiar words amiss, Clare's calm voice carefully correcting. Once she heard

a chuckle. Two pages . . . three . . . only that . . . she remembered that she had boasted of twenty . . . seventeen to be read yet and they were all laughing. To have to stand there . . . three pages . . . four. . . " *But as Childe fioland turned round——*"

" Louder, please," said Clare.

" *But as Childe Roland turned round——*" and even Marion was laughing. . . . *Turned round to look once more back to the high road——*"

" And slower."

" *To the high road——*" She stopped suddenly, a lump in her throat.

" Go on, Agatha."

" *To the high road——*" The letters danced up and down mistily. " *To the high road where the cripple——where the cripple——* Oh, Miss Hartill," she cried imploringly, " isn't it enough ? "

It was surrender. Clare nodded.

" Yes, you may sit down now. Your essay, please : thank you. And now I'll read you, once more, what Louise has to say on the same subject. I dare say you'll find, Agatha, that you were almost as unfair to her essay, as you were to—your o\vn." And she smiled her sudden dazzling smile. Agatha, against her will, smiled tremulously back.

Clare, with a glance at the little figure, huddling at the foot of the table, began to read. The essay, for all its schoolgirl slips and extravagance, was unusual. The thought embodied in it, though tinged with morbidity, striking and matured. Clare did it more than justice. Her beautiful voice made music of the crude sentences, revealed, embellished, glorified. Her own interest growing as she read, infected the class; she swept them along with her, mutually enthusiastic. She ended abruptly, her voice like the echoes of a deep bell.

Marion broke the little pause.

" I liked that," she said, as if surprised at herself.

" So did I," Clare was pleased.

She dipped her pen in red ink and initialled the foot of the essay.

" That was good work, Louise. Now, the others."

But Louise, shy and glowing, broke in—

" But it wasn't mine, Miss Hartill, not a bit."

Clare looked at her, half frowning.

⁴⁴ Not yours ? Your handwriting—— ? "

" Oh, I wrote it. But you've made it different. I hadn't meant it like that."

Clare raised a quizzical eyebrow.

" I have misinterpreted—— ? "

Louise was too much in earnest to be fluttered.

" I only mean—you made it sound so beautiful that it was like listening to—to an organ. I didn't bother about the words while you read. It was all colours and gold—like the things in the Venetian room. You know. The meaning didn't matter. But I did mean something, not half so good, of course, only quite different. Horrid and grisly like the plain he travelled through, Childe Roland. It ought to have sounded harsh and starved, like rats pattering—what I meant—not beautiful."

" I see." Clare was interested. She was quite aware that she had used her magnificent voice to impress arbitrarily her opinion of Louise's work upon the class. That Louise, impressionable as she knew her to be, should have yet detected the trick, amused her greatly.

" So you think I didn't understand your essay ? "

Louise's shy laugh was very pleasant.

" Oh, Miss Hartill. I'm not so stupid. It's only that I can't have got the—the——"

" Atmosphere ! " The girl in spectacles helped her.

" The atmosphere that I meant to; so you put in a different one to help it. And it did. But it wasn't what I meant."

Clare glanced at her inscrutably, and began to score the other essays. She would get at Louise's meaning in her own way. She skimmed a couple, Agatha, be it recorded, receiving the coveted initials, before she spoke again.

" Didn't I tell you all to learn *Childe Roland*, too ? Ah, I thought so. Begin, Marion, while I finish these. Two verses."

Her pen scratched on, as Marion's expressionless voice rose, fell and finished. Agatha continued, jarringly dramatic. Two more followed her. Then Clare put down her pen.

" ' For mark ! . . . ' "

There was a warning undertone in Louise's colourless voice, that crept across the room like a shadow. Clare lifted her head and stared at her.

" 'For mark! no sooner was I fairly found
 Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,
 Than, pausing to throw backward a last view
 O'er the safe road, 'twas gone; grey plain all round:
 Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
 I might go on; nought else remained to do.' "

There was horror in the whispering voice : the accents of one bowed beneath intolerable burdens, sick with the knowledge of nearing doom, gay with the flippancy of despair. Louise was looking straight before her, vacant as a medium, her hands lying laxly in her lap. Clare made a quick sign to her neighbour to be silent, and the strained voice rose anew.

Clare listened perplexedly. She told herself that this was sheer technique—some trick had been played, she was harbouring some child actress of parts—only to be convinced of folly. She knew all about Louise. Besides, she had heard the child read aloud before. Good, clean, intelligent delivery. But nothing like this—this was uncanny. Uncanny, yet magnificent. The artist in her settled down to enjoyment; yet she was uneasy too.

" 'And just as far as ever from the end! ' "

The creeping voice toiled on across the haunted plain, growing louder, clearer, nearer.

Vision was forced upon Clare, serene in her form-room, swift and sudden vision. She not only heard, every sense responded. At her feet lay the waste land of the poem, she smelt the dank air, shrank from the clammy undergrowth, watched the bowed figure of the wandering knight, stumbling forwards doggedly. It was coming towards her, the outline blurred in the evening mist, the face hidden. The voice was surely his ?

" 'Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled
 Increasing like a boll.' "

She heard it, alive with warning.

Nearer, ever nearer; the bowed form was at her very feet, as the voice rose anew in despairing defiance.

" ' **To view** the last of me——' "

The helmeted head was flung back; the voice echoed from hill to hill—

" 'I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
 Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
 And blow. Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.' "

The figure fell, face upwards, at her feet. Clare tore at the visor with desperate hands, for at the last line, the strong voice had broken, quavering into the pitiful treble of a frightened child. The bars melted under her touch, as dream things will, and she was staring down at no bearded face, but at Louise. Louise herself, with blank, dead eyes in a broken, blood-flecked face. The dead mouth smiled,

" You see, that was what I meant, Miss Hartill. That atmosphere."

Clare roused herself with a start. Louise, rosily alive, and quivering with eagerness, was waiting for her comments. She got none.

" Begin again," said Clare mechanically, to the next girl.

The brightness died out of Louise's face, as she subsided in her seat. Clare, dazed as she was, saw it, and was touched. The child deserved praise—should not be punished for the vagaries of Clare's own phantasy. And the monkey could recite ! She shook off the impression of that recital as best she could. Curious, the freaks of the imagination ! She must tell Alwynne of the adventure—Alwynne, dreamer of dreams. . . . And Alwynne was interested in Louise; was coaching her. . . . Perhaps she was responsible . . . had coached her in that very poem ? She hoped not . . . it would be interference. . . . She did not like interference. But no—that performance was entirely original, she felt sure. There was genius in the child—sheer genius . . . and but for Clare herself, she would yet be rotting undeveloped in the Lower Third. She was pleased with herself, pleased with Louise too; ready to tell her so, to see the child's face light up again delightedly; she was less attractive in repose. . . .

Clare's chance came.

It was the turn of the hockey captain to recite. She appealed to Clare.

" Oh, Miss Hartill! You said I needn't, Louise and I—because of all our extra work. Not the poem."

Clare considered.

" I remember. Very well. But, Louise ? " She looked at her questioningly, half smiling. " When did you find the time? "

Louise laughed.

" I don't know, Miss Hartill. It found itself."

" Ah I And how much extra work have you, Louise ? "

Louise reflected.

" All the afternoons, I think. And three evenings when I go to lectures. And, of course, gallery days, when I make up in the evenings."

" And homework ? "

" Oh, there's heaps of time at night always."

Clare smiled upon her class.

" Well, Lower Fifth—what do you think of it ? "

The class opened its mouth.

" Louise is moved up four forms. She's thirteen. She's top of the class and first in to-day's results. You hear what her extra work is. And she finds time to learn *Childe Roland*—optional. What do you think of it ? "

Agatha bit down her envy.

" It's pretty good," she said.

Clare's glance approved her.

" Yes. So I think. It's so good that I'm more than pleased. I'm—impressed. Rather proud of my youngest pupil. For next time you will learn——" And with one of her quick transitions, she began to dictate the homework.

The gong clanged as she finished. AlWynne's voice was heard in the passage, inquiring for Miss Hartill, and Clare hurried out. Followed a confused banging of books and desk-lids, a tangle of fragmentary remarks, and much trampling of boots on uncarpeted boards, as one after another followed her. Within five minutes the room was bare, save for Clare's forgotten satchel at the upper end of the big table, and Louise, motionless in her chair at the foot.

CHAPTER VI

LOUISE was tasting happiness.

Happiness was a new and absorbing experience to Louise. The only child of a former marriage, she had grown up among boisterous half-brothers with whom she had little fellowship. Her father, a driving, thriving merchant, was prouder of his second brood of apple-cheeked youngsters than of his first-born, who fitted into his scheme of life as ill as her mother had done. He had imagined himself in love with his first wife, had married her, piqued by her elusive ways, charmed by her pale, wood-sorrel beauty; and she, shy and unawakened, had taken his six feet of bone and muscle for outward and visible sign of the matured spiritual strength her nature needed. The disappointment was mutual as swift; it had taken no longer than the honeymoon to convince the one that he had burdened himself with a phantasm, the other that she was tied to a philistine. For a year they shared bed and board, severed and inseparable as earth and moon; then the wife, having passed on to a daughter the heritage of a nature rare and impracticable as a sensitive plant, died and was forgotten.

The widower's speedy re-marriage proved an unqualified success. Indeed, the worthy man's after life was so uniformly and deservedly prosperous (he was as shrewd and industrious in his business as he was genial and domesticated in his home), that he might be forgiven if his affection for his eldest child were tepid; for, apart from her likeness to his first wife, she was, in existing, a constant reminder of the one mistake of a prosperous career. He was kind to her, however, in his fashion; gave her plenty of pocket-money (he was fond of giving); saw to it that she had a sufficiency of toys and sweets, though it piqued him that she had never been known to ask for any. Otherwise was content to leave her to his wife.

The second Mrs. Denny, kindly, capable and unimaginative as her husband, had her sense of duty to her step-daughter;

but she was too much occupied in bearing and rearing her own family, whose numbers were augmented with Victorian regularity, to consider more than the physical well-being of the child. Louise was well fed and warmly clad, her share was accorded her in the pleasures of the nursery. What more could a busy woman do ?

Louise, docile and reserved, was not unhappy. Until she went to school, however, her mental outlook resembled that of a person suffering from myopia. Her elders, her half-brothers, all the persons of her small world, were indefinite figures among whom she moved, confused and blundering. She knew of their existence, but to focus them seemed as impossible as to establish communication. She did not try over hard; she was sensitive to ridicule; it was easier to retire within her childish self, be her own confidante and questioner.

She had an intricate imagination and before she learned to read had created for herself a fantastically complete inner world, in which she moved, absorbed and satisfied. Indeed, her outward surroundings became at last so dangerously shadowy that her manner began to show how entire was her abstraction, and Mrs. Denny, sworn foe to 'sulks' and 'moping,' saw fit to engage a governess as an antidote.

The governess, a colourless lady, achieved little, though she was useful in taking the little boys for walks. But she taught Louise to read, and thereafter the child herself assumed entire control of her own education.

The mother's books, velvety with dust that had sifted down upon them since the day, six years back, when they had been tumbled in piles on an attic floor by busy maids preparing for the advent of the second Mrs. Denny, were discovered, one rainy day, by a puma-fanged Siegfried, alert for treasure. (Jontented years were passed in consuming the trove.

Her mother's choice of books was so completely to her taste that they gave the lonely child her first experience of mental companionship; suggesting to her that there might be other intelligences in the world about her than the kindly, stolid folk who cherished her growing body and ignored her growing mind. She was almost startled at times to realize how completely this vague mother of hers would have understood her. Each new volume, fanciful or quizzical or gracious, seemed a direct gift from an invisible yet human personality, that concerned itself with her as no other had ever done ; that was never

occupied with the dustiness of the attic, or a forgotten tea-hour, but was astonishingly sensitive to the needs of a little soul, struggling unaided to birth. The pile of books, to her hungry affections, became the temple, the veritable dwelling-place of her mother's spirit.

Seated on the sun-baked floor, book on knee, the noises of the high road floating up to her, distance-dulled and soothing, she would shake her thick hair across her face, and see through its veil a melting, shifting shadow of a hand that helped to turn her pages. The warm floor was a soft lap; the battered trunk a shoulder that supported; the faint breeze a kiss upon her lips. The fantastic qualities the mother had bequeathed, recreated her in the mind of her child, bringing vague comfort (who knows ?) alike to the dead and the living Louise.

Yet the impalpable intercourse, compact of make-believe and yearnings, was, at its sweetest, no safe substitute for the human companionships that were lacking in the life of Louise. Half consciously she desired an elder sister, a friend, on whom to lavish the stores of her ardent, reticent nature.

At twelve she was sent to school. At first it did little for her. She was unaccustomed to companions of her own age and sex and, quite simply, did not know how to make friends with many who would have been willing enough, if she could have contributed her share, the small change of joke and quarrel and confidence, towards intimacy. But Louise was too inured to the solitude of crowds to be troubled by her continued loneliness. She met the complaints of Mrs. Denny, that she made no friends like other children, with a shrug of resignation. What could she do ? She supposed that she was not nice enough; people didn't like her.

Secretly her stepmother agreed. She was kind to Louise, but she, too, did not like her. She found her irritating. Her dreamy, absent manner, her very docility and absence of self-assertion were annoying to a hearty woman who was braced rather than distressed by an occasional battle of wills. She thought her shyness foolish, doubted the sincerity of her humility, and looked upon her shrinking from publicity, noise and rough caresses, her love of books and solitude, as a morbid pose. Yet she was a just woman and did not let the child guess at her dislike, though she made no pretence of actual affection. She knew perfectly well that Louise's mother (they had been school-girls together) had irritated her in exactly the same way.

Educationally, too, the first year at school affected Louise but slightly. Her brothers' governesses had done their best for the shy, intelligent girl, and her wide reading had trained, her awkwardness and childish appearance obscured, a personality in some respects dangerously matured. But her dreaminess and total ignorance of the routine of lesson-learning hampered her curiously; she learnt mechanically, using her brain but little for her easy tasks, and she was not considered particularly promising.

With Clare's intervention the world was changed for Louise; she had her first taste of active pleasure.

It is difficult to realize what an effect a woman of Clare's temperament must have had on the impressionable child. In her knowledge, her enthusiasms, her delicate intuition and her keen intellectual sympathy, she must have seemed the embodiment of all dreams, the fulfilment of every longing, the ideal made flesh. A wanderer in an alien land, homesick, hungry, for whom, after weary days, a queen descends from her throne, speaking his language, supplying his unvoiced wants, might feel something of the adoring gratitude that possessed Louise. She rejoiced in Clare as a vault-bred flower in sunlight.

On all human beings, child or adult, emotional adventure entails, sooner or later, physical exhaustion; the deeper, the more novel the experience, the greater the drain on the bodily strength. To Louise, involved in the first passionate experience of her short life, in an affection as violent and undisciplined as a child's must be, an affection in itself completely occupying her mind and exhausting her energies, the amount of work made necessary by the position to which Clare and her own ambition had assigned her, was more of a burden than either realized. Only Alwynne, sympathetic coach (for Louise had two years back work to condense and assimilate), guessed how great were the efforts the child was making. Clare, who always affected unconsciousness of her own effect on the ambitions of the children, had persuaded herself that Louise was entirely in her right place; and Louise herself was too young, and too feverishly happy, to consider the occasional headaches, fits of lassitude and nights cinematographed with dreams, as anything but irritating pebbles in her path to success—and Clare.

The weeks in her new class had been spread with happiness—a happiness that had grown like Elijah's cloud, till, on the day of the Browning lesson, as she listened to the beloved voice

making music of her halting sentences, to the words *of* praise, of affection even, that followed, it stretched from horizon to horizon.

As she sat in the deserted class-room, her neat packet of sandwiches untasted in the satchel at her elbow, she re-lived that golden hour, dwelling on its incidents as a miser counts money. There was the stormy beginning; Agatha's mockery; her own raging helplessness; Clare's entrance; the exquisite thrill she had felt at her touch, that was not only gratitude for championship. . . . Never before had Clare been so near to her, so gentle, so protecting. . . . And afterwards, facing Louise at the foot of the table, how beautiful she had been. . . . Yet some of the girls could not see it. . . . They were fools. . . . Her head had been framed in the small, square window, so darkened and cobwebbed by crimson vines that only the merest blur of white clouds and blue hills was visible. . . . She had worn a gown of duller blue that lay in stiff folds : the bowl of Christmas roses, that mirrored themselves on the dark, polished table, had hidden the papers and the smeared ink-pot. Suddenly Louise remembered some austere Dutch Madonnas over whom delightful, but erratic Miss Durand had lingered, on their last visit to a picture gallery. She called them beautiful. Louise, with fascinated eyes sidling past a wailful of riotous Rubens, to fix on the soap and gentian of a Sassoferato, had wondered if Miss Durand were trying to be funny. She remembered, too, how some of the younger girls, comparing favourites, had called Miss Hartill ugly. She had raged loyally—yet, secretly, all but agreed. With her child's love of pink and white prettiness she had had no eyes for Clare's irregular features. But to-day something in Clare's pose had recalled the Dutch pictures, and in a flash she had understood, and wondered at her blindness. Miss Durand was right: the drawn, grey faces and rigid outlines had beauty, had charm—the charm of her stern smile. . . . The saints were hedged with lilies, and she, too, had had white flowers before her, that filled the air with the smell of the marvellous Roman church at Westminster. . . . The painted ladies were Madonnas—mothers—and Miss Hartill, too, had worn for a moment their protective look, half fierce, half tender. . . .

Why was it ? What had made her so kind ? Not only to-day, but always ? The girls feared her, some of them; those that she did not like talked of her temper and her tongue; Rose Levy hated her; even Agatha and Marion, and all of them,

were a little frightened, though they adored. . . . Louise was never frightened. . . . How could one be frightened of some one so kind and wonderful? She could say what she liked to Miss Hartill, and be sure that she would understand. . . . It was like being in the attic, talking aloud. . . . Mother would have been like that. . . . If it could be. . . .

Louise, her chin in her doubled fists, launched out upon her sea of make-believe.

If it could be. . . . If it were possible, that Mother—not Mamma, cheery, obtuse Mamma of nursery and parlour—but Mother, the shadow of the attic—had come back? All things are possible to him that believeth: and Mr. Chesterton had said there was no real reason why tulips should not grow on oaks. . . . Heaps of people—all India—believed in reincarnation, and there was *The dateless Bairier* and *The Dead Leman* for proof. . . . Might it not be?

The idea was intoxicating. She did not actually believe in it, but she played with it, wistfully, letting her imagination run riot. She wove fantastic variations on the themes 'why not,' 'perhaps,' 'who knows.'

She was but thirteen and very lonely.

She was in far too exalted a mood to have an appetite for her sandwiches, or time for the books beside her. She was due for extra work with Alwynne at three, and the intervening hour should have been used for preparation. Wasting her time meant sitting up at night, as Louise was well aware, and a tussle with Mrs. Denny, concerned for the waste of gas. But for all that, she would not and could not rouse herself from the trance of pleasure that was upon her. Her mind was contemplating Clare as a mystic contemplates his divinity; rapt in an ecstasy of adoration, oblivious alike of place and time. She did not hear the luncheon gong, or the gong for afternoon school, or a door, opening and shutting behind her. Yet it did not startle her, when, turning dreamily to a tap on her shoulder, she found herself facing Miss Hartill herself. Miss Hartill should have left the school before lunch, she knew, but it was all in order. What could surprise one on this miraculous day? She did not even rise, as etiquette demanded; but she smiled up at Clare with an expression of welcoming delight that disarmed comment.

Clare, too, could ignore conventions. She was merely touched and amused by the child's expression.

"Well, Louise? Very busy?"

Louise glanced vaguely at her books.

" Yes. I ought to be, I mean. I don't believe I've touched anything. I was thinking——"

" Two hours on end ? Do you know the time ? I heard Miss Durand clamouring for you just now." Clare looked mischievous. She could forgive forgetfulness of other people's classes.

Louise was serene.

" I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. I'd forgotten. I must go."

But she made no movement. She sat looking at Miss Hartill as if nothing else existed for her. The intent, fearless adoration in her eyes was very pleasant to Clare; novel, too, after the more sophisticated glances of the older girls.

With an odd little impulse of motherliness she picked up Louise's books, stacked them neatly and fitted them into the satchel. Louise watched her. Miss Hartill buckled the strap and handed her the bundle.

" There you are, Louise! Run along, my child, I'm afraid you'll get a scolding." She stooped to her, bright-eyed, laughing. " And what were you thinking of, Louise, for two long hours ? "

" You," said Louise simply.

A touch of colour stole into Clare's thin cheeks. She took the small face between her hands and kissed it lightly.

" Silly child ! " said Miss Hartill.

CHAPTER VII

ALWYNNE, drumming with her fingers on the window-sill, as she stood by Louise's desk, was distinctly annoyed. Louise, for the first time since she had known her, was late. It was, indeed, not one of her assigned classes; but she and Louise had found their hours together so insufficient for all the work that they were trying to make good, that Alwynne had good-naturedly arranged to give her a daily extra lesson. It bit into Alwynne's meagre free time; but she was fond of Louise; proud of her, too; and there was Clare ! Clare was so anxious for Louise's success. Clare had been so pleased with the plan. . . .

Perhaps it was natural that Alwynne, as she made the arrangement, forgot to consult Elsbeth. She told her about it afterwards, and Elsbeth praised her for her unselfishness, and was anxious lest she should be overtired. She did not remind Alwynne that she was alone all day; that she had been accustomed to look forward to the gay tea-hour, when Alwynne returned, full of news and nonsense. She resigned herself cheerfully to a solitary meal, and to keeping the muffins hot against Alwynne's uncertain homecoming.

The extra lessons had been a real boon to Louise, and she had grown attached to Alwynne and intimate with her. Alwynne's elder-sisterly attitude to the children she taught, although it horrified the older women, was seldom abused; it merely made her the recipient of quaint confidences, and gave her an insight into the characters of her pupils that was invaluable to girls and governess alike. To developing girls a confidante is a necessity. The present boarding-school system of education ousts the mother from that, her natural position; renders her, to the daughter steeped in an alien atmosphere, an outsider, lacking all understanding. Invaluable years pass before the artificial gulf that boarding-school creates between them, is spanned. And the substitute for the only form of sympathy and interest that is entirely untainted by selfish impulses is usually the ~~oft~~ **chance**

acquaintance, the neighbour of desk and bedroom; occasionally, very occasionally, for the girl's feverish admiration usually precludes sane acquaintanceship, a mistress of more than average insight. Such a mistress, Alwynne, in spite of, or perhaps because of, her youthful indiscretions of manner, was in a fair way to become.

And of all the children who had opened their affairs to her, none had experienced more completely the tonic effect of a kind heart and a sense of humour, than Louise.

She would come to her lesson, overtired from the strain of the morning classes, over-stimulated from the contact with Clare, over-hopeful or utterly depressed, as the mood took her. Alwynne's cheerful interest was balm to the child's overwrought nerves. Alwynne let her spend a quarter of an hour or more in confiding the worries and excitements of the day, after which, Louise, curiously revived, contrived to get through an amazing amount of work. There was no doubt as to Louise's capacity for advanced work, but her state of mind affected her output; she was, as Alwynne once phrased it to Clare, 'like a violin—you had to tune her before she was fit for use.' And Alwynne's 'timing' had done more than she or Clare or even Louise herself had guessed, towards her success in her new class.

Bit by bit, Alwynne had heard all about Louise; the details of her meagre home-life; her attitude to the busy world of school, that frightened while it attracted her; her difficulties with her fellows; her delight in her work. Finally, there was Clare. Louise was very shy about Clare; inclined to scent mockery, to be on the defensive; but Alwynne's own matter-of-fact enthusiasm had its effect. Also Alwynne's interest, though it invited, never demanded confidences. It took Louise some time to realize that it arose from simple friendliness of soul; that there was neither curiosity nor pedagogic zeal behind it; that, though she was teased and laughed at, she was respected, and, out of school hours, treated as an equal; that she and her schoolgirl secrets were safe with Miss Durand. It was, indeed, in the light of after events, pathetic that Louise, dazzled by Clare's will-o'-the-wisp brilliance, never realized how close to her for a season the friend, the elder sister she had longed for, really stood. With the egoism of a child, and a child in love, she was humbly and passionately grateful for Clare's least sign of interest, yet accepted all the many little kindnesses that

Alwynne showed her, as a matter of course. She scarcely realized, absorbed as she was in Clare, that she was even fond of Miss Durand, yet she relied on her implicitly: and Alwynrie, innocent of the jealous, acquisitive impulse that tainted Clare's intercourse with any girl who caught her fancy, was not at all disturbed or hurt by Louise's attitude. She looked after the child as she would have looked after a starving cat or a fugitive emperor, if they had come her way, as a matter of course, and as instinctively as she ate her dinner.

She was thinking of Louise, as she sat waiting, and a little curious as to what the child would say to her. She had heard all about the Browning lesson, at lunch, from Rose Levy, whose veiled, epigrammatic malice was usually amusing. Agatha had been on her other side, and she had anticipated equally amusing protests and contradictions and a highly coloured and totally different version. But Agatha had been unusually subdued that morning. Both had made it apparent, however, that Clare had been more than a little pleased with Louise.

But, however triumphant Louise's morning might have been, she had no business to be late now. What did she mean by keeping her waiting? Twice had Alwynne been down to the preparation room, searching for her: she did not mean to be impertinent, of course, but it was, at least, casual. Alwynne, with easy, evanescent indignation, resolved to give Louise a taste of her tongue.

Here the child herself burst in upon her meditations, flushed to her glowing eyes, that were bright as if with drugs, excited as Alwynne had never yet guessed that she could be, charged with some indefinable quality as a live wire is charged with electricity. She stammered her apologies mechanically, sure of pardon, and, the formality complied with, was eager, touchingly eager for questions and the relief of communication.

But Alwynne, at nineteen, could not be expected to forego a legitimate grievance.

She read Louise a little lecture on punctuality and politeness, and settled at once to the work in hand. She said, with intention, that they must not waste any more time.

Louise submitted with her usual meekness, and did, Alwynne could see, do her utmost to apply herself to her work. But her answers were ludicrously vague and *mal a propos*, and she met Alwynrie's comments, momentarily sharper, with an abstracted smile.

Suddenly Alwynne lost patience with her.

"I don't know what's the matter with you to-day, Louise," she said sharply. "I don't believe you've taken in a word of what I've said. If you can't take a little more trouble, I'd better go home."

Louise, obviously and pathetically jerked back to consciousness from some dreamer's Paradise, looked up at her with scared, apologetic eyes. The radiance dimmed slowly from her face. She made no answer, only put up her hand to her head, with a queer little gesture of helplessness.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Alwynne, but already more gently. Her anger was always fleeting as a puff of smoke.

But Louise merely shrugged her shoulders and looked vaguely at her again. Then she returned to her work.

Alwynne, walking up and down the room, watched her intently as she bent over the Latin grammar. She was wrinkling her brows over a piece of prose that she had already construed at the previous lesson, and with an ease that had astonished Alwynne. She looked bewildered and put up her hand to her head again. Her efforts to recall her wandering thoughts were patent and almost physical in their intensity; her small hand hovered, contracting and relaxing, like a baby catching at butterflies.

Alwynne was puzzled by her. The child was sincere: but obviously something momentous had happened, and was still occupying her, to the exclusion of all else. Alwynne wished that she had been less hasty: she felt that she should not have checked her.

She stood a moment beside her, reading what she had written. It was scarcely legible, and made no sense. She put a hand on her shoulder—

"Louise, you are writing nonsense. What is it? Tell me what the matter is?"

Louise laid down her pen, gave her a quick, shy smile, hesitated uncertainly, then, to Alwynne's dismay, collapsed on the low desk in a fit of wild, hysterical crying.

Alwynne always shed the mistress in emergency.

She whipped her arms about the child, and, sitting down, gathered her into her lap. She felt how the little, thin body was wrenched and shaken by the sobs it did not attempt to control, but she said nothing, only held it comfortingly tight.

Slowly the paroxysm subsided, and the words came, jerky, fragmentary, faint. Alwynne bent close, to catch them.

Louise was so sorry . . . she was all right now . . . Miss Durand must think her crazy. No—no—nothing was wrong . . . it was the other way round . . . she was so happy that it frightened her . . . she was madly happy . . . she had been in heaven all day . . . it was too wonderful to tell any one about . . . even Miss Durand. . . . Miss Hartill—no one could ever know what Miss Hartill was. . . . She had been so good to her—so wonderful. . . . She had made Louise so happy that she was frightened . . . she couldn't believe it was possible to be so madly happy. . . . That was all. . . . Yes, it had made her cry—the pure happiness, . . . Wasn't it silly? Only she was so dreadfully tired. . . . It had hurt her head, trying to do the Latin—because she was so tired. . . . Yes, she had had headaches lately. . . . But she didn't care—it was worth it, to please Miss Hartill. . . . It was queer that being so happy should make her want to cry; it was comical, wasn't it?

She began to laugh as she spoke, with tears brimming over her lashes, and for a few moments was inclined to be hysterical again.

But Alwynne's firm grasp and calm voice were too much for Louise's will, weakened by emotion and fatigue; she was soon coaxed and hushed into quiet again, and after lying passively for a while in Alwynne's arms, fell into the sudden light sleep of utter exhaustion.

Alwynne, rocking her gently, sat on in the darkening room, without a thought of the passage of time; puzzling over the problem in her arms.

She was too ignorant and inexperienced to understand Louise's outburst, or to realize the dangerous strain that the child's sensibilities were undergoing; but the touch of the little figure, clinging, nestling to her, stirred her. She was vaguely aware that something—somehow—was amiss. Innocently she rejoiced that Clare was being kind to Louise, that the child was so happy and content; but the complaint of fatigue, the frequent headaches, troubled her. She would speak to Elsiebeth. . . . Perhaps the child needed a tonic? Elsiebeth would know. . . .

She glanced down. How different people looked asleep. . . . She had never before realized how young Louise was. What was she? Thirteen? But what a baby she looked, with her thin, child's shape and Binall, clutching hands. . . . It was the

long-lashed lids that did it, hiding the beautiful eyes that were so much older, as she saw now, than the rest of Louise. With her soul asleep, Louise looked ten, and a frail little ghost of ten, at that.

Alwynne frowned. She supposed Clare Hartill realized how young Louise was, \as right in allowing her to work so hard? But Clare knew all about girls, and \hat did she, Alwynne, know? After all Louise had never flagged before. . . . It was probably the usual end of term fatigue—and of course it was necessarily an unusually stiff three months for her. . . . She needed a holiday. . . . Next term would come more easily to her, poor little impetuous Louise. . . . Alwynne realized that she was growing fond of the child.

Suddenly she heard footsteps in the corridor, and her own name in Clare's impatient accents. Louise, too, roused at the sound, and, jerking herself upright, slid from Alwynne's lap to her feet, as the door opened and the light was switched on with a snap. Clare stood in the doorway.

Serenely Alwynne rose, smoothing the creases in her dress, while with the other hand she steadied Louise, swaying and blinking in the strong light. Clare's sharp eyes appreciated her calm no less than the tear-stains on Louise's cheek; she guessed distortedly at the situation. She bit her lip. She found nothing to be annoyed at, yet she was not pleased.

"Alwynne! I've been hunting for you high and low. I thought you were coming home to tea with me."

Alwynne beamed at her.

"Of course! And do you know, I forgot to tell Elsbeth. Isn't it disgraceful? But I'm coming."

She turned to Louise.

"My dear, run along home, and get to bed early; you look dreadfully tired. Doesn't she, Miss Hartill?"

But Clare was already in the passage.

Alwynne hurried after her, with a last cheerful nod, and Louise heard the echo of their footsteps die away in the distance.

Still dazed and heavy with sleep, her thoughts obscured and chaotic, she sat down again stupidly at her desk in the alcove of the window. She leaned her forehead against the cold pane and looked out.

It was a wild night. The wind howled and shrieked in the bare trees: the rain tore past in gusts; the lamp-post at the

corner was mirrored in the wet pavement, like a moon on an oily sea.

Louise pushed open the casement. The wind lulled as she did so, and she lent out. The air, at least, was mild, and a faint back-wash of rain sprayed soothingly upon her hot cheeks and swollen eyes.

Slowly her thoughts shaped themselves. So the day was over—the happiest day she had ever had. . . . She thought God was very wonderful to have made such a woman as Miss Hartill. She sent Him a hasty little prayer of thanks. But she had been very foolish that afternoon. . . . She could not understand it now. . . . She hoped Miss Durand would not tell Miss Hartill. . . . Miss Hartill had been in a great hurry ! Was that why she had not said good-night to her ? But such a little word. She wondered why Miss Hartill had not said good-night to her. . . .

The front door below the window creaked and opened. Louise peered downwards. Miss Durand and Miss Hartill came down the steps, sheltering under one umbrella, talking. Their voices floated up.

" I hope you don't spoil her, Aiwynne ? Yes, I know——" Alwymie was murmuring friendly adjectives. " But a mistress is in a peculiar position. You should not let yourself be too familiar——" A gust of wind and rain whirling down the road bore away the rest of the sentence.

Louise shut the window. She shivered a little as she gathered up her books.

Her happiest day was over.

CHAPTER VIII

A WEEK before Christmas Alwynne began to wonder how the day itself should be spent, or rather, if her plans for the spending would ever pass Elsbeth's censorship. She was doubtful. For the last two or three years Christmas had been to them a rock of collision.

"The pity of it!" thought Alwynne. Once it had been the event, the crowning glory, the very reason of the ending year. A year, indeed, had always presented itself to her in advance as a wide country through which she must make her way, to reach the hostel, Christmas, hidden in the mists of time, on its further border. She had the whole map of the land in her mind, curiously vivid and distinct. She had never consciously devised the picture; it had, from the first, presented itself complete and unalterable. She stood, on New Year's Day, at the entrance of a country lane which ran between uneven hedges through a varying countryside of fields and woods and heather-land. Each change in the surroundings represented a month, the smaller differences the weeks and days. She went down this winding lane as the days went by, in slow content. January >\as a silent expanse of high tableland, snow-bound to the horizon. Winding down hill through the sodden grassland of the bare February country, where she lighted on nothing but early parsnip fronds and sleepy celandine buds in the dripping \\ickery hedges, she passed at last into the wood of March, a wood of pollard hazels and greening oaks and bramble-guarded dingles, where the anemones grew, and the first primroses. She slipped and slithered in and out of mossy leaf-pits, and the briars clawed her hair and pinafore, as she robbed the primrose clumps with wet, reddened fingers. The wind shrieked overhead and wrestled \\ildly with the bare branches, but beyond there \\as blue sky and a drift of cloud. But, unawares, she would always head through the wood to when' the trees grew thinner and dash out at last, through a mist of pale cuckoo-pint, into the cowslip field that was April,

The path ran on through May and Juno between fields of ox-eye daisies and garden roses, always down hill, till she tumbled into August, the deep hot valley. There she found the sea.

With September the road lifted steadily, growing stony and ever steeper. It wound on ahead of her like a silver thread through a brocade of red and gold and purple, that was heather and bracken and beech. But the beech blossoms could never be gathered; they fell apart into a shower of dull leaves, and left her with a branch of bare twigs in her hand. The briony berries that she twisted into wreaths stained her straw hat with their black, evil juice; even the manna-like old-man's-board smelled sour and rotten. The decaying, witchhko beauty of the season tricked and frightened her; autumn was a hard hill to climb.

But far away, on the summit of that difficult hill, stood a house. An old house, gayly bricked, dressed in ivy, with a belfry from which carols rang out unceasingly. It was always night-time where it stood and cheerful lights were set in every window. Alwynne never saw the house till she had turned the bend of the road into November; then it faced her suddenly and she would wave to the distant windows with a thrill of excitement, and quicken her steps, with the goal of the journey in sight at last. There was yet a weary climb before it was reached; every day of December was a boulder, painfully beclambered. But she would come to the gates at last, and tear up the frosty drive, from the shadow of whose shrubberies Jacob Marley peered and clanked at her and ghosts of Christmas turkeys gobbled horribly, to the open holly-hung doorway where Santa Clans, authentic in beard and dressing-gown, welcomed her with Elsbeth's voice. Followed stay-at-home days of delirious merry-making, from which she awoke a week later, to lind herself, her back to a closed door, a spent cracker in her hand, looking out again, eager and a htllc wistful, across the white untrodden plain of yet another January.

But ever the next Christmas beckoned her anew.

To Elsbeth, too, Christmas was the day of delights, and Alwynne the queen of it. To Elsbeth, too, the pleasure of it began many weeks earlier in the secret fashioning of quaint gifts and surprises, and the anticipation of the small niece's delight in them. Elsbeth would have cheerfully cut off one of her slim fingers if Alwynne had happened to covet it. The

childless woman loved Alwynne—the child in Alwynne she worshipped.

But though the delight of actual motherhood was denied Elsbeth, she was spared none of its chagrins.

Stooping for years to a child's level, she was cruelly shaken when Alwynne, suddenly and inexplicably, as it always seems, grew up. It took Elsbeth almost as many years to straighten herself again. Years when Alwynne, in the arrogance of her enterprising youth, thought that Elsbeth was sometimes awfully childish. She supposed that she was growing old; she used not to be like that. . . .

Thereafter, each Christmas, challenging comparison as it did with the memory-mellowed charm of its forerunners, emphasized the change that had taken place. Yearly the ideal Christmas lured them to the old observances; yearly the reality satisfied them less.

Elsbeth still sat up half the night on Christmas Eve, at work upon the little tree. Alwynne still planned gorgeous and laborious presents for her aunt. Elsbeth still filled a stocking (out-size) with tip-toe secrecy, and Alwynne, at sixteen, still ran across in her dressing-gown, and curled up on Elsbeth's bed to unpack it.

But at sixteen one is too old and too young to be a child any more. The tree was a fir-tree, pure and simple; the fairy lights stank of tallow; and not even for the sake of a new bright sixpence, would Alwynne, in the thick of a vegetarian fad, devour a slice of the evil-coloured Christmas pudding.

Elsbeth, as she saw her old-time jokes and small surprises that could no longer surprise, fall utterly flat, thought that school had altered Alwynne altogether; that she was assuming airs of maturity ridiculous in a child of her age, ("Sixteen? She's a mere baby still," affirmed poor Elsbeth,) that she was growing indifferent, superior, heartless. And Alwynne, trying to appear amused, wondered why Christmas was so different from what it used to be and wished heartily that Elsbeth would not try to be skittish. It didn't suit her—made her seem undignified. Each, longing for the old days, when the other had conjured up so easily the true spirit of the festival, tried her affectionate best to do so still; each, failing inevitably, inevitably blamed the other. Neither realized, that Dan Christmas is the god of very little children, and that where they are not, he, too, does not linger.

But the last restless, unsatisfactory day had settled the matter for them finally. Alwynne had fidgeted through morning service, and pained her aunt, on the walk home, with her sceptical young comments; had omitted to kiss her under the mistletoe; had sat through the ceremonious meal, answering Elsbeth's cheerful pleasantries in monosyllables; and finally, after an unguarded remark, and the inevitable reproving comment, had flung out of the room in a fever of irritation. She came near thinking Elsbeth a foolish and intolerable old maid. *And* Elsbeth, sitting sadly over the fire all the lonely afternoon, puzzled meekly over Alwynne's hardness of heart, and cried a little, in pure longing, for the baby of a few years back, to whom she had been as God.

They were reconciled, of course, by tea-time. Alwynne, quieted by solitude, was soon bewildered at her own ill-humour, shocked at the sentiments she had been able to entertain, remorseful at hurting Elsbeth's feelings and spoiling her Christmas Day. They were able to send each other to bed happy again.

But they had no more snap-dragons and early stockings. The next Christmas, shorn of its splendours, was a strange day to them both, but, at least, a peaceful one, with Alwynne at her gentlest, and Elsbeth, forgiving her as best she could, for her long skirts and her seventeen years.

With the passing of yet another year, however, Alwynne's last scruple as to the sacrosanct privacy of Christmas celebrations vanished utterly. The ideal day, she saw at last, and clearly, should be neither a children's carnival, nor a symposium of relatives. (Alwynne knew of none but Elsbeth, but she dearly loved a phrase.) Christmas should be a time of social intercourse, of peace and goodwill towards men—the human race—neighbours and friends—not merely relations. . . . One should not shut oneself up. . . . It would be a sound idea, for instance, to ask some one to dinner. . . . A friend of Elsbeth's—or there was Clare! It would be very jolly if Clare could come to dinner. . . . Clare was delightful when she was in holiday mood; she could keep the table in a roar. . . . A little fun would do Elsbeth good. . . . Surely Elsbeth would enjoy having Clare to dinner!

She found herself, however, experiencing considerable diffidence in opening up the project to her aunt. Elsbeth, to whom the possibility of such a request had long ago presented itself, who could have told you by sheer intuition at what exact

moment the idea occurred to her niece, gave her no help. Alwynne had contrived to put her in the position of appearing to approve Clare Hartill. Clare, she felt, had had something to do with that. She knew that it would be unwise to lose the advantage of her apparent tolerance; knew that Clare expected her to lose it by some impulsive expression of mistrust or dislike, and intended to utilize the lapse for her own ends. It would be easy for Clare to pose as the generous victim of unreasoning hostility. But Clare should not, she resolved, have the opportunity. She, Elsbeth, would never be so far lacking in cordiality as to give her any sort of handle. But Clare Hartill should not eat her Christmas dinner with them, vowed Elsbeth, for all that.

So for a couple of days, Alwynne, approaching Elsbeth from all possible angles, found no crack in her armour, and somewhat puzzled, but entirely unsuspicious, thought it hard that Elsbeth should be, at times, so curiously unresponsive. She would not have scrupled to ask her aunt outright to invite Clare, but she quite genuinely wished to find out first if Elsbeth would mind, and never guessed that the difficulty she found in opening the matter was the answer to that question.

The arrival of the turkey was her opportunity.

Sailing into the kitchen in search of raisins (the more maturely dignified Alwynne's deportment, the more likely her detection in some absurd child's habit or predilection), she found Elsbeth raging low-voiced, and the small maid gaping admiration over the broodingnagian proportions of their Christmas dinner.

"Look at it, Alwynne! What am I to do? Twenty pounds! And we shan't get through ten! Really, it's too bad—I wrote so distinctly. It's impossible to return it—to Devonshire! No time. It's the twenty-second already. How shall we ever get through it?"

"We might get some one in to help us," began Alwynne delightedly. But Elsbeth, very busy all of a sudden, with basin and egg-beater, whisked and hustled her out of the kitchen.

Alwynne returned to the matter, however, later in the day,

"Elsbeth, we shall never manage that turkey alone."

"Of course, I must send some over to Mrs. Marpler," began Elsbeth hastily.

Mrs. Marpler was a charwoman. Alwynne contrived to make their succession of little maids adore her, but she and Mrs.

Marpler detested one another cordially. Mrs. Marpler's offences, according to Alwynne, were that she was torpid, inefficient, breathed heavily, smelled of cats, and, by the complicated and judicious recital of the authentic calamities which regularly befel her, lured from Elsbeth more than her share of the broken meats and old clothes of the establishment, perquisites which Alwynne, entirely incredulous, coveted for pet dependents of her own. Alwynne's offences, according to Mrs. Marpler, were, the aforementioned incredulity, her hostile influence on Miss Loveday, a certain crispness of manner and a tendency to open all windows in Mrs. Marpler's neighbourhood. The feud distressed Elsbeth, and Alwynne's diagnosis of Mrs. Marpler's character; for she liked to believe the best of every one. Alwynne forced her to agree, but secretly she sympathized with her feckless char-lady.

"Marpler has been out of work three weeks, and as poor Mrs. Marpler says, where their Christmas dinner is to come from——"

"How much extra did you pay her this week?" demanded Alwynne remorselessly. "And last week—and the week before—and the week before that? Of course he's out of work. Who wouldn't be?"

"My dear Alwynne, if you think they can buy a Christmas dinner on what I gave them——" retorted Elsbeth heatedly. "But it's absurd to argue with you. What do you know of what food costs?"

"Anyhow, Mrs. Baker, with six children——" began Alwynne, who also had been primed by a protegee. But she recollected that she did not wish to annoy Elsbeth at this juncture. Clare must take precedence of Mrs. Baker. "Well, you can send them the legs and the carcase," she conceded; "even then there will be more than we can possibly manage. Couldn't we ask some one to spend the day with us?"

"I hardly think," said Elsbeth, with a touch of severity, "that you would find any one. Most people like to keep Christmas with their Relations."

"Well, I haven't got any. But by all accounts I think I should hate 'em in the plural as much as I love 'em in the singular." She blew Elsbeth a kiss. "But if we could find some one—to help us eat up the turkey—and spend the evening—it would be rather jolly, don't you think? It was dullish last year, wasn't it?"

" Was it ? " said Elsbeth, with careful brightness. " I'm sorry. I had thought you enjoyed it."

" Oh, why is she so touchy ? I didn't mean anything," cried Alwynne within herself. And aloud—

" Oh, I only meant without a tree or anything specially Christmassy——"

" Alwynne," said Elsbeth, with scrupulous patience, " it was you who suggested not having one."

" I know, I know, I know, I know ! " cried Alwynne, in a fever.

Elsbeth sighed.

Alwynne repented.

" Elsbeth darling, I didn't mean to be rude; I'm a beast. And I didn't mean it wasn't nice last year. I only meant—it would be—be a change to have some one—because of the turkey—and I thought, perhaps Clare——"

" Can't you exist for a day without seeing Clare Hartill ? " asked Elsbeth, with a wry smile.

Alwynne dimpled.

" Not very well," she said.

Elsbeth stared at her plate. Alwynne edged her chair along the table, till she sat at Elsbeth's elbow. She slid an arm round her neck.

" Elsbeth ! Elsbeth, dear ! You're not cross, Elsbeth ? It's a very big turkey. Do, Elsbeth ! "

" Do what ? "

" Ask Clare. You Like her, don't you ? "

No answer.

" Don't you, Elsbeth ? " Alwynne's tone was a little anxious.

" Would you care if I didn't ? " The pattern of her plate still interested Elsbeth. She was tracing its windings with her fork.

" You silly—it would just spoil everything. That's just it—I would like to get you two fond of each other, only with Clare so busy there's never a chance of your really getting acquainted."

" I knew Clare Hartill long before you did, Alwynne. I knew her as a schoolgirl."

" But not well—not as I know her."

" No, not as you know her."

" There you are," said Alwynne, with satisfaction. " That's why—you **don't** know her properly. Oh, Elsbeth, you must

share all my good things, and Clare's the very best of them. Do let her come."

"She may be engaged; she probably is."

"^c Oh, no—Clare will be alone—I know, because——" she stopped herself.

Elsbeth questioned her with her eyes.

"Oh, nothing—only I happen to know," said Alwynne.

"Because?"

Alwynne shook her head mischievously.

"Oh, well, if you won't tell me——" began Elsbeth.

"Oh, I will, I will," cried Alwynne hastily.

"My dear, I don't want to know Miss HartnTs secrets, or yours either," said Elsbeth huffily. But to herself, "Why am I losing my temper over these silly trifles?"

"Elsbeth dear, it was nothing. Only Clare did ask me to spend Christmas Day with her."

"Well?" said Elsbeth jealously.

"What?" asked Alwynne's ingenuous eyes.

"Are you going?"

Alwynne nestled up to her, humming with careful flatness the final bars of *Home, sweet home*.

"Elsbeth, you old darling—I do believe you're jealous! Are you, Elsbeth? Are you?"

"Are you going?" repeated Elsbeth.

Alwynne was sobered by her tone.

"I'm going to spend my Christmas Day in my own home, with my own Elsbeth," she said, "and I think you needn't have asked me."

Elsbeth melted.

"My dear, I'm a silly old woman——"

"Yes, you tell me that once a week."

"One day you'll believe it. All right—you can ask your Miss Hartill—or shall I write?"

Alwynne hugged her.

"Elsbeth, you're an angel! I'll go round at once. Oh, it will be jolly."

"If she comes."

Alwynne turned, on the way to her bedroom. Elsbeth's intonation was peculiar.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't think she'll come, Alwynne."

"But I know she'll be alone——"

" Well, you go and ask her."

" But why do you say that—in that tone ? "

" I may be wrong. But I've known her longer than! you have. But run along and ask her."

" But why? Why ? "

" Oh, don't bother me, child," cried Elsbeth impatiently.

" Run along and ask her."

CHAFFER IX

" I ITAD a letter from Louise yesterday," announced Clare.

She was curled up in a saddle-bag before the roaring golden fire, and was busy with paper and pencil. Alwynne, big with her as yet unissued invitation, sat cross-legged on the white bearskin at her feet. The floor was littered with papers and book-catalogues. At Christmas-time Clare ordered books as a housewife orders groceries, and she and Alwynne had spent a luxurious evening over .HT lists. The vivid flames lit up Clare's thin, lazy length, and turned the hand she held up against their heat into transparent carnelian. Her face was in shadow, but there were dancing specks of light in her sombre eyes that kept time with the leaping blaze. Clare was a sybarite over her fires. She would not endure coal or gas or stove—wood, and wood only, must be used; and she would pay any price for apple-wood, ostensibly for the quality of its flame, secretly for the mere pleasure of burning fuel with so pleasant a name; for she liked beautiful words as a child likes chocolate—a sober, acquisitive liking. She had, too, though she would not own it, a delight in destruction, costly destruction; she enjoyed the sensation of reckless power that it gave her. The trait might be morbid, but there was not a trace of pose in it; she could have enjoyed a Whittington bonfire, without needing a king to gasp applause. Yet she shivered nightly as she undressed in her cold bedroom, rather than commit the extravagance of an extra fire. She never realized the comicality of her contradictoriness, or even its existence in her character, though it qualified every act and impulse of her daily life. Her soul was, indeed, a hybrid, combining the temper of a Calvinist with the tastes of a Renaissance bishop.

At the moment she was in gala mood. The autumn term was but four days dead, she had not had time to tire of holidays, though, within a week, she would be bored again, and restless for the heavy work under which she affected to groan. Her

chafing mind seldom allowed her indolent body much of the peace it delighted in—was ever the American in lotus-land. It was fidgeted at the moment by Alwynne's absorption in a lavishly illustrated catalogue.

"Did you hear, Alwynne? A letter from Louise."

Alwynne's "Oh?" was absent. It was in the years of the Rackham craze, and she had just discovered a reproduction of the *Midsummer* Helen.

"Any message?" Clare knew how to prod Alwynne.

The girl glanced up amused but a little indignant.

"You've answered it already? Well! And the weeks I've had to wait sometimes."

"This was such a charming letter," said Clare smoothly. "It deserved an answer. She really has the quaintest style. And Alwynne—never a blot or a flourish! It's a pleasure to read."

Alwynne laughed ruefully. She would always squirm good-humouredly under Clare's pin-pricks, with such amusement at her own discomfiture that Clare never knew whether to fling away her needle for good, or, for the mere experiment's sake, to stab hard and savagely. At that stage of their intimacy, Alwynne's guilelessness invariably charmed and disarmed her—she knew that it would take a very crude display of cruelty to make Alwynne believe that she was being hurt intentionally. Clare was amused by the novel pedestal upon which she had been placed; she was accustomed to the panoply of Minerva, or the bow of Dian Huntress, but she had never before been hailed as Bona Dea. It tickled her to be endowed with every domestic virtue, to be loved, as Alwynne loved her, with the secure and fearless affection of a daughter for a newly-discovered and adorable young mother. She appreciated Alwynne's determination of their relationship, her nice sense of the difference in age, her modesty in reserving any claim to an equality in their friendship, her frank and affectionate admiration—yet, while it pleased her, it could pique. Calm comradeship or surrendering adoration she could cope with, but the subtle admixture of such alien states of mind was puzzling. She had acquired a lover with a sense of humour and she felt that she had her hands full. Her imperious will would, in time, she knew, eliminate either the lover or the humour—it annoyed her that she was not as yet quite convinced that it would be the humour. She intended to master Alwynne, but she realized that it would

be a question of time, that she would give her more trouble than the children to whom she was accustomed. Alwynne's utter unrealisation of the fact that a trial of strength was in progress, was disconcerting : yet Clare, jaded and super-subtle, found her innocence endearing. Without relaxing in her purpose, she yet caught herself wondering if an ally were not better than a slave. But the desire for domination was never entirely shaken off, and Alwynne's free bearing was in itself an ever-present challenge. Clare loved her for it, but her pride was in arms. It was her misfortune not to realize that, for all her Olympian poses, she had come to love Alwynne deeply and enduringly.

Alwynne, meanwhile, laughing and pouting on the hearth, the firelight revealing every change of expression in her piquant face, was declining to be classed with Agatha Middleton; her handwriting might be bad, but it wasn't a beetle-track; anyhow, Queen Elizabeth had a vile fist—Clare admired Queen Elizabeth, didn't she ? She had always so much to say to Clare, that if she stopped to bother about handwriting——! Had Clare never got into a row for untidiness in her own young days ? Elsbeth had hinted. . . . But of course she reserved judgment till she had hoard Clare's version ! She settled to attention and Clare, inveigled into reminiscences, found herself recounting quaint and forgotten incidents to her own credit and discredit, till, before the evening was over, Alwynne knew almost as much of Clare's schooldays as Clare did herself. She could never resist telling Alwynne stories, Alwynne was always so genuinely breathless with interest.

They returned to Louise at last, and Alwynne read the letter, chuckling over the odd phrases and dainty marginal drawings. She would have dearly liked to see Clare's answer. She was glad, for all her protests, that Clare had been moved to answer; she knew so well the delight it would give Louise. The child would need cheering up. For, quite resignedly and by the way, Louise had mentioned that the Denny family had developed whooping-cough, and emigrated to Torquay, and she, in quarantine, though it was hoped she had escaped infection, was preparing for a solitary Christmas.

Alwynne looked up at Clare with wrinkled brows.

" Poor child ! But what can I do ? I haven't had whooping-cough, and Elsbeth is always so afraid of infection, or ^lse she could have come to us. I know Elsbeth wouldn't have minded,"

" You are going to leave me to myself then ? You've quite made up your mind ? "

Alwynne's eyes lighted up.

" Oh, Clare, it's all right. You are coming ! At least—I mean—Elsbeth sends her kindest regards, and she would be so pleased if you will come to dinner with us on Christmas Day," she finished politely.

Clare laughed.

" It's very kind of your aunt."

" Yes, isn't it ? " said Alwynne, with ingenuous enthusiasm.

" I'm afraid I can't come, Alwynne."

Alwynne's face lengthened.

" Oh, Clare ! Why ever not ? "

Clare hesitated. She had no valid reason, save that she preferred the comfort of her own fireside and that she had intended Alwynne to come to her. Alwynne's regretful refusal when she first mooted the arrangement, she had not considered final, but this invitation upset her plans. Elsbeth's influence was opposing her. She hated opposition. Also she did not care for Elsbeth. It would not be amiss to make Elsbeth (not her dislike of Elsbeth) the reason for her refusal. It would have its effect on Alwynno sooner or later.

She considered Alwynne narrowly, as she answered—

" My dear, I had arranged to be at home, for one thing."

Alwynne looked hurt.

" Of course, if you don't care about it—" she began.

Clare rallied her.

" Be sensible, my child. It is most kind of Miss Loveday; but—wasn't it chieily your doing, Alwynne ? Imagine her dismay if I accepted. A stranger in the gate ! On Christmas Day ! One must make allowances for little prejudices, you know."

" She'll be awfully disappointed," cried Alwynne, so eager for Clare that she beheved it.

" Will she ? " Clare laughed pleasantly. " Every one doesn't wear your spectacles. What would she do with me, for a whole day ? "

" We shouldn't see her much," began Alwynne. " She spends most of her time in church. I go in the morning—(yes, I'm very good!) but I've drawn the line at turning out after lunoh."

" Then why shouldn't you come to me instead ? It would

be so much better. I shall be all alone, you know." Clare's wistful intonation was not entirely artificial.

Alwynno was distressed.

"Oh, Clare, I'd love to—you know I'd love to—but how could I? Elsbeth would be dreadfully hurt. I couldn't leave her alone on Christmas Day."

"But you can me?"

"Clare, don't put it like that. You know I shall want to be with you all the time. But Elsbeth's like my mother. It would be beastly of me. You must put relations first at Christmas-time, even if they're not first really."

She smiled at Clare, but she felt disloyal as she said it, and hated herself. Yet wasn't it true? Clare came first, though Elsbeth must never guess it. Dear old Elsbeth was pretty dense, thank goodness! Where ignorance is bliss, etcetera! Yet she, Alwynne, felt extraordinarily mean. . . .

Clare watched her jealously. She had set her heart on securing Alvymie for Christmas Day, and had thought, ten minutes since, with a secret, confident smile, that there would not be much difficulty. And here was Alwynne holding out—refusing categorically! It was incredible! Yet she could not be angry: Alvyrme so obviously was longing to be with her. . . . Equally obviously prepared to risk her displeasure (a heavy penalty already, Clare guessed, to Alwynne), rather than ignore the older claim. Clare thought that an affection that could be so loyal to a tedious old maid was better worth deflecting than many a more ardent, unscrupulous enthusiasm. Alwynne was showing strength of character.

She persisted nevertheless—

"Well, it's a pity. I must eat my Christmas dinner alone, I suppose,"

"Oh, Clare, you might come to us," cried Alwynne. "I can't see why *you* won't."

Clare shrugged her shoulders.

"If you can't see why, my dear Alwynne, there's no more to be said."

Alwynne most certainly did not see, but Clare's delicately reproachful tone convicted her, and incidentally Elsbeth, of some failure in tact. She supposed she had blundered . . . she often did. . . . But Elsbeth, at least, must be exonerated . . . she did so want Clare to think well of Elsbeth. . . . t

She perjured herself in hasty propitiation.

" Yes. Yes—I do see. I ought to have known, of course. Elsbeth was quite right. She said you wouldn't, all along."

" Oh?" Clare sat up. " Oh? Your aunt said that, did she?" She spoke with detachment, but inwardly she was alert, on guard. Elsbeth had suddenly become worth attention

" Oh, yes." Alwynne's voice was rueful. " She was quite sure of it. She said I might ask you, with pleasure, if I didn't believe her—you see, she'd love you to come—but she didn't think you would."

" I wonder," said Clare, laughing naturally, " what made her say that?"

" She said she knew you better than I did," confided Alwynne, with one of her spurts of indignation. " As if——"

" Yes, it's rather unlikely, isn't it?" said Clare, with an intimate smile. " But you're not going?"

" I must. Look at the time! Elsbeth will be having fits!" Alwynne called from the hall where one was hastily slipping on her coat and hat.

Clare stood a moment—thinking.

So the duel had been with Elsbeth! So that negligible and mouse-like woman had been aware—all along . . . had prepared, with a thoroughness worthy of Clare herself, for the inevitable encounter . . . had worsted Clare completely. . . . It was amazing. . . . Clare was compelled to admiration. It was clear to her now that Elsbeth must have distrusted her from the beginning. It had been Elsbeth's doing, not hers, that their intercourse had been so slight. . . . Yet she had never restrained Alwynne; she had risked giving her her head. . . . She was subtle! This affair of the Christmas dinner for instance—Clare appreciated its cleverness. Elsbeth had not wanted her, Clare now saw clearly; had been anxious to avoid the intimacy that such an invitation would imply; equally anxious, surely, that Alwynne should not guess her uneasy jealousy: so she had risked the invitation, counting on her knowledge of Clare's character (Clare stamped with vexation—that the woman should have such a memory!) secure that Clare, unsuspecting of her motives, would, by refusing, do exactly as Elsbeth wished. It had been the neatest of gossamer traps—and Clare had walked straight into it. . . . She was furious. If Alwynne, maddeningly unsuspecting Alwynne, had but enlightened her earlier in the evening! Now she was caught, committed by her own decision of manner to the course

of action she most would have wished to avoid. . . . She could not change her mind now without appearing foolishly vacillating. . . . It would not do. . . . She had been bluffed, successfully, gorgeously bluffed. . . . And Elsbeth was sitting at home enjoying the situation . . . too sure of herself and Clare even to be curious as to the outcome of it all. She knew. Clare stamped again. Oh, but she would pay Elsbeth for this. . . . The *castis belli* was infinitely trivial, but the campaign should be Homeric. . . . And this preliminary engagement could not affect the final issues. . . . She always won in the end. . . . But, after all, Elsbeth could not be blamed, though she must be crushed; Alwynne was worth fighting for! Elsbeth was a fool. . . . If she had treated Clare decently, Clare might—possibly—have shared Alwynne with her. . . . She believed she would have had scruples. . . . Now they were dispelled. . . . Alwynne, by fair means or foul, should be detached . . . should become Clare's property . . . should be given up to no living woman or man.

She followed Alwynne into the hall and lit the staircase candle. She would see Alwynne out. She would have liked to keep Alwynne with her for a month. She was a delightful companion; it was extraordinary how indispensable she made herself. Clare knew that her flat would strike her as a dreary place to return to, when she had shut the door on Alwynne. She would sit and read and feel restless and lonely. Yet she did not allow herself to feel lonely as a rule; she scouted the weakness. But Alwynne wound herself about you, thought Clare, and you never knew, till she had gone, what a difference she made to you.

She wished she could keep Alwynne another couple of hours. . . . But it was eleven already . . . her hold was not yet strong enough to warrant innovations to which Elsbeth could object. . . . Her time would come later. . . . How much later would depend on whether it were affection that swayed Alwynne, or only a sense of duty. . . . She believed, because she hoped, that it was duty—a sense of duty was more easily suborned than an affection. . . . For the present, however, Alwynne must be allowed to do as she thought right. Clare knew when she was beaten, and, with her capacity for wry admiration of virtues that she had not the faintest intention of incorporating in her own character, she was able to applaud Alwynne heartily. Yet she did not intend to make victory easy to her.

They went down the flights of stairs silently, side by side.

Alwynne opened the entrance doors and stood a moment, fascinated.

"Look, Clare! What a night!"

The moon was full and flooded earth and sky with bright, cold light. The garden, roadway, roofs, trees and fences glittered like powdered diamonds, white with frost and moonshine. The silence was exquisite.

They stood awhile, enjoying it

Suddenly Clare shivered. Alwynne became instantly and anxiously practical.

"Clare, what am I thinking of? Go in at once—you'll catch a dreadful cold."

With unusual passivity Clare allowed herself to be hurried in. At the staircase Alwynne said good-bye, handing her her candle, and waiting till she should have passed out of sight. On the fourth step Clare hesitated, and turned—

"Alwynne—come to me for Christmas?"

Alwynne flung out her hands.

"Clare! I mustn't."

"Alwynne—come to me for Christmas?"

"You know I mustn't! You know you'd think me a pig if I did, now wouldn't you?"

"I expect so."

"But I'll come in for a peep at you," cried Alwynne, brightening, "while Elsbeth's at afternoon service. I could do that. And to say Merry Christmas!"

"Come to dinner?"

"I can't."

"Then you needn't come at all." Clare turned away.

Alwynne caught her hand, as it leaned on the balustrade. In the other the candle shook a little.

"Lady Macbeth! Dear Lady Macbeth! Miss Hartill of the Upper Sixth, whom I'm scared to death of, really—you're behaving like a very naughty small child. Now, aren't you? Honestly? Oh, do turn round and crush me with a look for being impudent, and then tell me that I'm only doing what you really approve. I don't want to, Clare, but you know you hate selfishness."

Clare looked down at her.

"All right, Alwynne. You must do as you like."

"Say good-night to me," demanded Alwynne. "Nicely, Clare, very nicely! It's Christmas-time."

Carefully Clare deposited her candlestick on the stair above. Leaning *over* the banisters, she put her arms round Alwynne and kissed her passionately and repeatedly.

" Good-night, my darling," said Clare.

Then, recoiling, she caught up her candlestick, and without another word or look, hurried up the stairs,

Alwynne walked home on air.

CHAPTER X

ELSBETH bore the news of Clare's defection with stoicism; but her motherly soul was disturbed by Alwynne's disappointment, though she could not stifle her pleasure in its cause. She felt, indeed, somewhat guilty, and was eager to atone by acquiescing in Alwynne's plan of visiting Clare while she went to church; and met her more than half way over the question of an altered tea-hour.

Alwynne, who from the first had been fretted, though but half consciously, by the faintly repellent manner assumed by each of the two women at mention of the other, was soothed by Elsbeth's advances. Elsbeth was a dear, after all: there was no one quite like Elsbeth. . . . For all her obstinacies and unreasonablenesses, she never really failed you. . . . She could be depended on to love you at your worst; you could quarrel with her with never a fear of real alienation. . . . Elsbeth might not be exciting, but she was as indispensable as food. . . . She was, after all, the starting-point and ultimate goal of all one's adventures. . . . Clare would lose some of her delightfulness, if there were no Elsbeth to whom to en-sky her. . . . Alwynne did not see what she wanted with a mother, so long as she had Elsbeth. . . . She had said so once to her aunt and had never guessed, as she was chidden for sacrilege against the picture over her bed, at the exquisite pleasure she had given.

After the little coolness of the past few days (her aunt's fault entirely, Alwynne knew, and so could be unruffled) Elsbeth's renewal of sympathetic interest was very soothing. Alwynne was glad to foster it by talking of Clare, and Clare, and nothing but Clare, for the rest of the week. In church on Christmas morning, poor Elsbeth, settling her spiritual accounts, begging forgiveness for uncharitable thoughts, and assuring her Maker that she wished Clare no evil, could yet sigh for the useful age of miracles, and patron saints, and devils, when a prayer in the right quarter could transport your enemy to inaccessible islands

of the Antipodes. She would have been magnanimous, have bargained for every comfort—Eden's climate and hot and cold water laid on—but the island must be definitely inaccessible and Antipodean.

Clare, too, had spent her morning, if not in prayer, at least in profound meditation. She felt stranded, and was wishing for Alwynne, and anathematizing the superfluous and intriguing aunt.

Clare made the mistake of all tortuous intelligences in being unable to credit appearances. She was being, as usual, unjust to Elsbeth, Alwynne, and the world at large. She could not believe in simplicity combined with brains : a simple soul was necessarily a simpleton in her eyes. Because her own words were ever two edged, her meaning flavoured by reservations and implications, she literally could not accept a speech as expressing no more and no less than its plain dictionary meaning. With any one of her own type of mind she was at her ease; her mistake lay in not recognizing how rare that typo was; in detecting subtleties where none existed, and wasting hint, suggestion and innuendo on minds that drove as heartily through them as an ox walks through a spider's thread stretched from post to gatepost of the meadow he means to enter.

Elsbeth, whom she had considered a negligible fool, had yesterday startled her into respect—not for the kindly and selfless pleasure in Alwynne's pleasure, that had, for all her little jealous anxieties, prompted the invitation to Clare, but for the totally imaginary cunning with which, in Clare's eyes, it had invested her. Alwynne's repetition of Elsbeth's remark had enlightened Clare: enlightened her to qualities in Elsbeth which Elsbeth herself would have been horrified to possess.

Clare saw, in the manner of the invitation, a gauntlet flung down, the preliminaries to a conflict, with Alwynne herself for prize; and the first warning of an antagonist sufficiently like herself to be considered dangerous, the more dangerous, indeed, for the apparently uninteresting harmlessness that could mask a mind in reality so scheming and so complex. She did not realize that if she did finally close with Elsbeth, with the intention of robbing her of Alwynne, she would have far more to fear from her simple, affectionate goodness of heart than from any subtlety of intellect with which Clare was choosing to invest her.

She wondered, as she frittered away the morning, how she should best counter Elsbeth's attack. She would call, of course

—in state; it would be due; she would not be judged deficient in courtesies. Alwynne should be there (she would ensure that), and she, Clare, would be exceedingly charming, and very delicately emphasize the contrast between Elsbeth and herself. It would be quite easy, with Alwynne already biased. Her eyes sparkled with anticipation. It would be amusing. She should enjoy routing Elsbeth.

And there was the case of Alwynne to be considered. She had been excessively nice to Alwynne lately, had, in fact, allowed her, for a moment, to see how necessary she was becoming to Clare. . . . That was a mistake. . . . One must never let people feel secure of their hold upon one. . . . That little speech of Alwynne's last night, mocking and tender—she had thrilled to it at the time—*did* it not, ever so faintly, shadow forth a readjustment of attitudes, sound a note of equality? That, though it had pleased her at the moment, must not be. . . . Alwynne must be checked. . . . It would not hurt her. . . . She was subdued as easily as a child, and as easily revived. . . . She never bore malice. Clare, who never forgot or forgave a pinprick, had often marvelled at her, could even now scarcely believe in the spontaneity of her good temper. But Alwynne, certainly, had been going too far lately; was absurdly popular in the school; could Clare guessed, have annexed more than one of her own special worshippers, if she had chosen. Louise, she knew, contided in her: she thought with a double stab of jealousy of the scene she had witnessed but a few days since; of Louise, fresh from her commendations, from her kiss even (that rare impulse, regretted as soon as gratified), at rest in Alwynne's arms. She recalled Louise's startled look and Alwynne's contrasting serenity. She had not enquired what it all meant—that was not her way. But she had not forgotten it. Alwynne was hers. Louise was hers. But they had nothing to seek from one another! Alwynne, undoubtedly, as the elder, the dearer, required the check; not little Louise. Louise's letter had genuinely touched her—she thought she would go and see the child, spend her Christmas Day charitably, in amusing her. And if (in after-thought) Alwynne came round in the afternoon, and found her gone—it couldn't be helped! It wouldn't hurt Alwynne to be disappointed. . . . It wouldn't hurt Alwynne to spend a day of undiluted Elsbeth. . . . And Louise would be so amusingly charmed to see Clare. . . . It was pleasant to please a child—a clever, appreciative child. . . . She would go round directly after lunch. . . . The

maid should go home for the afternoon. . . . She laughed mischievously as she imagined the blankness of Alwyrme's face, when she should be confronted by silence and a closed door. Poor, dear Alwynne ! Well, it wouldn't hurt her.

But Alwynne set out gaily on Christmas afternoon, and, first escorting Elsbeth to the lych-gate of her favourite church, walked on as quickly as her narrow fur-edged skirt would let her.

The clocks were striking three as she turned into Friar's Lane.

It was a cold, still day, and Alwynne shivered a little, and drew her furs closely about her, as she stood outside the door of Clare's flat. She had rung, but the maid was usually slow in answering.

The passage was damply cold. It would be all the jollier to toast oneself before one of Clare's imperial fires. . . . She wished the maid would hurry up. She waited a moment and then rang again.

There was no answer.

It struck her that the maid might have been given the afternoon off; but it was funny that Clare did not hear.

She rang again. She could hear the bell tinging shrilly within, but there was no other sound save the tick of the solemn little grandmother on the inner side of the wall.

Suddenly it occurred to her that Clare might be dozing. Clare never slept in the afternoons, but she did occasionally doze in her chair for a few minutes. She denied that she did so as strenuously as people always and unaccountably do; but Alwynne knew better. It always delighted her when Clare succumbed to drowsiness; a good sleeper herself, she had been appalled by Clare's acquiescence in four wakeful nights out of Heveil, and after a casual description that Clare had once given her of the and miseries of insomnia, ten minutes unexpected slumber did not give Clare herself more ease than it gave Alwynne.

The possibility of such an explanation of the silence, therefore, had to be considered respectfully : if Clare slept, far be it from Alwynne to wake her ! Yet she could not go away. . . . Clare, after that unlucky clash of wills, would be doubly hurt if Alwynne left without seeing her first. . . . But if Clare were asleep. . . .

Resignedly Alwynne sat herself down on Clare's doorstep to wait until a movement within should be the signal to ring again.

She was not annoyed; she always had plenty to think about; and it would be very pleasant, when Clare did at last open the door, to be received with open arms, and pitied, and scolded, and warmed. ... It was certainly very cold. . . . All the

draughts of the town seemed to have their home on the staircase, and to come sliding and slithering and undulating past, like a brood of invisible snakes.

She shifted her position. The doorstep was icy. She got up, and placed her muff, her chinchilla muff (shades of Elsbeth ! her beautiful, new chinchilla muff) on the whitened doorstep. Then she sat on it.

" Ah! That's better," murmured Alwynne appreciatively. She was grateful to Elsbeth for reminding her to wear her muff.

But it did not get any warmer, and the daylight was beginning to fade. She glanced at her watch—twenty mimites past three. Surely Clare was awake again now. But she would wait another five minutes. She watched the hands—marvelled at the interminable length of a minute, and was drifting off on her favourite speculation as to the essential unreality of time, when simultaneously the grandmother struck the half-hour and she sneezed. She jumped up horrified. A cold would mean a week's absence from Clare, and a restatement of Elsbeth's thesis ' of the advisability of wearing flannel petticoats and long-sleeved bodices.'

Also, half of her hoarded hour was gone. She rang again impatiently. No answer. Clare must be out. . . . Gone to the post ? No, Alwynne had been waiting half-an-hour, she would have returned by now. . . . Impossible that Clare should be out on Christmas afternoon, when she had refused an invitation and was expecting Alwynne herself. . . . She rang; and waited; and rang again and again and yet again.

"If Clare has gone out——" cried Alwynne indignantly; and subjected the handle to a final series of vicious tugs. The boll within pealed and rocked and jarred, gave a last hysterical gurgle and was dumb. She had broken the bell. She had broken Clare Hartill's bell!

Alwynne looked round about her guiltily; she felt more like nine than nineteen. The flight of stairs was still empty and silent. No one had seen her come; no one would see her go. ... If she went quietly away, and said nothing about it ? For Clare would be annoyed. . . . She always got so annoyed over little things. . . . What a pity to have a fuss with Clare over such a little thing as a broken bell!

She crept on tip-toe down the stairs and out into the road. Then she paused.

Was she being mean ! After all—there was no earthly use in telling Clare. . . . Clare would never let her pay for the mending.

. . . Yet naturally she would be annoyed to come back and find her bell broken. . . . She would think it was the milkman or the paper-boy. . . . Alwynne hoped they would not get into trouble. . . . Perhaps, after all, she had better tell Clare. Such an absurd thing to confess to, though!—that she had been in such a temper that she had broken the bell. Clare would be sarcastic . . . Yet it was Clare's fault for being out. . . . That was unkind. . . . She would tell Clare so . . . she would write and tell her. . . . She would write a note now, and tell her about the bell at the same time. . . . She retraced her steps, pulled out her note-book and pencil, and began to scribble—

Dear Clare—I'm awfully sorry but I'm afraid I've broken the bell. I couldn't make you hear. I thought you were asleep, but I suppose you are out. I must have rung too hard, but I didn't think you could be out. Heavily underlined. I'm dreadfully soiry about the bell.

She hesitated. If Clare would let her pay for a new one, she wouldn't feel so bad. . . . Yet how could she suggest it? It would sound so crude. . . . If only Clare would not be angry. . . . Absurd to be feeling afraid of Clare—but then she had never done anything so stupid before. . . . Angry or not, Clare would never let her pay. . . . Yet should she suggest it? She bit her pencil in distracted indecision, till the lead broke off between her teeth.

That settled it. The damp stump was barely capable of scoring an *Alwynne*.

She pinned the paper to the door with her only hatpin (a present of the forenoon) and reluctantly departed.

It was a pity that her best hat blew off twice into the mud.

Elsbeth was glad to get Alwynne back so early. Had Alwynne enjoyed herself?

Alwynne sneezed as she answered.

Before the evening was over Alwynne reeked of eucalyptus.

CHAPTER XI

LOUISE was at the nursery window, staring out into the brown, bare garden. The sky was smooth and a dark yellow, the naked trees barred it like a tiger's hide. The gathering dusk had swallowed up the wind. Not a twig stirred, not a sparrow's chirp broke the thick stillness. Spellbound, the world awaited the imminent snow.

Louise, sitting motionless in the window-seat, with her little pink nose flattening itself against the panes in dreary expectation of a stray unlikely postman, looked, with her peaked, ivory face and dark, unwinking eyes, her colourless clothes, and the sprig of holly with never a scarlet berry pinned to her flat little chest, like the mood of the December day made flesh.

Clare, at least, thought so. Dispensing with the indifferent maid, she had found her own way to the nursery, and pushing open the unlatched door, stood an instant, appraising the child and her surroundings. She noted with distaste the remains of the barely tasted lunch, still encumbering the table, and impinging on the little pile of austere Christmas presents, so carefully arranged : the gloves and stockings and the prim Prayer Book a mere background for a dainty calendar that she recognized. She smiled, with a touch of irritation—did Alwynne ever forget any one, she wondered ? But it was not suitable for a mistress to send her pupils presents. . . . She wished she had thought of sending Louise something herself . . . something more original than that obviously over-priced calendar. . . . It was not much of a Christmas table, she thought . . . not much of a Christmas Day for a child. . . .

She marvelled that a well-furnished room could look so dreary. Louise's huddled pose, the neglected fire, the book crushed face downwards on the floor, combined to touch her. With her incurable feeling for the effective attitude, she remained straight and stiff in the shadows of the doorway, but her gesture was beautiful in its awkward tenderness as she stretched out her hand to the window.

¹¹ Merry Christmas, Louise ! "

For an instant the child was silent, rigid, incredulous : then came a whirl of petticoats and a flash of black legs. Louise, wild with excitement, dropped to the floor and dashed across the room.

" Oh, Miss Hartill ! Oh, Miss Hartill ! You ? "

¹¹ Well, are you pleased to see me ? "

" Please, won't you sit down ? " Louise, between delight and embarrassment, did curious things with the big arm-chair. " I can't believe it's you. And on Christmas Day ! Won't you please sit down ? Is the room too warm for you ? Will you take off your furs ? Would you like some tea ? I'll make up the fire—it's cold in here. Will you take this chair ? Oh, Miss Hartill ! It's like the Queen calling on one. I don't know what to do." She looked up at Clare, blushing. Her pleasure and excitement were pretty enough.

Clare laughed.

" I'll tell you what to do. Run and put on your coat and hat. Would you like to come and spend the rest of the day with me ? "

" With you ? " Louise's eyes opened. " But it's Christmas Day ? "

" Well ? "

" I shan't be in the way ? "

" I don't think so," said Clare coolly. " I'll send you home if you are.¹

She twinkled, but Louise was serious.

" You could do that, couldn't you ? " she remarked with relief. " Oh, Miss Hartill, you are good ! And I was hating my Christmas Day so. Won't you sit down while I get my things on ? "

" Hurry up ! [>]J said Clare. And Louise fled to her bedroom.

Their walk back to Friar's Lane was a silent one. The snow was at last beginning to fall. Clare, half hypnotized by the steady silent motion, tramped forward, keeping time to some fragment of tune within her head. She was warmed by the pleasant consciousness of a kindly action performed, but its object, trotting beside her, was half forgotten.

Louise, very shy at encountering Miss Hartill unofficially, was far too timid to speak unless she were addressed. But she was perfectly happy; marvelling and rejoicing at her situation (Miss Hartill's guest, bound for her home !), overflowing with dog-like devotion to the Olympian who had actually remembered

her existence. She was glad of the silent walk. It gave her time to realize her own happiness; to learn by heart that picture of Clare, against the background of the empty nursery, to get her every sentence by rote, and store all safely in her memory before turning to the contemplation of the incredible adventure upon which she was now embarking.

Clare, preceding Louise up the staircase, found Alwynne's note awaiting her. She frowned as she read it and felt for her latch-key. It was just like Alwynne to leave a note like that for any one to read. . . . And the hatpin for any one to steal. . . . She wished it had been stolon before it had scratched her paint. . . . And the bell! It was really annoying of Alwynne ! It would cost her five shillings to put right. . . . She, Clare, was not mean, but she did grudge money for that sort of thing. . . . Really, Alwynne might offer to pay for it. ... But that, of course, would never occur to Alwynne. . . . She was altogether too reckless about other people's belongings. . . . Her own were her own affair. . . . But to break Clare's bell. . . . She must have been quite comprehensively annoyed to have actually broken it. ... Clare laughed. She had had a sudden vision of Alwynne's blank face and indignant peelings. Poor old Alwynne ! Well—it wouldn't hurt her. ... If she were careful to let Alwynne know to whom she had been sacrificed, Alwynne might not be quite so partisan over Louise next term. . . . That wouldn't be a bad thing. . . . She did not approve of intimacies between the girls and the mistresses. . . . But she, Clare, would make it up to both of them. . . . She would begin now, with Louise. . . . She would devote herself to amusing Louise. . . . She would give Louise the time of her life. . . . Louise would be sure to tell Alwynne about it afterwards. „ . .

CHAPTER XII

" WHAT are you going to do with yourself all the holidays ? » asked Clare, with a touch of curiosity. Louise had slipped off her chair on to the soft hearthrug, and sat, hugging her knees and staring up at Clare.

" Head," she said briefly, and gave a little gurglo of anticipation.

" All day long ? "

" Oh, yes, Miss Hartill. I never get a chance in term time. There's such heaps to read. I'd like to live in a library "

" Yet a peep at the world outside beats all the books that were ever written."

" I wonder." Louise rubbed her chin meditatively against her knees before she delivered herself. " You know—I think the way things strike people is much more interesting than the things themselves. I like exploring people's minds. Do you know ? "

" I know," said Clare. She laughed mischievously. " You in^an—that what you think I am, for instance, is much more interesting than what I really am "

Louise protested mutely. Her black eyes glowed.

" I daresay you're right, Louise. You wear pink spectacles, you see. I'm quite sure you would be appalled if any one Look them off. I'm a horrid person really."

Louise looked puzzled; then the twinkle in Miss Hartill's eyes enlightened her. Miss Hartill was teasing. She laughed merrily.

Clare shook her head.

" It's quite true. I'm an egoist, Louise ! "

" It's not true," said Louise passionately. She was on guard in an instant, ready to justify Miss Hartill to herself and the world. It amused Clare to excite her.

" My good child—what do you know about it ? "

" Lots," said Louise, with a catch in her voice. " You're not! You're not! "

"I am." Clare leaned forward, much tickled. She could afford to attempt to disillusion Louise. . . . Louise would not believe her, but she could not say later that she had not been warned. But at the same time, Clare warmed her cold and cynical self in the pure flame of affection her self-criticism was fanning. "I am," she repeated. "Why do you think I came round to see you to-day?"

Louise looked up at her shyly, dwelling on her answer as if it gave her exquisite pleasure.

"Because—because you knew I was alone, and you hated me to be miserable on Christmas Day."

"You?" Clare's eyebrows lifted for a second, but a glance into the child's candid eyes dispelled the vague suspicion. . . . Louise and conceit were incompatible. She listened with a touch of compunction to the innocent answer.

"Not me specially, of course. Any one who was down. Only it happened to be me. I think you can't help being good to people: you're made that way." Her eyes were full of wondering admiration.

Clare was touched. She sighed as she answered—

"I wish I were. You shouldn't believe in people, Louise. I came round because—yes, you were a lonely scrap of a school-girl, certainly—but there were lots of other reasons. I wanted a walk and I wanted to be amused, and I wanted—and I wanted——" she moved restlessly in her chair. "All pure egoism, anyhow."

"But you came," said Louise.

"To please you, or to punish some one else? I don't know!"

Louise enjoyed her incomprehensibility. She stored up her minuets to puzzle over later. Yet she would ask questions if Miss Hartill were in a talking mood.

"Do I know them?" (She had an odd habit of using the plural when she wished to be discreet.) She wondered who had been punished, and why, and thrilled deliciously, as she did to a ghost story. She thought that it would be terrible to have offended Miss Hartill: yet immensely exciting. . . . She wondered if all her courage would go if Miss Hartill were angry? She had always despised poor Jeanne du Barn: but Miss Hartill raging would be harder to face than a mob. . . .

"What have they done?" asked Louise eagerly.

"They? It's your dear Miss Durand," said Clare, with a grim

smile. " I'm very angry with her, Louise. She's been behaving badly."

Louise's eyes widened : she looked alarmed and distressed

" Oh, but Miss Hartill—she hasn't ! She couldn't ! What has she done ? "

" Shall I tell you ? " Clare leaned forward mysteriously.

Louise nodded breathlessly.

" She wouldn't copy me and be an egoist. And I wanted her to, rather badly, Louise. There, that's all ! You're none the wiser, are you ? Never mind, you will be, some day. Don't look so worried, you funny child."

" Why do you call yourself such names ? You're not an egoist ? You can't be," cried Louise desperately.

Clare laughed

" Can't i ? Most people are. It's not a synonym for murderer ! Stop frowning, child. Why, I don't believe you know what it means even. Do you know what an egoist is, Louise ? "

" Sir Willoughby Patterne ! " said Louise promptly.

Clare threw up her hands.

" What next ? I wish I'd had charge of you earlier. You shouldn't try so hard to say ' Humph,' tittle pig."

" I don't." Louise was indignant.

" Then what possesses you to steer your cockle-boat on to Meredith ? Well—what do you think of him ? What have you read ? "

" About all. He's queer. He's not Dickens or Scott, of course——" Her tone deprecated.

" Of course not," said Clare, with grave sympathy.

" But I like him. I liked Chloe. I liked the sisters—you know—' Fine Shades and Nice Feeling '——"

" Why ? " Clare shot it at her.

" I don't know. They made me laugh. They're awfully real people. And I liked that book where the two gentlemen drink wine ' Veuve ' something."

" What on earth did you see in that ? " Clare was amused.

" I don't know. I just liked them. Of course, I adore Shagpat."

" That I understand. It's a fairy tale to you, isn't it ? "

" Not a proper one—only Arabian Nightsy."

" What's a proper one, Louise ' "

Louise hesitated.

⁴¹ Well, heaps that one loves aren't. Grimm's and Hans

Andersen's aren't, or even *The Wondrous Isles*. And, of course, none of the Lang books. I hate those. You know, proper fairy stories aren't easy to get. You have to dig. You get bits out of the notes in the Waverley Novels, and there's *Kilmcnny*, and *The Celtic Twilight*, and *The Lore of Proserpine*, and Lemprière. Do you believe in fairies, Miss Hartill ? "

" It depends on the mood I'm in," said Clare seriously, " and the place. Elves and electric railways are incompatible."

Louise flung herself upon the axiom.

" Do you think so ? Now I don't, Miss Hartill—I don't. If they are—they can stand railways. But you just believe in them literatunly——"

" Literally," Clare corrected.

" No, no—litoratunly—just as a pretty piece of writing. You'll never see them if you think of them like that, Miss Hartill. The Greeks didn't—they just believed in Pan, and the Oreads, and the Dryads, and all those delicious people; and the consequence was that the country was simply crammed with them. You just read Lemprière ! I wish I'd lived then. Miss Hartill, did you ever see a Good Person ? "

" I'm afraid not, Louise. But I had a nurse who used to tell me about her grand-aunt : she was supposed to be a changeling."

Louise wriggled with delight.

" Oh, tell about her, Miss Hartill. What was she like ? "

" Tiny and black, with a very white skin. They were a fair family. Nurse said they all disliked her, though she never did them any harm. She used to be out in the woods all day—and she ate strange food."

" What ? "

" Fungi, and nettle-tops, and young bracken, and blackberries, my nurse said."

" Blackberries ? "

" She was Irish; the Irish peasants v,"on't touch blackberries, you know. We're just as bad, Louise. Heaps of fungi are delicious—wait till you've been in Germany. They know what's good : but, then, they won't touch rabbits, so there you are ! [expect my nurse's aunt thought us an odd lot, us Imraans."

" Was she really a fairy ? " Louise was breathless.

" How do I know ? A witch perhaps. I should think a young witch, by all accounts."

" What happened to her ? "

" She >vas ' swept ' on her wedding-day."

" Crossing water ? "

" No. She was to marry an old farmer. She went into the woods at dawn to wash in dew, and gather bindweed for her wreath——" She paused dramatically, her eyes dancing with fun; but Louise was wholly in earnest.

" Go on ! Oh, go on ! "

" She was never seen again."

" Oh, how lovely ! " Louise shivered ecstatically. " I wish I'd been her. What did her foster people do ? "

" What could they ? I think they were glad to be rid of her." (Clare suppressed a certain tall young gipsy, who had figured suspiciously in the original narrative.) " Fairy blood is ill to live with, Louise. I don't envy Mrs. Blake, or Mrs. Thomas Rhymer."

" No. But it's so difficult to live in two worlds at once."

" Shouldering the wise man's burden already ? "

¹¹ You get absent-minded, and forget—ink-stains, you know, and messages."

" I know," said Clare.

" You see, I have such a gorgeous world inside my head, Miss Hartill: I go there when I'm rather down, here. It's a sort of Garden of the Hesperides, and you are there, and Mother, and all my special friends."

" Who, for instance ? " Clare was curious; it was the first she had heard of Louise with friends of her own.

" Well—Elizabeth Bennett, and the Little Women, and Garm, and Amadis of Gaul——"

" Oh—not real people ? " Clare was amused at herself for being relieved.

" Oh, but Miss Hartill—they are real." Louise was indignant. "Ever so much more than—oh, most people ! Look at Mrs. Bennett and Mamma ! Nobody will think of Mamma in a hundred years—but who'd ever forget Mrs. Bennett ? "

" Mrs Bennett in the Garden of the Hesperides, Louise ? " Clare began to chuckle. " I can't swallow that."

Louise pealed with laughter.

" You should have seen her the other day, with the dragon after her. She'd been trying to sneak some apples, because Bingley was coming to tea."

" Who came to the rescue ? "

" Oh, I did." Louise was revelling in her sympathetic listener. " I have to keep order, you know. She was awfully blown, though. Siegfried helped me."

" I wish I could get to fairyland as easily as you do."

Louise considered.

" I don't. My country is only in my head. Fairyland must be somewhere, mustn't it? Do you know what I think, Miss Hartill? "

" In patches, Louise."

Louise blushed.

" No, but seriously—don't laugh. You know you explained the fourth dimension to us the other day ? "

" That I'm sure I never did." Clare was lying back in her chair, her arms behind her head, smiling inscrutably.

" Oh, but, Miss Hartill——"

" Never, Louise ! "

" Oh, but honestly—I'm not contradicting you, of course—but you did. Last Thursday fortnight, in second lesson."

" I wish you were as accurate over all your dates, Louise ! Your History paper was not all that it should be."

" It's holidays, Miss Hartill! But don't you remember ? "

" I explained to you that the fourth dimension was inexplicable—a very different thing."

" *The Plattner titory* explains it—clearly." Louise's tone was distinctly reproachful.

" Oh no, it doesn't, Louise. Mr. Wells only deludes you into thinking it does."

" Well, anyhow, I think—don't you think that it's rather likely that fairyland is the fourth dimension ? It would all fit in so beautifully with all the old stories of enchantment and disappearances. Then there was another book I read about it *The Inheritors*——"

" Have done, Louise ! You make me dizzy. Don't try to live exclusively on truffles. If you could continue to confine your attention to books you have some slight chance of understanding, for the next few years, it would be an excellent thing. Neither Meredith nor the fourth dimension is meat for babes, you know."

" I hke what I don't understand. It's the finding out is the fun." Louise looked mutinous.

" And having found out ? "

" Then I start on something else."

Clare considered her.

" Louise, I don't know if it's a compliment to either ot us—but I believe we're very much alike."

Louise gave a child's delighted chuckle, but she showed no surprise.

"That's nice, Miss Hartill." She hesitated. "Miss Hartill, did you know my Mother?"

"Mrs. Denny?" Clare hesitated.

Louise gave an impatient gesture.

"Not Mamma. My very own Mother."

"No, my dear." Clare's voice was soft.

Louise sighed.

"No one does. There are no pictures. Father was angry when I asked about her once: and Miss Murgatroyd—she was our governess—she said I had no tact. I miss her, you know, though I don't remember her. I had a nurse: she told me a little. Mother had grey eyes too, you know," said Louise, gazing into Clare's. "I expect she was rather like you."

She watched Clare a little breathlessly. There was more of tenderness in her face than many who thought they knew Clare Hartill would have credited, but no hint of awakening memory, of the recognition the child sought. She went on—

"People never come back when they're dead, do they?" She had no idea of the longing in her voice.

"No, you poor baby!" Clare rose hastily and began to walk up and down the room, as her fashion was when she was stirred.

"Never?"

"*'Stieg je em Freund Dir aus dem Grabe wieder?'*" murmured Clare.

"What, Miss Hartill?"

"Never, Louise."

Louise's thistledown fancies were scattered by her tone. Impossible to discredit any statement of Miss Hartill's. Yet she protested timidly.

"There was the Witch of Endor, Miss Hartill. Samuel, you know."

"Is that Meredith?" said Clare absently. Then she caught Louise's expression. "What's the matter?"

"But it's the Bible!" cried Louise horrified.

Clare sat down again and began to laugh pleasantly.

"What am I to do with you, Louise? Are you live or fifty? You want to discuss Meredith with me—(not that I shall let you, my child—don't think I approve of all this reading—I did it myself at your age, you see) and five minutes later you look at me round-eyed because I've forgotten my Joshua or my

Judges J Kings ? I beg your pardon; Kings be it! Never mind, Louise. Tell me about the Witch of Endor."

" Only that she called up Samuel, I meant, from the dead."

Louise was evidently abstracted; she was picking her words.

" Don't you believe it, Miss Hartill, quite ? "

" It's the Old Testament, after all," temporized Clare. She began to see Louise's difficulty. She had no beliefs herself; but she thought she would find out how fourteen handled the problem.

" Then the New is different ? There was Dorcas, you know, and the widow's son. That is all true, Miss Hartill ? "

Clare fenced.

" Many people think so."

" I want to know the truth," said Louise tensely. " I want to know what you think." She spoke as if the two things were synonymous.

Clare shook her head.

" I won't help you, Louise. You must find out for yourself. Leave it alone, if you're wise."

" How can I ? I've been reading——"

" Ah ? "

" The *Origin of Species*—and *We Two*."

Clare's gravity fled. She lay back shaking with laughter.

" Louise, you're delightful! Anything else ? "

Louise pulled up her footstool to Clare's knee.

" Miss Hartill, I've been reading a play. It's horrible. I can't bear it, though it was thrilling to read——"

Clare interrupted—

" Where do you get all these books, Louise ? "

" There are all Mother's, you know. Nobody else wants them. And then there's the Free Library."

Clare shuddered. She would sooner have drunk from the tin cup of a public fountain than have handled the greasy volumes of a public library.

" How can you ? " she said disgustedly. " Dirt and dog-ears ! "

Louise opened her eyes. She was too young to be squeamish.

" ' A book's a book for a' that,' " she laughed. " How else am I to get hold of any—that I like ? "

Clare jerked her head to the lined walls.

" Help yourself," she said.

Louise was radiant.

" May I ? Oh, you are good! I will take such care. I'll cover them in brown paper."

She jumped up and, running across the room, flung herself on her knees before the wide shelves. Timidly, at first, but with growing forgetfulness of Clare, she pulled out here a volume and there a volume, handling them tenderly, yet barely opening each, so eager was she for fresh discoveries. She reminded Clare of *Alice* with the scented rushes. Clare was amused by her absorption, and a little touched. The child's attitude to books hinted at the solitariness of her life: she relaxed to them, greeting them as intimates and companions; there was a new appearance on her; she was obviously at home, welcomed by her friends; a very different person to the shy-eyed, prim little prodigy her school-fellows knew.

Clare, glancing at her now and then, sympathized benevolently, and left her to herself; she understood that side of the child; her remark to Louise about the resemblance between them had not been made at random; she was constantly detecting traits and tastes in her similar to her own. She was interested; she had thought herself unique. Their histories were not dissimilar; she, too, different as her environment had been, could look back on a lonely, self-absorbed childhood; she, too, had had forced and premature successes. They had not been empty ones, she reflected complacently; she had used those schoolgirl triumphs as stepping-stones. She doubted if Louise could do the same: there was something unpractical about Louise—a hint of the visionary in her air. She had at present none of Clare's passion for power and the incense of success. Clare, quite aware of her failing, aware that it was a failing and perversely proud of it, yet hoped that she should not see it sprouting in the character of Louise. She hated to see her own defects reproduced (ineffably vulgarized) in others; it jarred her pride. The discovery of the resemblance between herself and Louise amused and charmed her, as long as it was confined to the qualities that Clare admired; but if the girl began to reflect her faults, Clare knew that she should be irritated.

She considered these things as she sat and sewed. She was an exquisite needlewoman. The frieze of tapestry that ran round the low-ceilinged room was her own work. Alwynno had designed it—a history of the loves of Deirdre and Naisrai some months before, when she and Clare had discovered Yeats together; and Clare had adapted the rough, clever sketches, working with her usual amazing speed. The foot-deep strips of needlework and painted silk, with their golden skies and dark

foregrounds, along which the dim, rainbow figures moved, were just what Clare had wanted to complete her panelled room; for she was beauty-loving and house-proud, though her love of originality, or more correctly her tendency to be superior and aloof, often enticed her into bizarrerie. But the Deirdre frieze was as harmonious as it was unusual; and Clare, as she daily feasted her eyes on the rich, mellow colours, was only annoyed that the idea of it had been Alvvyne's. That fact, though she would not own it, was able, though imperceptibly, to taint Clare's pleasure. She was quite unnecessarily scrupulous in mentioning Alwynne's share in the work to any one who admired it; but it piqued her to do so, none the less. If any one had told her that it piqued her she would have been extremely amused at the absurdity of the idea.

She was at the time working out a medallion of her own design, and growing interested, she soon forgot all about Louise, sitting Turkish fashion at the big book-case. The light had long since faded and the enormous fire, gilding walls and furniture, rendered the candles' steady light almost superfluous. Candle-light was another predilection of Clare's—there was neither electricity nor gas in her tiny, perfect liat. The tick of the clock in the hall and the flutter of turning pages alone broke the silence. Outside, the snow fell steadily.

Half-a-mile away Alwyine Durand, drumming on the window-pane, while her aunt dozed in her chair, thought incessantly of Clare, and was filled with restless longing to be with her. She tried to count the snowflakes till her brain reeled. She felt cold and dreary, but she would not rouse Elsbeth by making up the fire. She wished she had something new to read. She thought it the longest Christmas Day she had ever spent.

The neat maid, bringing in the tea-tray, routed Clare. She pushed aside her work and began to pour out; but Louise in her corner, made no sign.

Clare laughed.

" Louise, wake up ! Don't you want any tea ? "

Louise, as if the conversation had not ceased for an instant, scrambled to her feet and came to the table, a load of books in her arms, saying as she did so—

" I'll be awfully careful. May I take these, perhaps ? "

Clare nodded.

" Presently. I'll look them over first. Muffins ? "

She gave Louise a delightful meal and taught her to take

tea with a slice of lemon. She was particular, Louise noticed; some of the muffins were not toasted to her liking, and were instantly banished; she criticized the cakes and the flavouring of the dainty sandwiches; then she laughed wickedly at Louise for her round eyes.

"What's the matter, child?"

"Nothing," said Louise, embarrassed.

"I believe you're shocked because I talked so much about food?"

Louise blushed scarlet.

"I like eating, Louise."

"Yes—yes, of course," she concurred hastily.

Clare was entertained. She knew quite well that Louise, like all children, considered a display of interest in food, if not indelicate, at least extremely human. She knew, too, that in Louise's eyes she was too entirely compounded of ideals and noble qualities to be more than officially human. She enjoyed upsetting her ideas.

"If you come to actual values, I'd rather do without Shakespeare than Mrs. Jiceton," she remarked blandly.

"Oh, Miss Hartill^f," Louise was protesting—suspecting a trap—ready to ripple into laughter. "You do say queer things."

"T?"

"Yes. As if you meant that!"

"But I do! Eating's an art, Louise, like painting or writing. I had a pheasant last Sunday——" She gave the entire menu, and enlarged on the etceteras with enthusiasm.

Louise looked bewildeied.

"I never thought you thought about that sort of thing," she remarked. "I thought you just didn't notice—I thought you would always be thinking of poetry and pictures——" She subsided, blushing.

Clare laughed at her pleasantly.

"I thought, I thought, I think, I thought! What a lot of thoughts. I'm sorry, Louise 'Is all my star-dust gone?"

Louise shook her head vigorously, but she was still embarrassed. She changed the subject with agility.

"I've read that!"

"What?"

"The star-dust book—but I've picked out two others of hi'. May I? All these?"

Clare ran her finger along the titles.

" Yes—yes—Fiona Mcleod—yes—*Peer Gynt*—yes, if you like, you won't understand it, or Yeats—but all right. No, not Nietzsche ! Not on any account, Louise."

Louise protested.

" Oh, why not, Miss Hartill ? I'm nearly fourteen."

" Are you really ? " said Clare, with respect.

" He looks so jolly—Old Testamenty——"

" He does, Louise ! That's his little way. But he's not for the Upper Fifth."

" He's in the Free Library," said Louise, with a twinkle. Clare turned.

" You can have all the books you want, if you come to me. But no more Free Library, Louise. You understand ? I don't wish it."

Louise tingled like a bather under a cold spray. She liked and disliked the autocratic tone.

Clare went on.

" I detest trash—and there's a good deal, even in a Carnegie collection. There's no need for you to dull your imagination on melodrama like—what was it ? "

" What, Miss Hartill ? "

" The play you began to tell me about—you thought it horrible, you said."

Louise opened her eyes.

" Miss Hartill, it wasn't melodrama—it was good stuff. That's why it worried me. It's by a Norwegian or a Dane or some one. *Pastor Sang* it's called."

" That ? I don't follow. I should have thought the theology would have bored you, but there's nothing horrible in it."

" It worried me. Oh, Miss Hartill, what does it all mean ? Darwin says, we just grew—doesn't he ? and that the Bible's all wrong. But you say that doesn't matter—it's just Old Testament ? And this play says—do you remember ? the wife is ill—and the husband, who cures people by praying—he can't cure her——"

" Well ? " said Clare impatiently.

" And he says, if the apostles did miracles, we ought to be able to—he kills his wife, trying. He can't, you see. But the point is, if he couldn't, with all his faith—could the apostles ? And if the apostles couldn't, could Christ Himself ? The miracles are just only a tale, perhaps ? "

" Perhaps," said Clare. " You're not clear, Louise, but I know what you mean."

" It frightened me, that play," said the child in a low voice. " If there were no miracles—and everything one reads makes one sure there weren't—why, then, the Bible's not true! Jesus was just a man! He didn't rise? Perhaps there isn't an afterwards? Perhaps there isn't God? "

" Perhaps," said Clare.

The child's eyes were wide and frightened. She put her hand timidly on Clare's knee.

" Miss Hartill—you believe in God? "

Clare looked at her, weighing her.

Louise spoke again; her voice had grown curiously apprehensive.

" Miss Hartill—you do believe in God? "

Clare shrugged her shoulders.

Louise stared at her appalled.

" If *you* don't believe in God——" she began slowly, and then stopped.

They sat a long while in silence.

Clare felt uncomfortable. She had not intended to express any opinion, to let her own attitude to religion appear. But Louise, with her sudden question, had forced one from her. After all, if Louise had begun to doubt and to inquire, no silence on Clare's part would stop her. . . . Every girl went through the phase—with Louise it had begun early, that was all. . . . Yet in her heart she knew that Louise, with her already overworked mind, should have been kept from the mental distress of religious doubt. . . . She knew that for some years she could have been so kept; that, as the mouth can eat what the body will not absorb, so, though her intelligence might have assimilated all the books she chose to read, her soul need not necessarily have been disturbed by them. Her acquired knowledge that the world is round need not have jostled her rule of thumb conviction that it is flat. Her interest in 'ologies and 'osophies could have lived comfortably enough with her child's belief in four angels round her head, for another two or three years—strengthening, maturing years.

Clare knew her power. At a soothing word from her, Louise would have shelved her speculations, or at least have continued them impersonally. Clare could have guaranteed God to her. But Clare had shrugged **her** shoulders, and Louise had grown

white—and she had felt like a murderess. Do children really take their religion so seriously? . . . After all, what real difference could it make to Louise? . . . She, Clare, had been glad to be rid of her clogging and irrational beliefs. . . . Louise, too, when she recovered from, the shock, would enjoy the sense of freedom and self-respect. . . . If Louise talked like a girl of eighteen she could not be expected to receive the careful handling you gave a child of twelve. . . . Anyhow, it was done now. . . .

Suddenly and persuasively she began to talk to Louise. She touched gently on the history, the growth and inevitable decay of all religions—the contrasting immutability of the underlying code of ethics, upon which they, one and all, were founded. She told her vivid little stories of the religious struggles of the centuries, had her breathless over the death of Socrates, nailed up for her anew the ninety-five theses to the Wittenberg church door. Exerting all her powers, all her knowledge, all her descriptive and dramatic skill, to charm away one child's distress, Clare was, for an hour, a woman transformed, sound and honey-sweet. Against all that happened later, she could at least put the one hour, when, remorsefully, she had given Louise of the best that was in her.

Incidentally, she delivered to her audience of one the most brilliant lecture of her career. Later she wrote down what she remembered of it, and it became the foundation for her monograph on religions that was to become a minor classic. Its success was immediate—that was typical of Clare—but she never wrote another line. That also was typical of Clare. It bored her to repeat a triumph.

She soon had Louise happy again: it was not in Louise to stick to the high-road of her own thoughts, with Miss Hartill opening gates to fairyland at every sentence. Clare kept her for the rest of the evening, and took her home at last, weighed down by her parcel of books, sleepy from the effects of excitement and happiness. She poured out her incoherent thanks as they waited on the doorstep of her home. There had never been such a Christmas—she had never had such a glorious time—she couldn't thank Miss Hartill properly if she talked till next Christmas came.

Clare, nodding and laughing, handed her over to the maid, and went home, not ill-pleased with her Christmas either. She thought of the child as she walked down the snowy, star-lighted streets, and wondered whimsically what she was doing at the

moment. Would she say her prayers on her way to bed still, or had Clare's little, calculated shrug stopped that sort of tiling for many a long day? She rather thought so. She shook off her uneasy sense of compunction and laughed aloud. The cold night air was like wine to her. After all, for an insignificant spinster, she had a fair share of power—real power—not the mere authority of kings and policemen. Her mind, not her office, ruled a hundred other minds, and in one heart, at least, a shrug of her shoulders had toppled God off His throne; and the vacant seat was hers, to fill or flout as she chose.

CHAPTER XIII

WITH the opening of the spring term began the final and most arduous preparations for the Easter examinations.

The school had been endowed, some years before, under the will of a former pupil, with a scholarship, a valuable one, ensuring not only the freedom of the school, but substantial help in the subsequent college career, that the winning of it entailed.

The rules were strict. The papers were set and corrected by persons chosen by the trustees of the bequest. The scholarship was open to the school, but no girl over seventeen might enter: and though an unsuccessful candidate might compete a second time, she must gain a percentage of marks in the first attempt. Total failure debarred her from making a second. This last rule limited, in effect, the entries to members of the Sixths and Fifths, for the scholarship was too valuable for a chance of it to be risked through insufficient training. The standard, too, was high, and the rules so strictly enforced that withheld the grant if it were not attained, that Miss Marsham was accustomed to make special arrangements for those competing. They were called the 'Scholarship Class,' and had certain privileges and a great amount of extra work. To most of them the particular privilege that compensated for six months drudgery was the fact that they were almost entirely under Miss Hartill's supervision. She considered their training her special task and spared neither time nor pains. She loved the business. She understood the art of rousing their excitement, pitting ambition against ambition. She worked them like slaves, weeding out remorselessly the useless members. Theoretically all had the right to enter; but none remained against Miss Hartill's wishes.

In spite of the work, the members of the Scholarship Class had an envied position in the school. Clare saw to that. Without attackable bias, she differentiated subtly between them and the majority. Each of the group was given to understand,

without words, impalpably, yet very definitely, that if Miss Hartill, the inexorable, could have a preference, one had but to look in the glass to find it; and that to outstrip the rest of the class, to be listed an easy first, would be the most exquisite justification that preference could have. And as the type of girl who succumbed the most surely to Clare's witchcraft was also usually of the type to whom intellectual work was in itself attractive, it was not surprising if her favourite class were a hot-bed of emulation and enthusiasm—enthusiasm that was justified of its origin, for not even Henrietta Vigors denied that Clare contributed her full share to the earning of the scholarship, Miss Marsham, towards the end of the spring, was wont to declare, with her usual kindly concern, that she was thankful that the examination was not an annual affair. . . . Their good Miss Hartill was too anxious, too conscientious. . . . Miss Marsham must really forbid her to make herself ill. And, indeed, when the class was a large one, Clare was as reckless of her own strength as of that of her pupils, and suffered more from its expenditure. Where they were responsible, each for herself, Clare toiled early and late for them all. She fed them, moreover, from her own resources of energy, was entirely willing to devitalize herself on their behalf. The strain once over, she appeared slack, gaunt, debilitated. She had, however, her own methods of recuperation. Her ends gained, she could lake back what she had given—take back more than ever she had given. Moreover, the supply of child-life never slackened. Old scholars might go—but ever the new ones came. Was it not Clare who gave the school its latter-day reputation? By the end of the summer term Clare would be once more in excellent condition.

When the promotion of Louise to the Upper School had first been mooted, Miss Hartill had not forgotten that the scholarship examination was once more drawing near. She saw no reason why Louise should not compete. That Louise, the whilom dullard of the Third, the youngest girl in the Upper School, should snatch the prize from the expectants of the Sixths and Fifths, would be an effective retort on Clare's critics, tould redound very pleasantly to Clare's credit.

If she let the opportunity pass, Louise must wait two years: at thirteen it would be a triumph for Louise and Clare; at fifteen there would be nothing notable in her success. And the baby herself would be delighted. Clare was already sufficiently taken with Louise to enjoy the anticipation of-her delight.

She was quite aware that it would entail special efforts **on** her own part, as well as on the child's, and that she had a large class already on her hands, and in need of coaching. But there was always Alwynne. Alwynne was so reliable; she could safely leave Louise's routine work in Alwynne's hands. It remained to consult Louise and incidentally the parent Dennys.

Louise was awestruck, overwhelmed by the honour of being allowed to compete, absurdly and touchingly delighted. No doubt as to Louise's sentiments. No doubt as to the sincerity of her efforts. No doubt, until the spring term began, of the certainty of her success.

The spring term opened with Clare in Miss Marsham's carved seat at morning prayers. The school had grown accustomed to its head-mistress's occasional absence. Miss Marsham, who had for some time felt the strain of school routine too much for her advanced years, was only able to sustain the fiction of her unimpaired powers by taking holidays, as a mouse takes her drug, in ever-increasing doses. She was confident in this discretion alike of Clare Hartill and Henrietta Vigors, and, indeed, but for their efficiency, the school would have suffered more quickly than it actually did. Nevertheless, the absence of supreme authority had, though but slightly, the usual disintegrating effect. There was always, naturally, an increase of friction between the two women, especially when the absence of the directress occurred at the beginning of a term. There would be the usual agitations—problems of housing and classification. There would arrive parents to be interviewed and impressed, new girls to be gracefully and graciously welcomed. Clare (to whom Henrietta, for all her hostility, invariably turned in emergencies), showing delicately yet unmistakably that she considered herself unwarrantably hampered in her own work, would submit to being shown with an air of bored acquiescence, tempered with modest surprise at the necessity for her presence. It was sufficiently irritating to Henrietta, under strict, if indirect, orders to leave the decorative side of the vice-regency to her rival. She was quite aware of Clare's greater effectiveness. She did not believe that it weighed with Miss Marsham against her own solid qualities. She affected to despise it. Yet, despising, she envied.

She was unjust to Clare, however, in believing the latter's reluctance entirely assumed. Clare enjoyed ruffling the susceptibilities of Henrietta, but she was none the less genuinely

annoyed at being even partially withdrawn from her classes and was relieved when, at the end of a fortnight, Miss Marsham returned to her post. Clare had been forced to neglect her special Work. Classes had been curtailed and interrupted, the many extra lessons postponed or turned over to Alwynne, whom more than any other mistress she had trained and could trust.

It was Alwynne who, reporting to her at the end of the first fortnight, had made her more than ever eager to be rid of her deputy ship.

There were new girls in the Fifth in whom Alwynne was interested. One, at least, she prophesied, would be found to have stuff in her. It was a pity she was not in the Scholarship Class. . . . She was too good for the Lower Fifth. . . . Alwynne supposed it would be quite impossible to let her enter?

"At this time of day? Impossible! Do you realize that we've only another three months?"

"I don't suppose she'd want to, anyhow," said Alwynne. "She's a quaint person! Talk about independence! She informed me to-day that she shouldn't stay longer than half-term, unless she liked us."

"Oho! Young America!" Clare was alert. "I didn't know you referred to Cynthia Griffiths. I interviewed the parents last week. Immensely rich! She was demure enough, but I gathered even then that she ruled the roost. Her mother was quite tearful—implored me to keep her happy for three months anyhow, while they both indulged in a rest cure abroad. She seemed doubtful of our capacities. But she was not explicit."

"Cynthia is. I've heard the whole story while I tried to find out how much she knew. She's a new type. Her French and her German are perfect—and her clothes. Her bedroom is a pig-sty and she gets up when she chooses. I gather that she has reduced Miss Vigors to a nervous wreck already. Thank goodness I'm a visiting mistress! I wonder what the girls will make of her!"

"Or she of them."

"That won't be the question," surmised Alwynne shrewdly. "Clare, she has five schools behind her, American and foreign—and she's fifteen! We are an incident. I know. There were two Americans at my school."

"It remains to be seen." Clare's eyes narrowed. "Well, what else?"

Alwynne fidgeted.

" I'm glad you're taking over everything again. I prefer my small kids."

" Why? "

" Easier to understand—and manage."

Clare looked amused.

" Been getting into difficulties? Who's the problem? Agatha? "

" That wind-bag! She only needs pricking to collapse," said Alwynne contemptuously. Then, with a frown: " I wish poor little Mademoiselle Charette would realize it. Have you ever seen a Lower Fifth French lesson? But, of course, you haven't. It's a farce."

Clare frowned.

" If she can't keep order——"

" She can teach anyhow," said Alwynne quickly. " I was at the other end of the room once, working. I listened a little. It's only Agatha. Mademoiselle can tackle the others. She's effective in a delicate way; but senseless, noisy rotting—it breaks her up. She loses her temper. Of course, it's funny to watch. But I hate that sort of tiling. I did when I was a schoolgirl even, didn't you? "

" I don't remember." But in the back of Clare's mind was a class-room and herself, contemptuously impertinent to a certain ineffective Miss Loveday.

Alwynne continued, frowning—

" Anyhow, I wish you'd do something."

Clare yawned.

" One mustn't interfere with other departments—unasked."

" Well, I ask you." Alwynne was in earnest.

" Why? "

" I want you to."

" Why? "

Alwynne blushed.

" Why this championship? I didn't know you and Mademoiselle Charette were such intimates? "

" It's just because we aren't. I like her, but——"

" But what? "

" Well—we had a row. You see— You won't tell, Clare? "

Clare smiled.

" She doesn't like you," blurted out Alwynne indignantly. " And I just want to show her how altogether wrong——"

" What a crime! How did you find it out? " Clare was amused.

" She was telling me about Agatha. And I said—why on earth didn't she complain to you ? And she said—nothing on earth would induce her to. I said—I was sure you would be only too glad for her to ask you. And she said——" Alwynne paused dramatically : " She said—she hadn't the faintest doubt you would, and that I was a charming child, but that she happened to understand you. Then we had a row, of course."

Clare pealed with laughter.

" She's quite right, Alwynne. You are a charming child. So that is Mademoiselle Charette, is it ? And I never guessed." She mused, a curious little smile on her lips.

" She's a dear, really," said Alwynne apologetically. " Only she's what Mrs. Marpler calls ' 'aughty,' " I can't think why her knife's into you."

" Suppose——" Clare's eyes lit up, she showed the tip of her tongue—sure sign of mischief afloat. " Suppose I pull it out ? What do you bet me, Alwynne ? "

Alwynne laughed.

" I wish you would. I don't like it when people don't appreciate you. Anyhow, I wish you'd settle Agatha. You know, it's not doing the scholarship French any good. The class slacks. Mademoiselle is worried, I know."

Clare was serious at once.

" That must stop. The standard's too high for trifling. And one or two of them are weak as it is. Especially Louise. Isn't she ? Don't you coach her for the grammar ? How is her extra work getting on, by the way ? Like a house on fire, I suppose ? "

" Not altogether." Alwynne looked uneasy.

" What ? " Clare looked incredulous.

" She's the problem," said Alwynne.

She had a piece of paper on the table before her and was drawing fantastic profiles as she spoke, sure sign of perturbation with Alwynne, as Clare knew.

" Well ? " demanded Clare, after an interval.

Alwynne paused, pencil hovering over an empty eye-Locket. She seemed nervous, opened her lips once or twice and closed them again.

" What's wrong ? " Clare prompted her.

" Nothing's wrong exactly." Alwynne flushed uncomfortably. " After all, you've seen her in class. Her work is as good as usual ? "

" I think so. Her last essay was a little exotic, by the bye,

not quite as natural—but you corrected them I was so busy."

"You don't think she's getting too keen, working too hard?" Alwynne's tone was tentative.

"Do you think so?" Clare was thoroughly interested. She was tickled at Alwynne's anxious tones. She always enjoyed her occasional bursts of responsibility. But she was nevertheless intrigued by Alwynne's hints. She had certainly not given her class its usual attention lately. To Louise she had scarcely spoken unofficially since term began; no opportunity had occurred, and she had been too busy to make one. Louise had returned a bundle of books to her on the opening day of the term, and had been bidden to fetch herself as many more as she chose. But Clare had been out when Louise had called. Clare, to tell the truth, had not once given a thought to Louise since Christmas Day. She had taken a trip to London with Alwynne soon after. The two had enjoyed themselves. The holidays had flown. But she had been glad to find her class radiantly awaiting her. She had found it much as usual. Alwynne's perturbation was the more intriguing.

"Do you think so?" she repeated, with a lift of her eyebrows that reduced Alwynne's status to that of a Kindergarten pupil teacher. She enjoyed seeing her grow pink.

"Of course, it's no affair of mine," said Alwynne aggrievedly. She went on with her drawing.

Clare swung herself on to the low table and sat, skirts a-sway, gazing down at Alwynne's head, bent over its grotesques. There was a curl at the nape of the neck that fascinated her. It lay fine and shining like a baby's. She picked up a pencil and ran it through the tendril. Alwynne jumped.

"Clare, leave me alone. You only think I'm impertinent."

"Does she want a finger in the pie, then?" said Clare softly. "Poor old Alwynne!" The pencil continued its investigations. Alwynne tried not to laugh. She could never resist Clare's soft voice, as Clare very well knew.

"I don't! I only thought——"

"That Louise—your precious Louise——"

"She's trying so awfully hard——"

"Yes?"

"She's overdoing it. The work's not so good. She's too keen, I think——"

"Yes?"

" I think——"

" Yes, Alwynne ? "

" You won't be annoyed ? "

" That depends."

" Then I can't tell you."

" I think you can," said Clare levelly.

Alwynne was silent. Clare took the paper from her and examined it.

" You've a fantastic imagination, Alwynne. When did you dream those faces ? Well—and what do you think ? Be quick."

" I think she's growing too fond of you," said Alwynne desperately.

She faced Clare, red and apprehensive. She expected an outburst. But Clare never did what Alwynne expected her to do.

" Is that all ? Pooh ! " said Clare lightly and began to laugh. She swung backwards, her finger-tips crooked round the edge of the table, her neat shoes peeping and disappearing beneath her skirts as she rocked herself. She regarded Alwynne with sly amusement.

" So I've a bad influence, Alwynne ? Is that the idea ? "

Alwynne protested redly. Clare continued unheeding.

" Well, it's a novel one, anyhow. Could you indicate exactly how my blighting effect is produced ? Don't mind me, you know." Then, with a chuckle : " Oh, you delicious child ! "

Alwynne was silent.

" Tell me all about it, Alwynne dear ! " cooed Clare.

Alwynne shrugged her shoulders with a curiously helpless gesture.

" I can't," she said. " I thought I could—but I can't. You don't help me. I was worried over Louise. I thought—I think she alters. I think she gets a strained look. I know she thinks about you all the time. I thought—but, of course, if you see nothing, it's my fancy. There's nothing definite, I know. If you don't know what I mean——"

" I don't ! " said Clare shortly. " Do you know yourself ? "

" No ! " said Alwynne. She searched Clare's face wistfully.

" I just thought perhaps—she was too fond of you—I can't put it differently. I'm a fool ! I wish I hadn't said anything."

" So do I," said Clare gravely.

" I didn't mean to interfere : it wasn't impertinence, Clare," said Alwynne, her cheeks flaming.

Clare hesitated. She was annoyed at Alwynne's unnecessary

display of insight, yet tickled by her penetration, not displeased by the jealousy which, as it seemed to her, must be at the root of the protest. Alwynne had evidently not forgotten her chilly Christmas afternoon. . . . Louise, as obviously, had talked. . . . There must have been some small degree of friction for Alwynne to complain of Louise. . . . Curiously, it never occurred to Clare that Alwynne's remarks hid no motive, that Alwynne was genuinely anxious and meant exactly what she had said, or tried to say. Possibly in Alwynne's simplicity lay her real attraction for Clare. It made her as much a sphinx to Clare as Clare was to her.

As she stood before her, apprehensive of her displeasure, obviously afraid that she had exceeded those bounds to their intercourse that she, more than Clare, had laid down, yet withal, a curiously dogged look upon her face, Clare was puzzled as to her own wisest attitude. She was inclined to batter her into a retraction; it would have relieved her own feelings. Clare could not endure criticism. But she was not yet so sure of Alwynne as to allow herself the relief of invective. She thought that she might easily reserve her annoyance for Louise. It was Louise, after all, who had exposed her to criticism. . . . And if Alwynne chose to be jealous, it was at least a flattering display. . . . She supposed she must placate Alwynne. . . . After all, fifty Louises and her own dignity could not weigh against the possession of Alwynne. . . . She spoke slowly, choosing her words.

"As if I could think you impertinent! But, my dear—I'm older than you. Can't you trust me to understand my girls? After all, I devote my life to them, Alwynne." Clare's quiet dignity was in itself a reproof.

"I know." Alwynne lifted distressed eyes. "I didn't mean—I didn't imply—of course, you know best. I only thought——"

"That I took more notice of Louise than was wise?"

"No, no!" protested Alwynne unhappily.

Clare continued—

"If you think I'm to blame for encouraging a lonely child—she has no mother, Alwynne—lending her a few books—asking her to tea with me—because I felt rather sorry for her——"

"I didn't mean that——" Alwynne twisted her fingers helplessly.

"Then what did you mean?" dare asked her. She had slipped on to the floor, and was facing Alwynne, very tall and grave and quiet. "Won't you tell me just exactly what you did mean?" she allowed a glimmer of displeasure to appear in her eyes.

And Alwynne, tongue-tied and cornered, had nothing whatever to say. She had been filled with vague uneasiness and had come to Clare to have it dispelled. The uneasiness was still there, formless yet insistent—but the only effect of her clumsy phrases was to hurt Clare's feelings. After all, was she not worrying herself unduly? Was she to know better than Clare? She had felt for some moments that she had made a fool of herself. There remained to capitulate. Her anxiety over Louise melted before the pain in Clare's eyes—the reproof of her manner.

"Would you like me to speak to Louise, before you?" went on Clare patiently. "Perhaps she could explain what it is that worries you——"

"No, no! for goodness' sake, Clare!" cried Alwynne, appalled. Then surrendering, "Clare—I didn't mean anything. I do see—I've been fussing—impertinent—whatever you like. I didn't mean any harm. Oh, let's stop talking about it, please."

"I'd rather you convinced yourself first," said Clare frigidly. "I don't want the subject re-opened once a week." Then relenting, "Poor old Alwynne! The trials of a deputy! Has she worried herself to death? But I'm back now. I think I can manage my class, Alwynne—as long as you stand by to give me a word of advice now and then."

Alwynne squirmed. Clare laughed tenderly.

"My dear—give Louise a little less attention. It won't hurt either of you. Are you going to let me feel neglected?" Then, with a change of tone. "Now we've had enough of this nonsense." She curled herself in her big chair. "Alwynne, there's a box of Fuller's in the cupboard, and an English Review. Don't you want to hear the new Masfield before you go home?"

And Alwynne's eyes grew big, and she forgot all about Louise, as Louise's 'loveliest voice' read out the rhyme of *The River*.

Yet Clare had a last word as she sent her home to Elsbeth.

"Sorry?" said Clare whimsically, as Alwynne bade her good-bye.

"I always was a fool," said Alwynne, and hugged her defiantly.

But Clare, for once, made no protest. She patted her ruffled hair as she listened to the noises of the departure,

"Too fond of me?" she said softly. "Too fond of me? Alwynne—what about you?"

But if Alwynne heard, she made no answer.

CHAPTER XIV

Miss MARSHAM was accustomed to recognize that it was the brief career of Cynthia Griffiths that first induced her to consider the question of her own retirement.

It is certain that the school was never again quite as it had been before her advent. The Cynthia Griffiths term remained a school date from which to reckon as the nation reckons from the Jubilee. In an American school Cynthia Griffiths must have been at least a disturbing element—in the staid English establishment, with its curious mixture of modern pedagogy and Early Victorian training, she was seismic.

With their usual adaptability, the new girls, as they accustomed themselves subduedly to the strange atmosphere, had found nothing to cavil at in the school arrangements. They had not thought it incongruous to come from Swedish exercises to prolonged and personal daily prayers, kneeling for ten minutes at a time while their head mistress wrestled with Deity. It might have bored girls of sixteen and eighteen to learn their daily Bible verse, and recite it alternately with the Kindergarten and Lower School, but it never occurred to them to protest, any more than they were likely to object to the little note-book which each girl carried, with its printed list of twenty-five possible crimes, and the dangling pencil wherewith, at tea-time, to mark herself innocent or guilty. The hundred and one rules that Edith Marsham had found useful in the youth of her seminary, forty years before, and that time had rendered obsolete, irritating, or merely unintelligible, were nevertheless endured with entire good nature by her successions of pupils. Alwynne and her contemporaries might fume in private and Clare shrug her shoulders in languid tolerance, but nobody thought it worth while to question directly the entire sufficiency of a bygone system to the needs of the new century's hockey-playing generations.

But a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

What, if you please, is an old lady to do? An old lady declining on her pleasant seventies, owning sixty, not a fi&y more, traditionally awe-inspiring and unapproachable, whoso security lies in the legends that have grown up of the terrors of her eye and tongue, when Young America clamours at her intimidating door? Young America, calm-eyed, courteous, coaxing, squatting confidentially at the feet of Authority, demanding counsel and comfort. Useless for harried Authority to suggest consultation with equally harried assistants. Young America, with a charming smile and the prettiest of gestures, would rather talk it over quietly with Authority's self. Authority, who is the very twin of her dear old Grannie at home, will be sure to understand. Such fusses about nothing all day and every day! Can it be that Authority expects her to keep her old bureau tidy, when she's had a maid all her life? Young America will be married as soon as she quits Europe (follows a confidential sketch of the more promising of Young America's best boys), and have her own maid right on. Can Authority, as a matter of cold common-sense, see any use in bothering over cupboards for just three months or so? If so—right! Young America will worry along somehow, but it seemed kind of foolish, didn't it? Or could Young America hire a girl—like she did in Pans? Anyway it was rough luck on the lady in the glasses to get an apoplexy every day, as Authority might take it was the case at present. Another point—could Authority, surveying matters impartially, see any harm in running down town when she was out of candy? It only meant missing ten minutes French, and if there was one thing Young America (lapsing suddenly, with bedazmg fluency, into that language) was sure of, it was French. These English-French classes meant well—but, her God! how they were slow! There had been—Young America confessed it with candid regret—some diiiiculties with the cute Little mark-books. Young America had mislaid throe in a fortnight. She just put them down, and they lay around awhile, and then they weren't there. Some of the ladies had been real annoyed. And once on the subject of mark-books, did Authority really mean that she was to chalk it up each time she was late for breakfast, or said 'Darn it,' or talked in class? Would, in her place, Authority be able to keep tally? Couldn't Young America just mark off the whole concern and be done with it? Young America apologized for worrying Authority with these quaint matters—but, on her honour, every lady in

the school seemed to have gone plumb crazy, about them. . . . They just sat around and yapped at her. Young America was genuinely scared. She had thought a heart-to-heart chat with Authority ought to put things right. She would be real grateful to Authority for fixing things. . . .

And so, with the odd curtsey she had learned among 'the Dutchies,' as she called her German peneionat, and a hearty kiss on either cheek, Young America, affable as ever, beamed upon Authority and withdrew.

Authority felt as if it had been out in a high wind. Instinctively it clutched at its imposing head-dress. All was in place. Authority lay back in its chair and gasped fishily.

But Miss Vigers, frenzied into confession of inability to deal with the situation—got scant sympathy.

"What am I to do? I hate troubling you—I am sure, though, it's a relief to us all to have you back. Of course, if you had been at home she would never have been admitted. . . . You would have realized the unsuitabiility—but it was not my decision. . . . MissHartill. . . . But what am I to do? I flatter myself I can control our English girls—but these Americans! Open defiance, Miss Marsham! Her room! She refuses to attend to it. She comes and goes when she chooses. She treats me, positively, as an equal. Her influence is unspeakable! It must be stopped! Ten minutes late for breakfast—oh, every day! Once, I could excuse. And on the top of it all to offer me chocolates! I must ask you to punish her severely. . . . Keep her in? Miss Marsham, I did. . . . I sent her to her room. Miss Marsham, will you believe me? When I went up to her later, she was fast asleep! On the bed! In the day-time!! Without taking off the counterpane!!! Miss Marsham, I leave the matter to you!"

She paused for the comments her tale deserved. But to outraged Authority, it had called up a picture—an impudent picture of Young America, curled kitten-fashion on its austere white pallet—pink cheek on rounded arm, guileless eyes opening s! jepily under a sour and scandalized gaze.

Henrietta started. She could not believe her ears.

Benevolently—unmistakably—Authority had chuckled.

But the scandal was short-lived. Before the term was over: before Henrietta had braced herself to her usual resource, a threat of resignation, or Miss Marsham, hesitating between the devil of her protesting subordinates and the deep sea of Young

America's unshakable conviction that in her directress she had an enthusiastic partisan, could allow her maid to suggest to her that she needed a change, the end had arrived.

Cynthia, as Alwynne had surmised, found ten weeks of an English private school more than enough for her; and an imperious telegram had summoned her docile parents.

She departed as she had come, in a joyous flurry. The school mourned, and the Common-room, in its relief, sped the parting guest with a cordiality that was almost effusive.

A remark of Henrietta's, as the mistresses sat over their coffee on the afternoon of Cynthia's departure, voiced the attitude of the majority to its late pupil.

"I'm thankful," Miss Vigers was unusually talkative, "deeply thankful that she's gone. An impossible young woman. Oh, no—you couldn't call her a girl. Would any girl—any English girl—conceivably behave as she has? They have begun to imitate her, of course. That was to be expected. She demoralized the school. It will take me a month to get things straight. I have three children in bed to-day. Headaches? fiddlesticks! Over-eating! I suppose you heard that there was a midnight feast last night?"

The Common-room opened its eyes.

"I'm not astonished. A farewell gathering, I suppose? I'm sure it's not the first," said Clare, her eyes alight with amusement. "But go on. How did you find it out?"

"Miss Marsham informed me of it," said Henrietta, with desperate calmness. "It appears that Cynthia asked her permission. Miss Marsham—er—contributed a cake. Seed!"

Clare gurgled.

"This is priceless. Did she tell you? I wonder she had the face."

Henrietta grew pink.

"No. Cynthia herself. She—er—offered me a slice. She had the impertinence—the entirely American impertinence—to come to my room—after midnight—to borrow a tooth-glass. To eat ices in. It appeared that they were short of receptacles."

"Ices?" came the chorus.

"Her mother provided them, I believe. In a pail," said Henrietta stiffly.

"Did you lend the tooth-glass?" asked Clare.

Henrietta coughed.

" It was difficult to refuse. She had bare feet. I did not wish her to catch cold."

Clare turned away abruptly. Her shoulders shook.

" I do not wish to be unjust. I do not think she was intentionally insubordinate." Henrietta fingered one of the tall pink roses that had appeared on her desk that morning. " I believe she meant well."

" She was a dear ! " said the little gym mistress.

" She was an impossible young woman," retorted Henrietta with spirit. " At the same time——"

" At the same time? " Clare spoke with unusual friendliness

" She certainly had a way with her," said Henrietta.

CHAPTER XV

CYNTHIA GBIFFITHS had set a fashion.

Her kewpie hair-ribbons and abbreviated blouses were an unofficial uniform long after she had ceased, probably, to know that such articles of dress existed. Her slang phrases incorporated themselves in the school vocabulary. Her deeds of derring-do were imitated from afar. To have been on intimate terms with her would have been an impressive distinction, had not every member of the school been able to lay claim to it. For Cynthia's jolly temperament laughed at schoolgirl etiquette, could never be brought to realize the existence of caste and clique. She darted into their lives and out again, like a dragonfly through a cloud of gnats. It was not strange that her beauty, her prodigality, in conjunction with the all-excusing fact of her nationality, should have attracted the weather-cock enthusiasm of her companions; should have made her, short as her career had been, the rage.

Yet the one person on whom that career was to have a lasting influence was, to all appearance, the least affected by it.

Cynthia and Louise Denny were class-mates, for Clare, amused and interested by the new type, had, after all, arranged for Cynthia to join the Scholarship Class, though there could be no idea of her entering. She agreed with Alwynne that there was not much likelihood of Cynthia's sojourn being a long one. In the meantime, as she had explained to Miss Marsham, it was better to have the firebrand under her own eye. Miss Marsham agreed with alacrity, and contrasted Clare's calmly capable manner with the protests of Henrietta. She realized joyfully that Cynthia would not be permitted to appeal from any decision of Miss Hartill. She recalled, not for the first time, that in all Clare's years there had never come a crisis for which she had been found unprepared. Details of a campaign might finally reach the ears of Authority—there would be always birds of the air to carry the matter—but from Miss Hartill herself, no word;

if pressed, there would be a brief summary, a laughing comment, never an appeal for help. Miss Marsham had built up her school by sheer force of personality. She was old now, grown slack and easy, but instinctively she recognized a ruling spirit, a kindred mind. One day she must choose her successor. . . . She was rich. Her school need not fall to the highest bidder. . . . There were Henrietta and Clare. Henrietta had scraped and saved, she knew. . . . Henrietta was fond of trying on Authority's shoes. . . . Of Clare's wishes she was less sure. . . . But Clare was a capable girl—a capable girl. . . . Clare had never let any one worry her. . . .

She read Clare correctly. Clare had no intention of allowing Cynthia Griffiths to lessen her prestige. But she had her own method of solving the American problem. She treated her new pupil with the easy good humour, the mocking friendliness of an equal. She realized the impossibility of counteracting the effects of a haphazard education, but recognizing equally the inherent kindness and lawlessness of the character, played on both qualities in her management of the girl. Her classes were not demoralized, but stimulated, by the newcomer's presence : yet Clare had said nothing to Cynthia of rules and regulations. But Miss Hartill's manner had certainly implied that while to her, too, they were a folly and a weariness, after all it was easy to conform. It saved trouble and pleased people. All conveyed without prejudice to the morals of her other pupils in a shrug, and a twinkle, and a half-finished phrase.

Cynthia was charmed. Here was common-sense. For the first time she felt herself at home. She appalled the classes by her loud encomiums, her delighted discovery of qualities that it was blasphemy to connect with Miss Hartill. For Cynthia, with the pitiful shrewdness that her cosmopolitan years had instilled, admired Clare for reasons that bewildered the worshippers. To them Clare moved through the school, apart, Olympian, a goddess, condescending delightfully. To Cynthia, accustomed to intrigue, she was obviously and admirably Machiavellian. It amazed her that the English girls could not perceive Miss Hartill's cleverness, that they should adore her for qualities as foreign to her character as they were essentially insipid, and be indignant at understanding and discriminating praise.

But Cynthia was above all philosophical. She shrugged her shoulders over the crazy crew, and reserved her comments for—

Louise. For in Louise, incredible as Alwynne Durand, for instance, would have thought it, she did find a listener—an antagonist, easily pricked into amusing indignation, into white-hot denials—nevertheless, a listener. Indeed, it was the attitude of Cynthia to Clare Hartill rather than her personal attraction that was responsible for Louise's departure from her original and sincere attitude of indifference to the advances of the popular American.

Louise was less in the foreground than she had been in the previous term. She had come back to school, less talkative, less brilliant, but working with a dogged persistence that had on Alwynne, at least, a depressing effect. But Alwynne, also, was seeing less of the girl. Cynthia Griffiths obstructed her view—Cynthia, taking one of her vociferous likings to a sufficiently unresponsive Louise. For the *rapprochement* was scarcely a normal, school-girl intimacy. Cynthia Griffiths had been intrigued by Louise's personality. She had been quick to grasp the importance of the child's position—to guess her there by reason of her brains and temperament. Yet to Cynthia, judging life, as she did, chiefly by exterior appearances, Louise, insignificant, timid, shadowy, was an incessant denial of her nevertheless recognizable influence in school politics. In the language of Cynthia, she was a dark horse. Cynthia was charmed—school life was dull—the mildest of mysteries was better than none. She would devote herself to deciphering a new type. This little English kid had undoubted influence with girl and mistress alike. Cynthia had intercepted glances between her and Miss Hartill, and Miss Durand too, that spoke of mutual understanding. Perhaps it was money—half the school in her pay? Or secret influences of the most sinister? Hypnotism, maybe? Cynthia Griffiths, fed on dime novels and magazine literature, was not ten minutes in concocting the hopefulest of mare's nests. She approached Louise between excitement and suspicion.

Cynthia was not scrupulous. She forced her way through the reserves and defences of the younger girl like a bumble-bee clawing and screwing and buzzing into the heart of a half-shut flower.

She found much to puzzle her, more to amuse, but nothing to justify her gorgeous suspicions. She confessed them one day to Louise, in a burst of confidence, and Louise was hugely delighted. Cynthia always delighted her. She liked her jolly

ways, and her sense of fun, and was quite convinced that she had no sense of humour at all. The conviction saved her some suffering. She was jealous, inevitably jealous, of the brilliant new-comer, painfully alive to, exaggerating and writhing at Clare's preoccupation with her; yet with the warped shrewdness proper to her state of mind, she could calculate with painful accuracy how long it would take Clare to tire of her new toy, what qualities would soonest induce satiety. She guessed, hoped, prayed, that Miss Hartill would discover, as she had done, Cynthia's lack of conscious humour, the obtuseness that underlay her boisterous ease. She was not fine enough to hold Miss Hartill long : she would grow too fond of Miss Hartill: would, in the terrible craving to render up her whole soul, expose herself in all her crudity. Louise did, for a while, soothe the jealousy, the tearing, clawing beast in her breast, with that comfortable conviction. That her reasoning was subconscious, that she was unaware of the process of analysis and deduction that led to her conclusions, is immaterial; she felt—and as she felt, she acted; her reasons for her actions were sounder than she dreamed.

She made mistakes often enough : her profound occupation with Clare Hartill had induced a spiritual myopia; the rest of the world was out of focus; and it was her initial misunderstanding of Cynthia Griffiths that led to their curious, unaffectionate alliance. In all Louise's ponderings, she had never doubted but that Cynthia would, like the rest of the world, fall down and worship at the shrine of Clare Hartill. Cynthia Griffiths, amused spectator of an alien life, did nothing of the kind. On Louise—amazed, fiercely incredulous, all-suspicious, yet finally convinced of the inconceivable fact—it had a curious effect. She should have been indignant, contemptuous of the obtuse creature—as, indeed, in a sense, she was—but chiefly she was conscious of a lifted weight—of an enormous and hysterical gratitude.

Cynthia was a fool—a purblind philistine. But what relief was in her folly, what immense security ! Jealousy could not die out in Louise, but it entered on a new phase—became passive, enduring resignedly inevitable pain. But its vigilance, its fierce pugnacity was dead; for Cynthia—dear fool—did not care. Pearls had been cast before Americans. Louise was ready enough to be gracious to such exquisite insensibility. She became friendly. She had guarded her secret jealously from the

world. She was 'keen' on Miss Hartill, certainly, but so was half the school, at least. She was merely in the fashion. In significant and circumspect, giving no confidences, no one but Clare herself, and Alwynne Durand, guessed at the intensity of her affection. But with Cynthia Griffiths she was reckless. Ostrich-like, she trusted to the protection of her formal disclaimer, while with each new discussion, each half-confidence, she exposed herself and her feelings more completely.

And Cynthia, dropping her theories, began to be interested in the strange, vehement imp, with its alternating fits of frankness and reticence, wit and childishness, its big brain and its inexplicable yet obvious unhappiness. She affected Louise, was accustomed to pet and parade her, long before she had solved the problem of her character; indeed, it was not until she had confided to the child her plans for an early departure, that Louise relaxed her self-protective vigilance. She had begun, in her talks with Cynthia, to realize the relief and healing of self-expression. If Cynthia were going away to Paris, America, never to be seen again, what harm in talking—in saying for once what you felt? There was wry pleasure in it, and, oh, what harm?

Louise found an odd satisfaction in leading Cynthia—on her side, if you please, alert for evidence, the amateur detective still—to sit in judgment on Clare Hartill; would sit, horrified, thrilled, drinking in blasphemy. She would have allowed no other human being to impeach the smallest detail of Clare Hartill's conduct, but from Cynthia, though she raged hotly, she did allow, and in some queer fashion, enjoy it. She had, perhaps, a vague assurance that Cynthia, being a foreigner, could not be taken seriously.

So the pair discussed Clare Hartill from all possible angles till Louise occasionally forgot to keep up her elaborate pretence of indifference, to insist on its being understood that the discussion was rhadamanthine in its impersonality.

"Yes, I'm off soon," Cynthia had confided. They were sitting together in her cubicle. "All this is slow—slow. Ne' mind! Wait till this child gets going!" She stretched herself lazily, and flung back on her little white bed, arms behind her head. Louise studied her magnificent torso.

"Why did you come?" she demanded.

Cynthia laughed.

"Italy—France—Deutschland—I'd done everywhere but

England. Now comes a tour round the world—and so home. I'm Californian, you know. I'll have great times then. You don't live, over here. You're afraid of your own shadows. Now an American girl——"

"How do you mean?"

"Aren't you? Always afraid of breaking rules! Haven't I asked you—haven't I begged you to come out with me one day? Oh, Louise, it would be great! I saw a taxi-man yesterday, outside church, with the duckiest eyes! Lunch somewhere, and 'phone through for the new show at Daly's. An American show! Dandy! Only taken you four years to transfer here! Let's go, Louise? We'd be back to supper."

Louise twinkled.

"Rot! We'd be expelled."

Cynthia opened her china-blue eyes.

"For a little thing like that? Why? We wouldn't miss a class. Besides, we'd say you asked me home to tea."

Louise looked distressed. Their ideas of veracity had clashed before.

Cynthia, watching mischievously, giggled.

"Poor kid! Doesn't it want to tell lies, then?"

"You see—English people don't! Of course, I know it's different abroad," said Louise delicately.

"Haven't you ever, Louise?"

Louise flushed crimson.

"You have?" Cynthia was amused. "What was it, Louise? Oh, what was it? Tell! Oh, you needn't mind me—my average is—well, quite average. What was it?"

Louise's lips closed.

"I call you the limit, you know! 'English people don't!' With a red-hot tarradiddle on your little white conscience all the time. You're a good pupil, Louise!"

Louise, blushing, turned suspiciously.

"What are you at now?" she demanded.

"I was thinking of Clarissa." Cynthia smiled with intention.

"Clarissa who?"

"Clare, kid! Clare! Sweet Clare! Sugar-sweet Clare! Our dear Dame Double!"

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that," said Louise, in her lowest voice. "You know I hate it."

"All right, honey!" Cynthia rolled lazily on to her side and pulled a box of chocolates from the shelf beside her.

The room was quiet for a while.

" Cynthia? "

"Urn? "

" What did you mean just now ? "

" Have a candy ? "

" No, thanks ! "

Cynthia munched on.

" About Miss Hartill ? " Louise's tone was half defiant, half guilty. She felt disloyal in re-opening the subject. Yet Cynthia's hints rankled.

" I don't know ! Nothing, I guess."

" Oh, but you did mean something," said Louise uneasily.

" Maybe."

"Tell me."

" Want to know? "

" Yes."

"Badly? "

" It's not true, of course ! But I'd like to know."

Cynthia's eyes danced. She could be grave enough otherwise, but her eyes and her dimples could never be kept in order.

" Tell about the tarradiddle first, and I will."

But to Louise a lie was a lie and no joking matter. She fidgeted.

" If you must know——"

" I must."

" Well—you know how Miss Hartill hates birthdays ? "

"Why? "

" At least, school ones. You know, there's such a fuss at Miss Marsham's—a holiday, and presents, and all that. So Miss Hartill won't let hers be known."

" ' Splendid Isolation ' stunt."

" If you're going to be a hatefully unjust pig, I won't tell you."

" I apologize. Have a candy ? "

" Well, you know, Agatha found out that Miss Hartill was giving a party last week, and, of course, every one thought it was for hers. But it turned out it was Daffy's birthday; Miss Hartill gave it for her. It was Agatha's fault. She was so dead certain about it."

" But what did it matter ? "

" Well, you see, I'd got some roses——"

" Pale pink and yellow ? Beauties ? "

" Yes."

"Oho! So that's where they came from. I did Dame Double an injustice. I thought it was a best boy." Cynthia gurgled.

"You saw them?"

"I went to tea with her—it must have been that day—the eighth?"

Louise nodded.

"A party! Agatha is a coon. There was only Daffy there! I wonder she didn't ask you."

Louise said nothing. Her face was expressionless.

"Mean old thing!" Cynthia grew indignant as the situation dawned on her.

"She can't ask every one. There was no reason whatever to ask me." But Louise's voice had a suspicious quiver in it, which Cynthia, with unusual tact, ignored.

"Well—about the roses? They were beauties, kid!"

"Oh, I brought 'em round, going to school. I thought she'd started, but she hadn't. She opened the door. So there I was, stuck." Louise began to laugh. "I'd meant to leave them, just without any name."

"I see." Cynthia twinkled.

"She was rather—rather breakfasty, you know—and I got flustered and forgot to wish her 'many happy.' Wasn't it lucky? I was thankful afterwards. I only said they were out of the greenhouse and I thought she'd like them. She did, too." Louise smiled to herself.

"Well?"

"That's all."

"But where did the lie come in?"

"Oh! Oh—well—I'd bought them, you see. As if Mamma would let me pick flowers. Besides, we haven't even got a greenhouse. But I had five shillings at Christmas, and sixpence in the pudding—and sixpence a week pocket-money—and I never have anything to buy. I could well afford it," said Louise, with dignity.

"That's not a lie," said Cynthia, disappointed. "It's barely an—an evasion."

"I didn't mean to—evade. I was only afraid she'd be cross, and yet I couldn't resist getting them. Do you know the feeling, when you ache to give people things? But it was a b'e, of course."

"Oh, well! You needn't mind. She tells plenty herself—acts them, at least——"

Louise caught her np.

"There! That's it! That's one of the things! You're always hinting things! Why do you? I won't have it! Of course, I know you're only in fun, but if anybody heard you——"

"I'm not! Oh, but it's no use talking! You think she's a god almighty. What's the use of my telling you that she's a conceited——"

"She's not! "

"Oh, she's a right to be. She'd be a peach if I had the dressing of her——"

"She doesn't like American fashions. We don't want her to. We like her as she is."

"And she knows it—you bet your bottom dollar! There's not much she doesn't know. Why, she simply lives for effect! She's the most gorgeous hypocrite——"

"You're a beastly one yourself—you pretend you like her——"

"But I do! I admire her heaps! But I understand her. You don't. She likes to be top dog. She'll do anything for that. She likes to know every woman and child in the school is a bit of putty, to knead into shape. I know! I've met her sort before—only generally it was men they were after. And yet it bores her too——" parenthesized Cynthia shrewdly. "That's why she likes me. I don't care two pins for her tricks. That stings her up a bit. She'll be mighty bored when I go."

Louise listened, angry, yet fascinated. It gave her a curious pleasure to hear Miss Hartill belied. She would hug herself for her own superior discernment. A phrase from a half-digested story often recurred to her: 'One doesn't defend one's god! One's god is a defence in himself.' But Cynthia was going too far—abandoning innuendo for direct assault. She struck back.

"It's easy to say things. Just saying doesn't make it so. And if it did, I shouldn't believe it."

"Oh! I can prove it." Cynthia laughed. "Have you noticed the Charette comedy?"

"Mademoiselle? Oh, she hates Miss Hartill. But she's French, of course."

"Does she just? H'm——! "

"Well, there was a French girl—she left last term—she told Marion that Mademoiselle had said things to her about Miss Hartill. Agatha told me. Agatha loathes Mademoiselle. Of course, Mademoiselle is rather down on her."

" I don't wonder. You know how Agatha hazes her in class."

" I can't stand Agatha." Louise shook herself. " Last French Grammar it was awful—silly, you know, not funny. One simply couldn't work. Mademoiselle kept her in. I suppose Agatha didn't like that. She's been a lamb since, anyway. About time too ! "

" Shucks ! It wasn't being kept in. It was Clarissa. Oh, my dear, it was fun ! There was poor little Mademoiselle, storming away in her absurd English, and Agatha cheeking her for all she was worth."

" How did you hear ? "

" Why, I was in the studio ! Agatha didn't know we were there, of course. The glass doors were open. You know, Daffy gives me extra drawing. And just when Agatha was in full swing, and Mademoiselle speechless with rage, Miss Hartill turned up—wanted Daffy."

" Oh, go on ! " Louise cried breathlessly.

" It really was funny, you know. Miss Hartill was talking to Daffy and the row going on next door—you couldn't help hearing—and suddenly Daffy said—Daffy had been fidgeting for some time—' Listen ! ' and Clarissa said, ' Oho-o ' ! You know her way, with about ten o's at the end; and Daffy said, ' There ! Now do you believe me ? ' kind of crowing. And Miss Hartill, she just smiled, like a cat with cream, and said, ' All right, Alwynne ! All right, my dear ! ' and went into the next room. Say, it was exciting ! She didn't raise her voice, but she just let herself go, and in about two minutes Agatha came out like a ripe cheese—literally crawling. I wish she hadn't shut the door. I couldn't hear any more. I could see, of course, and you bet I watched out of the tail of my eye. Daffy never noticed me."

" What happened then ? "

" Oh ! They stood and talked, and Mademoiselle was scarlet and seemed to be pitching into Miss Hartill, as far as I could see, and Miss Hartill was letting her talk herself out, and sometimes she smiled and said something; that always started Mademoiselle off again. And at last Mademoiselle went and sat in one of the window-seats, and I couldn't see her face, but I imagined she was howling. French people always do. Clarissa went and patted her shoulder."

" She is a dear ! " Loyally Louise bit back her instant jealousy.

" Oh, she was enjoying herself," said Cynthia coolly. " You should have seen her face. Sort of smiling at her own thoughts. Have you ever seen a spider smile ? "

Louise disdained an answer.

" Nor have I! Have a candy? But I bet I know what it looks like."

" Well, what happened ? " demanded Louise impatiently.

" Oh, it was annoying ! Daffy came and sat down in my place, to correct. I couldn't see any more. Only when Miss Hartill came out (she didn't notice me, I was putting away the group), she said to Daffy, ' She's coming to tea on Friday.' And Daffy said, ' Clare, you're a wonder ! ' And Miss Hartill said, ' I didn't do it for her, Alwynne ! ' And Daffy got pink. Clarissa did look pleased with herself."

" Well, so she ought! Wouldn't you be—if you could make people happy ? "

Cynthia threw up her hands. " Happy! Oh, Momma! Are you happy ? "

Louise winced.

"Is Daffy? Mademoiselle? Any of you fools? Oh, it's no use talking ! You won't believe me when I tell you that she's a cat. Yes, a pussy-cat, Louise ! A silky, purring pussy-cat, pawing you, pat—pat—so softly, like kisses. But if you wriggle—my ! Look out for claws ! Have a candy ? "

Louise gathered herself together. She came close to the bed, and leaning over the older girl, spoke—

" I don't understand what you're driving at—but you're wrong. It's you that's a fool. You misjudge her, utterly. You don't understand her—you're not fit to."

" Are you ? " Cynthia laughed at her openly.

" Of course not. No one—Daffy does, of course. But us ?—girls? Just because she's been heavenly to you, you take advantage, to watch her, to judge, to twist all she says and does. Why do you hate her so ? "

" I don't." Cynthia pulled herself upright. " My dear, you're wrong there. I like her immensely. She's a real treat. But I don't worship her like you do."

" I don't! I—I just love her." Louise glowed.

Cynthia laughed jollily.

" Oh, well! You'll get over that. Wait till you get a best boy."

" If you think I'd look at any silly man, after knowing her——"

" My dear girl! Has it never occurred to you that you'll marry some day ? "

Louise shook her head.

" I've thought it all out. I could never love anybody as much as I do Miss Hartill. I know I couldn't."

" But it's not the same ! Falling in love with a man——"

" Love's love," said Louise with finality. " Where's the difference ? "

Cynthia sat up.

" Where's the difference ? Where's the——? " She giggled. But something in the quality of her laughter disturbed. Louise frowned.

" I didn't say anything funny. You'll love your husband, I suppose, that you're always talking about having—and I'll stick to Miss Hartill. It's perfectly simple."

But Cynthia was still laughing. Louise grew irritable under her amused glances, and would have turned away, but Cynthia flung her arm about her.

" Stop ! Don't you really know ? "

" What ? "

" The difference."

Cynthia's eyes shone oddly. Louise moved uneasily, disconcerted by their expression.

Cynthia continued.

" Hasn't any one told you ? Why, with the books you've read——Haven't you read the Bible ever ? "

" Of course! " Louise was indignant. " I've been right through—four times."

" And you've never noticed? Good Lord! That's all I read it for."

" I haven't an idea what you're driving at," said Louise. Cynthia was making her thoroughly uncomfortable.

Cynthia was flushed, laughing, pure devilry in her eyes. Her lips were pouted, her little teeth gleamed. She looked like a child licking its lips over forbidden dainties. She had pulled Louise into her lap and her voice had dropped to a whisper.

" Shall I tell you ? Would you like to know ? You ought to—you're fourteen—it's absurd—not knowing about things—shall I tell you ? "

Louise fidgeted. Cynthia's manner had aroused her curiosity, but none the less she was repelled. Why, she could not have said. She hesitated, aroused, yet half frightened.

"I'll tell you," said Cynthia lusciously.

With a sudden effort Louise freed herself from the encircling arm. She edged away from the elder girl, stammering a little.

"I don't think I want to know anything. It's awfully sweet of you. I'd rather—I always ask Daffy things. Do you mind?"

Cynthia, good-tempered as ever, laughed aloud.

"Lord, no! But what a little saint! Aren't you ever curious, Louise? All right! I won't tease. Have a candy?"

And Louise, eating chocolates, was not long in forgetting the conversation and all the curious discomfort it had aroused. If a leaf had fallen on the white garment of her innocence—a leaf from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—she had brushed it aside, all unconscious, before it could leave a stain.

CHAPTER XVI

THE spring term was nearly over, holidays and a trip to Italy deliciously near; yet Clare Hartill sat at breakfast and frowned over a neatly-written letter.

Clare Hartill did not encourage the re-entry of old friends into her life. She did not forget them. She would look back upon the far-off flaming intimacy with regret, would quote its pleasures to the friend of the hour with disconcerting enthusiasm; but she was never eager for the reappearance of any whose ways had once diverged from her own. Pleasant memories, if you will; but, in the flesh, old friends were tiresome. They claimed instant intimacy; were free-tongued, fond, familiar; could not realize that though they might choose to stand still, she, Clare, had grown out of their knowledge, beyond their fellowship. She, indeed, would find them terribly unaltered; older, glamorous, yet amazingly, humiliatingly the same. She would look at them furtively as she entertained them, and shudder at the lapse from taste that surely must have explained her former affection. She would be gracious, kind, yet inimitably distant, and would send them away at last, subdued, vaguely disquieted, loyal still, yet very sure that they would never trouble her again. Which was exactly what Clare Hartill intended. Yet she had her fits of remorse withal, her secret bitter railing at fate and her own nature, for that she could neither keep a friend nor live without one. Recovering, she would be complacent at having contrived, without loss of prestige, to rid herself of bores.

There was one fly in her ointment. Who knows not that fly, earnest and well-intentioned, which, when it is dug out with a hairpin, cleanses itself exhaustively and forthwith returns to the vaseline jar? Such a fly, optimistic and persistent, was the correspondent who invariably signed herself, 'Ever, dear Clare, your affectionate little friend, Olivia Pring. P.S. Do you remember . . .?' There would follow a reminiscence, at least twenty years old, that Clare never did remember.

Olivia Pring was a school-mate. There had been a term together in the Lower Third. For a few weeks she had been Clare's best friend and she never let Clare forget it. Clare, with removes and double removes, had disappeared speedily from Olivia's world, but she never quite shook off Olivia. Olivia, amiable, admiring, impervious to snubs, refused to be shaken off. She went her placid way, became a governess, and an expert in the more complicated forms of crochet. She wrote to Clare about twice a year—dull, affectionate letters. Clare, that involute character, amazed herself by invariably answering them. At long intervals Olivia would be passing through London, and would announce herself, if quite convenient, as intending to visit her dear Clare that afternoon. She would describe the lengthy tussle between herself and her employer, before she had wrested the requisite permission to stay the night—and did Clare remember the last visit but three, and the amusing evening they had had? And the letter was invariably delayed in the posting, and its arrival would precede that of Olivia by a bare half-hour. Olivia, growing ever fatter and more placid, would apologize breathlessly between broad smiles at the sight of Clare and recollections of the dear old days. And Clare, as one hypnotized, would go to her linen cupboard and give out sheets for the spare room. There would follow an evening of interminable small-talk for Clare, of sheer delight for Olivia Pring, who, consciously and conscientiously commonplace, enjoyed dear Clare's daring views as a youthful curate might enjoy, strictly as an onlooker, what he imagines to be the less respectable aspects of an evening in Paris.

And Clare would retire to bed at ten-fifteen and sleep as she had not slept for weeks. Olivia would be regretfully obliged to catch the eight-eleven, and would depart amid embraces. And Clare would order up a second breakfast and wonder why she stood it. Yet the pile of unused doileys in her linen cupboard increased yearly. A doiley was Olivia's invariable tribute, and arrived, intricate and unlovely, within a week of her visit.

Clare fingered her letter in quaint helplessness. She had a sleepless night behind her, and a big morning's work before, and her usual end-of-term headache. Olivia was arriving—she glanced at the hopelessly legible sheets—at three-fifty. No chance of mistake there. Clare decided that it was quite impossible for her to survive a seven hours' *t&e-d-t&e* with her affectionate friend Olivia Pring. If only Alwynne could help

her out. But Alwynne, she knew, was taking the skimmings of the Sixths and Fifths to a suitable Shakespeare performance. She had taken the pick of the classes herself the evening before. No chance of Alwynne, then. And Cynthia! Alack for Cynthia! who could have been trusted to amuse Olivia Fring as much as Olivia Pring would have amused her—Cynthia ...ust be aboard ship by now. Clare, in regretful parenthesis, hoped Cynthia would send a few compatriots to Utterbridge. . . . Americans gave a fillip to one's duties. . . . Anyhow Alwynne and Cynthia were out of the question.

There was Louise! She brightened. Louise, queer little thing, was always amusing. . . . Louise would serve her turn. . . . Louise would be so charmed to come. . . . Clare laughed a little consciously. Perhaps she had neglected Louise a trine of late, perhaps it was not altogether fair of her. A happy thought buffered the prick of her yawning conscience. It was Alwynne's fault. . . . Alwynne, with her ridiculous, well-meaning objections. . . . She, Clare, had given in to them, for peace and quiet sake. . . . And now, most probably, Louise was not too content with life. . . . One knew what schoolgirls were. . . . Never mind! Clare would be very nice to Louise this evening. . . . Louise should enjoy herself, and, incidentally, preserve Clare from expiring of boredom at poor Olivia's large, flat feet.

The invitation was given during the eleven o'clock break. Clare would occasionally join the school in Big Hall, and share its milk and biscuits. Often enough to make it any day's delightful possibility, not often enough for it to be other than an event. She would sit on the platform steps, watching the gay promenaders below, informal, approachable, tossing the ball to the daring few, hedged about, in turn, by the tentative many. Sometimes she would stroll about the hall with a girl on either side, or one only. She had a curious little trick of catching the girl she spoke with by the elbow, and pushing her gently along as she talked, bending over (she was very tall) and enveloping. Everybody knew the 'Gendarme Stunt' as Cynthia Griffiths irreverently termed it, and no one would have dreamed of approaching or interrupting such a *t&e-d-tete*.

Nevertheless, Miss Hartill had not exchanged three sentences with Louise Denny on the morning of Olivia Pring's arrival, before every girl in Big Hall knew of it, and twice the number of eyes were following them, with an elaborately accidental gaze, in their progress.

Possibly Clare was a little touched by Louise's delight at the invite, ion. At any rate she managed, in spite of her headache, to be a very charming companion. She confessed to the headache, and asked Louise for advice. And Louise, deeply concerned, could think of nothing but a recipe she had found in Clare's own Culpeper, in which rhubarb and powdered dormice figured largely. She suggested it in a doubtful little voice. The school would have given a good deal to know what made Miss Hartill laugh so.

Miss Hartill told Louise all about her visitor, whom, she declared, she depended on Louise to entertain, and added a couple of comical tales of their mutual school-days. Unfortunately Clare's *novel* owed their charm more to her inventive touches and graphic manner than to the actual underlying fact. Louise was left with the impression of an Olivia Pring who had been Friar Tuck to Clare's Robin Hood. She appreciated the honour of being asked to meet her to a degree that would have tickled Clare, had she guessed it.

'Miss Olivia Pring!' Louise meditated all day over Miss Olivia Pring. Evidently Miss Hartill's best friend. . . . She hoped Miss Olivia Pring would like her. . . . How dreadful it would be if she didn't . . . for what might she not say of her to Miss Hartill? Louise must be careful, oh, so careful, of her manneis and her speech. . . . It was rather hard luck that she would not have Miss Hartill to herself. . . . It would be dreadfully uncomfortable—talking before a stranger. . . . Except for the cleightfulness of being asked by Miss Hartill, she could have wished that Miss Hartill had not asked her. Rather an ordeal for a thirteen-year-old—supper with Miss Hartill and Miss Olivia Pring.

Now shyness, like any other painful sensation, is inexplicable to such as have not experienced it, is at once forgotten by such as outgrow it, but to those at its mercy is sheer suffering, paralyzing, stultifying, a spiritual Torture of the Pear.

Clare Hartill should have understood; she had her own furtive childhood for reference; but Clare Hartill had a headache, and she was very tired of Olivia Pring. Ohvia was so placid, so shapeless, so ridiculous, in her pink flannel blouse, and the reckless glasses, that were ever on the point of toppling over the precipice of her abbreviated nose into the abyss of hef half-open mouth. It certainly did not occur to Clare that Louise could feel the slightest discomfort on account of Olivia Pring.

But Louise was blind to the flannel blouse, and the foolish face, and the unmanageable glasses. She was wearing glasses of her own, rose-coloured affairs, through which Miss Pring appeared, not only as a 'grown-up' and a stranger, but as the intimate of Deity in Undress. Miss Pring did nothing to dispel the illusion—she had conscientiously flattened the high spirits out of too many little girls to be interested in a new specimen. She addressed herself chiefly to Clare—recalling incessantly, and enlarging upon, trifling incidents of their mutual past, which every fresh sentence of the badgered hostess contrived to recall to her elastic memory. Louise, always sensitive, her shyness growing with every word, could but take each unexplained allusion as a personal snub, and feeling herself entirely superfluous, began to imagine that Miss Hartill was already regretting the invitation. Panic-struck she tried to remedy matters by effacing herself as completely as possible. It was wonderful what a small and insignificant person Louise could sometimes look, and did look that evening in one of Clare's big arm-chairs. Her prim little whisper and deprecatory smile might have struck Clare as pathetic if Clare had not been so very tired of the affectionate reminiscences of Olivia Pring. As it was, she was annoyed. She had asked Louise of the bright eyes and quick stammer and extravagant imagery, to supper with her—the panther-cub, not the leveret. She had talked of Louise too—had looked forward to putting the child through its paces, if only for the benefit of Olivia Pring. She had even surmised that Louise would take Olivia's measure, and at a nod from Clare would be delicately, deliciously impertinent. Indeed, she had thought her capable of it. But it was only a schoolgirl after all—a silly, tongue-tied schoolgirl—that she had for an instant compared with Alwynne : Alwynne, monstrously absent, a match for ten Olivias.

She yawned, shrugged her shoulders, and suggested, in fine ironic fit, a game of 'Old Maid.' Oh'via was extremely pleased. She so much preferred Old Maid—or Beggar-my-Neighbour, perhaps ?—to Bridge. She did not approve of Bridge. In her position it did not do. Clare would remember that she had always said. . . .

Clare fetched the cards.

Louise ! Louise ! You have done yourself no good to-night. Shy ? Nonsense ! What is there to be shy about ? A few words from Miss Hartill—a prompting or two—a leading question

—could have broken the ice of your shyness for you, eh ? And Miss Hartill knows it, as well as you, if not better. That shall not avail you Who are you, to set Miss Hartill's conscience itching ? Miss Hartill has a headache. Pull up your chair, and deal your cards, and stop Miss Hartill yawning, if you can. Believe me, it's your only chance of escape.

Louise was a clumsy dealer. Her careful setting out of cards irritated Clare to snatching point. Olivia triumphed in every game. On principle, Clare disliked losing, even at Beggar-my-Neighbour. And they played Beggar-my-Neighbour till ten o'clock.

Louise grew more cheerful as the evening progressed, ventured a few sentences now and then. Clare was dangerously suave with both her guests; but Louise, taking all in good faith, hoped after all, that she had not appeared as stupid as she felt. It had been dreadful at first, she reflected, as she put on coat and hat. But it had gone better afterwards. . . . She didn't believe Miss Hartill was cross with her. . . . That had been a silly idea of her own. . . . Miss Hartill was just as usual.

She made her farewells. Clare came out into the hall and ushered her forth.

" Good-bye ! " Louise smiled up at her. " It was so kind of you to have me. I have so much enjoyed myself." Then, the formula off her tongue : " Miss Hartill, I do hope your head's better? "

" Thank you ! " said Clare inscrutably. " Good-night! " Then, as the maid went down the stairs : " Louise ! "

" Yes, Miss Hartill ? "

Clare was smiling brilliantly.

" Don't come again, Louise, until you can be more amusing. At any rate, natural. Good-night ! "

She shut the door.

CHAPTER XVII

LOUISE spent her Easter holidays among her lesson books. Miss Hartill and Miss Durand were in Italy, all responsibilities put aside for four blessed weeks, but for Louise there could be no relaxation. The examinations were to take place a few days before the summer term began, and their imminence overshadowed her. Useless for Miss Durand to extract a promise to rest, to be lazy, to forget all about lessons. Louise promised readily and broke her promise half-an-hour after she had waved the train out of the station. Impossible to keep away from one's History and Latin and Mathematics with examinations three weeks ahead. Miss Durand' might preach; her overtaxed brain cry pax; her cramped body ache for exercise; but Louise knew herself forced to ignore all protests. She would rest when the examinations were over. Till then—revision, repetition—repetition, revision—with as little time as might be grudged to eating and sleeping and duty walks with Mrs. Denny.

There was no time to lose. The nights swallowed up the days all too swiftly.

Yet, waking one morning with a start to realize that the day of days had dawned at last, she found it incredible. The morning was exactly like other mornings, with the sun streaming blindingly in upon her, because she had forgotten, as usual, to draw her blind at night, her head already aching a little, hot and heavy from uneasy sleep. All night long her brain had been alert, restless, beyond control. All night long it had tugged and fretted, like a leashed dog, at the surface slumber that tethered it. She felt confused, burdened with a half-consciousness of vivid, forgotten dreams.

She dressed abstractedly, lesson books propped against her looking-glass, and wedged between soap-dish and pitcher. For the hundredth time she coned the technicalities of her work, and making no slips, grew more cheerful, for it had been the letter, not the spirit, that had troubled her—little

matters of rules and exceptions, of dates and derivations, that would surely trip her up. But she was feeling sure of herself at last, and thrilling as she was with nervous excitement, could yet be glad that the great day had dawned, and ready to laugh at all her previous despondencies. Things were turning out better than she had expected. There was bracing comfort in beginning with her own subject—Miss Hartill's own subject. She could have no fears for herself in the Literature examination. French in the afternoon, that was less pleasant. But she would manage—must, literally. 'Miss Hartill expects——' She laughed. She supposed the sailors felt just the same about Nelson as she did about Miss Hartill. She wondered if Lady Hamilton had minded his only having one eye and one arm? Suppose Miss Hartill had only one eye and one arm? Oh! If anything happened to Miss Hartill. . . .! She shivered at the idea and instantly witnessed, with all imaginable detail, the wreck of the train as it entered Utterbridge station, and she herself rescuing Miss Hartill, armless and blind, from the blazing carriage. She had her on the sofa, five years later, in the prettiest of invalid gowns, contentedly reliant on her former pupil. And Louise, blissfully happy, was her hands and feet and eyes, her nurse, her servant, her—(hastily Louise deprived her alike of income and friends) her bread-winner and companion. Here her French Grammar, slithering over the soap to the floor, woke her from that delicious reverie.

She picked it up, and applied herself for a while to its dazing infinitives. But teeth-brushing is a rhythmic process: her thoughts wandered again perforce. She had got to be first. . . . Miss Hartill would be so pleased. . . . It would be heavenly to please Miss Hartill again as she used to do. . . . Nothing had been the same since Cynthia came. . . . She flushed to the eyes at the recollection of her last unlucky visit——' You needn't come again unless you can be more amusing. You might at least be natural. . . .' Yet Miss Hartill had been so kind at the last . . . had waved to her from the train. . . .

The postman's knock startled her, disturbed her meditations anew. Letters! Was it possible? Would Miss Hartill have remembered? Have sent her, perhaps, a postcard? Stranger things had been. She had for weeks envisaged the possibility. She finished her dressing and tore downstairs.

The maid was hovering over the breakfast-table.

"Are there any letters' Baxter? Are there any letters?"

But she had already caught sight of a foreign postcard on her plate, a postcard with an unfamiliar stamp. She scurried round the table, her heart thumping.

But the big, adventurous handwriting was hatefully familiar. The postcard was from Miss Durand.

She waited a moment, her lips parted vacantly, as was her fashion when controlling emotion; waited till the maid had gone.

Then she crumpled and tore the thin cardboard in her hand and flung it at last on the floor, in a passion of disappointment.

"She might have written!" cried Louise. "Oh, she might have written! It wouldn't have hurt her—a postcard."

Presently a thought struck her. She groped under the table for the torn scraps of paper and spread them in her lap, piecing them eagerly, laboriously. Miss Hartill might have written on Miss Durand's postcard.

She had the oblong fitted together at last and read the scrawl with impatient eagerness. Miss Durand was just sending her a line to wish her all imaginable luck. She and Miss Hartill were having a glorious time. They were sitting at that moment where she had made a cross on the picture postcard. She wished Louise could be with them to see the wonderful view over the valley and with good wishes from them both, was her Alwynne Durand. . . .

Louise's eyes softened—'from them both.' That was something! Miss Hartill had sent her a message. She sighed as she wrapped the scraps carefully in her handkerchief. Life was queer. . . . Here was Miss Durand, so kind, so friendly always—yet her kindness brought no pleasure. . . . And Miss Hartill, who could open heaven with a word—was not half so kind as Miss Durand. Louise marvelled that Miss Hartill could be so miserly. She was sure that if she, Louise, could make people utterly happy by kind looks and kind words, stray messages and occasional postcards, that she would be only too glad to be allowed to do it. To possess the power of giving happiness. . . . And with no more trouble to yourself than the writing of a postcard! Queer that Miss Hartill did not realize what her mere existence meant to people. . . . She couldn't realize it, of course . . . that was it. . . . She thought so little about herself. . . . It was her own beautiful selflessness that made her seem, occasionally, hard—unkind even. . . . She didn't realize what she meant to people. . . . If she had, she would have

written. ... Of course she would have written . . . just a word ... on Daffy's postcard. . . .

Louise sighed again. One didn't ask much. . . . But it seemed the more humble one grew—the less one asked—the more unlikely people were to throw one even that little. ... At any rate there was the examination to tackle. ... If she did well—! She lost herself again in speculations as to the form Miss Hartill's approval might take.

The family trooped in to breakfast as the brisk maid dumped a steaming dishful of liver and bacon upon the table.

Louise occupied her place and began to spread her bread-and-butter, avoiding her father's eye. But, as she foresaw, she was not permitted to escape.

Mr. Denny pounced upon the butter-dish.

"Not with bacon," he remarked, with reproachful satisfaction, and removed it.

Louise said nothing. She was careful not to look at her parent, for she knew that her expression was not permissible. His harmless tyrannies irritated her as invariably as her tricks of personality grated upon him. She thought him smug and petty, and despised him for his submissive attitude to her step-mother. His noisy interferences with her personal habits she thought intolerable, though she had learned to endure them stolidly. But most of all, she hated to see his fat, pudgy hands touching her food. She was accustomed to cut bread for the family. No one guessed why she had arrogated to herself that duty.

And he, good man, would look at his daughter occasionally, and wonder why she was so unlike his satisfactory sons and their capable mother : would be vaguely annoyed by her silences, and by a certain expression that reminded him uncomfortably of his first 'fine-lady' wife; would have an emotion of disquieted responsibility; would hesitate : would end by presenting his daughter with a five-shilling-piece, or be delivered from a dawning sense of responsibility by crumbs on the carpet, the muddy boots of a son and heir, or, as in the present instance, an unjustifiable predilection for butter.

"Bread with your meat," he said firmly and handed her a full plate.

Then he watched her with interest. His conception of the duties of fatherhood was realized in seeing that his children

slightly over-ate themselves at every meal. He did as he would be done by.

Louise picked up knife and fork unwillingly. She was dry-mouthed with excitement and the beginnings of a headache, and the liberal portion of hot, rich food sickened her. But anything was better than a fuss. She sliced idly at the slab of liver.

Opportunity beckoned Mr. Denny.

"Don't play with your food," said the father sharply.

She ate a few mouthfuls, conscious of his supervision. Satisfied, he turned at last to his own breakfast.

There was a peaceful interval.

The children talked among themselves. Mrs. Denny, hidden behind her tea-cosy, was exclusively concerned with the table manners of the youngest boy. The moment was propitious.

Softly Louise rose and slipped to the sideboard. Her plate once hidden behind the biscuit-tin. . . .

Mr. Denny looked up. He was ever miraculously alert at breakfast.

"More bacon, Louise ? "

"No, thank you, Father," said Louise fervently.

"Have you finished your plate ? "

"Yes, Father."

Her brothers gave tongue joyously.

"Oh-h ! You whopper ! "

"Oh, Father, she hasn't! "

"Mother, did you hear ? Louise says she's finished her bacon. She hasn't."

"Not near ! "

"Not half ! "

"Not a quarter ! "

"Well—of all the whopping lies ! "

Mr. Denny sprang up, his eyes glistening. He, too, enjoyed a scene. The plate was retrieved from its hiding-place and its guilty burden laid bare.

"Emma, do you see this ? Emma ! Leave that child alone and attend to me ! Flagrant ! Flagrant disobedience ! Louise, I told you to eat it. Turning up your nose at good food ! There's many a child would be thankful—Emma ! Am I to be disobeyed by my own children ? And a lie into the bargain ! If that is the way you are taught at your fine school, I'll take you away. Disgraceful ! Eat it up now. Emma ! Are you

or are you not going to back me up? Is all that food to be wasted?"

Mrs. Denny's calm eyes surveyed the excited table.

"Don't fuss, Edwin. Louise, eat up your bacon."

"I can't," said Louise sullenly.

"Then you shouldn't have taken so much."

"I didn't. It was Father——"

"Eat it up at once," said Mrs. Denny peremptorily, as the baby cast his spoon upon the carpet. The tone of her voice ended the discussion.

Mr. Denny watched his daughter triumphantly, as she toiled over her task, called her attention to a piece of bacon she had left on the edge of her plate, and when she had finished told her she was a good girl and that it would do her good. After which he gave her a shilling.

"I don't want it," muttered Louise.

"You don't want it?" repeated Mr. Denny incredulously.

Louise looked at him. There was a world of uncomprehending contempt in the eyes of father and child alike, though the father's were amused, where the child's were bitter.

Mr. Denny laughed jollily.

"I say, kids! Hear that? Your sister here hasn't any use for a shilling. Bet you haven't either! Eh? I don't think!"

Ensued clamour, with jostling and laughter and clutching of coins, from which the head of the house retired to his chair by the fire, chuckling and content. He enjoyed distributing largesse, especially where there was no great need for it, though he was liberal enough to famous charities. He never gave to beggars, on principle.

Louise slipped out of the room under cover of the noise, and was dressed and departing when her step-mother called her back.

"Louise! You stay to lunch to day, don't you?"

"At school? Oh no, Mamma. Holidays, you know! They only open a class-room for the exam."

"The fifty-pound job, eh?" Her father eyed her over the top of his paper approvingly. For once his daughter was showing a proper spirit. "Go in and win, my girl! I've given you the best education money could buy. If you don't get it, you jolly well ought to. Fifty quid, eh? I wasn't given the chance of earning fifty quid when I was thirteen. Shop-boy, I was. Started as shop-boy like me father before me,"¹

His wife cut in sharply.

"Isn't there an afternoon examination? I understood——"

"Yes, Mamma. But no dinners. It's all shut."

Mrs. Denny frowned.

"It's annoying. I wanted you out of the way. Nurse is taking the children for an outing. I've enough to do without providing lunches—you must take some sandwiches—spring cleaning—maids all busy——"

"I'd rather take sandwiches!" Louise's face brightened.

"I thought the cleaning was over—not a comfortable room in the house for the last fortnight." Mr. Denny was testy.

His wife answered them thickly, her mouth full of pins as she adjusted her dusting apron.

"Very well! Ask cook to—no, she's upstairs. Cut them yourself. There's plenty of liver. Perfectly absurd! Do you want the house a foot deep in dust? You leave the household arrangements to me! The top-floor hasn't been done for years—not thoroughly."

"The top floor? Not the attics?" said Louise.

"Yes! I'm re-arranging the rooms. John's getting too big for the nursery. He needs a room to himself. I'm putting him in cook's old room."

Louise paused, the slice of bread half cut.

"Where's cook going?" said her father.

She awaited the answer, a fear catching at her breath.

"Oh, in the lumber-room," said Mrs. Denny easily. "It only wants papering. A nice, big room! A sloping roof, of course. But with her wages, if she can't put up with a sloping roof—! But it'll take some clearing! You wouldn't believe what an amount of rubbish has collected."

"It's not rubbish," said Louise. Her voice was low with passion. "It's not rubbish! You shan't touch it."

Mrs. Denny spun round amazedly. Her step-daughter, the loaf clutched to her breast with an unconscious gesture, the big knife gleaming, was a tragi-comic figure.

"What on earth——?" she began.

Louise leaned forward, hot-eyed.

"Mamma! You won't! You can't! You mustn't! Father, don't let her! That's Mother's room! If you put cook in Mother's room——" She choked. A priestess defending her altars could have used her accents.

Mr. Denny put down his paper.

" What's the matter with the girl ! " he demanded.

Mrs. Denny shrugged her shoulders.

" I've no idea ! I don't know what she means. Put down that knife, Louise—you'll cut yourself. And mind your own business, please."

" You don't understand ! " Louise fought for calmness, for words that should enlighten and persuade. " I didn't mean to interfere. But the big attic ! Mamma ! Father ! That's my room. I always go there—do my lessons there—I love it ! You don't know how I love it. You see——" She paused helplessly.

" But you've got the nursery to sit in," said Mrs. Denny, equally helpless. " I'm sorry, Louise, if you've taken a fancy to the room—but I want it for cook."

Louise made her way to the hearth and stood between the pair.

" Mamma—please ! Please ! Please ! There's the other attic for cook—not this one ! "

" Now, be quiet, Louise ! " Mrs. Denny was getting impatient. Suddenly Louise lost grip of herself.

" It's not right ! It's not right ! You've got all the house ! Every room is yours and you grudge me that one ! Nobody's ever wanted it but me ! It's mine ! You've got your lovely rooms—drawing-room, and dining-room, and morning-room, and bedroom, and summerhouse, and the boys have got the nursery and the maids have got the kitchen, and yet you won't let me have the attic ! It's not fair ! It's mean ! Why can't cook have the other attic ? Not this one ! Not this one ! "

" But why ? Why ? " Mrs. Denny was more bewildered than angry. She looked down at her step-daughter as a St. Bernard looks at an aggressive kitten. Desperately Louise tore off her veils.

" Because of Mother. Can't you understand ? All her things are there. She's there ! So I've always played up there. Oh, won't you understand ? "

Mrs. Denny flushed.

" You talk a lot of nonsense, Louise. Finish your sandwiches. You'll be late."

" Then you will leave it, as it is ? "

" Certainly not. I told you—I need it for cook."

Louise turned to her father with a frenzied gesture.

" Father ! Don't let her ! Don't let her touch it ! Oh, how can you let her touch it ? "

Mr. Denny put down his paper, staring from one to the other.

"Emma? What's she driving at?"

"To control the household, apparently. She's a very impertinent child," said Mrs. Denny impatiently.

"Father! I'm not! I don't! Father! I only want her to leave my attic alone! Father——"

"Don't worry your father now," began Mrs. Denny.

"He's my father! I can speak to him if I choose," cried Louise shrilly.

"Now then, now then!" reasoned Mr. Denny heavily. "Can't have you rude to your mother, you know."

Louise gave herself up to her passion.

"She's not my mother! I call her Mamma! She's not my mother! Mother wouldn't be so cruel! To take away all I've got like that. Her books are there! Her things! It's always been our room—hers and mine! And to take it away! To put cook—it's horrible! It's wicked! It's stealing! I hate her! I hate you—all of you! I'll never forget—never—never—never!"

She stopped abruptly on a high note, stared blindly at the outraged countenances that opposed her, and fled from the room.

They listened to the clatter of umbrellas in the hall stand, to the furious hands fumbling for mackintosh and satchel, to the bang of the hall door.

Mr. Denny whistled.

"Hot stuff! What? I never knew she had it in her." There was a curious element of approval in his tone. He respected volubility.

His wife frowned; then, she, too, began to laugh. She was as incapable as he of imagining the state of nerves that could lead, in Louise, to such an outburst. To speak one's mind, noisily and emphatically, was a daily occurrence for her. Silence was stupidity, and meekness irritating. This 'row' was unusual because Louise had taken part in it, but she certainly thought no worse of her step-daughter on that account. The child should be sent to bed early as a punishment, she decided, but good-humouredly enough. She was too thick-skinned to be pricked by Louise's repudiation. She dismissed it as 'temper.' Its underlying criticism of her character escaped her utterly.

By the time the attic was cleared and the paperhanger at work, she had forgotten the matter.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT is not impossible to sympathize with Ahab.

It must have been difficult for him, with his varied possessions, to realize the value to Naboth of his vineyard. He had offered compensation. Naboth would undoubtedly have gained by the exchange. Ahab, owning half Palestine, must have been genuinely puzzled by this blind attachment to one miserable half-acre. One wonders what would have happened if they had met to talk over the matter. Ahab, convinced of the generosity of his offer, courteously argumentative, carefully repressing his not unnatural impatience, would have contrasted favourably with the peasant, black, fierce, dumb, incapable of explaining himself, conscious only of his own bitter helplessness in the face of oppression and loss.

The Naboth mood is a dangerous one. Fierce emotions, unable to disperse themselves in speech, can turn in again upon the mind that bred them, to work strange havoc. The affair of the attic, outwardly so trivial, shook the child's nature to its foundation. Though one's house be built of care's, it is none the less bedazing to have it knocked about one's ears. To Louise, the loss of her holy place, but yet more the manner of its loss, was catastrophic. Her nerves, frayed and strained by weeks of overwork and excitement, snapped under the shock. Her sense of proportion failed her. Miss Hartill, the examination, all that made up her life, faded before this monstrous desecration of an ideal. She suffered as Naboth, forgetting also his greater goods of life and kith and kin, suffered before her.

Before she reached the school the violence of her emotion had faded, and she was in the first stage of the inevitable physical reaction. She felt weak and shaken. She was going, she knew, to her examination. She wondered idly why she did not feel nervous. She tried to impress the importance of the occasion upon herself, but her thoughts eluded her—sequence had become impossible. She gave up the attempt, and her mind, released,

returned to the scene of the morning in incessant, miserable rehearsal.

Mechanically she made her way into the school by the unfamiliar mistresses' entrance, greeted the little knot of competitors assembled in the hall. But if she were introspective and distraught, so were they : her silence was unnoticed.

The nervous minutes passed jerkily. Louise thought that the clock must be enjoying himself. He was playing overseer; he wheezed and grunted as her father did at breakfast; had just such a bland, fat face. Her father would be a fat, horrible old man in another ten years. She was glad. Every one would hate him, then, as she hated him, show it as she dared not do.

Miss Vigers interrupted her meditations; Miss Vigors, utterly unreal in holiday smiles and the first hobble-skirt in which her decent limbs had permitted themselves to be outlined. She marshalled the procession.

The Lower Fifth class-room, newly scrubbed and reeking of naphthaline, with naked shelves and treble range of isolated desks, was unfamiliar, curiously disconcerting. Louise, ever perilously susceptible to outward conditions, was dismayed by the lack of atmosphere. She wriggled uneasily in her desk. It was uncomfortable, far too big for her : Agatha's initials, of an inkiness that had defied the charwoman, stared at her from the lid. She was at the back of the room. Between Marion's neat head and the coiffure of the little Jewess, the bored face of the examiner peered and shifted. He was speaking—

" You will find the questions on your desks. Write your names in the top right-hand corner of each page. Full name. Kindly number the sheets. You are allowed two and a half hours."

A pause. Some rustling of papers and the snap and rattle of pencil-boxes. Then the voice of the examiner again—

" You may begin."

Instantly a furious pen-scratching broke the hush. Louise glanced in the direction of the sound, and smiled broadly. Agatha had begun. Miss Hartill would have seen the joke, but the examiner was already absorbed in the book he had taken from his pocket. Louise gazed idly about her. So this was what the ordeal was like ! There were her clean, blank papers on the desk before her, and tho printed list of questions. She supposed she had better begin. . . . But there was plenty of time. She had a curious sense of detachment. Her body surrounded her, rigid, quiescent, dreading exertion. Her mind,

on the contrary, was bewilderingly active, consciously alive with thoughts, as she had once, under a microscope, seen a drop of water alive with ammalculi: thoughts, however, that had no connection with real life as it at the moment presented itself: thoughts that admitted the fact of the examination with a drcarny impersonality that precluded any idea of participation. Her mind felt comfortable in its warm bed of motionless flesh, would not disturb its repose for all the ultimate gods might offer: but was interested nevertheless in its surroundings, gazing out into them with the detached curiosity of an attic-dweller, peering out and down at a dwarfed and distant street. Yet each trivial object on which her eyes alighted gave birth to a train of thought that led separately, yet quite inevitably, to the memories that would shatter her quietude, as conscious and sub-conscious self struggled for possession of her mind

She stared at the intent backs of her neighbours. One by one they hunched forward, as each in turn settled to work. Louise considered them critically. What ugly things backs were! It was funny, but girls with dark skirts always pinned them to their blouses with white safety-pins, arid *vice versa*. It made them look skewered. . . . Yet Miss Durarid had said that backs were the most expressive part of the whole body. . . . That was the day they had seen the Watts pictures. But then the draperies of the great white figure in 'Love and Death' were not fastened up in the middle with safety-pins. . . . That had been a wonderful picture. . . . She knew how the boy felt, how he fought. . . . How long had he been able to hold the door? she wondered. Characteristically, she never questioned the ultimate defeat. It was terrible to be so weak. . . . But the Death was beautiful. . . . pitying . . . One wouldn't hate it while one resisted it, as one hated Mamma. . . . Mamma, forcing her way into an attic. . . . Louise writhed as she thought of it.

The girl in front of her coughed, a hasty, grudging cough, recovered herself, and bent again to her work. Louise was amused. What a hurry she was in! What a hurry every one was in! How hot Marion's cheeks were! And Agatha . . . Agatha was up to her wrists in ink. . . . Like the women in the French Revolution. . . . Though that was blood, of course. . . . They were steeped in gore. . . . It would be fascinating to write a story about the knitting women . . . click—click—clicking—like a lot of pens scraping. . . . What were they all

scribbling like that for ? Of course, it was the examination. . . . There was a paper on her own desk too. . . . How funny !

⁴ Distinguish between Shelley the poet, and Shelley the politician. Illustrate your meaning by quotations.'

Shelley ? The name was familiar. . . . She sells sea-shells. . .

' Give a short account of the life of Shakespeare.'

He had a wife, hadn't he ? A narrow, grudging woman, who couldn't understand him. . . . A woman like Mamma. . . . Mamma, who was turning out the attic and laughing at Louise. . . . Not that that mattered—but to clear the attic—to take away Mother's things. . . . What would Mother do—little, darling Mother. . . ? It was holidays. . . . Mother would know. . . . Mother would be there, waiting for Louise. A hideous picture rose up in Louise's mind. With photographic clearness she saw the attic and the faint shadow of her mother wavering from visibility to nothingness as the sunlight caught and lost her impalpable outlines: there was a sound of footsteps—Louise heard it: the faint thing held out sweet arms and Louise strained towards them; but the door opened, and Mrs. Denny and the maids came in. Mamma pointed, while the maids laughed and took their brooms and chased the forlorn appearance, and it fled before them about the room, cowering, afraid, calling in its whisper to Louise. But the maids closed in, and swept that shrinking nothingness into the dark corner behind the old trunk , but when they had moved the trunk, there was nothing to be seen but a delicate cobweb or two. So they swept it into the dustpan and settled down to the scrubbing of the floor.

The picture faded. Louise crouched over her desk, her head in her hands. About her the pens scratched rhythmically.

For a space she existed merely. She could not have told how long it was before thoughts began once more to drift across the blankness of her mind like the first imperceptible flakes that herald a fall of enow.

She moved stiffly in her seat. The thoughts came thicker—thoughts of her mother still, of the dream presence that she would not feel again. . . . Never again? There was the Last Judgment, of course. . . . She would see her then. . . . And who knew when the Judgment would come. . . . In a thousand years ? In the next five seconds ? She counted slowly, holding her breath : " One—two—three—four—five——" and stared out expectantly into space through the lashes of her dropped lids.

All about her sat forms, bowed like her own, scarcely moving. Of course, of course—she nodded to herself—satisfied with her own acuteness. Obviously, the Last Judgment. . . . They were all waiting for God. . . . He hadn't arrived yet, it seemed. . . . Well, one might look about a little first. . . . How queer Heaven smelt! The heart of Louise leapt within her. . . . Now was the opportunity to find Mother. . . . Mother would be somewhere among the dead. . . . But they all had ugly backs. . . . But Mother . . . Of course Mother would be standing on that high platform place like a throne. . . . It was her place. . . . She always stood there. . . . Or did she? Was there not some one else? very like her . . . with eyes . . . and a smile . . . whom Louise knew so well? Wasn't it Mother? With patient deliberation she strove to disentangle the two personalities, that combined and divided and blurred again into one. There was Mother—and the Other—one was shape and one was shadow—but which was real? There was Mother—and the Other—who was Mother? No, who was—who was—The Other was not Mother—but if not, who?—who?—who?—

A chorus of angels took up the chant: Who? who? who? They had flat, faint voices, that gritted and whispered, like pens passing over paper.

Who? who? who?

The answer came thundering back out of infinite space in the awaited voice of God. . . .

" You have ten minutes more."

Louise gave a faint gasp. Reality enveloped her once more, licking up her illusion as instantly and fiercely as an unnoticed candle will shrivel up a woman's muslins. She stood naked amid the ashes of her dreams.

She glanced wildly about her. The girls at her elbows were furiously at work. The little examiner had put away his book and was staring at her. Her eyes fell. Before her lay foolscap, fair and blank, save for her name in the corner, and a close-printed paper that she did not recognize, clamouring for information anent Shelley, and Carlyle, and the Mermaid Tavern. Because, of course, she was at the Literature examination, and there were ten minutes more.

And she had written nothing.

An instant she sat appalled. Then she snatched up her pen and wrote. . . .

Her pen fled across the paper at Tarn o' Shanter speed, leaving its trail of shapeless, delirious sentences. She never paused to consider—she wrote. She knew only that she had ten—twelve—fifteen questions to answer, and ten minutes in which to do it. Ten minutes for a two and a half hours' paper! No matter—if one stopped to think. . . . Hurry! hurry! Shelley was born in 1792—he was the son of Sir Timothy Shelley, of Field Place, near ~~Jorsham~~—

When the examiner collected the papers, she had written exactly two pages.

CHAPTER XIX

THE examination had taken place early in May, but the summer term was nearly over before news of the results arrived. When it came, it made but a small sensation. The school had tired of waiting. Not only was its own more intimate examination drawing near, but its many heads were filled, to the exclusion of all else, with the excitements and rivalries of the summer theatricals.

The school play was an institution. Of late years—ever since she had joined the staff indeed—it had grown into an annual personal triumph for Miss Hartill.

Clare was blessed—cursed—with that sixth sense, the *sens dn theatre*. Her own nature was, in essence, theatrical; her frigid and fastidious reserve warring incessantly with her irrepressible love of the scene for its own sake. She was aware of the trait and humiliated by its presence in her character. Usually she would curb her inclination with a severity that was in itself histrionic : at times she indulged it with voluptuous recklessness.

As a girl, the stage had appealed to her strongly; but her excessive squeamishness, with her acute sense of personal, bodily dignity, closed it to her as a career. Also her love of power. Though she knew little of stage life she had sufficient intuition to gauge correctly what she might become. Successful necessarily—dominant never. And she required a dais. But the compelling woman, she knew, is successful through her combination of intellectual strength with sexual charm. She must not scruple to use all the weapons at her service. Clare had told herself that there were some weapons to which she would never condescend. If sting had lain in the fact that, though she would, they were not hers to use, she did not acknowledge it, even to herself. Resolutely she put from her the idea of fostering a useless talent; and the desire to exploit it, save surreptitiously in social intercourse, dulled as she grew older.

Nevertheless, the yearly plays were to Clare a source of

excitement and gratification. She alone was responsible for the production. In five successful years they had become an event, a festival—not only to the school, but to the entire neighbourhood. Two, and then three public performances were given each summer, and the proceeds benefited the school charities. As *You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Verona*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, followed upon the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and exhausted the list of entirely suitable plays; but after some hesitation, Clare had devised for her next venture scenes from *King John*. Several forms were studying the period, the Sixths and Fifths were reading the play, politically also it was apropos. (Clare had ever sound reasons to gild her decisions) Privately she had been slightly embarrassed by the fact that the classes she supervised had that year proved themselves unusually poor in dramatic ability. She could depend, indeed, on a score of keen and capable children, but in Louise Denny alone had she glimpsed an actress who could do her credit. The child's physique precluded her from roles that, otherwise, she could easily have filled, but as Prince Arthur, she could be made the central, unforgettable figure of an otherwise trite performance. " *King John*," quoth Clare; " decidedly, the very play." And *King John* was chosen.

Since the beginning of the term, with Clare as generalissimo and Alwynne most ingenious of adjutants, staff and school had worked enthusiastically. Costumes were finished, staging painted and planned, and the various scenes were, at length, receiving their final polish. Alwynne was responsible for the interpretation of the minor parts, while Clare, in her spare time, devoted herself to the principals, attacking alternately the exaggerations of Agatha's 'Constance,' Marion's stolid 'Hubert,' a certain near-sighted amiability in the spectacted ' *King John*.'

Clare was a born stage-manager, patient, resourceful, compelling. The children trusted her; she had the habit of success. Her air of authority cushioned them, denied the possibility of failure. Clare, wholly in earnest, Clare at unusual hours, intimate and relaxed, Clare appealing, exhorting, inspiring, was irresistible. She got what she wanted from them and was not ill content. She knew to the last ounce their capabilities.

With Louise alone she had difficulties. The child was almost too easily trained. Responsive, quickly fired or chilled, she was, in fact, too delicately and completely attuned to Clare herself.

Clare could be crude : she had her gusty moods : the little seolian harp quivered to snapping point before them. Originally this extreme sensitiveness had fascinated Clare; she felt like a musician exploring the possibilities of an unknown instrument; but she tired of it in time. As Louise became saturated with the stronger personality, she had, in her passionate desire to satisfy Clare, grown into her mere replica; reproducing her phraseology, voicing her opinions, reflecting her moods, stifling, in the exquisite delight of abnegation, all in her that had originally attracted the older woman. That the effect had been, first to amuse, then to irritate, finally to bore Clare's fickle humour, was natural enough. Clare, had she cared, could have guided the child, despite the great disparity of age, into a pleasant path of affection and friendship, but that she did not choose. She was disappointed, and showed it: and there, for her, the matter ended. That she was in any way responsible, she would not admit.

She did not, indeed, fully realize the extent of the change in Louise until the rehearsals began. For all her growing indifference, in spite of the marked deterioration that automatically it had caused in the girl's work, she had still a high and just opinion of her capabilities. She was positive that as Prince Arthur, Louise would give a fine and original performance, and anticipated with amused interest her initial rendering of the character.

At the first rehearsal Louise did not disappoint her. She was neither stiff nor self-conscious, and her acting, which proved to be entirely instinctive, carried conviction. Though Clare worked from the head, she could appreciate the more primitive method, but even then, the character as portrayed by Louise amazed her. The deliberate pathos, the cloying charm, did not seem to exist for Louise. She played as in an ecstasy of terror. The text, Clare knew, could permit the reading, and the conception interested her; but the temptation to criticize, alter and improve, was natural. Here and there, as rehearsals progressed, she pulled and patched and patted—quite genuinely in the interest of the play as a whole. But the result was discouraging. The Louise of former days would have defended her own version, delighting Clare with shy impudences and flashes of insight, naïve parries and counter-attacks, till between them they had attained notable results. But the sparkle had been drilled out of Louise. She was humble, anxiously acquiescent, agreeing with every alteration, accepting every suggestion, however

foreign to her own instinctive convictions, while the vividness faded slowly from her reading, leaving it lifeless and forced.

"It's patchwork," said Clare disgustedly to Alwynne, at the end of the third week, "pure patchwork. She does everything I tell her—and the result is dire. What it will be like on the night, heaven knows! And there's nobody else. Yet she *can* act. That first performance was quite excellent."

"And she tries."

"She slaves! She would be less irritating if she didn't. You know, Alwynne, I let myself go yesterday. I told her how impossible she was. And all she did was to look at me like a mournful monkey!"

"Inarticulate. Exactly."

Clare lifted her eyebrows. Alwynne looked at her quaintly.

"You know perfectly well what's wrong. Why on earth don't you leave her alone?"

"Uncoached?"

"That as well, of course. You said yourself she was excellent 't first. Why don't you leave her to herself? It's safe. She's not like the others. She's a nectarine, not a potato. Give her a free hand till the dress-rehearsal. It won't be your reading—I prefer yours, too; at least I think I do——"

"I'm glad you say 'think.' But think again. There's no question of which you ought to prefer. But I, my good child, must consider my public! It wants to enjoy itself! It wants to weep salt tears! Louise's reading would cheat it of its emotions!"

"At least it will be a reading, not a repetition. I don't mean that, though, when I say—leave her alone. Clare—you won't realize what you mean to people!"

"I don't follow——" but Clare laughed a little.

"You do. You know you've made Louise crazy about you" Clare shrugged impatiently.

"I dislike these enthusiasms."

"But you cause them. I think it is rather mean to shirk the consequences."

"Really, Alwynne!" But Clare was still smiling.

"You do. You begin by being heavenly to people—and then you tantalize then."

"Does it hurt, Alwynne? Are you going to run away?"

Alwynne smiled.

"Oh, you won't get rid of me so easily. I'm a limpet Do

you know, I couldn't imagine existence without you now. I've never been so gloriously happy in my life. You wouldn't ever get really tired of me, would you ? "

" I wonder."

" I know."

" I've warned you that I'm changeable. Instance your Louise."

" Oh, Clare, do be nicer to Louise."

" Oh, Alwynne, do mind your own business. I'm as nice as is good for her. But I believe you're right about this acting, I'll wash my hands of her till the dress-rehearsal, if you like. You can tell her I said so."

But Alwynne, whispering to Louise that perhaps the old way was better after all, that Miss Hartill had said she didn't mind, achieved little

" Oh, Miss Durand—don't let her think I'm hopeless. I shall get it right in time. I'd rather stick to the way she showed me. Miss "Onrand—do you think she's angry ? Honestly, I will get it right. Miss Durand—I suppose there's no news 1 "

The child's face was very drawn; her eyes seemed larger than ever; she looked like a little old woman; Alwynne was concerned; she felt vaguely responsible. She, too, wished that the news, good or bad, would come, and put an end at least to the tension.

Arid one morning, all unexpectedly, the news did come.

The performances were but two days away. The decorous Big Hall was in confusion. The school sat, picnic-fashion, for its prayers; and the head mistress, entering between half-hung cloths, mounted a battlemented rostrum to address it. She carried a sheaf of papers. Louise, sitting with her class at the further end of the hall, outwardly decorous enough, was in reality paying little attention. Her vague, unhappy thoughts were concerned with the coming rehearsal; she could not remember what Miss Hartill's last directions had been; she was sure she should stumble. Sometimes the mere words seemed to evade her. Yet the play was on her shoulders—Miss Durand had said so. She supposed Prince Arthur was really fond of Hubert ? Not pretending, because he was afraid ? But of course it was easy to love a person and yet be terrified of them. She stole a look at Clare, prominent in the grave group of mistresses. They were all very intent. It dawned on her that the head mistress had been speaking for several minutes.

Suddenly there was an outburst of clapping. The spectacled girl at the end of the row grew pink and stared at her hands.

"What is it?" breathed Louise. "Oh, what is it? What is it?"

A neighbor caught the murmur and looked down at her curiously.

"Are you asleep? It's the lists. Your exam. You'll be second, I expect."

But Marion was second.

The clapping crackled up anew.

So the news was come!

It was cruel to let it spring upon you thus. . . . You would have asked so little . . . ten minutes . . . a bare five . . . in which to brace yourself. . . . Surprise was horrible. . . . it caught you with your soul half-naked . . . it shocked like Budden noise. . . .

There came a fresh outburst.

It was wicked to make such sounds. . . . like all the policeman's-rattles in the world. . . .

The reading proceeded; it calmed her; it barely stirred the beautiful silence. But presently the neat voice altered. Old Edith Marsham was a kindly soul. She had not quite forgotten her own school-days. She realized, perfunctorily, as the successful do, the blankness of defeat. Louise heard her name pronounced, a trifle hurriedly. Louise Denny—failed.

She made no sign. She sat erect, listening to the conclusion of that matter, clapped in due course, stood, kneeled, rose again, as applause, hymns and prayers buzzed about her, filed with her class from the hall and added her shy word to the clamour of congratulation in the long corridors. Inwardly, she was stunned by the evil that was upon her.

The irregular morning classes (the imminent entertainment had disorganized the entire system of work) gave her time to rouse, to review her position.

She turned helplessly within herself, wondering how she should begin to think—and where. She wondered idly if this was how soldiers felt, when a shell had blown them to pieces? She wondered how they collected themselves afterwards? Where did they begin? Did an arm pick up the legs and head, or how?

The picture thus conjured up struck her as excessively funny. She began to giggle. The mistress's astonished voice

roused her to the necessity for self-control. She picked up her pen. The thoughts flowed more clearly—yes, like ink in a pen.

So it had come.

All along she had known that she must have failed : known it from the day of the examination itself. The burden of that knowledge had been upon her for weeks like a secret guilt. Daily she had gone to prayers in cold fear, thinking : " Now—now—now—they will read it out." Daily she had studied Clare's face, to each change of expression, each abstraction or transient sternness, her heart beating out its one thought, " She has heard ! she knows ! " And yet behind her academic certainty of failure had lain a little illogical hope. There was just a chance—an examiner more kind than just. . . . a spilled ink-bottle . . . an opportune fire. The child in her could still pray for miracles, for help from fairyland, and half believe it on the way.

And now the daily terrors, the daily reliefs, were alike over. Louise, who had learned, as she thought, to do without hope these many weeks, realized pitifully her self-deception. This hopelessness, this dead weight of certainty, was a new burden—a Sisyphus rock which would never roll for her. She was at the end.

Her mind, for all its forced and hot-house development, had, in matters of raw fact, the narrow outlook of tñ^o schoolgirl, superimposed upon the passions, the more intense for their utter innocence, of the child. Her sense of proportion, that latest developed and most infallible sign of maturity, was embryonic. The examination, so intrinsically unimportant, appeared to her a Waterloo. She could not see beyond it.

Clare, inexplicably altering, daily sterner and more indifferent, save for stray gleams of whiniLSial kindness, that stung and maddened the child by their sweetness and rarity, would, Louise considered, be effectually alienated. But Louise could not conceive life possible without Clare. The future was a night of black misery, without a hint of dawn

CHAPTER XX

THE morning wore to an end. Clare had come in at the mid-morning break to announce that the dress rehearsal would take place on the afternoon of the following day. All costumes were to be ready. The day-girls were to lunch at the school. She was brief and businesslike, inaccessible to questions. She did not look at Louise.

Alwynne, later in the morning, supplementing her instructions, paused a moment at the child's desk. But Louise gave no sign. Alwynne hesitated. She herself was averse from verbal sympathy. Also she was pressed for time, and Clare, she knew, wanted her. The one o'clock bell shattered her indecision. She gave her directions and hurried away.

Louise packed her books together and went home.

She endured the cheerful noisy lunch; carried out some small commissions for her stepmother; shepherded the troop of small boys into the paddock behind the garden and saw them established at their games. She stayed a moment with the round two-year-old, sprawling by the pile of coats, but he, too, had his amusements. Every pocket tempted his enquiring fingers. He ignored her.

She went back to the house. Habit brought her for the fiftieth time to the attic, and she had opened the door before she remembered. She looked about her. An iron bedstead, covered by a crude quilt, stood where the trunk of books had lain. A square of unswept carpet lay before it. There was a deal night-table and a candlestick of blue tin, with matches and a guttered candle. Across a chair lay a paper-back, face downwards, and a pair of soiled red corsets. The ivy had been cut away from the window, and the sunlight cast no fantastic frieze, but a squared, black shadow on the floor. The air was close, and a little rank. Louise shrank from it.

"Mother?" she said; and then: "You've gone away, haven't you? It's no use calling?"

She waited. The uneven water-jug rattled in its basin.

She spoke again—

"Mother, I know it's all spoiled here, but couldn't you come? Just for a little while, Mother? I'm most miserable. Please, Mother?"

There was no answer.

"What shall I do?" cried Louise wildly. "What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?"

She turned from that empty place, stumbled to her room, and flung herself across her bed. She was shaken by her misery, as a dog shakes a rat. She cried, her head on her arms, till she was sick and blinded. Loneliness and longing seared her as with irons.

The clock ticked, and the sunshine poured into the room. The shouts of the children, the crack of ball on bat sounded faintly. The house slept. Two hours passed.

Somewhere a clock chimed and boomed. Four o'clock.

Slowly and stiffly Louise roused herself and got off her bed. She was cramped and shivering. She stood in the middle of the room and held out her hands to the brassy sunlight, but it did not warm her. She felt dazed and giddy; her head burned as if there were live coals in it. Her thoughts flowed sluggishly; she found it impossible to hurry them; they split apart into fragments that were words and meaningless phrases, or stuck like cogged wheels. Her mind moved across immense spaces to adjust these difficulties, but she policed them in vain. There was one sentence, in particular, that she could not deal with. It would not move along and make room for other thoughts. It danced before her; its grin spanned the horizon; it inhabited her mind, it was reversible like a Liberty satin; it ticked like a clock: "What next? What next? What next? Next what? Next what? Next what?"

What next? . . . Dully she reckoned it up. The tea-bell—homework—bedtime. Night—and the false dreams. Morning—and the anger of Miss Hartill. Day and week and month—and the anger of Miss Hartill. The years stretched out before her in infinite repetition of the afternoon's agony, till her raw nerves shrank appalled. Kneeling down, she told God that it was impossible for her to endure this desolation. She implored Him, if He should in truth exist, not to reckon her doubt against her, but to be merciful and let her die. It was not the first time that she had prayed thus, but never before with such fierce insistence. If He existed He could impossibly refuse. . . .

Speaking her thoughts, even to so indefinite a Listener, steadied her. A ghost of hope had drifted through her mind—A ghost indeed; a messenger that whispered not of waking but of sleep, not of arduous renewing but of an end. Death was life upon his lips and life, death; yet he was none the less a hope.

The familiar text upon the wall above her bed caught her eye. The message seemed no more miraculous than the pansies and mistletoe that wreathed about its gilt and crimson capitals. 'God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in Trouble.' 'Ask and it shall be given unto you' confirmed her from the other wall.

She sat between those tremendous statements and considered them.

God had never yet answered any prayer of hers. . . . Not, she supposed, that He could not, but because He did not choose. . . . He was rather like Miss Hartill. . . . But Miss Hartill would never understand. . . . At least one could explain things to God—if God were. . . . And she asked so little of Him—just to let her die and be at peace. . . . She thought He might—if He had even time for sparrows. . . . She wondered how He would manage it? If He would only be quick—because red-hot wires ran through her head when she tried to think, and she was afraid—afraid—afraid—of to-morrow and Miss Hartill. . . .

The tea-bell pealed across the garden.

She tidied her hair, and fetching the sponge and towel stood before the glass, trying to trim her marred face into some semblance of composure. The boys would be clamouring—and one never knew. . . . There might be tainted food—a loose baluster—a tag of carpet. . . . He had His ways. . . . She must not baulk Him. . . .

She went downstairs.

The children were tired and cross and quarrelsome—the heat had soured even cheerful Mrs. Denny. It was not a pleasant meal. But it could not oppress Louise. Outwardly docile and attentive, her mind had withdrawn into itself and sat aloof, inviolate, surveying its surroundings much as it would have watched the actors in a moving picture. She was impervious to bickerings and querulous comment. What did it matter? She would never have tea with them again. . . . She was going away from it all. . . . If only God did not forget . . .

All through the breathless evening she awaited His pleasure

Long after the house was quiet, and Mrs. Denny, tucking up her children, had come and gone, Louise lay wakeful—still waiting.

It was an airless night. Every other moment the little unaccountable noises of a sleeping building broke the warm silence. Shadows scurried across the counterpane and over her face like ghostly mice, as the trees outside her window bent and nodded to a radiant moon.

She was weary to the point of exhaustion. Momently her body seemed to shrink away from her into the depths of the bed—warm, fathomless depths—leaving her essential self to float free and uncontained. She would resign herself luxuriously to the sensation of disintegration, but with maddening regularity her next breath clicked body and soul together anew. Yet, as she drowsed, the space between breath and breath lengthened slowly, till they lay divided by incredible aeons in which her thoughts wandered and lost themselves, grew hoar and died and were born again; while the dead-weight of her body sank ever deeper into sleep, was recalled to consciousness with ever increasing effort.

She speculated languidly upon her sensations. They recalled a day at the dentist's, years before. A tube had been placed over her mouth and she had struggled, remembering a hideous story of a woman—a French marquise—that she had read in a magazine. The name began with a 'B' or a 'V.' 'Brin—' something. The Funnel—*The Leather Funnel*—that was the name of the story. . . . But there came no choking water-only sweet, buzzing air. . . . And then her body had dropped away from her, as it was doing now. . . . She recalled the sensation of rest and freedom; she had passed, like a bird planing down warm breezes, into exquisite oblivion. . . . She had returned, centuries later, to a dull aching pain, harsh noises, and lights that were like blows. . . . But if she had not returned? She would have been dead. . . . They would have buried her. . . . Such things had happened. . . . So that was death—that cradling, beautiful sleep. And God was sending it to her now; flooding her, drowning her in its warm comfort. . . . God was very good. . . . She was sorry—sorry that she had often not believed in Him. . . . But Miss Hartill didn't. . . . But she would never see Miss Hartill any more. . . . Perhaps, years after, when she was tired of sleeping, she would go back and see her again. . . . There was All Souls' Night, when you woke up. .

But she would not frighten Miss Hartill. . . . She laughed a little, to think that she could ever frighten Miss Hartill. . . . She would just kiss her, a little ghost's kiss that would feel like a puff of air . . . and then she would go back and sleep and sleep and sleep . . . with only the yew-berries pattering on to her gravestone to tell her when another year had drifted past. . . . It was funny that people could be afraid to die. . . . She wondered if ghosts snored, and if you heard them, if your grave were very close ? It was her last thought as she slid into slumber.

Instantly the breakfast gong came crashing across her peace. She fought against waking. Her eyelids lifted the weight upon them as violets press upwards against a clod of rotten leaves. She lay dazedly, her mind cobwebbed with dreams, her thoughts trickling back into the channels of the previous night. Slowly she took in her situation. There was the window, and a shining day without: she could hear the starlings quarrelling on the lawn, and the squeak of an angry robin. . . . There was her room, and the tidy pile of clothes by the bed . . . the bed, and she herself lying in it. . . . So she was not dead ! There was to-day to be faced, and Miss Hartill's anger, and all the other hundreds and thousands of days. . . .

And she must get up at once.

Her sick mind shrank from that, as from a culminating terror. She was desperately tired; her body ached as if it had been beaten. Dressing was a monstrous and impossible feat. . . . It could not be. . . . Yet her stepmother would come—she was between God and Mrs. Denny—and God had left her in the lurch.

She lay shielding her eyes from the strong light.

The pressure on her eyeballs was causing the usual kaleidoscopic ring of light to form within her closed lids. The phenomenon had always been a childish amusement to her; she was adept at the shifting pressure that could vary colour and pattern. She watched idly. Red changed to green, purple followed yellow, and the ring narrowed to a pin-point of light on its background of watered silk; then it broke up as usual into starry fragments. But they danced no dazzling fire-dance for her ere they merged again into the yellow ring : to her distracted fancy they were letters—fiery letters, that formed and broke and formed again. G—O—D—then an H and a P and an L. She puzzled over them. " God hopes ? " " • God helps ? " But He hadn't. . . . " God helps ? " A Voice in her ears exactly like her own took it up—" Those that help themselves." It spoke so loudly that

she shrank. The universe echoed to Its boom : yet she knew so well that the Voice was only in her own head.

No wonder her head ached, when it was all full of Lights and Voices. . . . And Miss Hartill would be angry if she took Them to school. . . . If only she need not go to school. . . . Why—why had God cheated her ? "He helped those——" Was that what They meant ?

She looked about her, brightening yet uncertain; then her long plait of hair caught her eye. Lazily she lifted it, disentangled a strand no thicker than coarse string, and doubling it about her throat, began to tighten it, using her fingers as a lever, till the blood sang in her ears. She had sat upright in bed for the greater ease. Suddenly she caught sight of her face in the wardrobe mirror. It was growing pink and puffy : the eyes goggled a little. The sensation of choking grew unendurable. Instinctively her fingers freed themselves and the noose fell apart. She swung forward, panting, and watched her features grow normal again.

"It's no good. Oh, I am a coward," cried Louise, wearily.

Her mother's old-fashioned travelling-clock, chiming the quarter, answered her, and for a moment forced her thoughts back from those borderlands where sanity ends. Habit asserted itself; she was filled with everyday anxieties. She was late, certainly for breakfast, probably for school. She jumped out of bed, washed and dressed in panic speed, collected her belongings and hurried from the house.

Her father, hearing the gate clack, glanced up from his newspaper.

"Has that child had any breakfast ? " he demanded, uneasily.

There was no answer. He was late himself, and his wife had poured his coffee and left the room. He could hear her heavy footfall in their bedroom overhead.

He returned to his reading.

CHAPTER XXI

LOUISE ran up the steep hill, her satchel padding at her back, the soft wind disordering her hair and whipping a colour into her white cheeks. She gained the deserted cloakroom, flung off her hat, and fled upstairs. But she was later than she guessed. Racing, against all rules, through the upper hall and down the long corridor, the drone of voices as she passed the glass-panelled doors warned her that no hurrying could avail her. She was definitely late. Her speed slackened.

The passage ended at right-angles to a small landing, into which her class-room opened. She paused, sheltering hi the curve of the wall, listening. The class was still. The single voice of a mistress rang muffled through the walls. She could not distinguish the accents.

It was Miss Durand's class; but when everything was so upset. . . . one never knew . . . it might be Miss Hartill herself. . . . That would be just Louise's luck. . . . She hated you to be late. . . . But there was no point in hesitating. . . .

Yet she hesitated, shifting her weight uneasily from foot to foot, till a far-oS step in the corridor without, ended her uncertainty. Some one was coming. . . . That again might be Miss Hartill. . . . Louise must be in her place. . . . Yet surely it was Miss Hartill's voice in the form-room ?

She crept to the door and peered through the glass.

Miss Durand was standing at the blackboard.

Louise entered, brazen with relief, and began her apologies. But Alwynne was no Rhadamanthus, and her official reprobation was marred by a twinkle. She would have been late herself that morning, but for Elsbeth—poor dear Elsbeth, who conceded, without remotely comprehending, the joys of that extra twenty minutes. And when had Louise been late before ? Little, good, frightened Louise ! She entered the name in the defaulters' book, but her manner sent the child to her desk quieted.

Alwynne, at sentry-go between blackboard and rostrum, dictating, supervising, expounding, yet found time to watch her. Louise was always a little on her motherly young mind. The child's shrinking manner worried her—and her pain-haunted eyes. Pain was Alwynne's devil. She was selfish, as youth must be, but at least, unconsciously. Hint trouble, and all of her was eager to serve and save. She was the instinctive Samaritan. But her perception was blurred by her profound belief in Clare. Louise, she knew, was in good hands, in wise hands; where she had known ten children, Clare had trained a hundred; if Clare's ways were not hers—so much the worse for hers.

Yet this disciplining of Louise was a long business; she wished it need not make the child so wretched. Surely Clare forgot how young she was. . . . There would be new trouble over the affair of the papers. . . . If Clare would but be commonplace for once, laugh, and say it didn't matter, and perhaps ask Louise to tea. . . . The child would be radiant for another six months—and work better too. . . . But, of course, it was absurd for her to dictate to Clare. . . . Louise had had such a pretty colour when she came in; it was all gone now. . . . She looked dreadfully thin. . . . Alwynne wondered if it would do any good to speak to Clare again. . . . Dear Clare—she was so proud of her girls, so eager to see them successful. . . . Louise was a bitter disappointment to her. . . . Yet, if she could have been gentler—but, of course, Clare knew best. . . . Alwynne only hoped the rehearsal would be a success. If Louise did well, it might adjust the tension. . . .

She watched the child, sitting apparently attentive, noted the moving lips, the little red volume half hidden in her lap. Shakespeare had no business in a physiology lesson, but Alwynne let her alone.

The hour was over all too quickly for Louise. Earlier in the year, when she had been at her most brilliant, and Miss Hartill's classes the absorbing joy of her day, she had yet welcomed the hours with Miss Durand. They alone had not seemed, in comparison, a waste of priceless time. They were jolly hours, quick-stepping, cheerful, laughter-flecked; void of excitements, yet never savourless; above all restful. Unconsciously she had counted on them for their recuperative value. Even now, exhausted, overwrought, beyond all influence, the kindly atmosphere could at least soothe her. \\tstfulljr

her eyes followed Alwynne, as the young mistress left the room.

Clamour arose; slamming of desk-lids, thud of satchels and rattle of pencil-cases mingling with the babble of tongues. The next lesson was French Grammar. The little Frenchwoman was invariably late. She dreaded the lesson as much as her audience enjoyed it. They welcomed it as a pleasant interlude—the hour for conversation. Agatha did not even trouble to keep an eye on the door, as she turned to Louise, immobile beside her.

"I say, were you late?"

"Didn't you see?"

"Why were you late? Weren't you called? Didn't you wake up?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Oh, the housemaid died in the night. Smallpox." Louise stooped over her book, her shoulders hunched against questions.

"No, but tell me. Did you get in a row?"

"You heard what Daffy said. I want to learn, Agatha."

"Oh, not that. Did you get in a row about the rehearsal?"

"What rehearsal?"

"The rehearsal yesterday."

Louise sat up, her eyes widening.

"There was no rehearsal yesterday?" she said anxiously.

"Wasn't there just!"

"But I never heard; nobody told me."

"Why, Daffy came in herself, yesterday morning. Everyone was there. I suppose you were moonstruck as usual. Do you mean to say you didn't hear? I don't envy you."

"Was she angry?" said Louise, in her smallest voice.

Agatha began to enjoy herself.

"Angry? She was raving!"

"What did she say?"

"Well, she didn't say much," admitted Agatha. "Just asked where you were, and if not, why not—you know her way. Then we got started and went all through it, and had a gorgeous afternoon. She read your part. I say, she can act, can't she? But she was pretty mad, of course."

"Was she——" said Louise. But it was not a question.

"Oh, and you're to go to her at break, this morning. Don't go and forget, and then say I didn't tell you." And

she turned to greet the entering mistress with a flood of Anglo-French.

Louise had three parts of an hour in which to assimilate the message. How unlucky she was ! She remembered the previous morning as one remembers a nightmare. . . . Miss Durand had certainly drifted through its dreadfulness—but of what she had said or done, Louise remembered nothing. But it was certain that she had managed to annoy Miss Hartill more than ever. To miss a special rehearsal! Now she was to go to her, and Miss Hartill would be so angry already, that when the question of the papers arose, the last chance of her leniency was gone. . . . For, of course, she would speak of the examination. . . . What would she say ? Her imagination stubbed; it could not pierce the terror of what Miss Hartill would say.

The break was half over before she had wrenched herself out of her desk, along the length of the school, and up the staircase to Clare's little sanctum.

She knocked timidly. Clare's answering bell, that invariably startled her, rang sharply. She hesitated—the bell rang again, a prolonged, shrill peal. She pulled herself together, opened the door, and went in.

The floor was littered with gay costumes. Miss Durand, in a big apron, laughter-flushed, with her pretty hair tumbling down her back, was sorting them into neat heaps.

Clare, at ease in a big arm-chair, directing operations, while her quick fingers cut and pasted at a tinsel crown, was laughing also.

"How happy they look," thought Louise.

Clare glanced up.

"Well, Louise," she said, not unkindly.

Louise stammered a little.

"Miss Hartill—I'm very sorry—I'm most awfully sorry. They said—the girls said—there was rehearsal yesterday, and you wanted me. I honestly didn't know. I've only just heard there was one."

Clare kept her waiting while she clipped at the indentations of the crown. The scissors clicked and flashed. It seemed an interminable process.

Finally she spoke to Alwynne, her eyes on her work.

"Miss Durand ! You gave my message to the Fifths ? "

Yes, Alwynne had told the girls.

"Wasn't Louise in the room at the time ? "

Alwynne's unwilling eyes took in every detail of the forlorn figure between them. She lied swiftly, amazing herself—

“As a matter of fact—I believe Louise was not in the room at the time. It was my fault: I should have seen that she was told. I'm so sorry.”

Louise gave a little gasp of relief—more audible than she realized.

Clare roused at it. She disliked a check. She disliked also the obvious sympathy between the child and the girl.

“No, it was my fault. I should have gone myself. It's always wiser. It saves trouble in the long run. Never mind, Louise. You couldn't help it. Are you sure of your words?”

Louise, infinitely relieved, was quite sure of her words.

“Very well. Shut the door after you—oh, Louise!”

Louise turned in the doorway.

“Yes, Miss Hartill.”

“I may as well explain to you now. I am re-arranging the classes.”

Louise questioned her mutely.

“You will be in the Upper Fourth next term.”

Louise stood petrified. She had never thought of this.

“You are moving me down? I am third still.”

“We think—Miss Marsham agrees with me—that the work in the Fifth is too much for you. It is not your fault.”

“Miss Hartill, I have tried—I am trying.”

Clare smiled quite pleasantly.

“I am quite sure of it. I tell you that I'm not blaming you. I blame myself. If I expected more of you than you could manage—no one but myself is to blame. I am sure you will do well in the Fourth.”

Louise broke out passionately—

“It is because of the examination.”

Clare held out her crown at arm's length, and eyed it between criticism and approval as she answered Louise.

“I think,” said Clare smoothly, “we had better not discuss the examination.”

Louise stood in the doorway, her mouth quivering.

Alwynne could stand the scene no longer. She jerked herself upright, and, going to the child, slipped her arm about her and pushed her gently from the room.

Clare was still admiring her crown, as Alwynne shut the door again. Alwynne must try it on. It would suit Alwynne.

Alwynrie peeped at herself in the little mirror, but her thoughts were with Louise on the other side of the door.

" Clare," said Alwynne uneasily, " you hurt that child."

Clare looked at her oddly.

" Do her good," she said. " Do you think no one has ever hurt me ? "

Alwynne was silent. At times her goddess puzzled her.

CHAPTER XXII

To the schoolgirls the dress rehearsal was, if possible, more of an ordeal than the performances themselves. The head mistress attended in state with the entire staff and such of the girls as were not themselves acting. Stray relatives, unable to be present at the play proper, dotted the more distant benches, or were bestowed in the overhanging galleries, while the servants, from portly matron to jobbing gardener, clustered at the back of the hall.

The platform at the upper end had been built out to form a stage, and when, late in the afternoon, the final signal had been given and the improvised curtains drew audibly apart, Clare had fair reason to plume herself on her stage-management.

The long blinds of the windows had been let down and shut out the sceptical sunshine ; and the candle footlights, flickering unprofessionally, mellowed the paintwork arid patterned the home-made scenery with re-echoing lights, pools of unaccountable shadow, and shaftlike, wavering, prismatic gleams, flinging over the crude stage-setting a veil of fantastic charm.

The play opened, however, dully enough. The scenes chosen had had inevitably to be compressed, run together, mangled, and Clare had not found it easy work. Faulconbridge, bowdlerized out of all but existence, could riot tickle his hearers, and King John, not yet broken in to crown and mantle, gave him feeble support. But with the entrance of Constance, Arthur and the French court, actors and audience alike bestirred themselves.

Agatha, her dark eyes flashing, her lank figure softened and rounded by the generous sweep of her geranium-coloured robes, looked an authentic stage queen. Her exuberant movements and theatrical intonation had been skilfully utilized by Clare, who, playing on her eager vanity, had alternately checked and goaded her into a plausible rendering of the part. She was the reverse of nervous; her voice rolled her opening speech without

a tremor; her impatient, impetuous delivery (she hardly let her fellow-actors finish their lines) fitted the character and was effective enough.

Yet to Clare, note-book in hand, prepared to pounce, cat-like, on deficiencies, neither she nor her foil dominated the stage, nor the row of schoolgirl princes. Her critical appreciation was for the little figure, wavering uncertainly between the shrieking queens, with scared anxious eyes, that swept the listening circle in faint appeal, quivering like a sensitive plant at each verbal assault, shrinking beneath the hail of blandishments and reproaches. The one speech of the scene, the reproof to Constance, was spoken with un-childlike, weary dignity—

" ' Good my mother, peace!
I would that I were low laid in my grave;
I am not worth this coil that's made for me.' "

Yet it was not Arthur that spoke, nor Louise—no frightened boy or overwrought, precocious girl. It was the voice of childhood itself, sexless, aloof; childhood the eternal pilgrim, wandering passive and perplexed, an elf among the giants; childhood, jostled by the uncaring crowd, swayed by gross energies and seared by alien passions.

" She's got it," muttered Clare to Alwynne, reporting progress in the interval; " oh, how she's got it! " She laughed shortly. " So that's her reading. Impudent monkey ! But she's got her atmosphere. Uncanny, isn't it ? It reminds me—do you remember that performance of hers last autumn with *Childe Roland* ? I told you about it. Well, this brings it back, rather. Clever imp. I wonder how much of my coaching in this act she'll condescend to leave in ? "

" You gave her a free hand, you know," deprecated Alwynne.

" I did. But it's impudence——"

" Inspiration——"

" Impudence all the same. When the rehearsal is over I must have a little conversation with Miss Denny." She showed her white teeth in a smile.

Alwynne caught her up uneasily—

" Clare—you're not going to scold ? It wouldn't be fair. You know you're as pleased as Punch, really."

Clare shot a look at her, but Alwynne's face was innocent and anxious. She shrugged her shoulders.

" Am I ? I suppose I am. I don't know. On my word,

Alwynne, I don't know! But run along, my deputy. There" an agitated orb rolling in your direction from the join of the curtains."

Alwynne fled.

The opening scene of the second division of the play—as Clare had planned it—showed Arthur a prisoner to John and the old queen. The child's face was changed, his manner strained; his startled eyes darted restlessly from Hubert to the king and back again to Hubert; the pair seemed to fascinate him. Yet he shrank from their touch and from Elinor's embrace, only to check the instinctive movement with pitiful, propitiatory haste, and to submit, his small fists clenched, to their caresses. His eyes never left their faces : you saw the tide of fear rising in his soul. Not till the interview with Hubert, however, was the morbid drift of the conception fully apparent. He hung upon the man, smiling with white lips; he fawned; he babbled; he cajoled; marshalled his poor defences of tears and smiles, frail defiance and wooing surrender, with an awful, childish cunning. He watched the man as a frightened bird watches a cat; turned as he turned, confronting him with every muscle tense. His high whisper premised a voice too weak with terror to shriek. Yet at the entrance of the attendants there came a cry that made Clare shiver where she sat. It was fear incarnate.

Clare fidgeted. It was too bad of Louise. . . . And what had Alwynne been thinking of? A free hand, indeed! To much of a free hand altogether! The fact that she was listening to a piece of acting, that, in a theatre, would have overwhelmed her with admiration, added to her annoyance. A school performance was not the place for brilliant improprieties. Certainly impropriety—this laborious exposure of a naked emotion was, in such a milieu, essentially improper—Louise must be crazy! And in what unholy school had she learned it all—this baby of thirteen? And what on earth would staff and school say?

She stole a look at her colleagues. Some were interested, she could see, but obviously puzzled. A couple were whispering together. A third had chosen the moment to yawn.

Her contradictory mind instantly despised them for fools that could not appreciate what manner of work they were privileged to watch. She saw her path clear—her attitude outlined for her. She would glorify a glorious effort (it was pleasant that for once justice might walk with expediency) and her sure, instant

tribute would, she knew, suffice to quiet the carpers. But, for all that, the performances themselves should be, she promised herself, on less dangerous lines than the dress-rehearsal. She would have a word with Louise : the imp needed a cold douche. . . But what an actress it would make later on ! Clare sighed enviously.

The scene was nearly over. With the glad cry— "' Ah! now you look like Hubert,' " the enchantment of terror broke. A few more sentences and Arthur was left alone on the stage.

As the door clanged (Alwynne was juggling with hardware in the wings) the child's strained attitude relaxed and the audience unconsciously relaxed with it. He swayed a moment, then collapsed brokenly into a chair. The long pause was an exquisite relief.

But before long the small face puckered into frowns; a backwash of subsiding fear swept across it. The hands twitched and drummed. You felt that a plan was maturing.

At last, after furtive glances at the door, he rose with an air of decision, and crossed quickly to the alcove of the window. For an instant the curtains hid him, and the audience stared expectantly at an empty stage. When he turned to them again, holding the great draperies apart with little, resolute fists, his face was alight with hope, and, for the first time, wholly youthful. In the soft voice ringing out the last courageous sentences, detailing the plan of the escape, there was a little quiver of excitement, of childish delight in an adventure. He ended; stood a moment smiling; then the heavy folds hid him again as they swept into position.

There was a tense pause.

Suddenly as from a great distance, came a faint wailing cry. Thereon, silence.

The curtains wheezed and rattled into place.

Alwynne, hurrying on to the stage to shift scenery for the following act, nearly tripped, as she dismantled the alcove, over a huddle of clothes crouched between backing and wall. She stooped and shook it. A small arm flung up in instant guard.

" Louise ? Get up ! The act's over. Run out of the way. Stop—help me with this, as you're here."

Obediently the child scrambled to her feet. She gripped an armful of curtain, and trailed across the stage in Alwynne's wake. Till the curtains rose on the final act she trotted after her meekly, helping where she could.

With King John embarked on his opening speech, Alwynne drew breath again. She ran her eye over the actors, palpitant at their several entrances, saw the prompter still established with book and lantern, and decided that all could go on without her for a moment. She put her hand on Louise's shoulder and drew her into the passage.

"What is it, Louise?"

"Nothing."

"What were you doing just now? Were you scared? Was it stage fright?"

"Oh no." Louise smiled faintly.

"Then what were you doing?"

Louise considered.

"I was dead. I had jumped, you know. I was finding out how it would feel."

"Louise! You gruesome child!"

"I liked it—it was so quiet. I'd forgotten about shifting the scenery. I'm sorry. Does it—did it hurt him, do you think, the falling?"

Alwynne put both her hands on the thin shoulders and shook her gently.

"Louise! Wake up! You're not Prince Arthur now! Gracious me, child—it's only a play. You mustn't take it so seriously."

Louise made no answer; she did not seem to understand.

Alwynne was struck by a new idea. She took the child's face in her hand and turned it to the gaslight. •

"Did I see you at lunch, Louise? I don't believe I did. Do you know you're a very naughty child to take advantage of the confusion?"

"Miss Durand, I had to learn. I was forgetting it all. I slipped the last two lines as it was—you know, the 'My uncle's spirit is in these stones' bit. I wasn't hungry."

"And you were very late, too. What did you have for breakfast?"

An agitated face peered round the corner.

"Miss Durand, which side do I come on from? Hubert's nearly off."

"The left." Alwynne hurried to the rescue, dragging Louise after her. She hustled the anxious courtier to his entrance, twitched his mantle into position, and saw him safely on the stage. Then she turned to Louise.

" Louise, will you please go to the kitchen and ask Mrs. Random for two cups of tea and some buns—at once. There is some tea made, I know. I'm tired and thirsty—two cups, please. Bring it to me here, and don't run into any one with your hands full. Be quick—I'm dying for some."

Louise darted away on her errand. Poor Daffy did look hot and flustered. . . . Daffy was such a dear . . . every one worried her . . . it was a shame. . . . Wouldn't Daffy have been a pleasant mother? Better than shouting Constance. . . . What was it she had asked for? A plum, a cherry and a fig? No, that wasn't it. Oh, of course, tea—tea and buns.

Alwynne looked after her, smiling and frowning; she was not in the least thirsty. What a baby it was. . . . But nothing to eat all day! Mrs. Denny ought to be ashamed of herself. . . . She, Alwynne, would keep a vigilant eye on her to-morrow, poor little soul. . . . Had she really lost herself so entirely in the part—or was there a touch of pose? No, that was more Agatha's line. . . . Agatha was enjoying herself. . . . She listened amusedly, watching through a crack in the screen, till a far-away chink caught her ear. She went out again into the passage, and met Louise with a laden tray.

Alwynne drank with expressive pantomime and motioned to the other cup.

" Drink it up," she commanded.

" It's a second cup—for you——" began Louise.

" Be a good child and do as you're told! I must fly in a minute."

The child looked doubtful; but the steaming liquid was tempting and the new-baked, shining cakes. She obeyed. Alwynne watched the faint colour flush her cheeks with a satisfaction that surprised herself.

" Finish it all up—d'you hear? I must go." She hesitated: " Louise—you were very good to-day. I am sure Miss Hartill must have been awfully pleased."

She went back to the stage. She had had the pleasure of bringing a look of relief to Louise's face. Alwynne could never remember that the kindest lie is a lie none the less.

In the part of Arthur the child, unconsciously, had seen embodied her own psychological situation. She had enacted the spirit, if not the letter, of her own state of mind, and in the mock death had experienced something of the sensations, the sense of release, of a real one. Left to to herself, she might gradually have dreamed and imagined and acted herself out of her

troubles, have drifted back to real life again, cured and sane. But Alwynne, with her suggestion of good cheer, had destroyed the skin of make-believe that was forming healingly upon the child's sore heart. Louise awoke, with a pang of hope, to her real situation.

'I am sure Miss Hartill must have been awfully pleased.' . . . So pleased that, who knew, she might yet forgive the crime of the examination? If it might be. . . ." What might be must be," cried the child within her.

There came a crash of clapping; the rehearsal was over at last, and in a few moments flocks of girls, chattering and excited, came trooping past Louise on their way to tea.

She did not follow them. She was suddenly aware of her boy's clothes. She must change them. . . . She could not find Miss Hartill till she was tidy, and she had determined to speak with her.

Miss Durand had said. . . . She would do as Arthur did to Hubert—she would besiege Miss Hartill, force her to be kind, till she could say, "Oh, now you look Miss Hartill! all this while you were disguised." She shivered at the idea of undergoing once more the emotional experience of the scene—but the vision of Miss Hartill transfigured drew her as a magnet pulls a needle.

She went towards the stairs.

The big music-room at the top of the house had been temporarily converted into a dressing-room, and she thought she would go quickly and change, while it was still quiet and spacious. But as she pushed open the swinging doors that divided staircase from passage, she saw Clare coming down the long corridor. There was no one else in sight. Again wild, unreasoning hopes flooded her. She would seize the opportunity. . . . She would speak to Miss Hartill there and then. . . . She would ask her why she was always angry. . . . Perhaps she would be kind? 'I am sure Miss Hartill must have been awfully pleased. . . .' She must have speech with her at once—at once. . . .

She waited, holding open the door, her heart beating violently, her face steeled to composure.

Clare, passing with a nod, found her way barred by a white-faced scrap of humanity, whose courage, obviously and pitifully, was desperation. But Clare could be very blind when she did not choose to see.

"Miss Hartill, may I speak to you?"

"I can't wait, Louise. I'm busy."

" Miss Hartill, was it all right ? Were you pleased ? I tried furiously. Was it as you wanted it ? "

" Oh, you played your own version," Clare caught her up sharply.

" But Miss Durand said—you said I was to."

" I expect it was all right," said Clare lightly. " I'm afraid I was too busy to attend much, even to your efforts, Louise." She smiled crookedly. " And now run along and change."

She pushed against the door, but Louise, beyond all control, caught bark the handles.

" Miss Hartill—you shall listen. Are you always going to be angry ? What have I done ? Will you never be good to me again as you used to be ? "

Clare's face grew stern.

" Louise, you are being very silly. Let me pass."

" Because I can't bear it. It's killing me. Couldn't you stop being angry ? "

Clare, ignoring her, wrenched open the door. Louise, flung sideways, slipped on the polished floor. She crouched where she fell, and caught at Clare's skirts. She was completely demoralized.

" Miss Hartill ! Oh, please—please—if you would only understand. You hurt me so. You hurt me so."

Clare stood looking down at her.

" Once and for all, Louise, I dislike scenes. Let me go, please."

For a moment their eyes strove. And suddenly Louise, relaxing all effort, let her go. Without another look, Clare retraced her steps and entered the Common-room. Louise, still crouching against the wall, watched her till she disappeared. The doors swung and clicked into rigidity.

There was a sudden uproar of voices and laughter and scraping chairs. A distant door had opened.

Louise started to her feet, and sped swiftly up the stairs, flight on flight, of the tall old house, till she reached the top floor and the music-room. It was empty. She flung-to the door, and fumbled with the stiff key. It turned at last, and she leaned back against the lock, shaking and breathless, but with a sense of relief.

She was safe. . . . Not for long—they would be coming up soon—but long enough for her purpose.

But first she must recover breath. It was foolish to tremble

so. It only hindered one . . . when there was so little time to lose.

Hurriedly she sorted out her little pile of everyday clothes—some irrelevant instinct insisting on the paramount necessity of changing into them. Mrs. Denny would be annoyed if she spoiled the new costume. She re-dressed hastily and, clasping her belt, crossed to the window.

It was tall and divided into three casements. The centre door was open. A low seat ran round the bay. She climbed upon it and stood upright, peering out.

How high up she was ! There was a blue haze on the horizon, above the line of faint hills, that melted in turn into a weald, chequered like the chessboard counties in *Alice*. So there was a world beyond the school ! Nearer still, the suburb spread map-like. She craned forward. Directly under her lay the front garden, and a row of white steps that grinned like teeth. It was on them that she would fall—not on the grass. . . .

She imagined the sensation of the impact, and shuddered. But at least they would kill one outright. . . . One would not die groaning in rhymed couplets, like Arthur. . . .

Clasping the shafts, she hoisted herself upwards, till she stood upon the inner sill. Instantly the fear of falling caught her by the throat. She swayed backwards, gasping and dizzy, steadying herself against the stout curtains.

" I can't do it," whispered Louise hoarsely. " I can't do it."

Slowly the vertigo passed. She fought with her rampant fear, wrenching away her thoughts from the terror of the death she had chosen, to the terror of the life she was leaving. She stood a space, balanced between time and eternity, weighing them.

With an effort she straightened herself, and put a foot on the outer ledge. Again, inevitably, she sickened. Huddled in the safety of the window-seat, stray phrases thrummed in her head: *My bones turn to water—There is no strength in me*. He knew—that Psalmist man. . . .

She slipped back on to the floor, and walked unsteadily to the littered table. Her hands were so weak that she could hardly lift them to pour out a glass of water.

She leaned against the table and drank thirstily. What a fool she was. . . . What a weak fool. . . . An instant's courage—one little second—and peace for ever after. . . . Wasn't it worth while? Wasn't it? Wasn't it? She turned again to her deliverance.

As she pulled herself on to the seat, she heard a noise of footsteps in the passage without, and the handle of the door was rattled impatiently. In an instant she was on the sill. This was pursuit—Miss Hartill, and all the terrors ! There must be no more hesitation. Once more she crouched for the leap, only, with a supreme effort, to swing herself back to safety again. Her hands were so slippery with sweat that they could barely grip the window-shafts. There was a banging at the door and a sound of voices calling. She swayed in a double agony, as fear strove against fear.

She heard the voice of a prefect—

" Who is it in there ? Open the door at once."

They would break open the door. . . . They would find her. . . . They would stop her. . . . Coward that she was—fool and coward. . . . One instant's courage—one little movement !

She stiffened herself anew. Poised on the extreme edge of the outer sill, she pushed her two hands through the belt of her dress, lest they should save her in her own despite. She stood an instant, her eyes closed.

Then she sprang. . . .

CHAPTER XXIII

CLARE was enjoying tea and triumph. She had worked hard for both, and was virtuously fatigued. The rocking-chair was comfortable, and the little gym mistress had brought her her favourite cakes. The Common-room, tinkling its tea-cups, buzzed criticism and approval. The rehearsal had been a success.

The talk centred, while opinion divided, on the Constance and the Prince Arthur. The general standpoint seemed to be that Agatha had reached the heights. Her royal robes had been effective; she reminded nearly every one of a favourite actress. Louise was less popular. A curious performance—very clever, of course—only one had not thought of Arthur quite like that ! Now the Constance——

Clare, watching and listening, purred like a sleepy cat. She wondered why Alwynne was absent . . . she was missing a lot. . . . Louise was annoying—she had been excessively irritated with her ten minutes before—and there was the debacle of the scholarship papers—but to class her with Agatha! What fools these women were !

The discussion had become argument, and was growing faintly acrimonious, when a deep voice cut across it.

Miss Hamilton, a visiting music mistress, always had a hearing when she chose to speak. She was a big woman, with a fine massive head and shrewd eyes. She dressed tweedily and carried her hands in her pockets, slouching a little. It was her harmless vanity to have none. Teaching music was her business; her recreations, hockey, and the more law-abiding forms of suffrage agitation. She was a level-headed and convincing speaker, with a triumphant sense of humour that could, and had, carried her successfully through many a fantastic situation. Rumours of her adventures had spread among the staff, if not through the school, and beglamoured her; she could have had a following if she had chosen. But her healthy twelve

stone crashed through pedestals, and she established comradeship, as she helped you, laughter-shaken, to pick up the pieces.

A postponed lesson had given her time to attend the rehearsal, and she had afterwards joined the flock of mistresses at tea. Clare, who thought more of her opinion than she chose to own, had eyed her once or twice already, and at the sound of her voice she stopped her lazy rocking.

"But they are not in the same category! Any schoolgirl could have played Constance as What's-her-name played it, given the training she has had." Miss Hamilton nodded pleasantly to the rocking-chair. She appreciated Clare's capacities. "But Arthur——"

"Well, I thought Agatha was splendid," repeated a junior mistress stubbornly.

"She was. An excellent piece of work! 'But the hands were the hands of Esau.'"

"They always are," said the little gym mistress fervently.

Clare gave her a quick, brilliant smile. She blushed scarlet.

The music mistress laughed; she enjoyed her weekly glimpse of school interdependencies.

"Why did you single out *King John*, Miss Hartill?" she inquired politely.

Clare was demure, but her eyes twinkled.

"The decision lay with Miss Marsham," she murmured.

"Of course. But having a Cinderella on the premises—eh?"

"If you know of a glass slipper——"

"You fit it on! Exactly! Where did you discover her?"

"Starving—literally starving, in the Lower Third." Clare thawed to the congenial listener. "It was an amazing performance, wasn't it? Of course, there was nothing of the actual Arthur in it——"

Miss Hamilton nodded.

"That struck me. It was a child in trouble—not a boy. Not a girl either—but, of course, only a girl would be precocious enough to conceive and carry out the idea. If she did, that is?"

"Oh, it was original," Clare disclaimed prettily. "It had little to do with me. I had to let her go her own way."

Miss Hamilton liked her generosity.

"You're wise. It's all very well to trim the household lamps, but a burning bush is best left alone. I don't altogether envy you. Genius must be a disturbing factor in a school."

" You think she has genius? "

" It was more than precocity to-day—or talent. The Constance had talent."

" And was third in the scholarship papers. Louise failed completely. Isn't it inexplicable? What is one to do? Of course, it was disgraceful: she should have been first. I expected it. I coached her myself. I know her possibilities. Frankly, I am deeply disappointed."

Miss Hamilton pulled her chair nearer. She was interested; Clare was not usually so communicative. But their further conversation was interrupted by the opening of the door, and old Miss Marsham appeared on a visit of congratulation, accepting tea and dispensing compliments with equal stateliness.

" An excellent performance! We must felicitate each other—and Miss Hartill. But we are accustomed to great things from Miss Hartill. There can be no uneasiness to-morrow. The child in the green coat, in that scene—ah, you remember? I thought her a trifle indistinct. Perhaps a hint——? Altogether it was excellent. Especially the Constance—most dramatic. If I may criticize—acting is not my department—but the Prince Arthur? Now, were you satisfied? Louise is a dear child, but hardly suitable, eh? "

Clare stiffened.

" I thought her acting remarkable."

" Did you? Now I can't help feeling that Shakespeare never intended it like that. He makes him such a dear little boy. It's so pathetic, you know, where he begs the man not to put out his eyes. So childlike and touching. Like little Lord Fauntleroy. I know I cried when I saw it, years ago. Now this child was not at all appealing."

Clare shrugged her shoulders.

" It is not a pretty scene, Miss Marsham, though the managers conspire to make us think so. A child at the mercy of brutes, knowing its own danger, terrorised into the extreme of cunning, parading its poor little graces with the skill of a mondaine—it's not pretty! And Louise spared us nothing."

Miss Marsham fidgeted.

" If that is your view of the scene, Miss Hartill, I wonder that you consider it fit for a school performance."

Clare hedged.

" My private view doesn't matter, after all. Traditionally it is inadmissible, of course. But if you would like the treat-

ment altered a little, I will speak to Louise. It is only the dress rehearsal, of course."

Miss Marsham looked relieved.

"Perhaps it would be better. A little more childlike, you know. But don't let her think me annoyed, Miss Hartill; I am sure she has worked so hard. Just a hint, you know. I should not like her feelings to be hurt. Poor child, the results were a sad disappointment to her, I'm afraid. You spoke to her about the change of class?"

"Yes."

"I hope she was not distressed?"

Clare remembered the look on Louise's face. She hesitated.

"She will get over it," she said

The kind old woman looked worried.

"You must not let her feel that she has failed over this, Miss Hartill—on the top of the other trouble. You will be judicious?"

A door slammed in the distance; there was a blurr of voices, a sound of hurrying footsteps.

Clare rose impatiently; she was tired of the subject.

"It will be all right, Miss Marsham. I understand Louise. What in the world is that disgraceful noise?"

But the door was flung open before she could reach it. Alwynne stood in the aperture, panting a little. In her arms lay Louise, her head falling limply, like a dead bird's. Behind them, peering faces showed for a moment, white against the dusk of the passage. Then Alwynne, staggering beneath the dead weight, stumbled forward, and the door swung to with a crash.

The roomful of women stared in horrified silence.

"She's dead," said Alwynne. "I found her on the steps. She fell from a window. One of the children saw it. She's dead."

She swayed forward to the empty rocking-chair, and sat down, the child's body clasped to her breast. She looked like a young mother.

Clare, watching half stupefied, saw a thin trickle of blood run out across her bare arm.

It woke her.

"Send for a doctor!" screamed Clare. "Send for a doctor! Will nobody send for a doctor?"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE sudden death of Louise Denny had shocked, each in **her** degree, every member of the staff. The general view was that such a deplorable accident could and should have been impossible. Every one remembered having long ago thought that the old-fashioned windows were unsafe, and having wondered why precautions had never been taken. Every one, the first horror over, canvassed the result of the unavoidable inquest, and speculated whether any one would be censured for carelessness. The younger mistresses were so sure that it was nobody's business to be on duty in the dressing-room at that particular hour that they spent the rest of the hushed, horror-stricken day in telling each other so, proclaiming, a trifle too insistently, their relief that they at least had nothing, however remote, to do with the affair: while inwardly they ransacked their memories to recall if perchance some half-heard order, some forgotten promise of standing substitute or relieving guard could, at the last moment, implicate them.

But the task of quieting and occupying the frightened children, and of clearing away, as far as might be, all traces of the dress rehearsal, was at least distraction. On the heads of the school, real and nominal, the strain was immeasurably greater. It was first truly felt, indeed, many hours later. Old Miss Marsham, in whom the shock had awakened something of her old-time decision of character, had conducted the interview with the decorously grieving parents with sufficient dignity; had overseen the temporary resting-place of the dead child; had communicated with doctors, lawyers and officials. But the spurt of energy had subsided with the necessity for it. She had retired late at night to her own apartments and the ministrations of her efficient maid, a broken old commander, facing tremulously the calamity that had befallen her life-work: foreseeing and exaggerating its effect on the future of the school, planning feverishly her defence from the gossip that must ensue. An accident ... of course, an accident ... a terrible yet unfore-

seeable accident. . . . That was the point. . . . At all costs it must be shown that it was an accident pure and simple, with never a whisper of negligence against authority or underling. . . . But she was an old woman. . . . She needed, she supposed bitterly, a shock of this kind to humble her into realizing that her day was over. . . . She had been driving with slack reins this many a long year. . . . She had known it and had hoped that no one shared her knowledge. And none had known. . . . So there came this pitiful occurrence to advertise her weakness to the world. . . . The poor child ! Ah, the poor little child ! There had been a lack of supervision, no doubt . . . some such gross carelessness as she, in her heyday, would never have tolerated. . . . And she was grown too old, too feeble to hold enquiry—to dispense strict justice. . . . She must depend on the lieutenants who had failed her, to hush the matter up—to make the administration of the school appear blameless. . . . They could do that, she did not doubt, and so she must be content. . . . But in the day of her strength she would not have been content. . . . But she was old. . . . It was time for her to abdicate. . . . She must put her affairs in order, name her successor—Clare Hariill or the secretary, she supposed. . . . They knew her ways. . . . There was that bright girl who had faced her to-day with the little child in her arms, . . . what was her name ? Daughter or niece of some old pupil of her own. . . . She could more easily have seen her in her seat than either of her vice-regents. . . . So young and strong and eager. . . . She had been like that once. . . . Now she was a weak old woman, and because of her weakness a little child lay dead in her house. . . . Yes, Martha might put her to bed. . . . Why not't She was very tired.

Henrietta Vigers had also her anxieties. She had so long claimed the position of virtual head that there was no doubt in her own mind that other people would consider her as responsible as if she had been the actual one. She worried incessantly. Should she have had bars put up to those old-fashioned windows ? She, who was responsible for all the household arrangements ? Ought she not to have foreseen the danger and guarded against it ? And there was the matter of the dressing-room mistress. . . . For the school machinery she had made herself even more pointedly responsible. . . . She should have arranged for some one to oversee the children. . . . But the dressing-room had been a temporary one and she had overlooked the

necessity. . . . Yet if some one had been in the room the accident could impossibly have happened. . . . She felt that she would be lucky to escape public censure, that loss of prestige in the eyes at least of the head mistress was inevitable.

But the more or less selfish perturbation, as distinct from the emotion of sheer humanity, that was aroused by the death of the little schoolgirl in the two older women, was as nothing to the sensation of sick dismay that it awoke in Glare Hartill. She, too, through the night that followed on the accident, lay awake till sunrise, considering her position. She was stunned by the unexpectedness of the catastrophe; a little grieved for the loss of Louise, but, above all, intensely and quite selfishly frightened. She felt guilty. She remembered, remorselessly enlightened, the afternoon, the expression in Louise's eyes, and not for one instant did she share the general belief in the accidental nature of her death. Her conscience would not allow her the comfort of such self-deception. Later she might lull it to sleep again, but for the moment it was awake, arid her master. This same keen-witted conscience of hers, this quintessence of her secret admirations and considered opinions, her epicurean appreciation of what was guileless and beautiful and worthy, co-existing, as it did, with the intellectuahzed sensuality of her imperious and carnal personality, was no small trial to Clare. Though it could not sway her decisions nor influence her actions by one hair's-breadth, it was at least cynically active, as now, to prick and fret at her peace. It was, indeed, at the root of the whimsical irritability that, for all her charm, made her an impossible housemate.

Essentially, her attitude to life was simple. It was an orange, to be squeezed for her pleasure. It must serve her; but she owed it, therefore, no duty. She found that she achieved a maximum of pleasurable sensations by following the dictates of that mind which is the mouthpiece of body, while indulging, as Lucullus ate turnips, in austere flirtations with that other mind, which is the mouthpiece of spirit. So she served Mammon, or rather, she allowed Mammon to serve her, but she was, on occasions, critically interested in God. And this was her undoing. Could she have been content to be frankly selfish, she might have been happy enough, but her very interest in the kingdom of Heaven had created her conscience, and had laid her open to its attacks. She ignored it, and it made her 'wretched: she compromised with it, and became a hypocrite.

She resented the death of Louise because it challenged her whole scheme of life. She was furiously angry with the dead child for what she felt to be an indictment of her legitimate amusements. Louise, so meek and ineffectual, had yet been able to steal a march on her, had stabbed in the back and run away, beyond reach of Clare's retaliation. . . . Louise had fooled her. . . . She, Clare, proud of her insight, her complete knowledge of character, her alert intuition, had yet had no inkling of what was passing in that childish mind. . . . If she had guessed, however vaguely, she could have taken measures, have scourged the mere suggestion of such monstrous rebellion out of that subject soul. . . . But Louise, secure in her insignificance, had tricked her, planned her sure escape. . . . But how unhappy she must have been !

In a sudden revulsion of feeling Clare grew faint with pity, as she tried to realize the child's state of mind during the past months. Her thoughts went back to the Christmas Day they had spent together. She had been happy enough then. . . . Half sincerely she tried to puzzle out the change in Louise, the gradual deterioration that had led to the tragedy. Had she been to blame? Louise had grown tiresome, and she had snubbed her. . . . There was the thing in a nutshell. . . . If she was to be so tender of the feelings of ah¹ the silly girls who sentimentalized over her, where would it end, at ah¹?

Poor little Louise. . . . She had been really fond of her at the beginning. . . . She had thought for a time that she might even supplant Alwynne. . . . But Louise had disappointed her. . . . She had let her work go to the dogs. . . . All her originality and charm fizzled out. . . . She had ceased to be interesting. . . . And she, Clare, had naturally been bored and had shown it. . . . Why couldn't the child take it quietly? It Louise had only known—and had conducted herself with tact—Clare had been preparing to be nicer to her again. . . . She had been deeply interested in her performance of the morning, had recognized its uncanny sincerity—had thought, with a distinct quickening of interest, that Louise was recovering herself at last, and that it might be as well to take her in hand again. . . . Oh, she had been full of benevolent impulses! But then Louise had been tiresome again . . . had stopped her and made a scene. . . . She hated scenes . . . at least (with a laugh) scenes that were not of her own devising. . . .

She supposed she should have recognized that the child was

overwrought—terribly overwrought by the emotions aroused by such an interpretation as she had insisted upon giving. . . . She ought never to have been allowed to play it like that. . . . That was Alwynne's doing. . . . Alwynne had persuaded Clare to leave Louise to her own devices. . . . Alwynne was so headstrong. . . . She hoped that Alwynne would never need to realize how much she was to blame. . . .

Here she became aware that her conscience was convulsed with cynical laughter. She flushed in the darkness, her opportune sense of injury increasing.

Alwynne might well be distressed. . . . If any awkward questions should be asked, Alwynne might find herself uncomfortably placed. . . . People would wonder that she had not noticed how unbalanced Louise was growing. . . . Every one knew how intimate, how ridiculously intimate, she and Louise had become. . . . Alwynne had fussed over her like an old hen . . . had even on occasion questioned her, Clare's, method with her. . . . She must have known what was in Louise's mind. . . . Yet Clare had no doubt that people would be only too ready to accuse her, rather than Alwynne, of criminal obtuseness. . . . Henrietta Vigers, for instance. . . . Henrietta would be less prejudiced than many others, though. . . . She was no friend to Alwynne. . . . It might do no harm to talk over the matter with Henrietta Vigers. . . . A word or two would be enough. . . .

Of course it would be considered an accident. . . . But if by any chance, vague suspicions were rife, a judicious talk with Henrietta would have served, at least, to prevent Clare from being made their object. . . . She had her enemies, she knew. . . . Alwynne, with her easy popularity, had none save Henrietta. . . . A few waspish remarks from Henrietta would not hurt Alwynne. . . . Clare would protect Alwynne from serious annoyance, of course. . . . If the mistresses—the school—oh, if the whole world turned against Alwynne, Clare would make it up to her. . . . What did Alwynne want, after all, with any one but Clare? The less the world gave Alwynne, the more she would be content with Clare, the more entirely she would be Clare's own property. . . . It was a good idea. . . . She would certainly speak to Miss Vigers. . . .

She was outlining that conversation till she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXV

ON the following afternoon Clare and Henrietta were sitting together in the mistresses' room. The afternoon classes were over and the day pupils and mistresses had gone home. The boarders were at supper and the staff with them.

But Henrietta had taken no notice of the supper-hour. She had more work in hand than she could well compass—letters to write and answer, of explanation, and enquiry, and condolence. She could have found time for her supper, nevertheless, but when she was overworked she liked her world to be aware of it. Clare, contrary to her custom, had stayed late. She was waiting for Alwynne. She had offered, perfunctorily enough, her assistance, but Henrietta had refused all help from her. Yet Henrietta had turned over the bulk of her formal correspondence to Alwynne, who sat, hard at work, in the adjacent office. She disliked Alwynne, but accepted the very necessary help from her more easily than from Clare Hartill. Yet she was softened by Clare's offer, which she had refused, and not at all grateful for Alwynne's help, though she accepted it.

She wrote busily for more than an hour, and Clare, silent, scarcely moving, sat watching her. Henrietta had, for once, no feeling of impatience at her idle supervision. She did not experience her usual sensation of intimidated antagonism. It was as if the stress of the last twenty-four hours had temporarily atoned the two incongruous characters. Neither by look or gesture had Clare flouted any suggestion or arrangement of Henrietta's—indeed, her presence had been quite distinctly a support. Henrietta had appealed more than once, and even confidently, to her. Henrietta had thought, with a touch of compunction, how strangely trouble brought out the best in people. Miss Hartill had been very proud of Louise Denny; evidently felt her death. The shock was causing her to unbend. Not, as one would have expected, to Alwynne Durand—she hoped, by the way, that Miss Durand was addressing those

envelopes legibly : she did so dislike an explosive handwriting—no, Miss Hartill was turning, very properly, to herself in the emergency. . . . She was pleased. . . . There should be freemasonry between the heads of the school. . . . And Clare Hartill, for all her lazy indifference, was influential and enormously capable. . . . Henrietta wondered if it would be safe to consult her. . . . She might, without acknowledging a definite uneasiness, find out cautiously whether it had occurred to Miss Hartill that she, Henrietta, might be considered to have been negligent.

She glanced across at her inscrutable colleague. Clare was staring thoughtfully at her. Her lips were puffed a little, as if in doubt.

Their eyes met for a moment in a glance that was almost one of understanding.

Henrietta hesitated, for the first time not at all disconcerted by Clare's direct gaze. But the sparkle of gay malice that attracted half her world, and disconcerted the other half, was gone from Clare's eyes. Their expression, for the time being, was calm, possibly friendly; at any rate, irreproachably matter-of-fact.

Henrietta flung down her pen with a sigh of fatigue, and bent and unbent her cramped fingers. But it was not fatigue that made her stop work. She wanted to talk to Clare Hartill, and had a queer conviction that Clare Hartill wanted to talk to her.

"Finished?" Clare spoke from the shadow of her deep chair. Her back was to the light, but Henrietta faced the west window. The evening sun laid bare her face for Clare's inspection. Not a flicker of expression could escape her, if she chose to look.

"More or less. I want half-an-hour's rest."

"I don't wonder. You've had everything to see to." Clare's voice was delicately sympathetic.

Henrietta unbent.

"A secretary's work isn't showy, Miss Hartill, but it's necessary : and any happening that's out of the common doubles it. The correspondence over this unhappy affair alone——"

"I know. Of course, at Miss Marsham's age——"

"It all falls on me ! People don't realize that. The extra work is enormous. Miss Marsham depends on me so entirely of course."

" Yes, yes," murmured Clare appreciatively.

Henrietta played with her papers.

"I feel the responsibility very strongly," she said abruptly; but her tone was confidential.

Clare nodded.

" Yet, of course—as far as nominal responsibility goes—I am not the head of the school. I cannot be held responsible—any oversight——"

Clare nodded.

" Oh, Miss Vigers—you merely carry out instructions, like the rest of us "—she hesitated imperceptibly—" officially," she added slowly.

Henrietta looked relieved.

" I am so glad you see what I mean."

" Oh, I do, entirely," Clare assured her grimly.

" I'm not heartless," said Henrietta suddenly, flushing. Her tone justified herself against unuttered criticism. "And the poor child's death was as much a shock to me as to any one. But I was not fond of her—as you were, for instance——"

Clare's pose never altered.

" I was very proud of her," she said gently. " I thought her an exceptional child. But, as Miss Durand said to me only a few days ago—I didn't really know her : not, at least, as she did. Alwynne, I know, thinks we have lost a genius. But you're right—it was a shock to me—a terrible shock."

" It was that to everybody, naturally. But in a way it's curious," said Henrietta meditatively, " how much we all feel it—how oppressively, at least: for I don't think any one was very fond of Louise."

" Oh, Miss Durand was deeply attached to her," Clare protested, her beautiful voice low with emotion.

" Yes, of course ! Oh, I've noticed that." Clare's unusual accessibility made Henrietta anxious to agree. Also, though she had noticed nothing unusual, she did not wish to appear lacking in penetration. She recalled Alwynne's haggard face; recollected how much she had had to do with the child; and decided that Clare was probably right.

" But except for her," she went on, " and your interest in her——"

" I've never had such a pupil," said Clare calmly. " Industrious—original—oh, I shall miss her, I know. But you're right—she was not popular——"

" Yet everybody feels her death—among ourselves, I mean—to an extraordinary degree. After all—an accident is only an accident, however dreadful! But there's a sort of oppression on us—a kind of fear. Do you know what I mean? I think we all feel it. It draws us together in a curious way."

" *The Tie of Common Funk*," rapped out Clare, forgetting her role.

Henrietta stiffened.

" I don't think it is an occasion for slang," she said. " The child's not buried yet."

Clare bit back a flippancy.

" I thought you would realize," continued Henrietta severely, " that the situation is trying for us all——"

" Of course I do." Clare hastened to soothe her " But seriously, Miss Vigers, I do not think you need be anxious., The inquest—oh, a painful ordeal, if you like. But you, at least, can have no reason to reproach yourself."

Henrietta relaxed again.

" No ! As I say, I'm not the head of the school. I'm not responsible for regulations—only for carrying them out. And accidents will happen "

" I only hope," said Clare, as if to herself, " that it will be considered an accident——"

Henrietta stared.

" But, Miss Hartill ! Of course it was an accident ! "

Clare looked at her wistfully.

" Yes ! It was, wasn't it ? Yes, of course ! It must have been an accident." Her tone dismissed the matter.

But Henrietta was on the alert. Her own anxieties had been skilfully allayed. Her mind was recovering poise. She nosed a mystery and her reviving sense of importance insisted on sharing the knowledge of it,

" Miss Hartill—you are not suggesting——? " Her tone invited confidence.

Clare gave a little natural laugh.

" Oh, my dear woman—I'm all nerves just at present. Of course I'm not suggesting anything. One gets absurd ideas into one's head. I'm only too relieved to hear you laugh at me. Your common sense is always a real support to me, you know. I've grown to depend on it all these years. I'm afraid I've got into the way of taking it too much for granted."

She gave a charming little deprecatory shrug.

Henrietta flushed : she felt herself warming unaccountably to Clare Hartill. She wondered why she had never before taken the trouble to draw her out. . . . She was evidently a woman of heart as well as brain. She felt vaguely that she must constantly have been unjust to her. But these sensations only whetted her eager curiosity. She pulled in her chair to the hearth.

" But what ideas, Miss Hartill ? If you will tell me—I should be the last person to Jaugh. I have far too much respect for—I wish you would tell me what is worrying you. Does anything make you think it was not an accident ? "

Clare was the picture of reluctance.

" Impressions—vague ideas—is it fair to formulate them ? Even if Louise were unbalanced—but, of course, I did not see much of her out of class. I confess I thought her manner strained at times. But I teach. I have nothing to do with the supervision of the younger children."

" That is Miss Durand's business," remarked Henrietta crisply.

" Oh, but if she had noticed anything——" began Clare. Then, lamely, " Obviously she didn't——"

" It was her business to. She should have reported to me. Why, she coached Louise, didn't she ? "

" Of course, if Louise had really overworked—badly——" reflected Clare, with the distressed air of one on whom unwelcome ideas are dawning. " One hears of cases—in Germany—but it's impossible ! "

Henrietta looked genuinely shocked, but none the less she was excited.

" She failed in that exam.——" she adduced.

" Yes ! Miss Durand coached her for that, you know. Poor Miss Durand ! How she slaved over her ! She was dreadfully disappointed," said Clare indulgently.

" Of course, she let her overdo herself ! " cried Henrietta triumphantly. " But you coached her too—didn't you notice either ? "

" I coach the whole class. You know how busy I am. I'm afraid I left Louise a good deal to Alwynne," said Clare regretfully.

" But she's supposed to be grown up—an asset to the school, according to Miss Marsham," said Henrietta tartly. " But, J must say, if she couldn't see that the child was doing too much, she's not fit to teach——"

¹¹ Oh, my dear ! " cried Clare, distressed. " You mustn't say such things. ^You've no idea how conscientious Alwynne is. She may have worked Louise too hard—but with the best intentions. She would be heartbroken if you suggested it."

" Oh, you are always very lenient to Miss Durand," began Henrietta, with a touch of jealousy.

" Ah ! She's so young ! So full of the zeal of youth. Besides, I'm very fond of her." Clare's smile took Henrietta into her confidence—confessed to an amiable weakness.

Henrietta brooded.

" Oh, Miss Hartill, you talk of my common sense. I wish—I wish you could see Miss Durand from my point of view for a moment." She eyed Clare, attentive and plastic in her shadows, and took courage. " This—appalling—probability——"

" Possibility——" Clare deprecated.

" Oh, but it seems terribly probable to me—only carries on my idea of Miss Durand. She is so ignorant—so inexperienced—so undisciplined—she cannot possibly have a good influence on young children——"

" She is my friend ! " Clare reminded her, with gentle dignity.

" And if your suspicions are correct—if Louise's death were not accidental—if it had anything to do with her state of mind—if it were the effect of overwork—I consider—I must consider Miss Durand in some measure reponsible. I feel that Miss Marsham should be told."

Clare shook her head. Her solemn, candid eyes abashed Henrietta.

" Miss Vigers—we are speaking in confidence. I should never forgive myself if anything I've said to you were repeated."

" Of course, of course ! " Henrietta appeased her hastily. " But I've had my own suspicions—oh, for a long time, I assure you. I've not been blind. And I might feel it my duty—on my account, you understand—after all Miss Marsham depends on me implicitly—to speak to her—for the sake of the school——"

Clare considered.

" That, of course—I can't prevent. But Miss Vigers—forgive me—but—don't let your sense of responsibility make you unfair. And for heaven's sake, don't let my vague uneasiness—it's really nothing more—affect your judgment. We may both be utterly mistaken. I am sure the result of the inquest will prove us mistaken after all—it will be found to have been an accident."

Henrietta closed her lips obstinately.

Clare rose in her place.

"It was an accident!" she cried passionately. "In my heart I am sure.¹ I wish I'd never said anything to you. I'd no right to be suspicious. Think of what Miss Durand's feelings would be if she realized——" She flung out her hands appealingly. "Oh, we're two overwrought women, aren't we? Sitting in the dusk and scaring ourselves with bogies. It was an accident, Miss Vigers—a tragic accident! Make yourself think so! Make me think so too!" Her beautiful eyes implored comfort.

Henrietta, quite touched, patted her awkwardly on the arm. She enjoyed her transient superiority.

"Of course, of course, we'll try to think so. Now you must go home. You are quite overwrought. It will be a trying day for us all to-morrow. I shall go to bed early too. Won't you go home now?"

Clare nodded, mute, grateful. She went to her peg, and took down her hat and jacket.

"Have you finished with Miss Durand? She was going home with me."

"Oh! Miss Durand!" Henrietta's tone grew crisper. "Yes, of course. I'll see if she has done. I'll send her to you. And you mustn't let yourself worry, Miss Hartill. Leave it all to me. These things are more my province. Good-night!" said Henrietta cordially.

She left the room.

Clare, pinning on her hat, stared critically at herself in the inadequate mirror.

"I think," she said confidentially, "we did that rather well,"

She smiled. The cynical lips smiled back at her.

"You beast!" cried Clare, with sudden passion. "You beast! You beast!"

She was still staring at herself when Alwynne came for her.

CHAPTER XXVI

CLARE HARTILL'S precautions proved to be unnecessary as the alarms of her colleagues. The inquest was a formal and quickly concluded affair, and the only corollary to the verdict of accidental death was an expression of sympathy with all concerned.

Whereon, there being no further cause for the detaining of Louise Denny above ground, she was elegantly and expeditiously buried.

The whole school attended the funeral. The flowers required a second carriage, and for the first time in his life, Mr. Denny was genuinely proud of his daughter. He did not believe that his own death could have extracted more lavish tributes from the purses of his acquaintances.

Clare Hartill, writing a card for her wreath of incredible orchids, did not regret her extravagance. After all—one must keep up one's position. . . . There would certainly not be such another wreath in the churchyard. . . . How Louise would have exclaimed over it! Poor child. . . . It was all one could do for her now. Clare hesitated, pen arrested—'With deepest sympathy.' It was not necessary to write anything more. . . . Her name was printed already. . . . But Louise would have liked a message. . . . After all, she had been very proud of Louise. . . .

She reversed the card, and wrote, almost illegibly, in a corner, 'Louise—with love. C. H.' She paused, lips pursed. Sentimental, perhaps? Possibly. . . . But let it go. . . .

Hastily she impaled her card on its attendant pin, and thrust it, print upward, among the flowers. The message was for Louise; no one else need see it.

Alwynne, too, sent flowers. But as usual she had spent all but a fraction of her salary. Seven and sixpence does not make a show, even if the garland be home-made. The shabby wreath was forgotten among the crowd of hot-house blooms. It lay

in a corner till the day after the funeral. Then the housemaid threw it away.

So Louise had no message from Alwynne.

By the end of a fortnight Louise was barely a memory in the school. A month had obliterated her entirely.

Yet her short career and sudden death had its influence on school and individual alike. Miss Marsham had had her lesson; she began to make her preliminary preparations for giving up her head mistress-ship, and selling her interest in the school; though it was the following spring before she began to negotiate definitely with Clare, on whom her choice had finally fallen. She would not be hurried; she would not appear anxious to settle her affairs; but she had determined, between regret and relief, that the next summer should be the last of her reign.

Henrietta, though her anxieties were abated by the turn affairs had taken, was still doubtful whether Miss Marsham were as blindly reliant upon her as usual. But, though feeling her position still somewhat insecure, her spirits had risen, and her natural love of interference had risen with them. She could not forget her conversation with Miss Hartill: an amazing conversation—a conversation teeming with suggestions and possibilities. . . . Of course, Miss Hartill had had no idea, poor distracted woman, of how skilfully Henrietta had drawn her out. . . . Henrietta felt pleased with herself. Without once referring to Miss Hartill, she could follow out her own plans as far as Miss Durand was concerned. . . . Later, Miss Hartill might remember that apparently innocent conversation and realize that Henrietta had stolen a march on her. . . . Yet, though she might be loyally angry, for her friend's sake, she could not do anything to cross Henrietta's arrangements . . . could not wish to do anything, because essentially, if reluctantly, she had approved them, had recognized that it was time to curtail Miss Durand's activities. . . .

Henrietta felt virtuous. Miss Durand had brought it on herself. . . . She wished her no harm. . . . But it was right that Miss Marsham should realize how far she was from an ideal school-mistress. . . . She had been engaged as scholastic maid-of-all-work. . . . Yet in a few terms she had become second only to Miss Hartill herself. . . . It was not fit. . . . Let her go back to her beginnings. . . . She, Henrietta, had only to open Miss Marsham's eyes. . . . But to that end there must be evidence. . . .

For the rest of the term, patient and peering as a rag-picker, she went about collecting her evidence.

Clare did not give another thought to her conversation with the gimlet-eyed secretary. It had served its purpose—had been a barrier between herself and the possibility of attack—had given her a feeling of security. She perceived, nevertheless, that her transient affability had made Henrietta violently her adherent. Clare was resigned to knowing that the change of face would be temporary—she could not allow a parading of herself as an intimate, and thither, she shrewdly suspected, would Henrietta's amenities lead. But she found it amusing to be gracious, as long as no more was expected of her. She did not like Henrietta one whit the better; felt herself, indeed, degraded by the expedient to which she had resorted, and fiercely despised her tool. Henrietta should be given rope, might attack Alwynne unhindered, nevertheless she should hang herself at the last. . . . Clare would ensure that. . . . Once—Henrietta had called her a cat. . . . Oh, she had heard of it ! Well—for the present, she would purr to Henrietta, blank-eyed, claws sheathed. . . . Let her serve her turn.

But Clare, beneath her schemes and jealousies, was, nevertheless, deeply and sincerely unhappy. The removal of the entirely selfish and cold-blooded panic that had been upon her since Louise's death, left her free to entertain deeper and sincerer feelings. She thought of Louise incessantly, with a growing feeling of regret and responsibility. She hated responsibility, though she loved authority—she had always shut her eyes to the effects of her caprices. But the more she thought of Louise, the more insistent grew her qualms. That the child was dead of its own will, she never doubted; but she fought desperately against the suggestion that her own conduct could have affected its state of mind, was ready to accept the most preposterous premise, whose ensuing chain of reasoning could acquit her. But nobody having accused her, no ingenuity of herself or another, could, for the time being, acquit her. She was merely a prey to her own intangible uneasinesses. Yet it needed but a key to set the whole machinery of her conscience in motion against her. The key was to be found.

The term was drawing to an end, and Alwynne, rounding off her special classes and generally making up arrears, was proportionately busy. She still spent her week-ends with Clare, but she brought her work along with her. She had

her corner of the table, and Clare her desk, and the two would work till the small hours.

But by the last Sunday evening, Clare's piles of reports and examination papers had disappeared, and she was free to lie at ease on her sofa, and to laugh at Alwynne, still immersed in exercise books, and tantalize her with airy plans for the long, delicious holidays. It had been, in spite of the season, a day of rain and cold winds. The skies had cleared at the sunset, with its red promise of fine weather once more, but the remnant of a fire still smouldered on the hearth. Alwynne was flushed with the interest of her work, but ever and again Clare shivered, and pulled the quilted sofa-wrap more closely about her. She wished that Alwynne would be quick. . . . Surely Alwynne could finish off her work some other time. . . . It wouldn't hurt her to get up early for once, for that matter. . . . She was bored . . . She was dull. . . . She wanted amusement. . . . She wanted Alwynne, and attention, and affection, and a little butterfly kiss or two. . . . Alwynne ought to be awake to the fact that she was wanted. . . .

She watched her, between fretfulness and affection, aesthetically appreciative of the big young body in the lavender frock, and the crown of shining hair, pleased with her property, intensely impatient of its interest in anything but herself.

" Alwynne——? " There was a hint of neglect in her voice.

Alwynne beamed, but her eyes were abstracted.

" Only another half-hour, Clare. I must just finish these. You don't mind, do you ? "

" 11 Mind ? " Clare laughed elaborately. She picked up a book, and there was silence once more.

Leaves fluttered and a pen scraped. The light began to fade.

Suddenly Alwynne gave a smothered exclamation. Clare looked up and pulled herself upright, angry enough.

" Alwynne ! Your carelessness—you've dropped your wet pen on my carpet. It's too bad."

Alwynne groped hastily beneath the table. But even the prolonged stooping had not brought back the colour to her cheek, as she replaced her pen on the stand.

" I'm sorry. I was startled. It hasn't marked it. Clare—just listen to this."

" What have you got hold of ? " demanded Clare irritably. She disliked spots and spillings and mess, & Alwynne might know.

" It's Louise's composition book. I always wondered where it had got to, when I cleared out her desk. It must have lain about and got collected in with the rest, yesterday."

¹⁴ Well ? " said Clare, with a show of indifference.

" Here's that essay on King John and his times. Do you remember? You gave it to them to do just before the play. It's not corrected. Not finished." She hesitated. " Clare ! It's rather queer."

" Is it any good ? " said Clare meditatively.

¹⁴ What for ? "

" The School Magazine. We're short of copy. The child wrote well. But I suppose it wouldn't do to use it—though I don't see why not."

Suddenly Alwynne began to read aloud.

" Another way by which King John got money from the Jews was by threatening them with torture. He was all-powerful. He could draw their teeth, tooth by tooth, twist their thumbs, or leave them to rot in dark, silent prisons. They could not do anything against him. If he could not force them to yield up their treasure he would have them burned, or cause them to be pressed to death. This is a horrible torture. I read about a woman who was killed in this way in the ' Hundred Best Books'; and there was a man in Good King Charles's days whom they killed like this. It is the worst death of any. They tie you down, so that you cannot move at all, and there is a slab of stone that hangs a little above you. This sinks very slowly, so that all the first day you just lie and stare at it and wonder if it really moves. People come and give you food and laugh at you. You are scarcely afraid, because it moves so little and you think nobody could be really so cruel and hurt you so horribly, and that you will be saved somehow. But all the time the stone is sinking—sinking—and the day goe' by and the night comes and they leave you alone. And perhaps you go to sleep at last. You are horribly tired, because of the weeks of fear that are behind you. Perhaps you dream. You dream you are free and people love you, and you have done nothing wrong and you are frightfully happy, and the one you love most kisses your forehead. But then the kiss grows so cold that you shrink away, only you cannot, and it presses you harder and harder, and you wake up and it is the stone. It is the sinking stone that is pressing you, pressing you, pressing you to death—and you cannot move. And you shriek and

shriek for help within your gagged mouth, and no one comes, and always the stone is pressing you, pressing you, pressing you——"

Clare caught the exercise-book from Alwynne's hand and thrust it into the heart of the half-dead fire. It lay unlighted, charring and smouldering. The unformed handwriting stood out very clearly. Clare caught at a matchbox, and tore it open; the matches showered out over her hand on to the rug and grate. She struck one after another, breaking them before they could light. Silently Alwynne took the box from her shaking fingers, lit a match and held it to the twisting papers. A thin little flame flickered up, overran them eagerly, wavered a second, and died with a faint whistling sigh.

"Do you hear that? Did you see that?" Clare knelt upright on the hearth. She held up her forefinger. "Listen ! Like a voice ! Like a child's voice ! A child sighing ! Light the candles—light all the candles ! I want light everywhere. No room for any shadow."

But as Alwynne moved obediently, she caught at her hand.

"Alwynne ! Stay with me ! Don't go into another room. Alwynne, I'm frightened of my thoughts."

Alwynne put her hand shyly on her shoulders, talking at random.

"Clare, dear, do get up. Come on to the sofa. You mustn't kneel there. You'll strain yourself. I always get tired kneeling in church. It makes one's heart ache."

Clare would not move.

"Don't you think my heart aches ? " she said. " Don't you think it aches all day? You're young—you're cold—you can sit there reading, reading—with a ghost at your shoulder——"

An undecipherable expression flashed across Alwynne's face. It came but to go—and Clare, absorbed in her own passion, saw nothing.

"It's Louise ! " she cried, between sincerity and histrionics. " Calling to some one. Calling from her grave. They call it an accident, like fools. Oh, can't you hear ? She died because she was forced. She's complaining—plaining—plaining——I tell you it's nothing to do with me. It wasn't my fault ! "

She flung her arms about Alwynne's waist and clutched her convulsively. She was sincere enough at last.

"Alwynne ! Alwynne ! Say it was not my fault."

Alwynne sank to her knees beside her and held her close.

They clung to each other like scared children. But Clare's abandonment awoke all Alwynne's protective instincts. She crushed down whatever emotions had hollowed her eyes and whitened her cheeks in the last long weeks, and addressed herself to quieting Clare. Clare, stepped off her pedestal, unpoised, clinging helplessly, was a new experience. In the face of it she felt herself childish, inadequate. But Clare was in trouble and needed her. The very marvel of it steadied. All her love for Clare rose within her, overflowed her, like a warm tide.

By sheer strength she pulled Clare into a chair and dropped on to the floor beside her, face upturned, talking fast and eagerly.

"You're not to talk like that. Of course it's not your fault. As if anything could be your fault. Clare, darling, don't look like that. You must lean back and rest. You're just tired, you know. We've talked of it so often. You know it was an accident. Why can't you believe it, if every one else does?"

"Do you?" said Clare intently.

Alwynne's eyes met hers defiantly.

"I do. Of course I do. It's wicked to torment yourself. But if I didn't—if the poor baby was overtired and overworked—is it your fault? You only saw her in class at the last. You couldn't help it if the exams, and the play were suddenly too much—if something snapped——"

"You see, you do think so," said Clare bitterly. "I've always known you did. Well—think what you like—what do I care?" She put up her clenched hands and rubbed and kneaded at her dry aching eyes.

Alwynne watched her, desperately. Here was her lady wanting comfort, and she had found none. She wracked her brains as the sluggish minutes passed.

Clare's hands dropped at last. She met Alwynne's anxious gaze and laughed harshly.

"Well? The verdict? That I was a brute to Louise, I suppose?"

Alwynne looked at her wistfully.

"Clare, I do love you BO."

Clare stiffened.

"Then I warn you—stop! I'm not good for you. I hurt people who love me. You always pestered me about hurting Louise. You needn't protest. You always did. And now you

lay her death at my door. I see it in your face. Can't I read you like a book? Can't I? Can't I?" Her face was distorted by the conflict within her.

Alwynne's simplicity was convinced. Here, she felt, was tragedy. Awe and pity tore at her sense of reality. Love loosened her tongue. Her words rushed forth in a torrent of incoherent argument. She was so eager that her fallacies had power to convince herself, much more Clare.

"Clare, I won't have it. You don't know what you say. What is this mad idea you've got? What would poor Louise think if she heard? Why, she adored you. And you were kind—always kind—only when you thought it better for her, you were strict. It's folly to torment yourself. If you do—what about me?"

"You?" Clare's eyes glinted suddenly.

"Me! If you are to blame, how much more I? Oh, don't you see?" Alwynne's face grew rapt. Here was inspiration; her path grew suddenly clear. "Clare, don't you see? If she did—" she paused imperceptibly—"I ought to have seen what was coming. I knew her so much better than you."

Clare repressed a denial.

"Oh, darling—you mustn't worry. It's my responsibility. Try and think—at the play, for instance. Did you think her manner strained? No, of course you didn't. But I did. I thought at the time it had all been too much for her. I did notice—I did! I thought—that child will get brain-fever if we're not careful—I meant to speak to Elsbeth. I meant to speak to you. Oh, I'd noticed before. Only I was busy, and lazy, and put it off. She was unhappy at failing—I knew. I wanted to tell you that I knew how much it meant to her—and I didn't. I was afraid—" She broke off abruptly; her eloquence ended as suddenly as it had begun.

But she had succeeded in her desire. Clare was recovering poise; would soon have herself all the more rigidly in control for her recent collapse. She stiffened as she spoke.

"Afraid of whom?"

"I mean I was afraid all along of what might happen," Alwynne concluded lamely. "You see, it was my fault?" There was an odd half-query in her voice.

"If you noticed so much and never tried to warn me, you are certainly to blame." Clare's voice was full of reluctant conviction. "I can't remember that you tried very hard."

" Oh, Clare! " began Alwynne. Their eyes met. Clare's face was hard and impassive—all trace of emotion gone. Her eyes challenged. Alwynne's lids dropped as she finished her sentence. " That is---no, I didn't try very hard."

" And why not ? "

Inconceivably an answer suggested itself to Alwynne, an unutterable iconoclasm. Her mind edged away from it horrified and in an instant it was not. But it had been.

" I don't know," she stammered.

" You realized the responsibility you incurred ? " Clare went on.

" I didn't. No, never ! " Alwynne supplicated her.

" You do now ? "

" Oh, yes," she said despairingly. She rejoiced that Clare could believe and be comforted, but it hurt her that she believed so easily. It alarmed her, too, made her, knowing her own motives, yet doubt herself. She felt trapped.

" I'm sorry you told me," said Clare abruptly.

They sat a moment in silence. A ray from the dying sun illuminated their faces. In Alwynne an innocent air of triumph fought with distress, and a growing uneasiness. Clare was expressionless.

Clare put up her hand to shelter herself, and her face was scarcely visible as she went on. She spoke softly.

" My dear, I can't say I'm not relieved. I feel exonerated—completely. Yet I wish you hadn't told me. I'd have rather thought it my fault than known it——"

" Mine," said Alwynne huskily.

Clare bent towards her, tender, gracious, yet subtly aloof: confessor, not friend.

" Ob, Alwynne ! Why will you always be so sure of yourself ? Why not have come to me for advice as you used to ? What are we elder folk for ? I love your impetuosity—your self-reliance—and I believe, I shall always believe, that you wanted to spare me trouble and worry. I know you. But you're not old enough, Alwynne, to decide everything for yourself. You wouldn't believe it, I suppose—oh, I was just the same. But doesn't all this dreadful business show you ? A few words—and Louise might have been with us now. Of course you acted for the best, but——There, my dear, there, there——" for her beautiful, pitiful voice had played too exquisitely on Alwynne's nerves, and the girl was sobbing helplessly.

And Clare was very kind to Alwynne, and let her cry in peace. And when she was tired of watching her, she braced her with deft praises of courage and self-control. Self-control appealed very strongly to Clare, Alwynne knew. While she dried her eyes, Clare whispered to her that the past was past and that one couldn't repair one's mistakes by dwelling on them. Let devotion to the living blot out a debt to the dead. She must try and forget. Clare would help her. Clare would try to forget too. They would never speak of it again. Never by word or look would Clare refer to it. It should be blotted out and forgotten.

And after a discreet interval, when there was no chance of big, irrepressible tears dropping into the gravy, or salting the butter, Clare thought she would like her supper.

She made quite a hearty meal, and Alwynne crumbled bread and drank thirstily, and watched her with humble, adoring eyes.

Clare, in soft undertones, was delicately amusing, full of dainty quips that coaxed Alwynne gently back to smiles and naturalness. She spared no pains, and sent Alwynne home at last, with, metaphorically speaking, her blessing.

But Alwynne stooped as she walked, as though she carried a burden.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE summer holidays came and went, eight cloudless weeks of them. Clare loved the sun; was well content to be out, day after day, cushioned and replete, on the sunniest strip of sand in the sunniest corner of a parched and gasping England. She found it wonderfully soothing to listen with shut eyes to the purr of the sea and the distant cries of gulls and children, with Alwynne to fan her and shade her, and clamber up and down two hundred feet of red cliff for her when the corkscrew was forgotten, or the salt, or Clare's bathing-dress, or a half-read magazine. Clare grew brown and plump as the drowsy days went by. Alwynne grew brown, too, but she certainly did not grow plumper. But then the heat never suited Alwynne. She had often said so, as she reminded Elsbeth. For, when Alwynne came back to her for the three weeks at home that she had persuaded Clare were due to Elsbeth, Elsbeth was difficult to satisfy. Elsbeth was inclined to be indignant. What sort of a holiday had it been, if Alwynne could come back so thin, and tired, and colourless under her tan? What had Miss Hartill been about to allow it?

But Alwynne's account of their pleasant lazy days was certainly appeasing. . . . It must have been the heat. . . . Not even the most suspicious of aunts could conscientiously suspect Clare of having anything to do with it. . . . Wait till September came, with its cooling skies. . . . Alwynne would be better then.

In the meantime Elsbeth tried what care and cookery and coddling could do, and Alwynne submitted more patiently than usual.

Alwynne, indeed, was unusually gentle with Elsbeth in the three weeks they spent together before the autumn term began. She was always good to Elsbeth, considerate of her bodily comforts, lovingly demonstrative. But Clare had taught Alwynne very carefully that she was growing up at last,

becoming financially and morally independent, free to lead her own life, that if she stayed with Elsbeth it was by favour, not by duty. And Alwynne, immensely flattered by the picture of herself as a woman of the world, had lived up to it with her usual drastic enthusiasm. Elsbeth, not unused to disillusionment and hopes deferred, could sigh and smile and acquiesce, knowing it for the phase that it was and forgiving Alwynne in advance. But Clare, who owed her neither gratitude nor duty, she never forgave. She was a very human woman, for all her saintliness.

She got her reward that summer, when Alwynne came back, quieted, grave, very tender with Elsbeth, clinging to her sometimes as if she were nearer nine than nineteen. But Elsbeth was fated never to have her happiness untainted. She was haunted by the conviction that Alwynne's subduement was not natural. Her pleasure in being with her aunt was so obvious that Elsbeth was worried, and knowing how infallibly Alwynne turned to her in any trouble, she expected revelations. But none came—only the manner was there that always accompanied them. Yet something was wrong. ... A quarrel with Clare Hartill?

But Alwynne, delicately questioned, chattered happily enough of their holiday, and there were frequent letters——She was over-anxious, too, to protest that she was perfectly well, and, in proof, exhausted herself in unnecessary housework. But she continued restless and abstracted, jumped absurdly at any sudden noise, and followed Elsbeth about like a homeless dog.

And she had contracted an odd habit of coming late at night into Elsbeth's room, trailing blankets and a pillow under her arm, to beg to sleep on Elsbeth's sofa—just this once! She would laugh at herself and pull Elsbeth's face down to her for a kiss, but she never gave any good reason for her whim. But she came so often that Elsbeth had a bed made up for her at last, and she slept there all the holidays, or lay awake. Elsbeth suspected that she lay awake two nights out of three.

With the autumn term Alwynne seemed to rouse herself, and flung herself into her work with her usual energy. Elsbeth saw less of her. The school claimed all her days, and Clare the bulk of her evenings. She had moved back into her own room again, and Elsbeth, her door ajar, would lie and watch the crack of light across the passage, and grieve over her darling's sleeplessness, and the shocking waste of electric light.

She wondered if the girl were working too hard. . . . Could that be at the root of the matter? She grew so anxious that she could even consult Clare on one of the latter's rare and formal calls.

"I am so glad to see you. Alwynne is changing; she'll be down in a minute. I made her lie down. Miss Hartill, I'm very distressed about the child. Do you think she looks well?"

Clare, less staccato than usual, certainly didn't think so.

"So thin—she's growing so dreadfully thin. Her neck! You should see her neck—salt-cellars, literally! And she had such a beautiful neck! But you've seen her in evening dress."

Yes, Clare had seen her.

"And so white and listless! I don't know what to make of her. I don't know what to do."

Clare, with unusual gentleness, would not advise Elsbeth to worry herself. Possibly Alwynne was doing a little too much. Clare would make enquiries. But she was sure that Elsbeth was over-anxious.

But Elsbeth was not to be comforted. She nodded to the open door.

"Look at her now—dragging across the hall."

But Alwynne, in her gay frock, cheeks, at sight of Clare, suddenly aflame, did not look as if there were much amiss. She was thinner, of course . . .

Elsbeth, however, had made Clare uneasy. She attacked Alwynne on the following day.

"Your aunt says you're dying, Alwynne. What's the matter?"

"Dear old Elsbeth!" Alwynne laughed lightly.

"Is anything wrong?" Clare did not appear to look at her; nevertheless she did not miss the slight change in Alwynne's face, as she answered with careful cheeriness—

"What should be wrong in this best of all possible——"

Clare caught her up.

"I'm not a fool, Alwynne. What's the matter?"

"I wish you wouldn't discuss me with Elsbeth," said Alwynne uneasily. "I don't like it. I won't have you bothered,"

"I'm not," said Clare coolly. "At the same time——"

Alwynne braced herself. She knew the tone.

"—I don't like any one about me with a secret grief and a pale, courageous smile. I can't stand a martyr."

"I'm not!" Alwynne was wincing. Then, suddenly:

"What has Elsbeth been saying? Honestly, I didn't know she'd noticed anything."

"What is the matter?" said Clare again, gently enough.

"Tell me, silly child!"

Alwynne shrugged her shoulders.

"Nothing! Just life!"

Clare waited.

"I'm sorry if I've been horrid—" she paused—"to Elsbeth."

Clare opened her eyes.

"What about me?"

"I'm never horrid to you," said Alwynne with compunction.

"That's what's so beastly of me."

"Well, upon my word!" cried Clare blankly.

"Oh, you know what I mean." Alwynne jumbled her words.

"I always want to be nice to you. It's perfectly easy. And then I go home to Elsbeth, the darling, and am grumpy and snappy, and show her all the hateful side of me. Heaven knows why! Only yesterday she said, 'You wouldn't speak to Clare Hartill like that,' in her dear, hurt voice. I felt such a brute."

A little smile hovered at the corners of Clare's mouth.

"I was always so sorry," said Clare smoothly, "that you couldn't spend Christmas Day with me last year."

Alwynne wrinkled her forehead.

"What's that got to do——?"

Clare caught her up.

"With your secret griefs? Nothing whatever! You're quite right. But what are they, Alwynne? Who's been worrying you? Have you got too much to do?"

"It's not that," said Alwynne unwillingly.

"Then what?"

"Oh, things!"

"What things?"

"Miss Vigers, for one," Alwynne began. Then she burst out: "Clare, I don't know what I've done to her! She never leaves me alone."

Clare stiffened.

"Miss Vigers? What has she to say to you? You're responsible to me—after Miss Marsham."

"She doesn't seem to think so. It's nag, nag, nag—fuss, fuss, fuss. Are the girls working properly? Am I not neglecting this? Or overdoing that? Do I remember that Dolly Brown had measles three terms ago? Why is Winifred Hawkins

allowed to sit with the light in her eyes? Do I make a habit of keeping So-and-so in? and if so, why so? And Miss Marsham doesn't approve of this, and Miss Marsham evidently doesn't know of that—and my manner is excessively independent—and will I kindly remember. . . ? Oh, Clare, it's simply awful. I get no peace. And you know how driven I am, with Miss Hutchins away. You'd think I'd done something awful from the way she treats me. Everlastingly spying and hinting——"

"Hinting what?" Clare's voice was icy.

"That's what I can't make out. That's the maddening part of it. Do you think I'm such a failure? Do you think I'm not to be trusted? I get on with the children—they work well! Truly, Clare, I don't know why she dislikes me so. You'd think she was trying to worry me into leaving."

"You should have told me before," said Clare curtly, and changed the subject so abruptly that Alwynne feared she was angry, and wished that she had held her tongue.

She was right. Clare was angry. Clare had conveniently forgotten her little conversation with Henrietta on that panic-stricken summer day: was naturally surprised and indignant to find it bearing the fruit she had intended it to bear. This was what came of confiding in people! And Henrietta, she had no doubt, would be prepared to give chapter and verse for her surveillance, if Clare should, directly or indirectly, call it in question. . . . Henrietta would appear to have Clare in a cleft stick: and Alwynne was to suffer in consequence. Clare (a great deal fonder of Alwynne than she, or Alwynne, or any one save Elsbeth, guessed) laughed to herself, once, softly, and her eyes snapped. Wait a while, Henrietta . . . wait a wee while!

Thoughtfully she approached the question of the counter-attack. That was inevitable, a sop to her own conscience. Besides, it would be amusing. . . . It was necessary, however, to decide upon the weapon.

It was a small matter—the refusal of a boarder for lack of space—that provided it. Quietly, she went to work.

For the first time, for her own departments had allowed her energy its outlet, she set herself to disentangle the lines on which the school was run. She found many knots. Half day, half boarding school, grown from a timid beginning into one of the most flourishing of its kind, it was, indeed, like the five hundred-year-old town in which it stood, a marvellous com-

pound of ancient custom and modern usage. The 'Seminary for Young Ladies' of the 'seventies was three parts obliterated by the 'nineties' High School regimen, on which, in its turn, was superimposed the cricket and hockey of the twentieth century's effemination of the public-school system; the whole swollen, patch-work concern held together by the personality of its creator, and its own reputation.

Clare nodded. It was obvious to her, that with the retirement of Miss Marsham, accomplished already in all save name, the school would fall to pieces. A pity . . . it had a fine past . . . was a valuable property still. . . . With a vigorous woman at its head, judiciously iconoclastic, no stickler for tradition, it should revive its youth. . . . She herself, for instance. . . . She toyed with the idea.

Miss Marsham was looking out for a successor. . . . She herself had been sounded. . . . Should she? She shook her head. Life was very pleasant as it was. . . . She knew that she hated responsibility as much as she liked power. . . . She sat on the school's shoulders, at present. . . . As head mistress the school would sit on hers. . . . No, thank you! She had better uses for her spare time. . . . There were books . . . idleness. . . . Alwynne. . . . Imagine never having time to play with Alwynne!

Nevertheless it would be fascinating to plan out the reorganization of the school . . . and carry it out, for that matter. She could do it, she knew. She would get all pat and then have some talks—some suggestive talks—with Miss Marsham. . . . She, Clare, had some little influence. . . . And there was life in the old warhorse yet. . . . Anything that she could be persuaded to believe would benefit her school would have her instant sanction. . . . She would be nominally responsible, of course, and would give Clare, nevertheless, a free hand. . . . And Clare, sweeping clean, would sweep away whatever withstood her. . . . Henrietta would have little energy left for Alwynne when Clare had finished her spring-cleaning. . . .

For the next few weeks, Clare spent nearly all her spare time at the school. She would stay to supper, and even, on occasion, superintend 'lights out.' She would ask artless questions, and the matron and the younger mistresses found her "so sympathetic when you really got her to yourself. So sensible, you know—always sees what you mean."

Finally, Clare shut herself up for a Saturday and a Sunday

with a neat little notebook, and drew up plans and made some calculations. Then she went to see Miss Marsham. She went to see Miss Marsham several times.

The plan was certainly an excellent one. . . . Miss Marsham could not follow the details very well . . . but that, of course, would be dear Clare's affair. . . . A great saving . . . an immense improvement. . . . There would be changes, of course. . . . This idea of separate houses, for instance. . . . It would mean taking extra premises—but Clare was quite right, they were overcrowded—had had to turn away girls. . . . She quite agreed with Clare. . . . she had always preferred boarders herself; one had a freer hand. . . . With a mistress responsible for each house, though, what would there be left for Miss Vigers to do? . . . Yes—she might take over a house, of course. . . . But Miss Marsham paused uneasily. She anticipated trouble with Henrietta.

She was justified. Henrietta refused utterly to discuss the suggested alterations. Miss Marsham must excuse her; she had her position. . . . One house? after controlling the entire school's economy? She did not suggest that Miss Marsham could be serious—that was impossible . . . Miss Marsham was serious? Then there was no more to be said. . . .

She said a good deal, however, and at considerable length; ended, breathless, waspish, leaving her resignation in her principal's hands. Neither she nor Miss Marsham dreamed that it would be accepted.

But Clare Hartill, consulted by Miss Marsham, was puzzlingly relieved. Very delicately she congratulated her chief on being extricated from a difficult position; praised Miss Vigers's tact—or her sense of fitness. Unusual good sense. . . . People so seldom realized their limitations, unprompted. . . . poor Miss Vigers was certainly no longer young. . . . hardly the woman for a modern house-mistress-ship. . . . Old fashioned. . . . in these days of degrees and college-training so much more was expected. . . . and after that affair in the summer no doubt she had lost confidence in herself. . . . Clare was sure that Miss Vigers had appreciated Miss Marsham's forbearance, but of course, she must know, in her own heart, that if she had taken proper precautions—it was her business to arrange for a mistress to be on duty, wasn't it?—the accident could not have happened. Poor little Louise! Oh, and of course, poor Miss Vigers too! . . . Well, it was for the best, she supposed. . . . and Miss Vigers

seemed to feel that it was time for her to go. . . . Perhaps it was. . . . But they would all be sorry to lose her. . . . Clare really thought that she would like to get up a presentation from the school. . . . Now what did Miss Marsham consider appropriate?

So Henrietta found herself taken at her word. She left, passionately resentful, at the half-term; hoping, at least, to embarrass her employer thereby. (But Clare Hartill knew of such a nice suitable woman—Newnham.)

Henrietta Vigers was forty-seven when she left. She had spent youth and prime at the school, and had nothing more to sell. She had neither certificates nor recommendations behind her. She was hampered by her aggressive gentility. Out of a £50 salary she had scraped together £500. Invested daringly it yielded her £25 a year. She had no friends outside the school. She left none within it.

Miss Marsham presented her with a gold watch, decorously inscribed; the school with a handsomely bound edition of Shakespeare.

Heaven knows what became of her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SAID Clare to Elsbeth at their next meeting—

" I found out what the trouble was. Henrietta Vigers nas been slave-driving her. I should have guessed before, but you know how that sort of thing can go on in a school unnoticed."

" Oh, yes," said Elsbeth.

Clare shot a suspicious glance at her, but Elsbeth's face \vas impassive.

" But she'll be all right now. Miss Vigors is leaving us at half-term."

" So I hear."

Their eyes met. Clare flushed faintly.

" I couldn't have Alwynrie bullied."

" I know exactly how you feel," said Elsbeth quietly. Then, with a direct glance, " Has Miss Vigers got another post ? "

" I haven't enquired."

" You're a bad enemy," Elsbeth's tone was quaintly reflective, almost admiring.

" But a good friend, I hope ? " Clare laughed.

" I hope so," said Elsbeth doubtfully, and Clare laughed again. It amused her to cross swords with Elsbeth. At times she felt, that had it not been for Alwynne—that bone of contention—she could have liked her.

" You can't be one without the other," she instructed her. " I don't pretend to be a saint. And you'll see how much better Alwynne will be next term."

But the spring term came, and Alwynne was no better. She flagged like a transplanted tree. She went about her business as usual, but even Clare, not too willing to acknowledge what interfered with her scheme of things, realized that her efficiency was laborious, that her high spirits were forced, her comicalities not spontaneous, that she was in fact, not herself, but merely an elaborate imitation.

But where Elsbeth grew anxious Clare grew irritated. She

spied a mystery. Some obscure, yet powerful instinct prevented her from probing it, but she was none the less piqued at being left in the dark. It annoyed her too, that Alwynne should be obviously and daily losing her health and good looks. Clare required above all vitality in her associates. It had been, in her eyes, one of Alwynne's most attractive characteristics. This changing Alwynne, whitened, quieted, submissive, the sparkle gone from her eyes and the snap from her tongue, was less to her taste. Alwynne, very conscious of her shortcomings and of Clare's irritation at them, grew daily more nervously propitiatory—ever a fatal attitude to Clare. It roused the petty tyrant in her. There were jarrings, misunderstandings, exhausting scenes and more exhausting reconciliations. Yet the two were always together. Clare, viciously adroit as she grew in those days in piercing the armour of Alwynne's peace, exacted nevertheless her incessant service. And never had Alwynne so strained every nerve to please her.

Elsbeth, guessing at the situation, could give thanks when influenza, sweeping over the school, claimed Alwynne as its earliest victim. Her turn had come. She nursed Alwynne through the attack, prolonged her convalescence, excluded all enquirers, censored messages and letters. When Alwynne grew better, and talked, restless yet unwilling, of fixing the date of her return, Elsbeth, lips firmly set, went out one afternoon to pay a call upon Miss Marsham, and returning, sat down to write a letter. She busied herself for the rest of that day and all the next over Alwynne's wardrobe, mending and pressing and freshening.

Alwynne protested.

"Elsbeth dear, do leave my things alone. I'll mend them some time—honestly. They're all right. I wish you wouldn't fuss."

But Elsbeth fussed placidly on.

Tn the evening came letters for them both. Alwynne read hers hurriedly.

"Elsbeth, it's from Clare! She wants to know why I'm not coming back. What does she mean? Of course I'm coming back. Mademoiselle Charette is already, and she was ill after I was!"

Elsbeth sniffed.

"She was only in bed two days—Miss Marsham said so. You're not going back this term, Alwynne. I've geen Miss

Marsham myself. I told her what the doctor said. I've arranged things. She agrees with me—you're not fit to. It's only a month to end of term. They can manage. You've simply got to have a change. So I wrote to Dene—to the Lumsdens, and Alicia's answer has just come. They're delighted to have you. I knew they would be, of course. They have asked us so often. Such a nice letter. Such a lovely place. Now, my dear, be a sensible child and don't argue, because I've made up my mind. It'll do you good to get away."

For in AlWynne's face astonishment had been succeeded by indignation. Elsbeth prepared herself resignedly to face a storm of protest, if not a blank refusal. To be arranged for as if she were a child—unconsulted—Clare—the school—the coaching—leaving Elsbeth alone—Dene—utter strangers—perfectly well—simply ridiculous ! Elsbeth saw it all coming.

" My dear Elsbeth ! What a preposterous——" began Alwynne. Then the weakness of convalescence swamped her. She sank back in her chair.

" Perhaps it will," said Alwynne wearily. " All right, Elsbeth ! Ill go if you want me to. Anyway, I don't much care."

CHAPTER XXIX

A WEEK later Alwynne was sitting in a diminutive go-cart, drawn by a large pony, and driven by a large lady with a wide smile and bulgy knees, with which, as the little cart jolted over the stony road, she unconsciously nudged Alwynne, imparting an air of sly familiarity to her pleasant, formal talk. This, Alwynne supposed, was Alicia. She liked her, liked her fat kind face, her comfortable rotundity, and her sweet voice. She liked her cool disregard of her own comical appearance, wedged in among portmanteaux and Alwynne and a basket of market produce, with an old sun-hat tied bonnet-fashion to shade her eyes, and her scarf ends fluttering madly, as she thwacked and tugged at the iron-mouthed pony.

She was more than middle-aged, a woman of flopping draperies and haphazard bookings, and scatter-brained grey locks, that had been a fringe in the days of fringes. She moved, as Alwynne noticed later, like a hurried cow, and tripped continually over her long skirts. Yet, in spite of her ramshackle exterior, she was not ridiculous. The goodmen and stray children they encountered greeted her with obvious respect. Alwynne, comparing the keen eyes and their cheerful crowsfeet, with the chin, firm enough in its cushion of fat, guessed her the ruling spirit of the Dene household, and wondered why she had not married a vicar.

But Alicia, though Alwynne listened politely to her flow of talk, and answered prettily when she must, did not long occupy her attention.

She was in her own country again. She loved the country—woods, fields, hedges and lanes—as she loved no city or sea-town of them all. London, Paris, Rome—Swiss mountains or Itab'an lakes—she would have given them ah¹ for Kent and Hampshire and the Sussex Weald. But Clare would never hear of a country holiday. Alwynne took deep breaths of the clean, kindly air, and wondered to herself that she had taken the proposal of her

holiday so dully. She had not realized that she was going into the country—she had not realized anything, except that she was tired, and that Elsheth would not leave her alone. She had shrunk painfully from the idea of meeting strangers, from the exertion of accommodating herself to them. But this good air made one feel alive again. . . .

She stared over the pony's ears at the gay spring landscape.

"Those are the Dene fields," said Alicia, following her glance.

"There are two Denes, you know—Dene Village and Dene Fields. There's a couple of miles between them. We are in the hollow, where the road dips, at the foot of Witch Hill."

"Witch Hill?"

Alicia flourished her whip at the sky-line. The fields were spread over the hillside in sections of chocolate and magenta and silver-green, with here and again a parti-coloured patch, where oats and dandelions, pimpernel and sky-blue flax choked and strangled on an ash-heap. From the slopes Witch Hill lifted a brow of blank white chalk, crowned and draped in woodland, lying against pillows of cloud, for all the world like a hag abed, knees hunched, and patch-work quilt drawn up to ragged eyebrows. Round her neck the road wound like a silver riband; looped, dipped, disappeared, for two imfeiced miles—to flash into view but a parrot's flight away, and swerve, with a steep little rush, round a house with French windows thatched in yellow jessamine.

Alwynne's eyes lit up.

"What a good name! Who was she before she was turned into that?" She stopped, flushing. Alicia would think her stupid.

Alicia laughed pleasantly.

"Do you like fairy tales? You've come to the right place—the country-side's full of them. There's a fairy fort—Roman I suppose, really, and a haunted barn out beyond Dene Compton, besides Witch Hill and the Witch Wood just behind our house. There's a story, of course. I don't know it—you must ask Roger. He's always picking up stories."

"Roger?"

"My nephew, Roger Lumsden. Hasn't Elsbeth——?"

"Oh yes, of course."

"He's away just now. Look, now you can see the house properly."

"Behind the hill?" Alwynne had caught sight of a group of buildings crowning a secondary slope.

" No, no—that's the school, Dene Compton."

" A school ? " Alwynne screwed up her eyes to look at it.

" What a big place ! Girls or boys ? "

" Both."

" Oh ! A board school ! " Alwynne's interest flagged.

" Scarcely ! " Alicia laughed. " Haven't you heard of Dent Compton ? And you a schoolmistress ! "

Alwynne was politely blank.

" The thin end of the co-educational wedge. It's unique—or was, till a few years ago. There are several now, dotted about England. *You* ladies' seminaries should be trembling in your shoes."

" Boys and girls ! What a mad idea ! Yes, I believe Clare—I believe I did hear something about it. It's all cranks and simple lifers and socialists though, isn't it ? "

" You'd better come up one day and see. I'll take you."

" Why, do you know them ? "

" I teach there."

" You ? Oh—I beg your pardon," cried Alwynne strickenly. Alicia laughed.

" I'm accustomed to it. Jean will be delighted with an ally. She pretends to disapprove. But Roger and T are generally too much for her."

" Is he a master, then ? "

" Good gracious, no ! But he has a lot of friends at the school. He ought to be interested—it's his land, you know. His people lived there for generations—the Lumsdens of Dene Compton. The head master has the old house, but the school itself is new—all those buildings you see. No, not those—" Alwynne's eyes were caught by a glitter of glass roofs—" those are Roger's houses. He's a gardener, you know. He lives for his bulbs and his manures."

The tiny cart rocked as the pony bucketed down the dip of the road and whirled it through the gates and up the short drive, Alwynne clutched the inadequate rail.

" He will do it," said Alicia resignedly. " He wants his tea. There's Jean. Mind the door."

She pulled up the rocketing pony as the ridiculous little door burst open and Alwynne and her baggage were precipitated on to the gravel.

A little woman ran out from the porch.

" Are you hurt ? It always does that. I'm always asking

Alicia to tell Bryce to take it to be seen to. Alicia—I shall speak to Roger if you don't. My dear, I hope you haven't hurt yourself. That pretty frock—but it will all brush off. And how is Elsbeth, and why didn't you bring her with you? Come in at once and have some tea. Alicia has driven round to the stables. It's Bryce's afternoon off."

Jean was a prim little red-haired woman, some years younger than Alicia, with brisk ways, and a clacking tongue. She had Alwynne in a chair, had given her tea, deplored her white looks, suggested three infallible remedies, recounted their effect on her own constitution and Alicia's and her nephew's, and, digressing easily, was beginning a detailed history of Roger's health since, at the age of five or thereabouts, he had come under her care, before Alwynne had had time to realize more than that the room was very cheerful, Jean very talkative, and she herself very, very tired. She could not help being relieved when Alicia returned. Jean, with her neat dress and knowledgeable ways and little air of apologizing for her slap-dash elder, should, by all the rules, have been the more reliable of the cousins. Yet Alwynne turned instinctively to Alicia; and Alicia, spread upon a chair, fanning herself cyclonically with her enormous hat, did not fail her.

"Jean! The child's as white as a sheet. You can ask about Elsbeth to-morrow, and Roger will keep. Take her up to her room, leave her to unpack and lie down in peace and quiet, and come back and give me my tea. Supper's at seven, Alwynne. Take my advice and have a good rest. There are plenty of books—oh, yes, I know all about your likes and dislikes. Elsbeth's a talker too—on paper! Jean—if you're not down in five minutes, I'll come and fetch you."

Alwynne, half an hour later, curled comfortably upon a sofa, in front of a blazing fire, with a lazy hour before her and a Copperfield upon her knee, thought that Alicia was a perfect dear. And Jean? Jean, pulling out the sofa, poking the fire, pattering about her like a too intelligent terrier—Jean was a dear too. . . . They were a couple of comical dears.

And 'The Dears' was Alwynne's name for them from that day **on**.

CHAPTER XXX

ALWYNNE settled down with an ease that surprised herself. Much as she loved the country, a country life would have bored her to death, Clare had often assured her, as a permanent state; but for a few weeks it was certainly delightful. She enjoyed pottering about the garden with Jean, and jogging into the village on her own account behind the obstinate pony, who, approving her taste in apples, allowed her to believe that she more or less regulated his direction and pace. She enjoyed the complicated smells of the village store, half post office, half emporium, and the taste of its gargantuan bulls'-eyes. She sent, in the first enthusiasm of discovery, a tinful heaped about with early primroses to Clare; but Clare was not impressed.

Clare disapproved strongly of AlWynne's holiday, needed her too much to allow it necessary. Her first letters were a curious mixture—half fretfulness over Alwynne's absence, half assurance of how perfectly well she, Clare, got on without her. Alwynne would have been exquisitely amazed could she have known how eagerly Clare awaited her bi-weekly budget. Alwynne was afraid her letters were dull enough. She apologized constantly—

Of course, Clare, this will seem very small beer to you—but little things are important down here. It's all so quiet, you see. I've been perfectly happy this morning because I found a patch of white violets in a clearing, and Jean and Alicia were just as excited when I told (hern at lunch : and we went off with a teabasket afterwards, and dug violet roots for an hour, or more, and then spread our mackintoshes over a felled trunk and made tea. The giound was sopping, but it was fun. You'd love my cousins. They're as old as Elsbeth but full of beans, and they've travelled and are interesting—only they will talk incessantly about this nephew they've got. It's 'Roger' this and 'Roger' that—he seems to rule them with a rod of iron—can't do wrong! He comes back next week. I rather wonder what

he'll be like. The Dears make him out a paragon; but I'm expecting a prig, myself! There are photographs of him all over the place. He's quite good-looking.

But before Alwynne could tire of the lanes and village, of gardening with Jean, and hints of how Roger stubbed up roots and handled bulbs, Alicia had provided her with a new interest. She remembered her promise one morning and took her up to Dene Compton.

Alicia gave Italian lessons twice a week, and from her Alwynne had gleaned many quaint details of the school and its workings. What she heard interested her, though she was prepared to be merely, if indulgently, amused. She looked forward to the visit if only to get copy for a letter to Clare. Clare, too, liked to be amused.

The gong was clanging for the mid-morning break when Alicia, Alwynne in her wake, led the way into the main building, and waving her airily towards a mound of biscuits, bade her help herself and look about her for a while, because she, Alicia, had got to speak to——She dived into the crowd.

Alwynne, thus deserted, stood shyly enough in a roofed corner of the great brick quadrangle, munching a fair imitation of a dog-biscuit, and watching the boys and girls who swarmed past her as undisturbed by her presence as if she were invisible. At the boys she smiled indulgently as she would have smiled at a string of lively terriers, but of the girls she was sharply critical. They wore curious, and as she thought hideous, serge tunics : she jibbed at their utilitarian plaits : but she conceded a good carriage to most of them and was impressed by a certain pleasant fearlessness of manner. A couple of men, Alicia, and a bright, emphatic woman in a nurse's uniform, wandered through the crowd, which made way courteously enough, but seemed otherwise in no degree embarrassed by their propinquity. Alwynne had a sudden memory of Clare's triumphal progressions; compared them uneasily with the fashion of these quiet people.

She watched a small girl dash panting to the loggia at the opposite side of the quadrangle, where a slight man in disreputable tennis-shoes, leaned against a shaft and observed the pleasant tumult. There was a moment's earnest consultation, and the small girl darted away again and disappeared down a corridor. The man resumed his former pose—head on one side, smiling a little.

Alwynne ventured out of her corner and caught at Alicia as she passed.

" Cousin Alice ! I like all this. I'm glad you brought me. Who's that ? " She nodded towards the man in tennis-shoes.

" The Head."

" The head master ? "

" Why not ? "

" But—but—when Miss Marsham comes in—you can hear a pin drop——Is he nice ? "

Alicia laughed.

" I'll introduce you,"

She did.

" Well," said Alicia with a twinkle as they walked home together later, " what did you think of him 1 "

Alwynne flushed, but she laughed too.

" Cousin Alice—it was too bad of you. He just said ' How do you do ? ' and smiled politely. Then he said nothing at all for five minutes, and then he clutched at one of the girls and handed me over to her with another smile—an immensely relieved one—and drifted away. I've never been so snubbed in my life."

" You're not the first. So you didn't like him ? "

" Oh—I liked him," conceded Alwynne grudgingly.

They walked on in silence for a while.

" What's that? " Alwynne pointed to a large grey building half way down the avenue.

" The girls' house, Hill Dene. They sleep there; and have the needlework classes, and housewifery, I believe."

⁴¹ Do they have everything else with the boys ? "

" Practically."

" Does it answer ? "

" Why not ? Girls with brothers and boys with sisters have an advantage over the solitary specimens, everybody knows. This is only extending the principle."

Alwynne giggled suddenly.

" You know that girl he dumped me on to—she was showing me round, and we ran into some boys in the gym. I couldn't make out why, but she jolly well sent them flying."

" Out of hours, I expect."

" But the coolness of it, Cousin Alice ! She was a bit of a thing—the boys were half as high again ! "

" But not prefects."

" Oh, *I* see." Alwynne meditated. " Oh, Cousin Alicia, that girl asked me to go with them next Saturday for a tramp. Over Witch Hill. She and another girl and some boys. Imagine ! they're going by themselves—without a master or a mistress or anything ! "

"Why not? "

" We don't. We crocodile. Two and two, and two and two, and two and two. And I trot along at the side and see that they don't take arms. But of course, you can't control the day-girls. One of them asked two of the boarders out for the day one Sunday, at least her mother did, and we met them after church on the promenade, arm in arm—all three ! I tell you, there was a row. They were locked up in their bedrooms for three days, and nobody might speak to them for the rest of the term. Miss Marsham said it was defiance and that they might remember they were ladies."

" I don't think they want 'ladies' here," said Alicia. " They're quite content if they produce gentlewomen. Your school must be peculiar."

" Oh, no," said Alwynne, opening her eyes. " There are dozens of schools like Utterbridge. I was at two myself when I was young. It's this place that's peculiar. It's like nothing I've heard of. I want to explore. He said I could. Yes, I forgot—he did say that—that I was to come up whenever I liked."

And for the next week Alwynne spent a good half of her days at Dene Compton. She clung to Alicia's skirts at the first, afraid of appearing to intrude. But she soon found that she might go where she would without arousing curiosity or even notice, though boys and girls alike were friendly enough when she spoke to them. Accustomed to her mistress-ship, she was half-piqued, half-amused to find herself so entirely unimportant.

But the great school fascinated her. It was scarce a third larger than her own in point of numbers, but the perfection of its proportions made it impressive. The arrangements for the children's physical well-being reflected the methods employed for their spiritual development. There was an insistence on sunlight and fresh air and space—above all, space. There was no calculation of the legal minimum of cubic feet: body and mind alike were given room in which to turn, to stretch themselves, to grow.

Gradually she realized that she had been living for years in a rabbit warren.

With her discoveries she filled many sheets of notepaper. But Clare's letters were nicely calculated to divert enthusiasm. Their tone was changing; they allowed Alwynne to guess herself missed. There was in them a hint of appeal: a suggestion of lonely evenings——Never a word of Alwynne's doings. Yet, by implication, description of her new friends and their outlook was dismissed as unnecessary. Clare, Alwynne was to realize, would smile pleasantly as she read, and think it all rather silly.

Elsbeth—*so pleased that they are so kind to you at Alicia's school*—was more genuinely uninterested. Dene Compton had been the home of a certain John Lumsden for Elsbeth. She did not care for descriptions of its metamorphosis. She wanted to hear about Dene, and her cousins, and how Alwynne was eating and sleeping, and if Roger Lumsden had come back yet. She asked twice if Roger Lumsden had come back yet. But Alwynne had an annoying habit of leaving her questions unanswered through eight closely written sheets. It was not only Clare who was very tired of co-education and Dene Compton.

But Elsbeth got her news at last, and was satisfied with it 843 Macchiavellis usually are, whose plots are being developed by unconscious and self-willed instruments. Alwynne, who in her spare time had discovered what spring in the country could mean, tucked in the news at the end of an epistle that was purely botanical—

. . . and cuckoo-pint and primroses and violets! Have you ever seen larches in bud? Oh, Elsbeth, why can't we live in the country? Every collection of buildings bigger than Dene Village ought to be razed by Act of Parliament. I expect the earth hates cities as I hated warts on my hands when I was little. Well, I must stop. Oh—the Lumsden man turned up a day or two ago. The Dears were in ecstasies, and he let himself be fussed over in the calmest way, as if he had a perfect right to it. I think he's conceited. I don't think you'd like him. He's back for good, apparently, but he won't worry me much. I'm only in at meals. The Dears are always busy and let me do as I like, and I either go up to Compton, or prowls, or take a rug and book into the garden. It's quite hot, although it's barely April—so you needn't worry. The garden is jolly, big and half wild: only 'Roger' is beginning to trim it—the vandal,"

He's by way of being a gardener, you know. Great on bulbs and roses, I believe.

By the way is he a relation ? Even The Dears are only very distant cousins, aren't they ? Because he will call me ' Alwynne ' as if he were. I call it cheek. I was very stiff, but he's got a hide like a rhinoceros. When I said ' Mr. Lumsden,' he just grinned. So now I say ' Roger' very markedly whenever he says ' Alwynne.,' " can't see what Jean and Alicia see in him ; but of course I have to be polite. They are dears, if you like—are giving me a lovely time.

I hope you're not very dull, Elsbeth dear. You must try and get out this lovely weather. Why not have Clare to tea one day ? You'd both enjoy it. I heard from her yesterday—such a jolly letter,"

Heaps of love from Jean and Alicia—and you know what a lot from me ,"

ALWYNNE.

P.8.—I found these violets to-day on a bank behind the church They'll be squashed when you get 'em, but they'll smell still.

P.S.—The Lumsden man saw me writing, and said, would I send you his love, and do you remember him ? I told him I'd scarcely heard you mention his name, so it wasn't probable—but he just smiled his superior smile. He reminds me of Mr. Darcy in P. and P. I can't say I like him.

CHAPTER XXXI

ROGER LUMSDEN had been home a week. Alwynne, save at meals, had seen little of him, and that little she did not intend to like. There was a memory of a passage of arms at their first meeting which rankled.

Roger had been c nquiring when the Compton holidays began. Alicia hesitated—

" Let me see—the play's Tuesday week——"

" Wednesday week," put in Alwynne.

" Tuesday——"

" No, Wednesday," Alwynne persisted. " Because, you know, Mr. Bryant is so afraid that Gertrude Clarke won't be out of the ' San.' He says he can never coach up another Alkestis in the time. Besides, there isn't any one. He's been tearing his hair."

Alicia laughed.

" She knows more about it than I do, Roger ! She's been half living there, haven't you, Alwynne ? "

Roger turned to her with a smile and the first touch of personal interest that he had shown.

" Jolly place, isn't it ? You teach, don't you ? I wonder how it strikes you ! "

But he was a stranger and Alwynne was nervous. She answered flippantly, as she always did when she was not at her ease—

" Oh, I can't get over their dresses ! Appalling garments ! Imagine that poor girl trying to rehearse Alkestis in a pea-green potato sack ! It must be delicious. And their hair ! Doesn't anybody ever teach them to do their hair ? "

He eyed her thoughtfully, from her carefully dressed head to her shining shoe-buckles, and shrugged his shoulders.

" Is that all you see ? " said Roger dispassionately, and withdrew interest.

Alwynne grew hot with annoyance. Idiot ! All she saw. . . . As if she had meant anything of the kind. . . . One said things

like that. . . . One just said them. . . . Especially when one was nervous. . . . Taking a remark like that seriously. . . . Oh well, if he liked to think her a fool—let him ! Silly prig !

She endeavoured to put him out of her mind. But his mere existence disturbed her. She was not accustomed to tobacco, for instance. . . . and it was disconcerting to find him in her favourite corner of the library or occupying the writing-table that no one had seemed to use but herself. He appeared to have forgotten that he had snubbed her and was unquenchably friendly. She found herself being pleasanter than she intended, but she made it a point of honour never to agree with him. That, at least, she owed herself.

She watched him furtively, alert for justification of her ill-humour. She told herself that it would be easier to be nice to him if everybody else did not fuss over him so. . . . It was ridiculous to see how Jean, especially, brightened at the sight of him. . . . He was good to her, certainly : she was argumentative, without being shrewd, but he never lost patience, as Alwyime, in secret was inclined to do. Even Alicia, so stoutly the head of her household, submitted every difficulty, from an unexpected legacy to a dearth of eggs. And he would sit down solidly and think the matter out. And his advice, from a flutter in rubber to pepper in the chicken pail, would be followed literally, and generally, Alwynne admitted, with success.

But she jibbed furiously when the sisters began to consult him about her personal affairs.

" Roger, don't you think that Alwynne——? "

But here Roger was invariably offhand and non-committal. Curiously, however, this attitude, correct as it was, did not appease Alwynne. But she was forced, at least, to admit that he could, on occasion, be tactful.

The last week of the term had begun. Alicia, at breakfast behind the coffee urn, was making her plans.

" It's a busy week. The Swains want us to go to lunch, Jean, only we haven't a day before Sunday, have we ? At least—there's Tuesday; it's only the dress-rehearsal. I can get out of that. Alwynne can represent me." She nodded benevolently.

There was a slight pause. Roger, glancing up, stared openly. Alwynne had turned as white as paper. Her words came stickily.

" Cousin Alice, I can't. I mean—I'd rather—I don't want to go much, if you don't mind."

Alicia blessed herself.

"But, my dear! Why not? I thought you'd be looking forward——Oh, I suppose you've watched it so often, already."

"No—I haven't seen it; I'm afraid rehearsals bore me——" Alwynne broke off with an attempt at a light laugh.

"But you've been up to Compton so much," Alicia's tone was reproachful. "I should have thought you would have been sufficiently interested——"

"Oh, I am! Only—you see I've got letters to write—to Elsbeth——"

"Well, you've got all the week to write in! Are you so afraid of being bored? Compton wouldn't be flattered. We rather pride ourselves on our acting, you know! My dear, we're expected to go—must give the performers some sort of an audience to get them into training for the night. You ought to understand, of all people! Don't you ever give plays at your school?"

Alwynne was silent, but prompted by an instinct she could not have explained, she turned to Roger, stolid behind his eggs and bacon. She said nothing, but she looked at him desperately. He gave an imperceptible nod. He had been watching her intently.

"But, dear Alwynne——" Jean was chirruping her version of Alicia's remarks when Roger's calm voice interrupted—

"I say, Alicia! I thought you and Jean were coming with me! I can't go on the night itself. Of course you must come. Go to your lunch on Sunday—I'll look after Alwynne. But I'm not going up to Compton without you. Spoil all the fun."

"Of course, if Roger wants us——" began Jean quickly.

"Oh, I didn't want to miss it," retreated Alicia hastily. "I only thought the Swains——But of course Sunday would do."

"I met old Swain yesterday," said Roger, "travelled up to town with him. He was very full of his daughter's engagement."

"Engagement!" Alicia and Jean swooped to the news, like gulls to a falling crust. It kept them busy till breakfast was over.

And Roger returned to his eggs and bacon with never a glance at Alwynne.

Alwynne, half an hour later in her own room, fighting certain memories, arguing herself fiercely out of her weakness, had yet time to puzzle her head over Roger Lumsden. How quick he had been—and how kind. ... Or had he noticed nothing? Had that adroit change of subject been accidental? That was much more likely.

She dismissed him from her mind. She wished she could dismiss all the thoughts that filled her mind as easily.

Alwynne was grateful enough to Roger, however, when Tuesday came and he set out for Compton, an aunt on either arm : but on Sunday she had to pay for her non-attendance. Hurrying down, a little late, to lunch, she was half-way through her usual apologies before she realized that neither Jean nor Alicia were in their places. Of course—they were going to the Swains' . . . Their nephew, however, waiting gravely behind his chair, admitted her excuses with a little air of acknowledging them to be necessary that ruffled her at once, though she had promised herself to be pleasant. After all, she was staying, as she had told herself several times already, with Jean and Alicia. Once more she applied herself, quite unsuccessfully, to snubbing his air of host. Roger listened to her in some amusement; her ungracious ways disturbed him no more than the runnings and peckings of an angry bird, and her charming manner to his aunts and occasional whim of friendliness to himself, had prevented him from pigeon-holing her definitely as a pretty young shrew. He was inclined to like her, for Jean and Alicia had confessed themselves absurdly taken with the girl, and he was accustomed to be influenced by their judgment; but the touch of hostility that usually showed itself in her manner to him puzzled as much as it amused him.

He enjoyed baiting her, yet he thought, carelessly, that it was a pity she should have inaugurated guerilla warfare. She looked as if she could have been pleasant company for his spare time if she had chosen. However, he would have little enough spare time, for the next few weeks, anyhow. . . . he had promised Jean to set to work seriously at the renovation of her garden. . . . He should be thankful for a visitor requiring neither escort nor attention .

Yet, naturally, her independence piqued him. He eyed her swiftly, as she sat at his right hand. She was a curious girl, he thought, to be so pretty and well-dressed, and yet so self-sufficing. Girls, apparently of her type, (he thought of his American cousins) usually needed a good deal of admiration to keep them contented.

She did not look altogether contented, though. . . . there were lines and puckers at the corners of her large eyes, that were surely out of place. . . . nineteen, wasn't she? She had had a breakdown, of course. . . . rather absurd, for such a child. . . . Jean had hinted a guess at some trouble. . . .

A love affair, he supposed. That would account for her thorniness, her occasional air of absence and depression, that contrasted with her usual cheerfulness. . . . Yet that curious whim the other day—what had it meant? More than a whim, he imagined—her very lips had grown white. . . . He was quite sure that he had helped her out of a hole. . . . She might at least show a certain decent gratitude. . . . He wondered what she was thinking about, sitting there so silently. . . . she was generally talkative enough. . . . pretty quarrelsome, too. He supposed she was having a fit of the blues. . . . He had better talk to her, perhaps. . . .

Alwynne, eating her wing of chicken, was merely and sheerly shy. She was garrulous enough with women, but she did not in the least know how to talk to men. Therefore and naturally she was full of theories. She had vague ideas that they had to be amused as babies have to be amused, but confronted with the prospect of a prolonged *tete-d-lete*, without Alicia or Jean to retire upon, she had nothing whatever to say. Yet she had been taught by Elsbeth to consider a lack of table-talk as a lack of manners, and was irritated with herself for her silence, and still more irritated with Roger for his.

She met his belated attempts at conversation none too graciously—was bored by the boat-race, and would have nothing to say to the weather; though she thawed to his catalogue of copses and plantations in the neighbourhood, where certain wild flowers she had not yet discovered might be found.

But it was impossible for Alwynne to be silent long, and by the time they had adjourned to the drawing-room, the pair were talking easily enough. Roger did not find himself bored. He had, from the beginning, recognized that she was no fool, that her remarks owed their comicality to her phrasing of them, and that essentially they were shrewd, her acrobatic intellect swinging easily across the gaps in her education. The gaps were certainly there. He would marvel at her amazing ignorance, only to be tripped up by her unexpected display of authoritative knowledge. Gradually he began to analyse and discriminate, to see that she was naturally observant. Her remarks on life as she knew it, were as illuminating as original. She had humour and a nice sense of caricature. But when she, as it were, hoisted herself on the shoulders of the women about her, and from that level peered curiously at an outer, alien world, her insight failed her, her views grew distorted and merely grotesque. He thought

he guessed the reason. She was no longer gazing, critical and clear-eyed, at known surroundings, but, still supported by the opinions of the women of her circle, was seeing what she had expected to see, what she had been told by them that she would see.

For all her air of modern girl, her independence, her store of book experience, she was comically conventual in her curiosities and intolerances, in her prim company manners and uncontrollable lapses into unconventionality. She had an air of not being at her ease; yet he guessed that it was merely the unaccustomed environment that disturbed her poise. He could see her handling surely enough a crowd of schoolgirls. He was equally certain that she ruled through sheer, easy popularity. She had dignity in spite of her whimsies, but he could not imagine her intimidating even a schoolgirl.

But most of all her attitude to himself amused him. She had a certain veiled antagonism of manner, that was allied to the antagonism of the small child to any innovation. She talked to him readily enough (and he, for that matter, to her) yet she was always on the defensive, inquisitive yet wary. He felt that if she had been ten years younger, she would have circled about him and poked.

A stray phrase explained her to him.

They had discussed the latest raid. At AlWynne's age and period all conversational roads led to the suffrage question, and he had found her re-hash of Mona Hamilton's arguments sufficiently entertaining. He guessed a plagiarism of the matter, but the manner was obviously her own. She was full of second-hand indignation over the conduct of a certain Cabinet Minister.

"He won't even see them!" she explained grievously. "Not even a deputation from the constitutional section! Just because some women are fools—and burn things——" The pause was eloquent. "It's so utterly unreasonable," declaimed Alwynne. "But of course men are unreasonable," said Alwynne, pensively reflective.

"Are they?"

"All I know are, anyhow."

He considered her ingenuous countenance—

"If it's not a delicate question—how many do you know I " said Roger softly.

She looked at him, mildly surprised.

"Hundreds 1 In books, that is."

" Oh—books ! I meant real life."

" Surely a page of Shakespeare is more real than dozens of real people's lives."

" Side issue ! I'm not to be deflected. How many men do you know, in real life, well enough to discuss the suffrage with ? "

" I'm always kept at school the day the vicar comes to tea," she said suggestively.

" Who else ? "

She saw his drift, but defended herself, smiling.

" The assistants are most intelligent at the circulating library."

" Who else ? "

" There were music masters at school. I didn't mean *you* were unreasonable," she deprecated.

He began to laugh, openly, mischievously, delighting in her discomfiture.

" Anyhow. I know a lot about women," said Alwynne heatedly. He eyed her respectfully.

" I'm sure you do. But we were talking of men. And on the whole—you make me a polite exception—as a result of your wide knowledge, your complicated experience of Us—as a class—you consider that we are unreasonable ? "

But he spoke into space. Alwynne had retired, pinkly, to a sofa and a novel. But he thought, as he settled to his own reading, that he heard a strangled chuckle. Alwynne, caught napping, always tickled Alwynne.

Over the top of his book, he considered her bent head approvingly. He liked her sense of fun. It was not every girl who could appreciate the smut on her own nose. . . . quite a pretty nose too. . . . indeed the whole profile was unexceptionable. . . . He noticed how well the patch of sky and the slopes of Witch Hill framed it. . . . and her hair. . . . it regularly mopped up the sunlight! He felt that he wanted to take the great heavy rope and twist it like a wet cloth till the gold dropped out on to the floor in shining pools.

He supposed she would be called a beautiful woman. . . . He had always looked upon a beautiful woman as an improbable possibility, like a millionaire or an archbishop—whom you might meet any day, but somehow never did. . . . Yet he was in the same house with one—and she his semi-demi cousin. . . . Yes—she was certainly beautiful. . . .

Here Alwynne, who had not been entirely absorbed, looked

up and caught his eye. Neither quite knew how to meet the other's unexpected scrutiny. Roger, less agile than Alwynne, stared solemnly until she looked away.

Alwynne gave a little inaudible sigh. She was boring him, of course. . . . It was pretty obvious. . . . Yet he had been quite nice all through lunch. . . . It was a pity. . . . She wondered if he wanted to read, or if she ought to go on talking? She racked her brains for something to say to him. It was not so easy to talk if he would not do his share. . . . She supposed she had talked too much about the suffrage. . . . Men never liked to be contradicted. . . . She glanced at him swiftly, and met his look once more, and once more he stared, till her dropping lids released him. Then he lit his pipe.

She shrugged her shoulders.

She thought it very rude of him to leave off talking. . . . Silence was oppressive unless you knew people well. . . . It snubbed you. . . . Especially when you had been, as Alwynne feared she had, holding forth a trifle. . . . She supposed he had put her down as a talkative bore. . . . Elsbeth always said that strangers thought her enthusiasms were pose. . . . as if it mattered what strangers thought! She hated strangers. . . . She was always fantastic with new acquaintances. . . . It was the form her shyness took. If Roger chose to think she was posing. . . . It didn't affect her anyway. . . . She was only too glad to be able to read in peace. . . . Hang Roger!

She settled herself to her reading.

For five long minutes they both read steadily. But Alwynne's book was not interesting; she began to flutter the pages, her thoughts once more astray.

It was rather a shame of The Dears to desert her . . . to leave her to entertain a strange man who didn't like her. . . . It made her look a fool. . . . She hated boring people. . . . If she bored their precious nephew as much as the book on her lap bored her! . . . She wondered why, with all the library to choose from, she had pitched on it. Of course, it was Roger's suggestion. . . . Well, she didn't think much of his taste. . . . Or perhaps he imagined it was the sort of stuff to appeal to her? She flung up her chin indignantly, to find his serious and critical eyes once more concerned with her. She met them with a raising of eyebrows—a hint of cool defiance. It was Roger's turn to retire into his book.

He was an odd sort of a man. . . . She wondered what Clare would think of him? As if Clare would bother her head. . . . But then he wasn't Clare's cousin. But Clare would be out in the woods after the wild hyacinths. . . . Somebody had said it was blue with them in the little wood behind the house. . . . She must send Clare a boxful to-morrow. . . . or to-day? She supposed there was an evening post. . . . It was a pity to waste such a heavenly afternoon. . . .

She stole yet another glance at Roger; he was evidently engrossed at last. It would not be rude? After all, what did it matter? He wasn't too polite himself! She drove her book viciously down the yielding side of the Chesterfield, swished to the open French window, and so out. The gravel crunched moistly beneath her thin shoes; she could feel every pebble. She glanced back into the drawing-room. All quiet. But by the time she had changed, the man might have come out. . . . She would change afterwards. . . . The smooth lawn sloped invitingly—beyond lay the rose walk and the wood, little Witch Wood that she had never yet explored, just because it was always at hand.

She picked up her silken skirts and took to her heels.

It was exactly half an hour later that Roger's book also grew dull to the point of imbecility. He shut it with a bang, stirred the sun-drowned fire, and knocked out his pipe against the shining dogs. Then he too walked out on to the terrace.

He wondered where the girl had got to. Then he frowned. Little half-moons dented the wet yellow path and the stretch of grass beyond it. It was very careless, cutting up the turf like that. . . . If there was one thing he hated. . . . Of course she was town-bred. . . . could not be expected to realize the sacredness of a lawn. . . . But he must certainly tell her. . . . He might as well find her and tell her at once. . . . Then he laughed. Alwynne's high heels had betrayed her. The tracks led straight to the wood. So that was the lure. . . . He remembered saying that the hyacinths would probably be out. . . .

He wondered if she knew her way. . . . It wasn't a large wood. . . . Perhaps he had better go and see. . . . and warn her off the lawn coming back? He hesitated. His eyes fell on Jean's forgotten bodge, lying by the border. If the hyacinths were out, she would need a basket. . . . She had not taken one. . . . Trust her to forget such a detail. . . . She would be glad of it though. . . . He tipped out the weeds into a neat

pile and jumping the narrow bed, ran down, in his turn, towards the wood.

Alicia and Jean, home to tea, were annoyed to find the fire out.

The gardener, rolling the lawn next day, thought as ill of hob-nailed boots as of high French heels.

CHAPTER XXXH

ALWYNNB left the garden behind her and crossed the stretch of grass, half lawn, half paddock, that lay between kitchen-garden and wood. It was fenced with riotous hedges, demure for the moment in dove-grey honeysuckle and star of Bethlehem, with no hint in their puritan apparel of the brionies and eglantines that were to follow. About the hedge borders the grass grew tall and rank, and, as she watched, the wind would stir it into a sea of emerald and the parsley-blossoms sway above it like snatches of drifting foam. Beyond the hedge shadow, 'Nicholas Nye,' the one-eyed donkey, reposed Celestially among the buttercups, which, making common cause with the afternoon sun, had turned his grazing ground into a Field of the Cloth of Gold.

For a moment she was minded to content herself with all the buttercups on earth to gather, and to go no further that day; but staring down the dazzling slope, her eyes rested once more upon the pleasant darkness of the goal for which she had been bound. Among the nearer tree trunks were stripes and chequerings of blue—the blue that is lovelier than the sea, the one blue in the world to the flower-lover. At once, indifferently, she left the buttercups to Nicholas Nye and hurried on and into the wood.

There were hyacinths everywhere, hyacinths by the million. It was as if the winds had torn her robes from the faint, spring sky, and had flung them to earth, and she now bent above them naked and shivering.

Alwynne wandered from patch to patch in an ecstasy of delight. As usual, her pleasure shaped itself into exclamations, phrases, whole sentences of the letters she would write to Clare Hartill of her experiences. If only she could have Clare with her, she thought, to see and hear and touch and smell—to share the loveliness she was enjoying. Her thoughts flew to Italy, to their crowded month of beautiful sights together. She

laughed—she would discard all those memories for love of this present vision. ... If only Clare could see it. ... She could never describe it properly.... adjectives welled up in her mind and dispersed again, like bubbles in a glass of water. The stalks and the hoarse ring of the hyacinth bells fascinated her. Clare was forgotten. She began to pick for the sake of picking.

The hot silence of early afternoon lay upon tree and bird and air. Alwynne, moving from blue clump to blue clump, grew ashamed of the rustle of her dress and the scrunch of twigs and soaked leaves beneath her feet, and trod softly; even her own calm breathing sounded too loudly for the perfect peace of the place and the hour.

She picked steadily, greedily—she had never before had as many flowers as she wanted, and there was inexpressible pleasure in filling her arms till she could hold no more; yet, some twenty minutes later, as she straightened herself at last, a little giddily, and looked about her over the pile of azure bells, there was no sign of bareness, for all she had gathered; she still stood to her knees in a lake of blue and green and gold.

She stretched herself lazily as she considered the flowers about her and wondered at their luxuriance. They were thicker and longer-stemmed than the mass of those she carried: the leaves were juicy and shining like dark swords: the last dozen of her armful had flecked her hands and dress with milky syrup. The ground, too, was black and boggy, and sucked at her feet as she moved. Suddenly she realized that the trees grew thick and close together—that the patches of sunlight were far apart—and that she had wandered farther into the wood than she had intended. She thought that she had picked enough, more than enough for Elsbeth as well as Clare; that it was time to be getting home. She had no idea of the hour. ... It would not do to risk being late. . . .

She moved forward uncertainly.

She had had a blessed afternoon: she had surrendered herself to the sounds and sights and smells of the spring, to the warmth of the sun and the touch of the wind, till every sense was drunken with pleasure. _ But her ecstasy had been impersonal and thoughtless: she had enjoyed too completely to have had knowledge of her enjoyment. With the return to realization of place and time, her mood was changing. She was no longer of the wood, but in it merely; wandering in the dark heart of it, no dryad returned and welcome, but a stranger, one Alwynne

Durand, in thin shoes and an unsuitable dress, with the wood's flowers, not her own, in her hands. Stolen flowers—their weight was suddenly a burden to her. She felt guilty, and had an odd, sudden wish to put them down tenderly at the foot of a tree, hide them with grasses and run for her life. She laughed at the idea as she looked for the path—what were flowers for, but picking'« Yet she could not get rid of the feeling that she had been doing wrong, and that even now she was being watched, and would, in due time, be caught and punished, her stolen treasures still in her hands.

But wild flowers are free to all—and the wood was Roger Lumsden's wood ! He had told her that he rented it.

She moved backwards and forwards, turning hurriedly hither and thither, trampling the hyacinths and stumbling on the uneven ground, unreasonably flurried that she could not find any path. She could not even track her own footsteps.

It was very strange, she thought, when she had penetrated so easily the depths of the wood, that the return should be so difficult. She had thought it a more copse. She put her free hand to her eyes, scanning the wall of greenery in all directions. She fancied that at one point the trees grew less densely, and set out, scrambling over rough ground towards the faint light.

But in spite of her hurry she advanced slowly. The thin switches of the undergrowth whipped her as she pushed them aside, and the huge briars twisted themselves about her like live things. Twice the slippery moss brought her to her knees, and the faint light grew no stronger as she pressed forward. She began to feel frightened, though she knew the sensation to be absurd. It was impossible to be lost in a little wood, half a mile across. . . . It was merely a question of walking straight on till one emerged on open fields. . . .

She told herself so, and tried to be amused at her adventure, and hummed a confident little tune as she plodded on, very careful not to look behind her. Her shoes, thudding and squelching in the wet mess of mould and green stuff, made more noise than one would have thought possible for one pair of feet, and woke the oddest echoes.

Of course, it was impossible that any one could be following her. . . . But the wood was so horribly silent that her own breathing and clumsy footfalls (there could be nothing else) counterfeited the noises of pursuit. . . . She could have sworn there wa» a presence at her elbow, in her rear, moving as she

moved, stumbling **aa** she stumbled. Twice she faced round abruptly, standing still—but she saw nothing but the wall of vegetation, motionless, silent, yet insistently alive. She felt that every tree, every leaf, every blade of grass, was watching her with green, unwinking eyes. There was nothing more in the wood than there had been a pleasant hour ago—less indeed, for she realized suddenly that the sun had gone in and that it was cold; yet she owed to herself at last that she was nervous, vaguely uneasy. Instantly, by that mere act of recognition, fright was born in her—unreasonable and unreasoning fright, that, in the length of a thought, pervaded her entire personality, crisping her hair, catching at her throat, paralysing her mind. The wood-panic had her in its grip—the age-old terror that still lies in wait where trees are gathered together, though the god that begot it be dead these nineteen hundred years.

She began to run.

It was impossible to pass quickly through the tangled undergrowth; but sheer fright gave her skill to avoid real obstacles, strength to crash over and through the mere wreckage of the wood. She turned and doubled like a hare, yet desperately, with the hare's terror of the sudden turn that might confront her with the presence at her heels. She could endure its pursuit, but she knew that its revelation would be more than she could bear. She was so far merely and indefinitely frightened, but to face the unknown would be to confront fear itself. And she was more frightened of fear than of any evil she knew. She could, she thought, meet pain or sickness or any mere misery, with sufficient calmness, but the fear of fear was an obsession. She tore through the wood, shaken and gasping with terror of the greater terror she every moment expected to be forced to undergo; for almost the only clear thought remaining to her, in that onrush of panic, was the realization that there was, at her elbow, in her heart, physical or metaphysical, she knew not which, some as yet veiled fact waiting to be revealed, in view of which her present agitation was trivial and meaningless.

She ran on, blind and blundering; yet her feet were so clogged by the weight of earth and wet, her thoughts by the sweat of the fear that was on them, that neither seemed to move for all her willing. And all the while, another part of her consciousness sat aloof, critical and detached, laughing at her for an excitable fool, analysing, in Clare's crispest accents, the illusions which were bewildering her, and wondering coolly that any

girl of her age could so let her imagination run away with her.

She pulled herself together with an immense effort of will.

That was the truth. . . . It was her own imagination that was literally and physically running away with her, whipping her tired body into unnecessary exertion, flogging her into mad flight from this pleasant, harmless place, with its hideous and horrible suggestion of evil at hand. . . . But the evil was in her own mind. . . . There was nothing pursuing her, no vague ghost at her elbow. . . . The horror was in herself, to be faced, and fought, and trampled. . . . Running would not help her. . . . she would only carry her terror with her. . . . For an instant she had a lightning glimpse of the reasons of the Sadducean attitude to personality, and its desperate denials of future existence. She was suddenly appalled at the hideous possibility of existing eternally with her own undying thoughts for company. She wondered if there were really such a thing as soul suicide, and thought that, if so, many must have chosen to commit it.

Here her shifting, crowding thoughts blotted out the glimmer of understanding, as flies clustering on a window-pane can blot out light; yet the word *suicide* remained in her mind, disturbing, vaguely suggestive. It was connected with something terrible—she could not remember what—that in its turn was one with the vague horror at her elbow, that walked with the echo of her footsteps and panted with the echoes of her breaths, and yet was not real at all, but only in her mind.

She did not believe she should ever find her way out of the wood. . . . The hyacinths in her arms were so heavy—a queerly familiar weight: and the sun had gone in, which had, somehow, something to do with the trouble. . . . She felt the black depression of the winter months that she had left Utterbridge to escape settling down on her once more. She turned hopelessly to elude it, but it surrounded her like a fog, as indeed she half believed it to be. She supposed they had sudden fogs in the country, when the sun went in. . . . And the sun had gone in because she had picked all the hyacinths. . . . She remembered the story clearly enough now. . . . The sun had played at quoits with a child, and had thrown amiss, and killed it, and the purple blood had trickled down from the child's forehead. . . . So the sun had turned it into purple hyacinths. . . . But she, Alwynne, had been gathering all the hyacinths, and they were a heavy bunch, heavy as a dead child's body. . . . and in another minute they

would be disenchanted, and she would be carrying a dead child's body in her arms. . . .

She stood still, gazing down at the flowers, white and glassy-eyed with terror, wondering that she was still alive and not yet mad. For she knew that the fear she had feared was upon her at last. She dared not blink lest in that second the change should take place, and she should find Louise, long buried, in her arms. Because, of course, it was Louise who had been following her all the while. . . . Louise—who had committed suicide. . . . She was following Alwynne, because it was Alwynne's fault. . . . Clare had said so. . . . Well—at least she could tell Louise that she had meant no harm. . . .

She waited, swayed back against a tree trunk, the flowers a dead weight over her arm. She held them gently, lest a rough movement should wake the horror they hid. With what was left of sanity she prayed.

The trees encircled her, watching. From far away there came once more a sound of footsteps.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ROGER set out at a quick pace for the wood, the basket rattling lightly on his arm; but the track of AlWynne's shoes was lost in the deep grass of the paddock, and he hesitated, wondering where he should look for her. Followed a cupboard-love scene with Nicholas Nye, who accompanied him to the boundary of his kingdom, snuffling windily in the empty bodge. He brayed disgustedly when Roger left him, his ancient lips curling backward over yellow stumps, in a smile that was an iiibult. He had the air ot knowing exactly where Roger was going, and of being lecrmgly amused

For ten minutes Roger wandered about, starting aside from the pathway half a dozen times, deceived by a swaying branch, or the deceptive pink and white of distant birch bark. He tramped on into the thickness of the wood, till at last, through a thinning of trees, a hundred yards to his left, he caught a ghimpse of gold, that could only, he told himself, be AlWynne's hair. He frowned. It was just like the girl to go floundering into the only boggy bit of the wood, when two thirds were drained and dry, and thick with flowers. . . . It was sheer spirit of contradiction ! She would catch cold of course; and he would, not to mince matters, be stunk out with eucalyptus for the next ten days . . . and The Dears would fuss . . . he knew them ! His fastidiousness was always revolted by a parade of handkerchiefs and bleared eyes. He was accustomed to insist that disease was as disgraceful as dirt: and that there was not a pin to choose between Dartmoor and the London Hospital as harbourage for criminals. But he could always dismount from his hobby-horse for any case of suffering that came his way. He could give his time, his money, or his tenderness, with a matter-of-course promptitude that relieved all but a tender-skinned few of any behief that they had reason to be grateful to him.

Roger, his eye on the distant halo, crashed through the undergrowth at a great rate, emerging into a little natural clearing, 4o find Alwynne facing him, a bare half-dcw&en yards away.

The full sight of her pulled him up short.

She was standing—lying upright, rather, for she seemed incapable of self-support—flattened against a big grey oak. One arm, flung backwards, clutched and scrabbled at the bark; the other, crooked shelteringly, supported a mass of bluebells. Her face was grey, her mouth half open, her eyes wide and pale. Very obviously she did not see him.

" Alwynne ! " he exclaimed.

She cowered. He exclaimed again, astonished and not a little alarmed—

" Alwynne! Are you ill? What on earth has happened? "

She flung up her head, staring.

" Roger? " she said incredulously.

Then her face began to work. He never forgot the expression of relief that flowed across it. It was like the breaking up of a frozen pool.

" Why, it's you ! " cried Alwynne. " It's you ! It's only you ! " The flowers dropped lingeringly from her slack hands, and she swayed where she stood. He crossed hastily to her and she clung helplessly to his arm. She looked dazed and stupid.

" Of course it is," he said. " Who did you think it was ? "

Alwynne looked at him.

" Louise," she said, " I thought it was Louise. She's come before, but never in the daytime. A ghost can't walk in the daytime. But this place is so dark, she might think it was night here, don't you think ? "

He gave her arm a gentle shake.

" Let's get out of this, Alwynne," he began persuasively. " I think you're rather done for. There's been a hot sun to-day, and you've been stooping till you're dizzy. Come on. What a lot of flowers you've picked ! Come, let's get out of this place."

" Yes," she said; " let's get out of this place."

" What about your bunch ? " he questioned, glancing down at the hyacinths' heaped disorder. " Don't you want it ? "

He felt her shiver.

" No," she said, " no." She hesitated. " Could we hide it ? Cover it up? It ought to be buried. I can't leave it—just lying there——" There was a catch in her voice.

He concealed his astonishment and looked about him.

" Of course not," he said cheerfully. " Here—what about this ? "

A huge tussock of bleached grass, its sodden leaves as long as

a woman's hair, caught his eye. He parted the heavy mass and showed her the little cave of dry soil below.

"What about this? They'll be all right here," he suggested gravely.

Alwynne nodded.

"Yes—put it in quickly," she said.

Without a word, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, he did as she asked. Then, rising and slipping her arm through his own, he pushed on quite silently, holding back the strong pollard shoots, clearing aside the brambles, till they reached the uneven footpath once more, that led them in less than five minutes to the further edge of the wood. As they emerged into the open fields, he felt the weight on his arm lessening. He glanced at his companion, and saw that there was once more a tinge of colour in her cheek.

She drew a deep breath and looked at him.

"I thought I should never get out again," she said dispassionately, as one stating a bald fact.

"Get where?"

"Out of that wood. You were just in time. I thought I was caught. I should have been, if you hadn't come."

Then she grew conscious of his expression, and answered it—

"I suppose you think I'm mad."

"I do rather."

"I don't wonder. It doesn't much matter——" Her voice flagged and strained.

They walked on in silence.

She began again abruptly.

"Of course you thought I was mad. I knew you would. I do myself, sometimes. Any one would. Even Clare. That's why I never told any one. But it never happened when I was awake before."

"I wonder if you would tell me exactly what happened?"

"I was frightened," she began irresolutely.

"For a moment I wondered if a tramp——"

She laughed shakily.

"I'm a match for the average tramp, I think. I'm head of the games."

He was amused.

"You'd tell him what you thought of him, I'm sure."

But already her smile had grown absent; she was relapsing into her abstraction.

They had crossed the field as they talked, and struck into the little gravelled path that led to the monster glass-houses on the other side of the hedge. A wide gate barred their progress. Roger manipulated the rusty chain in silence for a moment, then, as the gate yawned open, turned to her pleasantly——

"Won't you have a look round, as we've come so far? You're in my territory now, and I've a houseful of daffodils just bursting."

His calm matter-of-fact manner had its effect. Alwynne absorbed in her sick thoughts, found herself listening to his account of his houses and his experiments, as one listens subconsciously to the slur of a distant water-course. She did not take in the meaning of his words, but his even voice soothed her fretted nerves.

Roger was perfectly aware of her inattention. He was not brilliant, but he was equipped with experience and common-sense and kindness of heart; and above all he was observant. The Alwynne of his acquaintance, pretty, amusing, clever, had attracted him sufficiently, had even, as he admitted to himself as he went in search of her, been able to entice him from his Sunday comfort to wander quarrelling in wet fields. But the Alwynne he had come upon half-an-hour 'iter was a revelation; at a glance every preconceived notion of her character was swept away.

His first idea was that she had been frightened by roughs, but her manner and expression speedily contradicted it. She was, he perceived, struggling, and not for the first time, with some overwhelming trouble of the mind. He had been appalled by the fear in her eyes. He remembered Jean's account. Elsbeth had been worried about her for a long time: ill-health and depression: she believed there had been some sort of a shock—a child had died suddenly at the school. . . .

Alwynne's gay and piquant presence had made him forget, till that moment, such rudiments of her history as he had heard. But seeing her distress, he was angry that he had been obtuse, and amazed at her skill in concealing whatever trouble it might be that was oppressing her. All the kindliness of his nature awoke at sight of her haunted, hunted air; he bestirred himself to allay her agitation; he resolved then and there to help her if he could.

He had recognized at once that she was in no state for argument or explanation, and had devoted himself to calming her, falling in with her humour, and showing no surprise at the extravagance

of her remarks. He had her quieted, almost herself, by the time they had reached his nursery and descended brick steps into a bath of sweet-smelling warmth.

Alwynne exclaimed.

The glass-house was very peaceful. Above a huge Lent lily the spring's first butterfly hovered and was still awhile, then quivered again and fluttered away, till his pale wings grew invisible against the aisles of yellow bloom. The short, impatient barks of Roger's terrier outside the door came to them, dulled and faint. The sun poured down upon the already heated air.

Alwynne walked down the long narrow middle way, hesitating, enjoying, and moving on again, much, Roger thought, as the butterfly had done. She said little, but her delight was evident. Roger was pleased; he liked his flowers to be appreciated. But he, too, said little; he was considering his course of action.

At the end of the conservatory was a square of brick flooring on which stood a table with a tobacco jar, and a litter of magazines; beside it an ancient basket-chair. Roger pulled it forward.

"This is my sanctum," he said. "Won't you sit down? I do a lot of work herti in the winter."

Alwynne sank into the creaking wicker-work with a sigh of relief.

"I shall never get up again," she said. "It's too comfortable. I'm tired,"

"Of course." He smiled at her. "Don't you worry. You needn't budge till you want to. I'll get some tea."

"You mustn't bother. It'll be cold. It's miles to the house," said Alwynne wearily.

He made no answer, but began to clear away the rubbish on the table. He moved deftly, light-footed, without clumsy or unnecessary noise; in spite of his size, his movements were always silent and assured.

She closed her eyes indifferently. She had said that she was tired; the word was as good as another where none were adequate to express her utter exhaustion. She felt that, in a sense, she was in luck to be so tired that she could not think. . . . She knew that later she must brace herself to an examination of the nightmare experience of the afternoon, to renew her struggle against the devils of her imagination; but for the moment her weakness was her safeguard, and she could lie relaxed and thoughtless, mesmerized by the flooding sunshine and the pulsing scents and

the quiet movements of the man beside her. She wondered what he was doing, but she was too tired to open her eyes, or to interpret to herself the faint sounds she heard. She thought dreamily that he was as kind as Elsbeth. She was grateful to him for not talking to her. He was a wonderfully understanding person. . . . He might have known her for years. . . . He made her feel safe . . . that was a great gift. . . . If she, Alwynne, had been like that, kind and reassuring, to poor little Louise—if only she had understood—Louise would have come to her, then, instead of brooding herself to death. . . . Poor Louise. . . . Poor unhappy Louise. . . . And after all she had not been able to kill herself. . . . She was still alive, lying in wait for her, though she knew that Alwynne could not help her. . . . She would never go away, though they had left her outside in the cold—in the cold of the wood—and were safe in this warm summer land . . . she would be waiting when they came oixt again. . . . She shuddered as she thought of retracing her steps. She would ask Roger to take her home another way. . . . She would not have to explain. . . . He had not wanted explanation. . . . She was passionately grateful to him because he had not overwhelmed her with questions at their meeting. She could never explain, of course, because people would think her mad. . . . They might even send her to an asylum, if she told them. . . . She longed for the relief of confession, yet who would believe that she was merely a sane woman rendered desperate by evil dreams? Not Clare, certainly—not Elsbeth, though they loved her. . . . She would just have to go on fighting her terrors as best she could, till she or they were crushed. . . .

She sighed hopelessly and opened her eyes.

"Had a doze? Good! Tea's ready! I expect you want it," said Roger cheerfully.

She was surprised into normality, and began to smile as she looked about her.

The rickety table had been covered by a gay, chequered cloth. There was crockery, and a little green tea-pot, and a pile of short-bread at her elbow. A spirit-lamp and kettle were shelved incongruously between trays of daffodils.

Roger sat upon an upturned flower-pot, and beamed at her.

"Oh, how jolly!" cried Alwynne, the Alwynne once more of his former acquaintance. "Where did it come from?"

He showed her a cupboard against the wall, half hidden by a canopy of smilax.

"I always keep stores here," he confessed boyishly. "I used to when I was a kid. This is the old glass-house, you know, o» Great House land. I've built all the others. I used to to' Robinson Crusoe then, and now it's useful, when I'm busy, no» to have to go up to the house always. Won't you pour out?" Alwynne flashed a look at him.

"I don't believe it's that. You enjoy the—the maroonmg still. I should. I think it's perfectly delightful here."

"Well, Harris—my head-gardener—doesn't approve. Thinks it's *infra dig*. He told me once that he knew ladies enjoyed making parlours of their conservatories, and letting in draughts and killing the plants; but he was a nurseryman himself. However, I've broken him in to it. Oh, I say, there's no milk!"

"I don't take it. Clare—a friend of mine—never does, so I've got accustomed to it." She drank thirstily. "Oh, it's good! I didn't know I wanted my tea so."

"I did," he said significantly.

She coloured painfully: she would not look at him.

"I was very tired," she said lamely.

"Were you?" he asked her. "You weren't gone half an hour. Do you know it's only half-past three?"

He was very gentle; but she felt herself accused. She played uneasily with her rope of beads as she chose her words. Roger, for all his intentness, could not help noticing how white and slender her hands showed, stained though they were with hyacinth-milk, as they fingered the blue, glancing chain. They were thin though; and folio whig the outline of her wrist and arm and bare neck, he thought her cheek, for all its smooth youthfulness, was thin also, too thin—altogether too austere, for her age and way of life.. She had always been flushed in his presence, delightfully flushed with laughter, or anger, or embarrassment, and he had noticed nothing beyond her pretty colour. But now, he saw uneasily that there were hollows round her eyes, as if she slept little, and that there were hollows as well as dimples in her cheeks. He was astonished to find himself not a little perturbed at his discovery, so perturbed that he did not, for a moment, realize that she was speaking to him.

"I am very sorry," she was saying. "I'm afraid you thought—I'm afraid I was rather silly—in the wood. I was disturbed when you found me." Her words came jerkily. "I had not expected—that is—I did not expect—" She broke off. Her eyes implored him to leave her alone.

He would not understand their appeal.

" Yes, you expected——" he prompted her.

She controlled her voice with difficulty.

" Heavens knows ! " She laughed, with a pitiful little air of throwing him off the scent. " One gets frightened for no reason sometimes,"

" Does one ? "

" In the country—I'm town-bred." She smiled at him.

He made up his mind, though he felt brutal.

" You were expecting—Louise ? "

There was a silence. Slowly she lifted shaking hands, warding him off.

" No, no ! " she said. " For pity's sake. You are calling her back." Then, struck with a new idea, she grew, if possible, whiter still. " Unless," she said, whispering, " you saw her—you too 1 Then there is no hope. I thought it was in my mind—only in my mind—but if you saw her too——" Her voice failed.

He thrust in hastily, ready enough to comfort her, but knowing well that the time had not come. Yet he felt like a surgeon at his first operation.

" No, you are mistaken. There was no one. I don't even know who Louise is. Only you mentioned her—once or twice, you see."

" Did I ? " she said. Then, with an effort at a commonplace tone : " I was stupidly upset. You must excuse——"

He broke in.

" Who is Louise ? " he asked her bluntly.

" A ghost," said Alwynne, white to the lips.

Again they were blankly silent.

Then she spoke, with extraordinary passion—

" If you laugh—it will be wicked if you laugh at me.

" I'm not thinking of laughing," he said, with the petulance of extreme anxiety.

She met his look and shrugged her shoulders.

" Then you think I'm crazy," she began defiantly. " I can't help it, what you think," She changed the subject transparently. " Roger, it's nice here. What are the names of all these flowers ? Are those big ones daffodils, or jonquils, or narcissi ? I never know the difference. I never remember——" Her voice trailed into silence.

" But look here," he began, and stopped again abruptly, deep in thought.

The flame of the spirit-lamp on the shelf between them flickered and failed, and sputtered up again noisily. Mechanically he rose to extinguish it, and, still absently, cleared the little table of its china and eatables.

Then he sat down once more, and leant forward, his arms on the table, his expression determined, yet very friendly.

"Alwynne," he said, in his most matter-of-fact voice, "hadn't you better tell me all about it?"

"You?"

"Why not?" he said comfortably. "You'll feel ever so much better if you get it off your chest."

For an instant she hesitated: then she shook her head wearily.

"I would like to tell some one. But I can't. I sound mad, even to myself. I couldn't tell any one. I couldn't tell Elsbeth even."

"Of course not," he agreed. "You can't worry your own people."

"No, you can't, can you?" she said, grateful for his comprehension.

"Of course not. But you see—I'm different. Whatever your trouble is, it won't worry me—because I don't care for you like Elsbeth and your friends. So you can just ease off on me—d'you see? If I do think you mad, it just doesn't matter, does it? What does it matter telling some one a secret when you'll never see them again? Don't you see?" he argued reassuringly.

She nodded dumbly. The cheerful, impersonal kindness of his voice and air made her want to cry. She realized how she had been aching for sympathy.

"Don't you see?" he repeated.

"You wouldn't make fun?" she asked him. "You wouldn't tell any one? You wouldn't talk me over?"

"No, Alwynne," he said gravely.

For a moment her eyes searched his face wistfully; then with sudden decision, she began to speak.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ALWYNNE'S words, after the months of silence, came rushing out, breaking down all barriers, sweeping on in unnatural fluency. Yet she was simple and direct, entirely sincere; accepting him at his own valuation, impersonally, as confessor and comforter, without a side glance at the impression she might make, or its effect on their after relations.

She told him the story of Louise ; and he felt sick as he listened. Unintentionally, for she was obviously absorbed in her school and uncritical in her attitude to it, she gave him a vivid enough impression of the system in force, of the deliberate encouragement of much that he considered unhealthy, if not unnatural. He detected an hysterical tendency in the emulations and enthusiasms to which she referred. The gardener in him revolted at the thought of such congestion of minds and bodies. He felt as indignant as if he had discovered a tray of unthinned seedlings. Alwynne conveyed to him, more clearly than she knew, an idea of the forcing-house atmosphere that she, and those still younger than she, had been breathing. The friend she so constantly mentioned, repelled him; he thought of her with distaste, as of an unscrupulous and unskilful hireling; he was amazed at the affection of Alwynne's references to her. Only in connection with the dead child was there a hint of uncertainty in her attitude. There perhaps, she admitted, had ' Clare ' been, not unkind—never and impossibly unkind—but perhaps, with the best of motives, mistaken. She had not understood Louise. Roger agreed silently and grimly enough. She had not understood Louise, whom she had killed, nor this loyal and affectionate child, whom she was driving into melancholia, nor any one it appeared, nor anything, but the needs of her own barrenly emotional nature. . . . He was horrified at the idea of such a woman, such a type of woman, in undisputed authority, moulding the mothers of the next generation. . . . He had never considered the matter seriously, but he supposed she

was but one of many. . . . There must be something poisonous in a system that could render possible the placing of such women in such positions. . . .

"Then what happened, after that poor child's death?" he asked. "She left, of course?"

"Who?"

"Your friend—' Clare '—Miss——?"

"Hartill. Oh, no! Why should she?"

"I should have thought—suicide—bad for the school's reputation?"

"Then you think it was—that—too? It was supposed to be an accident."

"How do you mean, 'supposed'?"

"There was an inquest, you see. I had to go. I was so frightened all the time, of what I might slip into saying. But they all agreed that it was an accident. She was fond of curling up in the window-seats with her books. Oh, she was a queer little thing! When you came on her suddenly, she used to look up like a startled baby colt. She always looked as if she wanted some one to run to. Well, there was no guard, you see, only an inch of ledge—she had not been well—she must have felt faint—and fallen. They all said it was that. I was so thankful—for Clare's sake. She could not reproach herself—after such a verdict. It was 'Accidental Death,' Only—I—of course—I knew. Some of them guessed—Clare—and I believe Elsbeth, though we never discussed it—and I knew. But nobody said anything—nobody has, ever since, except once Clare told me—what she feared. I never managed to persuade her that it was an accident, but at least she doesn't know for certain, and at least she knows she couldn't help it. And now we never speak of it. But," know——"

"What do you know?" he said. "You found out something?"

"She did—she did kill herself," said Alwynne. "Oh, Roger, she did. I've known it all along—I should have guessed anyway, I think, because I knew how unhappy she was. I knew how awfully she cared about Clare. Clare was very good to her sometimes. Clare was fond of her, you know. Clare takes violent fancies like that, to clever people. And Louise was brilliant, of course. Clare was charmed with her. Only Louise—this is how I've thought it out; oh, I've had time to think it out—she just got drunk on it, the happiness, I mean, of being

cared for. She hadn't much of a home. She was rather an ugly duckling to her people, I think. Then Clare made a fuss of her, and you see, she was so little, she couldn't see that—it didn't mean much to Clare. And I don't think grown-up people understand how girls are—they have to worship some one, at that age. Clare doesn't quite understand, I think. She is too sensible herself to realize how girls can be silly. She is awfully good to them, but, of course, she never dreams how miserable they get when she gets bored with them. She can't help it."

Roger's face was expressive—but Alwynne was staring at the uneasy butterfly.

"It doesn't matter, as a rule. Only Louise had no one else—and it just broke her heart. If she had been grown-up it would have been like being in love."

Roger made an inarticulate remark.

^{4<} "Don't you see?" said Alwynne innocently.

"I see." He was carefully expressionless.

"And then she was run down and did her work badly. And Clare hates illness—besides—she thought Louise was slacking. I tried to make her see——Oh," she cried passionately, "why didn't I try harder? It's haunting me, Roger, that I didn't try enough. I ought to have known how she felt—I was near her age. Clare couldn't be expected to—but Louise talked to me sometimes—I ought to have seen. I did see. All that summer she went about so white and miserable—and Clare was angry with her—and I hadn't the pluck to tackle either of them. I was afraid of being a busybody—I was afraid of upsetting Clare. You see—I'm awfully fond of Clare. She makes you forget everything but herself. And, of course, she never realized what was wrong with Louise. I didn't altogether, either—you do believe that?" She broke off, questioning pitifully, as if he were her judge.

He nodded.

"Right till the day of the play, I never really saw how crazily miserable she was growing. She was crazy—don't you think?"

"You want to think so?" He considered her curiously.

"It mitigates it."

"That she killed herself?"

"It's deadly sin. Or don't you believe——?"

"No," he said. "There's such a thing as the right of exit—but go on."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you what I think presently. I want all your thoughts now——There were signs——?"

"Of insanity? No. But she was—exaggerated—too intelligent—too babyish—too brilliant—too everything. She felt things too much. She failed in an exam.—sheer overwork—just before."

"I see. Was she ambitious?"

"Only to please Clare. Clare didn't like her failing."

"Did she tell the child so?" His tone was stern.

"Oh, no!"

"You're sure?"

"Clare would have told me if they had had a row. She tells me everything."

He smiled a little.

"How old is your friend?"

She looked surprised.

"Oh—thirty-three—thirty-four—thirty-five. I don't really know. She never talks about ages and looks and that sort of thing. She rather despises all that. She laughs at me for—liking clothes . . ." Her little blush made her look natural again. "But why?"

"I wondered. Then there was nothing to upset the child?"

"Only the failing. And then the play. I told you. She was awfully strange afterwards. That's where I blame myself. I ought to have seen that she was overwrought. But she drank the tea, and cheered up so when I told her Clare was pleased with her acting——"

"Was she?" He was frowning interestedly.

"I'm sure she must have been—it was brilliant, you know."

"She said so?"

"Oh, not actually—but I could tell. And it cheered the child up. I was quite easy about her—and then ten minutes later——" She shuddered.

"Then it might have been an accident," he suggested soothingly.

"It wasn't," she said, with despairing conviction.

"My dear girl! Either you're indulging in morbid imaginings—or you've something to go on?"

She shook her head with a frightened look at him.

"No!" she said hurriedly. "No!"

"Then why," he said quietly, meeting her eyes, "were you frightened At the inquest?"

She averted her eyes.

"I wasn't—I mean—I was nervous, of course."

"You were frightened of what you might slip into saying. You told me so ten minutes ago,"

"Oh, if you're trying to trap me?" she flashed out wrathfully.

He rejoiced at the tone. It was the impetuous Alwynne of his daily intercourse again. The mere relief of discussion was, as he had guessed, having a tonic effect on her nerves.

He smiled at her pleasantly.

"Don't tell me anything more, if you'd rather not."

She subsided at this.

"I didn't mean to be angry," she faltered. "Only I've guarded myself so from telling. You see, I lied at the inquest. It was perjury, I suppose." There was a little touch of importance in her tone. "But I'll tell you."

She hesitated, her older self once more supervening.

"Afterwards—when the doctor had come, and they took Louise away—after that ghastly afternoon was over——" She whitened. "It was ghastly, you know—so many people—crowding and gaping—I dream of all those crowded faces——"

"Well?" he urged her forward.

"I went up to the room where she had changed, to see that the children had gone——"

"She fell from that room?"

"She must have. After she had changed. She'd locked the door—to change. I broke it open. I thought she had fainted—a baby told me something about Louise falling—lispering so, I couldn't make out what she meant—and I'd run up to see. It turned out afterwards that little Joan had been in a lower room, and had seen her body as it fell past the window."

'How beastly!' he said, with an involuntary shudder.

"And when I got the door open—an empty room. Something made me look out of the window. She was down below—right under me—on the steps."

She was silent.

"But afterwards?" he urged her. "You went up again?"

"I had to. I was afraid already—recollecting little things. I looked about, in case she'd—left a message. And on the window-ledge—there were great scratches. Then I knew"

She was forgetting him, staring into space, peopled as it was with her memories.

"I don't understand," he said.

She did not answer.

"Alwynne!" he said urgently.

She looked at him absently.

"Scratches! What are you driving at?"

"Oh," she said dully, "there was a nail in her shoe. She had tried to hammer it in at morning school. It had made scratches all over the rostrum. I was rather cross about it."

"But I don't see," he began, and stopped, realizing suddenly her meaning.

"You mean—she must have stood on the ledge—to make those marks?"

"Yes," said Alwynne. Then, fiercely, "Well?"

"Yes, that's conclusive," he admitted. He looked at her pityingly. "You poor child! And you never told?"

"I got a paint-box," she said defiantly, "and painted them brown—like the paintwork. It would have broken up Clare to know—and all the questions and comments. What would you have done?"

He ignored the challenge, answered only the misery in the tone.

"It can't have been easy for you—that week," he said gently.

"Easy?" She began to laugh harshly. "And yet I don't know," she reflected. "I don't think I felt anything much at the time. It was like being in a play. Almost interesting. Entirely unreal. At the inquest—I lied as easily as saying grace. I wasn't a bit worried. What did worry me was a bit of sticking-plaster on the coroner's chin. One end was uncurled, and I was longing for him to stick it down again. It seemed more important than anything else that he should stick it down. It would have been a real relief to me. I'm not trying to be funny."

"I know," he said.

"And when it was over—I was quite cheerful. And at the funeral—I know they thought I was callous. But I didn't feel sad. Only cold—icy cold—in my hands and my feet and my heart. And I felt desperately irritated with them all for crying. People look appalling when they cry." She paused. "So they banked up Louise with wreaths and we left her." She paused again.

" Well ? " he prompted.

" I went home at the end of that week. Elsbeth sent me to bed early. I was log-tired all of a sudden. Oh, I was tired! I had hardly slept at all since she died. I'd stayed at Clare's, you know. She's a bad sleeper, too, and it always infects me—and we used to sit up till daylight, forgetting the time, talking. We've always heaps to talk about. Clare's a night-bird. She's always most brilliant about midnight." She smiled reminiscently. " We picnic, you know, in our dressing-gowns. She has a great white bearskin on the hearth. Her fires are piled up, and never go out all night. And I brew coffee—and we talk. It's jolly. I wish you knew Clare. She's an absorbing person."

" You're giving me quite a good idea of her," he said. Then, carelessly : " But she must have realized that after such a shock—and the strain——"

" Oh, it was much worse for Clare," she broke in quickly. " Think—her special pupil ! She had had such hopes of Louise. And Clare's so terribly sensitive—she was getting it on her mind. Do you know, she almost began to think it was her fault, not to have seen what was going on ? Once, she was absolutely frantic with depression, poor darling, until I made her understand that, if it was any one's, it must be mine. Of course, when I told her everything, how I'd guessed Louise was pretty miserable, and tried to tell her again and then funkcd it—well, then she saw. As she said, if I'd only spoken out. . . . She was very kind—but, of course, I soon felt that she thought I was responsible—indirectly—for the whole thing——" Her voice quavered.

Roger, watching her simple face, wanted to do something vigorous. At that moment it would have given him great satisfaction to have interviewed Miss Hartill. Failing that, he wanted to take Alwynne by the shoulders and shake the nonsense out of her. He repressed himself, however. He was in his way, as simple as Alwynne, but where she was merely direct, he was shrewd. He knew that she must show him all the weeds that were choking her before he could set about uprooting them and planting good seed in their stead.

She went on.

" But even then, though I had been neglectful—oh, Roger, what made Louise do it ? Just then ? She looked happier I It couldn't have been anything I'd said! I know I cheered

her up. It's inconceivable ! She was smiling, contented—and she went straight upstairs and killed herself ! "

He shook his head.

" Inconceivable, as you say. You're sure—of your facts ? "

" How ? "

" I mean—you were the last person to see her ? ¹

" Oil, yes, Roger ! every one was at tea."

" Miss Hartill ? "

" Clare would have said——"

" Of course," he said, " she tells you everything."

She nodded, in all good faith—

" Besides, Clare was in the mistresses' room."

" Impossible for her to have spoken with Louise ? "

" Quite. Clare would have told me——"

" Yet there remains the fact that Louise was, as you say, happier after seeing you. Within fifteen minutes she is dead. Either she went mad—which I don't believe, do you ? "

" I want to——"

" But you don't—knowing the child. Neither do I, from what you tell me. She seems to have been horribly sane. Sane enough, anyhow, to throw off a burden. So if, as we agree, she didn't suddenly go mad—something occurred to change her mood of comparative happiness to actual despair. I think, if you ask me, that she did see Miss Hartill after she left you."

" But Clare would have told me," repeated Alwynne stubbornly.

" I'm not so sure."

" But she said nothing at the inquest, either."

" Did you ² " he retorted. " If she had had a row with the child it would have sounded pretty bad."

" But Clare's incapable of deceit."

" She might say the same of you."

" But—if your guess were true, it would be Clare's fault—all Clare's fault—not mine at all ! " she deduced slowly.

" It's riot your fault, anyway," he assured her.

" But it would have been too utterly cruel of Clare not to have told me. She knew what I felt at the time—why not have told me ? "

" She might have been afraid—you might have shrunk——"

" From Clare ? " She smiled securely. Then, with a change of tone : " No, Roger. All this is guessing, far-fetched guessing."

" Anyhow, Alwynne," he said sharply, " there was gross

cruelty in her treatment of that child. You can't excuse it. Directly or indirectly, she is responsible for her death."

She flushed.

" You have not the shadow of right to say that."

" I do say it."

She put out her hand to him with a touch of appeal.

" Please—won't you leave Clare out of it? You are utterly wrong. You see, you don't know her. If you did you would understand. I am so grateful to you for being kind. I don't want to be angry. But I must, if you talk like that. Please—if you can, make me sure it wasn't my fault. But if it involves Clare—I'd rather go on being—not quite happy. Yet I hoped, perhaps, you would help me."

" Of course I'm helping you," he said, quick to catch and adopt her tone. He had no wish to intimidate. He liked her pathetic little dignities and loyalties. He was, so far, content; he had, he knew, in spite of her protestations, sown a seed of distrust in her mind. Time would ripen it. He felt no compunction in enlightening her blind devotion. He had quick antipathies, and he had conceived an idea of Clare Hartill that would have appalled Alwynne, and which justified to himself any measure that he might see fit to take. In his own mind he referred to her as 'that poisonous female.' There were no half-measures with Roger.

CHAPTER XXXV

ALWYNNE leant back in her chair and regarded Roger with some intentness.

" Well ? " he said politely.

" I was thinking——" she said lamely.

" Obviously."

" That it was rather queer—that I should tell you all this,, when I couldn't even tell Elsbeth."

" Don't you think it's often easier to talk to strangers ? One's personality can make its own impression—it has no preconception to fight against."

" Yes. But I hate strangers, till they've stopped being strange. And, you know"—she hesitated—" I haven't really liked you. Have you noticed it ? "

" In streaks," he admitted. " But why ? "

" You patronize so ! " she flared. " You make me feel a fool. This afternoon——Of course, it's quite true that I don't know much about men. I suppose you knew I was—inexperienced : but you needn't have rubbed it in. And you've always-talked down to me."

" I don't think I did," he considered the matter unsmiling. " I think it's rather the other way—the tilt of your nose disturbs my complacency. You listen to me at meals like Disapproval incarnate. You make me nervous."

" Do I ? " she asked delightedly.

" Yes." He laughed. " I hide it under a superior air, of course."

" Yes, of course," she sympathized. " That's what I do-always."

" It is useful," he agreed.

" People may think **you** disagreeable, but at least you're dignified. *You have chosen your fault well, I really cannot laugh at it.* Do you remember ? I told Elsbeth that you were like Mr. Darcy."

" And that you don't like me ? "

" Well—I didn't. That's why it's so queer—that I can talk to you so easily. I am grateful. It has helped, just talking."

" I knew it would."

" I feel better." She stirred in her seat. " Is it late ? Ought we to be going home ? "

He chose his words, his eyes on her, though he spoke casually enough.

" No hurry. We can always take a cut through the wood, you know."

She flinched at that, as he expected; spoke uneasily, furtive-eyed.

" I think I'd rather go at once—round by the road. Isn't there a road ? " She rose and looked about her, taking farewell of the daffodils.

" Yes, there's a road. Wouldn't you like a bunch ? " He took a pair of scissors from the wall, and began to select his blooms. Alwynne followed Mm delightedly. She thought she would have a surprise for Clare, after all. And Elsbeth ! Elsbeth was an after-thought. But she hoped there would be enough for Elsbeth.

" Why won't you go back through the wood ? " he said quietly, as, hands full, he at last replaced the scissors on their particular nail, and twitched a strand from the horse-tail of bass that hung beside them. " Tell me." Then, calmly, " Here—put your finger here, will you ? "

Mechanically she obeyed and he tied the knot that secured the great yellow sheaf and gave it to her.

" Now tell me. What frightened you in the wood ? What was wrong ? " He spoke quietly, but his tone compelled her.

" If you dreamed a dream——" she began unwillingly, " night after night—month after month—something ghastly——"

" Yes——" he encouraged her.

" Ah, well—at least you've the comfort of knowing it's a dream. But suppose, one day—you dreamt it while you were awake——? "

" Dreamt what ? " He guessed her meaning, but he was deliberately forcing her to reduce her terrors into words—thamore they crystallized, the easier she would find it to face and destroy them.

" Do you believe in hell ? " she flung at him.

" I should jolly well think so."

"For children?" Her tone implored comfort.

"I'm afraid so."

"But how can it be fair? They're so little. They don't know right from wrong."

"I knew a kid," he said meditatively, an eye on her tormented face, "only eight—used to act, if you please. Hung about London stage-doors, and bearded managers in their dens for a living. Quick little chap! Father drunk or ill; incapable, anyhow. The child supported them both. I've seen that child kept hanging about three or four hours on end. And what he knew! It made you sick and sorry. He must be twelve by now—getting on, I believe, poor kid! And a cheerful monkey! He's certainly had his hell, though."

She had hardly listened, she was absorbed in her thoughts; but she caught at his last words—

"In this life? Oh, yes! That's cruel enough. But not afterwards? Not eternal damnation? I don't mind it for myself so much—but for a baby that can't understand why—It isn't possible, is it?"

He began to laugh jollily.

"Alwynne—you utter fool! Don't you believe in God?"

"I suppose so," she admitted.

"Of course, if you didn't——"

"Yes," she thrust in. "Then it would be all right. I could be sure she was asleep—dead—like last year's leaves——"

"But why should God complicate matters?"

"Well—heaven follows—and hell—don't they? *Their worm dieth not*—and all the rest."

"Oh, I follow."

"Miss Mursham—the head mistress, you know—of course she's very old—but she believes—terribly. It's an awfully religious school. It scares some of the children. I used to laugh, but now, since Louise died, it scares me, though I am grown up. I've no convictions—and she is certain—and then I get these nightmares. I hear her calling—for water."

The flat matter-of-fact tone alarmed him more than emotion would have done.

"Water?"

"*For I am tormented in this flame.* I hear her every night—wailing." Her eyes strained after something that he could not see.

He found no words.

She returned with an effort.

"Of course, when it's over—I know it's imagination. My sense tells me so—in the daytime. Only I can't be sure. If only I could be sure! If some one would tell me to be sure. It's the reasoning it out for myself—all day—and going back to the dreams all night."

"How long has this been going on?" he asked curtly.

"Ever since—when I came home from Clare's—that night. I'd slept like a log. Then I woke up suddenly. I thought I heard Louise calling. I'd forgotten she was dead. Every night it happens—as soon as I go to sleep, she comes. Always trying to speak to me. I hear her screaming with pain—wanting help. Never any words. Do you think I'm mad? I know it's only a dream—but every night, you know——"

"You're not going to dream any more," he said, with a determination that belied his inward sense of dismay. "But go on—let's have the rest of it."

"There isn't much. Just dreams. It's been a miserable year. I couldn't be cheerful always, you know—and I used to dread going to bed so. It made me stupid all day. And Clare—Clare didn't quite understand. Oh—I did want to tell her so. But you can't worry people. I'm afraid Elsbeth got worried—she hates it if you don't eat and have a colour. She packed me off here at last."

She drew a long breath.

"This blessed place! You don't know how I love it. I feel a different girl. All this space and air and freedom. What is it that the country does to one's mind? I've slept. No dreaming. Sleep that's like a hot bath. Can you imagine what that is after those months? Oh, Roger! I thought I'd stopped dreaming for good—I was forgetting——"

"Go on forgetting," he said. "You can. I'll help you. You had a shock. It made you ill. You're getting well again. That's all."

"I'm not," she said. "I'm going mad. To-day, in that wood. . . . Louise came running after me—and I was awake. . . ."

Suddenly she gave a little ripple of high-pitched laughter.

"Oh, Mr. Lumsden! Isn't this a ridiculous conversation? And your face—you're so absurd when you frown. . . . You make me laugh. . . . You make me laugh. . . ."

She broke off. Roger, with a swift movement, had turned and was standing over her.

" Now shut up! " he said sharply. " Shut up! D'you hear? Shut up this instant, and sit down." He put his hand on her shoulder and jerked her back into her chair.

The shock of his roughness checked her hysteria, as he had intended it should. She sat limply, her head in her hand, trying not to cry. He watched her.

" Pull yourself together, Alwynne ! " he said more gently.

Her lips quivered, but she nodded valiantly.

" I will. Just wait a minute. I don't want to make a fool of myself." Then, with a quavering laugh, " Oh, Roger, this is pleasant for you I "

He laughed.

" You needn't mind me," he said calmly. " Any more than I mind you. Except when you threaten hysterics. I bar hysterics. I wouldn't mind if they did any good. But we've got lots to do. No time at all for them. We've got to work this thing out. Ready! "

Alwynne waited, her attention caught.

" Now listen," he said. " First of all, get it into your head that I know all about it, and that I'm going to see you through. Next—whenever you get scared—though you won't again, I hope—that you are just to come and talk it over. You won't even have to tell me—I shall see by your face, you know. Do you understand? You're not alone any more. I'm here. Always ready to lay your ghosts for you. Will you remember? "

He spoke clearly and patiently—very cheerful and reassuring.

" You've got to go home well, Alwynne. Because, you know, though you're as sane as I am, you've been ill. This last year has been one long illness. You had a shock—a ghastly shock—and, of course, it skinned your nerves raw. My dear, I wonder it didn't send you really mad, instead of merely making you afraid of going mad. If you hadn't put up such a fight—Honestly, Alwynne ! I think you've been jolly plucky."

The sincere admiration in his voice was wonderfully pleasant to hear.

Alwynne opened her eyes widely.

" I don't know what you mean," she began shyly.

" I'm not imaginative," he said, " but if I'd been hag-ridden as you have—" He broke off abruptly. " But, at least, you've fought yourself free," he continued cheerfully. " Yes, in spite of to-day." And his complete assurance of voice and manner had its effect on Alwynne, though she did not realize it

" You're better already. You say yourself you're a different girl since you got away from—since you came here. And when you're quite well, it'll be your own work, not mine. I'm just tugging you up the bank, so to speak. But you've done the real fighting with the elements. I think you can be jolly proud of yourself."

Alwynne looked at him, half smiling, half bewildered.

" What do you mean ? You talk as if it were all over. Shall I never be frightened again ? Think of to-day."

" Of course it's all over," he assured her truculently. " To-day ? To-day was the last revolt of your imagination. You've let it run riot too long. Of course it hasn't been easy to call it to heel."

" You think it's all silly imaginings, then ? "

" Alwyune," he said. " You've got to listen to this, just this. You say I'm not to talk about your friend, that I don't know her—that I'm unjust. But listen, at least, to this. I won't be unfair. I'll grant you that she was fond of the little girl, and meant no harm, no more than you did. But you say yourself that she was miserable till you relieved her mind by taking all the blame on yourself. Can't you conceive that in BO doing you did assume a burden, a very real one ? Don't you think that her fears, her terrors, may have haunted you as well as your own ? I believe in the powers of thought. I believe that fear—remorse—regret—may materialize into a very ghost at your elbow. Do you remember Macbeth and Banquo ? Do you believe that a something really physical sat that night in the king's seat ? Do you think it was the man from his grave ? I think it was Macbeth's thoughts incarnate. He thought too much, that man. But let's leave all that. Let's argue it out from a common-sense point of view. You said you believed in God ? "

" Yes," she said.

" And the devil ? "

" I suppose so."

" Well—I'm not so sure that I do,¹ he remarked meditatively. " But if I do—I must say I cannot see the point of a God who wouldn't be more than a match for him : and a God who'd leave a baby in his clutches to expiate in fire and brimstone and all the rest of the beastliness——Well, is it common sense ? " he appealed to her.

" If you put it like that——" she admitted.

" My dear, would you let Louise frizzle if it were in your hands? Why, you've driven yourself half crazy with fear for her, as it is. Can't you give God credit for a little common humanity? I'm not much of a Bible reader, but I seem to remember something about a sparrow falling to the ground—Now follow it up," he went on urgently. " If Louise's life was so little worth living that she threw it away—doesn't it prove she had her holl down here? If you insist on a hell. And when she was dead, poor baby, can't you trust God to have taken charge of her? And if He has—as He must have—do you think that child—that happy child, Alwynne, for if God exists at all, He must exist as the very source and essence of peace and love—that that child would or could wrench itself apart from God, from its happiness, in order to return to torment you? Is it possible? Is it probable? In any way feasible? "

Alwynne caught her breath.

" How you believe in God! I wish I could! "

Roger flushed suddenly like an embarrassed boy.

" You know, it's queer," he confided, subsiding naively, " till I began to talk to you, I didn't know I did. I never bother about church and things. You know——"

But Alwynne was not attending.

" Of course—I see what you mean," she murmured. " It applies to Louise too. Why, Roger, she was really fond of me—not as she was of Clare, of course—but quite fond of me. She never would have hurt me. Hurt? Poor mite! She never hurt any one in all her life."

" I wonder you didn't think of that before," remarked Roger severely. " I hope you see what an idiot you've been? "

" Yes," said Alwynne meekly. She did not flash out at him as he had hoped she would: but her manner had grown calm, and her eyes were peaceful.

" Poor little Louise! " said Alwynne slowly. " So we needn't think about her any more? She's to be dead, and buried, and forgotten. It sounds harsh, doesn't it? But she is dead—and I've only been keeping her alive in my mind all this year. Is that what you mean? "

" Yes," he said. " And if it were not as I think it is, sheer imagination—if your grieving and fear really kept a fraction of her personality with you, to torment you both—let her go now, Alwynne. Say good-bye to her kindly, and let her go home."

She looked at him gravely for a moment. Then she turned from him to the empty house of flowers.

" Good-bye, Louise ! " said Alwynne, simply as a child.

About them was the evening silence. The sun, sinking over the edge of the world, was a blinding glory.

Out of the flowers rose the butterfly, found an open pane and fluttered out on the evening air, straight into the heart of the sunlight.

They watched it with dazzled eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVI

ALTWYNNE had gone to bed early. She confessed to being tired, as she bade her cousins good-night, and, indeed, she had dark rings about her eyes; but her colour was brilliant as she waited at the foot of the stairs for her candle. Roger had followed her into the hall and was lighting it. The thin flame nickered between them, kindling odd lights in their eyes.

"Good-night," said Alwynne, and went up a shallow step or two.

"Good-night," said Roger, without moving.

She turned suddenly and bent down to him over the poppy-head of the balustrade.

"Good-night," said Alwynne once more, and put out her hand.

"You're to sleep well, you know," he said authoritatively.

She nodded. Then, with a rush—

"Roger, I do thank you. I do thank you very much."

"That's all right," said Roger awkwardly.

Alwynne went upstairs.

He watched her disappear in the shadows of the landing, and took a meditative turn up and down the long hall before he returned to the drawing-room.

He felt oddly responsible for the girl; wished that he had some one to consult about her. . . . His aunts? Dears, of course, but . . . Alicia, possibly. . . . Certainly not Jean. . . . Nothing against them . . . dearest women alive . . . but hardly capable of understanding Alwynne, were they? Without at all realizing it he had already arrived at the conviction that no one understood Alwynne but himself.

He caught her name as he re-entered the room.

"Ever so much better! A different creature 1 Don't you think so, Roger?"

"Think what?"

"That Alwynne's a new girl? It's the air. Nothing like

Dene air. But, of course, you didn't see her when she first came. A poor white thing ! She'd worked herself to a shadow. Now Elsbeth allowed it——"

Jean caught her up.

" Overwork ! Fiddlesticks ! It wasn't that. I'm convinced in my own mind that there's something behind it. A girl doesn't go to pieces like that from a little extra work. Look at your Compton women at the end of a term. Bursting with energy still, I will say that for them. No—I'm inclined to agree with Parker. I told you what she said to me ? ' She must have been crossed in love, poor young lady, the way she fiddle-faddles with her food ! ' "

Alicia laughed.

" When you and Parker get together there's not a reputation safe in the three Denes. If there had been anything of the kind, Elsbeth would have given me a hint."

" I should have thought Elsbeth would be the last person——" Jean broke off significantly.

Roger glanced at her, eyebrows lifted.

" What's she driving at, Aunt Alice ? "

" Lord knows ! " said Alicia shortly.

Jean grew huffed.

" It's all very well, Alicia, to take that tone. You know what I mean perfectly well. Considering how reticent Elsbeth was over her own affairs to us—she wouldn't be likely to confide anything about Alwynne. But Elsbeth always imagined no one had any eyes."

Alicia moved uneasily in her chair.

" Jean, will you never let that foolish gossip be ? It wasn't your business thirty years ago—at least let it alone now."

Jean flushed.

" It's all very well to be superior, Alice, but you know you agreed with me at the time."

Roger chuckled.

" What are you two driving at ? Let's have it."

Alicia answered him.

" My dear boy, you know what Jean is. Elsbeth stayed with us a good deal when we were all girls together—and because she and your dear father were very good friends——"

" Inseparable ! " snapped Jean. She was annoyed that the telling of the story was taken from her.

" Oh, they had tastes in common. But we all liked him.

I'm quite certain Elsbeth was perfectly heart-whole. Only Jean has the servant-girl habit of pairing off all her friends and acquaintances. I don't say, of course, that if John had never met your dear mother—but she came home from her French school—she'd been away two years, you know—and turned everybody's head. Ravishing she was. I remember her coming-out dance. She wore the first short dress we'd seen—every one wore trains in those days—white gauze and forget-me-nots. She looked like a fairy. All the gentlemen wanted to dance with her, she was so light-footed. Your father fell head over ears! They were engaged in a fortnight. And nobody, in her quiet way, was more pleased than Elsbeth, I'm sure. Why, she was one of the bridesmaids!"

"She never came to stay with them afterwards," Baid Jean obstinately, "always had an excuse."

"Considering she had to nurse her father, with her mother an invalid already——" Alicia was indignant. "Ten years of sick-nursing that poor girl had!"

"Anyhow, she never came to Dene again till after John died. Then she came, once. When she heard we were all going out to Italy. Stayed a week."

"I remember," said Roger unexpectedly.

"You! You were only five," cried Jean. The clock struck as she spoke. She jumped up. "Alicia! It's ten o'clock! Where's Parker? Why hasn't Parker brought the biscuits? You really might speak to her! She's always late!"

She flurried out of the room.

Roger drew in his chair.

"Aunt Alice, I say—how much of that is just—Aunt Jean!" Alicia sighed.

"My dear boy! How should I know? It's all such a long while ago. Jean's no respecter of privacy. I never noticed anything—hate prying—always did."

"She never married?"

"She was over thirty before her mother died. She aged quickly—faded somehow. At that visit Jean spoke of—I shall never forget the change in her. She was only twenty-six, two years older than your mother, but Rosemary was a girl beside her, in spite of you and her widow's weeds. And then Alwynne was left on her hands and she absorbed herself in her. She's one of those self-effacing women——But there—she's quite contented, I think. She adores Alwynne. Her letters are

cheerful enough. I always kept up with her. I'd like to see her again."

"Why didn't you ask her with Alwynne?"

"I did. She wouldn't come. Spring-cleaning, and one of her whimsies. Wanted the child to have a change from her. That's Elsbeth all over. She was always painfully humble. I imagine she'd sell her immortal soul for Alwynne."

"Well—and so would you for me," said Roger, with a twinkle.

"Don't you flatter yourself," retorted Alicia with spirit. Then she laughed and kissed him, and lumbered off to scold Jean up to bed.

Roger sat late, staring into the fire, and reviewing the day's happenings.

There was Alwynne to be considered. . . . Alwynne in the wood. . . . Alwynne in the daffodil house. . . . Alwynne hanging over the bannisters, a candle in her hand. . . . And Elsbeth. . . . Elsbeth had become something more than a name. . . . Elsbeth had known his mother—had been 'pals' with his father. . . . He chuckled at the recollection of Jean's speculations. . . . Poor old Jean! She hadn't altered much. . . . He remembered her first horror at Compton and its boys and girls. . . . But Elsbeth was evidently a good sort . . . appreciated Alwynne. . . . He would like to have a talk with Elsbeth. . . . He would like to have her version of that disastrous summer; have her views on Alwynne and this school of hers . . . and that woman . . . what was her name? . . . Hartill! Clare Hartill! Yes, he must certainly get to know Alwynne's Elsbeth. . . . In the meantime . . .

He hesitated, fidgeting at his desk; spoiled a sheet or two; shrugged his shoulders; began again; and finally, with a laugh at his own uncertainty, settled down to the writing of a long letter to his second cousin Elsbeth.

Elsbeth, opening a boot-boxful of daffodils on the following evening, had no leisure for any other letter till Alwynne's was read.

. . . , "hope, they'll arrive, fresh. Roger packed them for me himself. He's frightfully clever with flowers, you know; you should just see his greenhouses! But he goes in chiefly for roses; he's going to teach me pruning and all that, he says, later on. The Dears were out all day, but he looked after me. He's really

awfully nice when you get to know him. One of those sensible people. I'm sure you would like him. Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

Elsbeth smiled over her daffodils. She had to put them in water, and arrange them, and re-arrange them, and admire them for a full half-hour before she had time for the rest of her post, for her two circulars and the letter in the unfamiliar handwriting.

But when, at last, it was opened, she had no more eyes for daffodils; and though she spent her evening letter-writing, Alwynne got no thanks for them next day.

"Not even a note!" declaimed Alwynne indignantly. "She might at least have sent me a note! It isn't as if she had any one else to write to!"

Roger was most sympathetic.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ALWYNNK'S visit had been prolonged in turn by Alicia, Jean and Roger; and Elsbeth had acquiesced—her sedate letters never betrayed how eagerly—in each delay.

Alicia was flatteringly in need of her help for the Easter church decorations, and how could Alwynne refuse? Jean was in the thick of preparations for the bazaar: Alwynne's quick wits and clever fingers were not to be dispensed with. Alwynne wondered what Clare would say to her interest in a bazaar and a mothers' meeting, and was a little nervous that it would be considered anything but a reasonable excuse for yet another delay. Clare's letters were getting impatient—Clare was wanting her back. Clare was finding her holidays dull. Yet Alwynne, longing to return to her, was persuaded to linger—for a bazaar—a village bazaar! That a bazaar of all things should tempt Alwynne from Clare! She felt the absurdity of it as fully as ever Clare could do. Yet she stayed. After all, The Dears had been very good to her. . . . She should be glad to make some small return by being useful when she could. . . .

And Alwynne was pleasantly conscious that she was uncommonly useful. A fair is a many-sided gaiety. There are tableaux—Alwynne's suggestions were invaluable. Side-shows—Alwynne, in a witch's hat, told the entire village its fortunes with precision and point. Alwynne's well-drilled school-babies were pretty enough in their country dances and nursery rhymes; and the stall draperies were a credit to Alwynne's taste. Alwynne's posters hid the walls; and her lightning portraits—fourpence each, married couples sixpence—were the success of the evening. The village notabilities were congratulatory: The Dears beamed: it was all very pleasant.

Her pleasure in her own popularity was innocent enough. Nevertheless she glanced uneasily in the direction of Roger Lumsden more than once during the evening. He was very big and busy in his corner helping his aunts, but she felt herself

under observation. She had an odd idea that he was amused at her. She thought he might have enquired if she needed help during the long evening, when the little Parish Hall was grown crowded. Once, indeed, she signed to him across the room to come and talk to her, but he laughed and shook his head, and turned again to an old mother, absorbed in a pile of flannel petticoats. Alwynne was not pleased.

But when the sale had come to its triumphant end, and the stall-holders stood about in little groups, counting coppers and comparing gains—it was Roger who discovered Alwynne, laughing a trifle mechanically at the jokes of the ancient rector, and came to her rescue.

She found herself in the cool outer air, hat and scarf miraculously in place.

"Jean and Alicia are driving, they won't be long after us. I thought you'd rather walk. That room was a furnace," said Roger, with solicitude.

She drew a deep breath.

"It was worth it to get this. Isn't it cool and quiet? I like this black and white road. Doesn't the night smell delicious?"

"It's the cottage gardens," he said.

"Wallflowers and briar and old man. Better than all your acres of glass, after all," she insinuated mischievously. Then, with a change of tone, "Oh, dear, I am tired."

"You'd better hang on to my arm," said Roger promptly. "That's better. Of course you're tired. If you insist on running the entire show——"

"Then you did think that?" Alwynne gave instant battle. "I knew you did. I saw you laugh. I can walk by myself, thank you."

But her dignity edged her into a cart-rut, for Roger did not deviate from the middle of the lane.

lie laughed.

"You're a consistent young woman—I'm as sure of a rise—— You'd better take my arm. Alwynne! You're not to say 'Damn.'" A puddle shone blackly, and Alwynne, nose in air, had stepped squarely into it.

She ignored his comments.

"I wasn't interfering, I had to help where I could. They asked me to. Besides—I liked it."

"Of course you did."

She looked up quickly.

"Did I really do anything wrong? Did I push myself forward?"

"You made the whole thing go," he said seriously. "A triumph, Alwynne. The rector's your friend for life."

"Then why do you grudge it?" She was hurt.

"Do I?"

"You laugh at me."

"Because I was pleased."

"With me?"

"With my thoughts. You've enjoyed yourself, haven't you?"

She nodded.

"I never dreamed it would be such fun." She laughed shyly. "I like people to like me."

"Now, come," he said. "Wasn't it quite as amusing as a prize-giving?"

She looked up at him, puzzled. He was switching with his stick at the parsley-blooms, white against the shadows of the hedge.

"I suppose your goal is a head mistress-ship?" he suggested off-handedly.

"Why?" began Alwynne, wondering. Then, taking the bait: "Not for myself—I couldn't. I haven't been to college, you know. But if Clare got one—I could be her secretary, and run things for her, like Miss Vigers did for Miss Marsham. We've often planned it."

"All, that's a prospect indeed," he remarked. "I suppose it would be more attractive, for instance, than to be Lady Bountiful to a village?"

"Oh, yes," said Alwynne, with conviction. "More scope, you know. And, besides, Clare hates the country."

"Ah!" said Roger.

They walked awhile in silence.

But before they reached home, Roger had grown talkative again. He had heard from his aunts that she was planning to go back to Utterbridge on the following Saturday—a bare three days ahead. Roger thought that a pity. The bazaar was barely over—had Alwynne any idea of the clearing up there would be to do? Accounts—calls—congratulations. Surely Alwynne would not desert his aunts till peace reigned once more. And the first of his roses would be out in another week; Alwynne

ought to see them; they were a sight. Surely Alwynne could spare another week.

Alwynne had a lot to say about Elsbeth. And Clare. Especially Clare. Alwynne did not think it would be kind to either of them to stay away any longer. It would look at last as if she didn't want to go home. Elsbeth would be hurt. And Clare. Especially Clare,

But the lane had been dark and the hedges had been high, high enough to shut out all the world save Roger and his plausibilities. By the time they reached the garden gate Alwynne's hand was on Roger's arm—Alwynne was tired—and Alwynne had promised to stay yet another week at Dene. On the following day, labouring over her letters of explanation, she wondered what had possessed her. Wondered, between a chuckle of mischief and a genuine shiver, what on earth Clare would say.

But if Roger had gained his point, he gained little beside it. The week passed pleasantly, but some obscure instinct tied Alwynne to his aunts' apron-strings. He saw less of her in those last days than in all the weeks of her visit. He had assured her that The Dears would need help, and she took him at his word. She absorbed herself in their concerns, and in seven long days found time but twice to visit Roger's roses.

Yet who so pleasant as Alwynne when she was with him] Roger should have appreciated her whim of civility. It is on record that she agreed with him one dinner-time, on five consecutive subjects. On record, too, that in that last week there arose between them no quarrel worthy of the name. Yet Roger was not in the easiest of moods, as his gardeners knew, and his coachman, and his aunts. The gardeners grumbled. The coachman went so far as to think of talking of giving notice. Alicia said it was the spring. Jean thought he needed a tonic—or a change. Roger, cautiously consulted, surprised her by agreeing. He said it was a good idea. He might very well take a few days off, say in a fortnight, or three weeks. . . .

Only Alwynne, very busy over the finishing touches of Clare's birthday present, paid no attention to the state of Roger's temper. She was entirely content. The anticipation of her reunion with Clare accentuated the delights of her protracted absence. Indeed, it was not until the last morning of her visit that she noticed any change in him. That last morning, she thought resentfully, as later she considered matters in the train, he had certainly managed to spoil. Roger, her even-

minded, tranquil Roger—Roger, prime sympathizer and confederate—Roger, the entirely dependable—had failed her. She did not know what had come over him.

For Roger had been in a bad temper, a rotten bad temper, and heaven knew why. . . . Alwynne didn't. . . . She had been in such a jolly frame of mind herself. . . . She had got her packing done early, and had dashed down to breakfast, beautifully punctual—and then it all began. . . . She re-lived it indignantly, as the telegraph poles shot by.

The bacon had sizzled pleasantly in the chafing-dish. She was standing at the window, crumbling bread to the birds.

"Hulloa ! You're early !" remarked Roger, entering.

"Done all my packing already ! Isn't that virtue ? " Alwynne was intent on her pensioners. " Oh, Roger—look ! There's a cuckoo. I'm sure it's a cuckoo. Jean says they come right on to the lawn sometimes. I've always wanted to Bee one. Look ! The big dark blue one."

"Starling," said Roger shortly, and sat himself down. " First day I've known you punctual," he continued sourly.

" I'm going home," cried Alwynne. " I'm going home ! Do you know I've been away seven weeks ? It's queer that I haven't been homesick, isn't it ? "

"Is it ? " said Roger blankly.

" So, of course, I'm awfully excited," she continued, coming to the table. " Oh, Roger ! In six hoars I shall see Clare ! "

" Congratulations ! " He gulped down some coffee.

Alwynne looked at him, mildly surprised at his taciturnity.

" I've had a lovely time," she remarked wistfully. " You've all been so good to me."

Roger brightened.

" The Dears are such dears," continued Alwynne with enthusiasm. " I've never had such a glorious time. It only wanted Clare to make it quite perfect. And Elsbeth, of course."

" Of course," said Roger.

" So often I've thought," she went on: " ' Now if only Clare and Elsbeth could be coming down the road to meet us——' " she paused effectively. " I do so like my friends to know each other, don't you ? "

Roger was cutting bread—stale bread, to judge by his efforts. His face was growing red.

" Because then I can talk about them to them," concluded Alwynne lucidly.

" Jolly for them ! " he commented indistinctly.

Alwynne looked up.

"What, Roger? "

" I said, ' Jolly for them ! ' "

" Oh ! " Alwynne glanced at him in some uncertainty. Then, with a frown—

" Have you finished—already? "

" Yes, thank you."

" I haven't," remarked Alwynne, with sufficient point. Roger rose.

" You'll excuse me, won't you ? I've a busy morning ahead of me."

He got up. But in spite of his protestations of haste he still stood at the table, fidgeting over his pile of circulars and seed catalogues, while he coughed the preliminary cough of a man who has something to say, and no idea of how to say it.

Alwynne, meanwhile, had discovered the two letters that her napkin had hidden, and had neither ears nor eyes for him and his hesitations.

Roger watched her gloomily as she opened the envelopes. The first enclosure was read and tossed aside quickly enough, but the other was evidently absorbing. He shrugged his shoulders at last, and, crossing the room, took his warmed boots from the hearth. The supporting tongs fell with a crash.

Alwynne jumped.

" Oh, Roger, you are noisy ! "

" Sorry," said Roger, but without conviction.

She looked across at him with a hint of perturbation in her manner. She distrusted laconics.

" I say—is anything the matter? "

" Nothing whatever ! " he assured her. " Why ? " He bent over his boots.

" I don't know. You're rather glum to-day, aren't you ? "

" Not at all," said Roger, with a dignity that was marred by the sudden bursting of his over-tugged bootlace. His ensuing exclamation was vigorous and not inaudible. Alwynne giggled. It is not easy to tie a knot in four-sided leather laces. She watched his struggles without excessive sympathy. Presently a neat twist of twine flicked through space and fell beside him.

" ' Just a little bit of string,' " murmured Alwynne flippantly. But getting no thanks, she returned to her letter. Roger fumbled in silence.

"The Dears are late," remarked Alwynne at last, as she folded her sheets.

"No—it's we who are early. I got down early on purpose. I thought you might be, too. I wanted——" he broke off abruptly.

"Yes, I always wake up at daybreak when I'm excited," she said joyously. "Oh, Roger! How I'm looking forward to getting home! Clare says she may meet me—if she feels like it," she beamed.

"Oh!" said Roger.

Alwynne tapped her foot angrily.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded. "Why on earth do you sit there and grunt at me like that? Why won't you talk? You're an absolute wet blanket—on my last morning. I wish The Bears would come down."

"I think I hear them moving," he said, and stared at the ceiling.

"I hope you do." Alwynne flounced from the table and picked up a paper.

He stood looking at her—between vexation and amusement, and another sensation less easily defined.

"Well, I must be off," he said at last.

He got no answer.

"Good-bye, Alwynne. Pleasant journey."

Alwynne turned in a flash.

"Good-bye? Aren't you coming to see me off?" she demanded blankly.

He hesitated, looking back at her from the open window, one foot already on the terrace.

"I'm awfully busy. It's market-day, you know—and the new stuff's coming in. The Dears will see you off."

"Oh, all right." Alwynne was suddenly subdued. She held out a limp hand.

He disregarded it.

"Do you want me to come?" He spoke more cheerfully.

"One always likes one's friends to see one off," she remarked sedately.

"And meet one?" He glanced at the letter in her hand.

"And meet one. Certainly." Her chin went up. "I hadn't to ask Clare. But you needn't come. Good-bye!"

"Oh, I'm coming—now," he assured her, smiling.

Alwynne's eyebrows went up.

" But it's market-day, you know——"

"¹ Yes."

" You're awfully busy."

"¹ Yes."

" The new stuff's coming in."

"¹ Yes."

" Are you coming, Roger ? "

" Yes, Alwynne."

" Then, Roger dear—if you are coming, and it's no bother, and you can spare them, would you bring me a tiny bunch of your roses ? Not for me—for Clare. She does love them so. Do, Roger ! "

" I'm hanged if I do," cried Roger, and went his wrathful way.

But he did. A big bunch. More than enough for Clare.

CHAPTER XXXVTTT

ALWYNNE was out of the train a dangerous quartet minute before it came to a standstill, and making for the bunch of violets that bloomed perennially in Elsbeth's bonnet. There followed a sufficiency of kissing. It was like a holiday home-coming, thought Alwynne, of not so very long ago. But not so long ago she would have been exclusively occupied with Elsbeth, and her luggage, and her forgotten compartment; would not have turned impatiently from her aunt to scan the length of the platform. Not a sign of Clare? And Clare had promised to meet her. . . .

She prolonged as long as she might her business with porters and ticket collectors and outside-men, but Clare did not appear; and she left the station at last, at her aunt's side, sedately enough, with the edge off the pleasure of her home-coming.

A telegram on the hall stand, however, contented her. Clare was sorry; Clare was delayed; would be away another four days; was writing. Alwynne shook off her black dog, and the meeting with Clare still delightfully ahead of her, was able to devote herself altogether to Elsbeth. Elsbeth spent a gay four days with an Alwynne grown rosy and cheerful, affectionate and satisfyingly garrulous again; found it very pleasant to have Alwynne to herself, her own property, even for four days. Elsbeth might know that she was second fiddle still, but though it cost her something to realize that she could never be first fiddle again, she could be content to give place to Roger Lumsden. She shook her head over her inconsistency. She could school herself, rather than lose the girl's confident, to accept Clare Hartill as the main theme of Alwynne's conversation, till she was weary of the name, but she could not hear enough of Roger Ah¹ that Alwynne let fall of incident, description, or approval—Roger, bosbeth discovered, had, in common with Clare, no faults whatever—she stored up to compare, when Alwynne had gone to bed, with letters, half-a-dozeii by this time, that she

kept locked up, with certain other, older letters, in the absurd little secret drawer of her desk. And she would patter across into Alwynne's room at last, to tuck in a sheet or twitch back a coverlet or merely to pretend to herself that Alwynne was a baby still, and so, with a smile and a sigh, to her own room, to make her plain toilet and to say her selfless prayers to God and her counterpane. Happy days and nights—lour happy days and nights for Elsbeth.

Then Clare came back.

It was natural that Alwynne should meet her and go home with her, portmanteau in hand, to spend a night or two. . . . Elsbeth agreed that it was natural. . . . Throe nights or even four. . . . But when a week passed, with no sign from Alwynne but a meagre, apologetic post-card, Elsbeth thought that she had good cause for anger. Not, of course, with Alwynne . . . never, be it understood, with Alwynne . . . but most certainly with Clare Hartill. Alwynne was so fatally good-natured. . . . Clare, she supposed, had kept the child by a great show of needing her help. . . . Of course, school was beginning, had begun already. . . . Clare would find Alwynne useful enough. . . . No doubt it was pleasant to have some one at her beck and call again in these busy first days of term. . . . Possibly—probably—oh, she conceded the 'probably'—Clare had missed Alwynne badly. . . . Had not Elsbeth, too, missed Alwynne?

But she answered Alwynne's post-card affectionately as usual. If Alwynne were happier with Clare, Elsbeth would give no hint of loneliness. A hint, she knew, would suffice. Alwynne had a sense of duty. But she wanted free-will offering from Alwynne, not tribute.

In spite of herself, however, something of bitterness crept into her next note to Roger Lumsden, who had inveigled her, she hardly knew how, into regular correspondence. Her remark that *Alwynne, has been away ten days now*, was set down baldly, with no veiling sub-sentences of explanation or excuse.

Had she but known it, however, she was not altogether just to Alwynne. The first hours of re-union did certainly drive her aunt out of Alwynne's mind, but after a couple of days she was ready to remind herself and Clare that Elsbeth, too, had some claim on her time. It is possible, however, that had she been happier, she would have been less readily scrupulous. Clare had certainly been glad to see her, had, for an

hour or two, been entirely delightful. But with the resumption of their mutual life Clare was not long in falling back into her old bad ways, and in revenge for her two months' boredom, in sheer teasing high spirits at Alwynne's return, as well as in unreasoning, petulant jealousy, led Alwynne a pretty enough dance. For Clare was jealous, jealous of these eight weeks of Alwynne's youth that did not belong to her, and between her jealousy and her own contempt for her jealousy, was in one of the moods that she and Alwynne alike dreaded.

The mornings at the school came as a relief to them both, but no sooner were they together again than Claret pricking devil must out. Scenes were incessant—wanton, childish scenes. Yet Alwynne, sore and bewildered as she was by Clare's waxing unreasonableness, was yet not proof against the sudden surrenders that always contrived to put her in the wrong. She would repeat to herself that it must be she who was unreasonable, that she should be flattered rather than distressed, for instance, that Clare would not let her go home. . . . She would rather be with Clare than Elsbeth, wouldn't she? Of course! well, then! . . . Nevertheless she could not help wondering if any letters had come for her; if Elsbeth, expecting her daily would bother to send them on. . . . Roger had promised to write. . . . She thought that really she ought to go home.

But Clare would not hear of her leaving. Elsbeth wanted Alwynne? So did she. Didn't Elsbeth always have Alwynne? Surely Alwynne was old enough to be away from Elsbeth for a fortnight, without leave granted! Really, with all due respect to her, Alwynne's aunt was a regular Old Man of the Sea.

"Clare!" Alwynne's tone had a hint of remonstrance.

"Oh, I said 'with all respect,' But if she were not your aunt I should really be tempted to get rid of her—have you here altogether. You would like that, Alwynne, eh?"

Alwynne refused to nod, but she laughed.

"'Get rid'? Clare, don't be absurd."

Clare looked at her, smiling, eyes narrowed in the old way.

"Do you think I couldn't get rid of her if I wanted to? I always do what I set out to do. Look at Henrietta Vigers."

Alwynne sat bolt upright.

"Miss Vigers? But she resigned! She had been meaning to leave I She told us so! Do you mean that she didn't want to leave? Do you mean that she had to?"

"Have you ever seen a liner launched? You press an electric button, you know—just a touch—it's awfully simple——" She paused, eyes dancing.

But Alwynne had no answering twinkle.

"I wouldn't have believed it," she said slowly. Then, distractedly, "But why, Clare, why? What possessed you?"

"She got in my way," said Clare indolently.

Alwynne turned on her, eyes blazing.

"You mean to say—you deliberately did that poor old thing out of her job? If you did——But I don't believe it. If you did——Clare, excuse me—but I think it was beastly."

"*Demon! With the highest respect to you——*" quoted Clare, tongue hi cheek.

But Alwynne was not to be pacified.

"Clare—you didn't, did you?"

"My dear, she was in the way. She worried you and you worried me. I don't like being worried."

Alwynne shivered.

"Don't, Clare! I hate you to talk like that—even in fun. It's—it's so cold-blooded."

"In fun!" Clare laughed lightly. Alwynne's youthful severity amused her. But she had gone, she perceived, a trifle too far. "Well, then, in earnest—joking apart——"

Alwynne's face relaxed. Of course, she had known all along that Clare was in fun. . . .

"Joking apart—it was time for Miss Vigers to go. I admit saying what I thought to Miss Marsham. I am quite ready to take responsibility. She was too old—too fussy—too intolerant—I can't stand intolerance. She had to go."

Alwynne looked wicked.

"Clare, you remind me of a man I met, down at Compton. You ought to get on together. He's great on tolerance too. So tolerant that five hundred years ago he'd have burned every one who wasn't as tolerant as he. As it is, he shrugs them out of existence, *d la* Podsnap. Just aa you did Miss Vigers just now."

"Who was he?"

"Don't know—only met him once. But he tickled me awfully. He hadn't the faintest idea how funny he was."

"Did he shrug you out of existence?"

"My dear Clare—could any one snub me? You might as well snub a rubber ball."

" Yes, you're pretty thick-skinned." Clare paid her back reflectively.

Alwynne winced.

" Am I ? I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be. How, just now ? "

Clare yawned.

" Well, for one thing, you needn't flavour your conversation exclusively with Denes. They bore me worse than if they had an ' a ' in them."

" I'm sorry." Alwynne paused. Then she plucked up courage. " Clare, I stayed there two months. The Dene people are my friends, my great friends. I don't think you need sneer at them."

Clare yawned again.

" I wonder you ever came back, if they're so absorbing. What is the particular attraction there, by the way ? The old women or the young men ? "

Alwynne's lips quivered.

" Clare, what has happened ? What is the matter with you nowadays ? Why are you grown so different ? Why are you always saying unkind things ? "

Clare shrugged her shoulders.

" Really, Alwynne, I am riot accustomed to be cross-examined. Such a bore, giving reasons. Besides, I haven't got any. Oh, don't look such a martyr."

" I think I'll go home," said Alwynne in a low voice. " I don't think you want me."

" But Elsbeth does, doesn't she ? "

Clare settled herself more comfortably in the comfortable Chesterfield as she watched Alwynne out of the room. She lay like a sleepy cat, listening to the muffled sounds of Al Wynne's packing; let her get ready to her hat and her gloves and the lacing of her boots, before she called her back, and played with her, and forgave her at the last. Yet she found Alwynne less pliable than usual: convicted of sin, she was yet resolved on departure, if not to-day—no, of course she would not go to-day, after behaving so ill to her Clare—then, the day following. That would be Friday—a completed fortnight—and Saturday was Clare's birthday—had Clare forgotten ? Alwynne hadn't, anyhow. Oh, she must come for Saturday, and what would Elsbeth say to that ? There must be one evening, at least, given to Elsbeth in between. After all, it was jolly dull for Elsbeth all by herself.

Clare, good-tempered for the first time that afternoon, supposed it was, rather.

But on that particular day, Alwynne's qualms of conscience were unnecessary. Elsbeth was not at all dull. Elsbeth, on the contrary, was tremendously excited. And Elsbeth had forgotten all about Alwynne, was not missing her in the least. Elsbeth had received a letter from Dene that morning, and was expecting Roger Lumsden to supper

CHAPTER XXXIX

ELSBETH spent her day in that meticulous and unnecessary arrangement and re-arrangement of her house and person, with which woman, since time was, has delighted to honour man, and which he, the unaccountable, has as inevitably failed to notice. The clean cretonnes had arrived in time and were tied and smoothed into place; the vases new-filled; and the fire, though spring-cleaning had been, sprawled opulently in a brickless grate. The matches, with the fifty cigarettes Elsbeth had bought that forenoon, hesitating and all too reliant upon the bored tobacconist, lay, aliens unmistakable, near Roger's probable seat, and the knowledge of the supper laid out in the next room fortified Elsbeth as, years ago, a new frock might have done. Alwynne, in every age and stage, dotted the piano and occasional tables, and a photograph that even Alwynne had never seen was placed on the mantelshelf, that Roger, greeting Elsbeth, might see it and forget to be shy.

But it was Elsbeth that was shy, when Roger, very punctual, arrived amid the chimes of the evening service. Yet Elsbeth had been ready since five. They greeted each other in dumb show and sat a moment, smiling and taking stock, while the clamour swelled, insisted, ebbed and died away.

Roger, still silent, began to fumble at a case he carried, while Elsbeth found herself apologetically and for the thousandth time wondering to her guest why she had taken root so near a church, while within herself a hard voice cried exultantly, " He's his father, his father over again ! Nothing of Rosemary there ! " and she tasted a little strange flash of triumph over the dead woman she had been too gentle to hate.

But suddenly her lap was filled with roses, bunch upon tight masculine bunch, and the formal sentences broke up into incoherence as Roger stooped and kissed his second cousin Elsbeth.

They soon made friends. Roger, who had never quite forgotten her, found the pleasant-faced spinster as attractive as

the pretty lady of his childhood. He examined her as he ate his supper. A spare figure, soft grey hair, and square, capable hands; a kind mouth, not a strong one, set in lines firmer than were natural to it; gentle eyes, no longer beautiful, and a cheerful, tired smile; a sweet face, thought Roger, not a happy one. Yet she had Alwynne! She fluttered a little over the meal, and was anxious about his coffee, and full of little enquiries and attentions that were never irritating. There was a faint scent of verberna as she moved about him, and her silk gown did not crackle like younger women's dresses. She listened well, but he guessed her no talker, and later in the evening, gauged her affection for Alwynne by her breathless fluency. He thought her charming and a little pathetic, and wondered why nobody had ever insisted on marrying her.

Elsbeth's shyness soon dwindled; she slipped quickly into the informal 'aunt and nephew' attitude that he evidently expected, and found his friendliness and obvious pleasure in her as delightful as it was astonishing. She supposed, with a wistful little shrug, that she was near the rose! Nevertheless she enjoyed herself.

They talked in narrowing circles: of his father a little; more of his mother; of Dene, and Elsbeth's former visits. He described Compton and The Dears, and his gardens and his roses. Then, with a chuckle, an unauthorized attempt of Alwynne at pruning that had ended in disaster; and so plunged into coincidences.

"I expect you've guessed that I intend—that I want to marry Alwynne—with your permission," he added hastily, smiling down at her.

Elsbeth envied him his inches. For Alwynne's sake she did not intend to be dominated; but she found his mere masculinity a little overpowering, and did not guess that her frail dignity had made its own impression.

She smiled back at him.

"I'm glad you put that in. You should respect grey hairs."

"But I do."

"No. You imply that I'm a very blind and foolish guardian! My dear boy," her pretty voice shook a little, "I've hoped and prayed for this. You, John's boy, and—and dear Rosemary's, of course—and Alwynne, who's dearer to me than a daughter! Why, that's why I sent her down to Dene J" She blushed the rare blush of later middle age. "Oh, my dear—it was

shameless ! I was matchmaking ! I was ! And I've always considered it so indelicate. But I wished so strongly that you two might come together. When Alwynne wrote of you so often, I hoped : and then your letters made me sure. You had got on so well without me these twenty-five years—and then to feel the ties of kinship so very strongly all of a sudden—it was transparent, Roger."

He laughed.

" I hadn't forgotten really—though it's the vaguest memory. You gave me a rabbit in a green cabbage that opened. And one Sunday we shared Prayer Books. You had a blue dress—a pale blue that one never sees nowadays, and very pink cheeks."

" Ah ! the *crSpe de Chine*," said Elsbeth absently.

" I always remembered—though I'd forgotten I did. Alwynne brought it back. She's like you in some ways, you know. She made me awfully curious to see you again. From the way she talked I knew you'd be decent to me." He smiled. " Elsbeth—I'm tremendously in love."

" Have you told her so ? "

" Alwynne's rather difficult to get hold of. She doesn't understand anything but black and white."

" Clare Hartill—I suppose you've heard of Clare Hartill ? "

" Have I not ! "

" Clare Hartill says she has an uncanny ear for nuances."

" Also that she's thick-skinned ! The woman's a fool."

" Oh, she's quite right, Roger, though I expect she was in a temper when she said it. But it only means that Alwynne has been trained to listen to women. She can't follow men yet. She has been advised that they are grown-up children and that her role is to be superior but tactful."

He chuckled.

" Yes. When Alwynne's tactful—she's tactful *I*. You can't mistake it, can you ? Have you ever seen her sidling out of a room when she thought she wasn't wanted ? Still, she can hold her own, on occasion. She simply walked through my hints. But—how does she talk of me, Elsbeth, if she does at all, that is ? "

" She likes you, in the ' good old Roger ' fashion."

" But you do think I have a chance ? "

" That's why I wanted to see you. Frankly, at present I don't think you have."

He looked at her coolly, not at all depressed.

"Why not? "

" Clare Hartill."

" Ah ! " He sat down at the table again, his chin in his fist.

" You think her the obstacle ? "

" I taught her once. Alwynne has been absorbed in her for two years. Alwynne talks——" they both smiled. " I could compare. I ought to know her pretty well."

" Yes. But how can she affect Alwynne and me ? Of course I know what a lot Alwynne thinks of her. She's rather delightful on the subject. Thinks her perfection, and so on. Alwynne is naive; conveys more than she knows or intends, sometimes. And she never looks at her god's feet, does she ? ' Clare ' and ' Clare ' and ' Clare.' Personally, I imagine her a bit of a brute."

" I try to be fair. She is fond of Alwynne."

" Why not? But what's that got to do with Alwynne's caring for me, if I am lucky enough to make her ? And I'm—conceitedly sure—that it's only a question of waking Alwynne up."

" You don't know Clare. If once she knows, she'll never let the child go."

" But if Alwynne were engaged to me ? "

" She'll never allow it. She'll play on Alwynne's affection for her."

" But why? I shouldn't interfere with their friendship."

" My dear Roger—marriage ends friendship automatically. Clare would be shrewd enough to see that. And even—otherwise—she would never share. You don't guess how jealous women are."

Roger leant back in his chair with a gesture of bewilderment.

" My dearest cousin ! The age of sorcery is over. You talk as if Alwynne were under a spell."

" Practically she is. Of course Clare would put it on the highest grounds—unsuitability—a waste of talents. She pretends to despise domesticity. Alwynne would be hypnotized into repeating her arguments as her own opinion."

" Hypnotism ? "

" Oh, not literally. But she really does influence some women, and young girls especially, in the most uncanny way. I've watched it so often."

" She's not married ? "

" She hardly ever speaks to a man. I've seen her at gaities, when she was younger. She wag always rather stranded. Men

left her alone. Something in her seems to repel them. I think she fully realized it. And she's a proud woman. There's tragedy in it."

"Does she repel you?"

"Not in that way. I dislike her. I think her dangerous. I'm intensely sorry for her. And I do understand something of the attraction she exercises, better than you can, though it has never affected me. You see—eccentricity—abnormality—does not affect women as it does men. And she's brilliantly clever."

"So is Alwynne—you wouldn't call her abnormal?"

"Alwynne? Never! She's as sound and sweet as an apple. But—and it means a good deal at her age—she's in abnormal hands. Clare Hartill is abnormal, spiritually perverse—and she's fastened on the child. They adore each other. It's terribly bad for Alwynne. As it is, it will take her months to shake off Clare's influence, even with you to help her. That is, if you succeed in detaching her. I'm useless, of course. Loving—just loving—is no good. You can only influence if you are strong enough to wound. I merely irritate. I'm weak. But you could do as you like, I believe. Take her away from that selfish woman, Hoger! It's blighting her."

"You think," he said, "that she would be content with me—with marriage as a career? Of course, Miss Hartill's right about her talents."

"Alwynne? I don't think—I know. All her gifts are so much surface show; she's a very simple child underneath. Content? Can't you see her, Roger—with children! Her own babies?"

Koger beamed.

"It's rather a jolly prospect. Well, I must take my chance."

"Of course, you must wait; it's too soon yet. Even later, if Clare really wants her—wants her enough to suppress her own perverse impulses—I'm afraid you've little chance. But it's possible that she will not want her as much as that."

"I don't follow."

"I mean that Clare, with that impish nature of hers, may hurt Alwynne."

"I should think she has already, often enough."

"Yes—but Alwynne has never realized it, never realized that it was deliberate. She is always so sure that it was her fault somehow. If once she found out that dare was hurting her

for—for the fun of it, you know—for the pleasure of watching her suffer—as I'm sure she does—it might end everything. Alwynne hates cruelty. That poor child's death shook her. A little more, and she will be disillusioned."

"But loyal still?"

"Probably. But the glamour would be gone. She would be extremely unhappy. There your chance would come. Though I don't think Clare will give it you—for I believe Alwynne does mean more to her than most things. But she's an unaccountable person: there is the chance."

"I see," Roger rose and straightened himself. "Practically I'm not to depend on my own—attractions—at all." He laughed a little. "I am to watch the whims of this—this unpleasant school-marm, and be grateful to her for forcing Alwynne to prefer my deep sea to her devil. The situation is hardly dignified."

Elsbeth laughed too.

"Love is always undignified, Roger. What does it matter if you want her?" But she watched him anxiously as he walked to the window, and stood staring out.

There was a silence. At last he turned—

"Elsbeth, dear, it's a beautiful scheme, and a woman could carry it through, I daresay—but it's no good to me. It's too—too tortuous, too feminine. I don't mean anything rude. It's merely that I'm not—subtle enough, or patient. At least, I haven't got that cat-and-mouse kind of patience. I can wait, you know. That's different. I can wait all right. But I can't intrigue."

Elsbeth flushed.

"There is no intrigue. It's a question of understanding Alwynne and of using the opportunity when it comes."

"To trick and surprise and over-persuade her into caring for me! It's no good, Elsbeth. It isn't possession I want—it's Alwynne. Can't you see? We should neither of us be happy. She would always distrust me and remember that I'd taken an advantage. I should end by hating her, I believe. Can't you see?"

Elsbeth was shaken by her own thoughts.

"I see," she said finally. "And I see that you don't love her—or you'd take her on any terms."

"Would you?"

"Yes."

" Well, I wouldn't. And I do love her. But I want Alwynne on my terms. Do I sound an awful prig ? Cousin Elsbeth, hear my way ! I'm going to have it out with Alwynne."

" At once ? "

" At once. As soon as I see her—no beating about the bush,"

" Roger—she may be utterly out of the mood."

" Hang moods ! I beg your pardon, Elsbeth. But I'm going to tell her—certain things. If she doesn't like it I'm going back to Dene. She'll know where to find me when she changes her mind. Elsbeth, don't look so hopeless."

" You don't understand Alwynne."

" I don't want to understand her—I want to marry her. I must stick to my own way. Can't you conceive that all this consideration, all this deference to moods and dissection of motives, this horribly feminine atmosphere that she seems to have lived in, of subtleties, and reservations, and simulations—may be bad for her ? It seems to me that she's always being thought about. You, with your anxious affection—that unholy woman with her lancet and probe—you neither of you leave her alone for a second. She's always being touched. Well, I'm going to leave her alone. It gives her a chance."

" I've never spoiled her." Elsbeth was off at a tangent.

" I'm sure of it. I can remember leather holding you up to Mother once. He said you were the most judicious woman with children that he knew."

" Did he ? " said Elsbeth.

" Mother was awfully annoyed." Roger chuckled. " I'd been bawling for my fourth doughnut—and got it."

" I've never spoiled Alwynne," repeated Elsbeth tonelessly.

" No one could," remarked Roger with conviction.

Elsbeth looked up and laughed at him.

" So you are human ! " she said. " I was beginning to doubt it."

" When I get on the subject of Alwynne's adorableness——" he laughed back at her, " we're obviously cousins, aren't we ? But, really, I've been trying to be detached, and critical, and analytical, and all the things you feel are important. I wanted to see what you meant, Cousin Elsbeth; and I do see that we both want the same thing. But as to the means—I believe I must go my own way."

She eyed him doubtfully. But he looked very big and solid in the little room, comfortably sure of himself.

" You think me a frantic old clucking hen, don't you ' And are just a Little sorry for the duckling."

" I think you're a perfect dear," said Roger.

" You'll come to-morrow *I* Alwynne will be back, I hope."

" What time is she likely to turn up ? "

" About four, if she conies. She would lunch with Clare, I expect."

He nodded whimsically.

" Very well. To-morrow, at four precisely, there will be a row royal. To-morrow I am calling on Miss Hartill to fetch Alwynne home. Good-bye, Cousin Elsbeth."

He turned again in the doorway.

" Elsbeth, there's a house at Dene I've got my eye on. There's a turret room. My best roses will clamber right into it. That's to be yours. And Elsbeth ! Nobody but you shall run the nursery."

He had shut the door before she could answer, and she heard him laugh as he ran, two at a time, down the shallow steps.

She went to the window and watched till his strong figure had disappeared in the dusk.

" He is very like his father," said Elsbeth wistfully, glancing across at the faded likeness.

The dusk deepened and the stars began to twinkle.

" He will never be the man his father was," cried Elsbeth, suddenly and defiantly.

Her hands shook as she cleared away the remnants of the meal. She swept up the hearth, picked the coals carefully apart, and tidied the tidy room. Roger's roses still lay in a heap in the basket chair. She gathered them up and carried them into the tiny bathroom, that they might drink their fill all night. Their scent was strong and sweet. Then she lit her candle and prepared for bed.

The sheets were very cold. She tried not to think of Roger's father, lying in the grave she had never seen. The old, cruel longing was upon her for the sound of his voice and the sight of his face and the sweetness of his smile. She broke inixi painful weeping.

The hours wore past.

Of course he would marry Alwynne. . . . Alwynne would be happy. . . there was comfort in that . . . Roger would be kind to her. . . A good boy . . . a dear boy. . . .

" And he might have been my son," cried out Elsbeth to the uncaring night.

CHAPTER XL

ROGER never fought his battie-royal with Clare, for at the turn of Friar's Lane he met Alwynne herself, dragging wearily along the cobblestones, weighed down by paper parcels and the heavy folds of the waterproof hanging on her arm. Her hair was roughened by the wind that tugged and strained at her loosened hat; her face was drawn and shadowy; ehe had an air of exhaustion, of indefinable demoralization that Roger recognized angrily. Ho had seen it in the first weeks of her visit to Dene. Her thoughts were evidently far away, and she would have passed him without a look if he had not stopped her. She started violently as he spoke—it was like rousing a nightmare-ridden sleeper—then her face grew radiant.

"Roger!" she cried, and beamed at him like a delighted child.

He possessed himself of her parcels and they walked on, Alwynne's questions and exclamations tumbling over each other. Roger at Utterbridge! Why had he come? How long was he staying? How were The Dears and how did Dene spare him? When had he arrived?

Roger dropped his bomb.

"Yesterday. I went to supper with Elsbeth. We had a long talk."

His tone conveyed much. The brightness died out of Alwynne's face. She looked surprised and excessively annoyed.

"She knew you were coming?"

"She did,"¹

"Why on earth didn't she let me know? Why, she doesn't know you! She hasn't seen you since you were a kid! It's extraordinary of Elsbeth."

"I wouldn't let her."

"Wouldn't let her?" Alwynne looked at him blankly.

"Roger—I think you're cracked."

"Terse and to the point! Don't you worry. Elsbeth and I understand each other. Besides, we've been corresponding."

" You and Elsbeth ? "

" Yes. That's partly why I came. I wanted to get to know her. You see, your description and her letters didn't tally. So I came. We got on jolly well. I burst in on her again at breakfast this morning. She didn't fuss—took it like a lamb. I fancy you underrate our cousin—in more ways than one. She knows it too; she's no fool! I found that out when we talked about you."

" Elsbeth discussed me ?—with you ? " Alwynne's tone foreboded a bad half-hour to Elsbeth.

" Why not ? You're not sacred, are you ? " Roger chuckled.

Alwynne felt inclined to box his ears. Here was a new Roger. Roger—her own property—to take such an attitude—to ally himself with Elsbeth—to leave her in the dark ! Roger ! It was unthinkable. . . . And she had been so awfully glad to see him . . . absurdly glad to see him . . . he had made her forget even Clare. . . . Clare. . . . She began to occupy her mind once more with the scene of the previous day, recalling what she had said; contrasting it with what she had intended to say; stabbed afresh by Clare's manner; writhing at her own helplessness; when Roger's slow voice brought her thoughts back to the present.

" You've been away from Elsbeth a fortnight," he said accusingly, as they entered the Town Gardens.

She flared anew at his tone.

" Certainly. I've been staying with friends. Have you any objection ? "

" A friend," he corrected.

She flushed.

" Clare Hartill is my best friend——"

" Your worst, you mean."

She turned on him.

" How dare you say that ? How dare you speak of my friends like that ? How dare you speak to me at all ? "

He continued, quite unmoved—

" Don't be silly, Alwynne. Your best friend is your Aunt Elsbeth—you ought to know that. You don't treat her well, I think. You've been away a fortnight with that—friend of yours; you stayed on without consulting her——"

" I telephoned," cried Alwynne, in spite of herself.

" Since then you've sent her one post-card. She isn't even sure that you're coming back to-day; she's just had to sit tight

and wait until it's your—no, I'll give you your due—until it's your friend's pleasure to send you back to her, fagged out, miserable—just like my dog after a thrashing. And Elsbeth's to comfort you, and cosset you, and put you to rights—and then you'll go back to that woman again, to have the strength and the spirit drained out of you afresh—and you walk along talking of your best friend. I call it hard luck on Elsbeth."

Alwynne's careful dignity was forgotten in her anger. She turned on him like a furious schoolgirl.

"Will you stop, please?² How dare you speak of Clare? If Elsbeth chooses to complain——What affair is it of yours, anyhow? I'll never speak to you again—never—or Elsbeth either." Her voice broke—she was on the verge of tears.

Roger took her by the arm, and drew her to a seat.

"You'd better sit down," he said. "We've heaps to talk over yet, more than you've a notion of. And if we're to have a row, let's get it over in the open—far less dangerous. Never get to cover in a thunderstorm. I know what you want." He had watched her fumbling unavailingly in bag and pocket and had chuckled. He knew his Alwynne. He produced a clean silk handkerchief and dangled it before her. She clutched at it with undignified haste.

"'Thank you,' first," he said, holding it firmly. A moment victory hung in the balance. Then—

"Oh! Oh, thank you," said Alwynne, with fine unconcern, and secured it. Their eyes met. It was impossible not to smile.

"At the same time," remarked Alwynne, a little later, "you've no right to talk to me like that, Roger, whatever you choose to think. You're not my cousin."

"I'm Elsbeth's. It strikes me she needs defending."

Alwynne laughed.

"You know I'm awfully fond of Elsbeth. You know I am. I am a beast sometimes to her, you're quite right—but she doesn't really need defending. Honestly."

"Not from you, I know. But frankly, without wanting to be rude to your friend—I think she makes you careless of Elsbeth's feelings. Elsbeth was awfully hurt this week, and she's the Bort of dear one hates to see hurt."

Alwynne looked at him wistfully.

"Roger," she said hesitatingly, "suppose some one were unkind to me—hurt me—hurt me badly, very often, almost

on purpose—would you defend me? Would you care at all?"

"I shouldn't let 'em," he grunted.

"If you couldn't help it?"

"I shouldn't let 'em," he repeated doggedly.

"But should you care?"

"Of course I should. What rot you talk. Of course I should. But I shouldn't let them."

"Oh, Roger," she cried, suddenly and pitifully, "they do hurt me sometimes—they do, they do."

Roger looked around him with unusual caution. The Gardens were empty. There was not even a loafer in sight. He put his arm round her, and drew her clumsily to him. She yielded like a tired child, and lay quietly, staring with brimming eyes at the gaudy tulip-bed on the further side of the walk.

"I believe you're about fed up with that school of yours," he said, after a time, as if he had not followed the allusion to Clare. She nodded.

"I'm not lazy, Roger; you know it's not that. It's just the atmosphere, and the awful crowding. Such a lot of women at close quarters, all enthusiasm and fussing and importance. They're all hard-working, and all unselfish and keen—more than a crowd of men would be, I believe. But that's just it—they're dears when you get them alone, but somehow, all together, they stifle you. And they all have high voices, that squeak when they're keenest. D'you know, that was what first made me like you, Roger—your voice? It's slow, and deep, -and restful—such a reasonable voice. You mustn't think me disloyal to the school. The girls are all frightfully interesting, and the women are dears, and there's always Clare—only we do get on each other's nerves."

"A boys' school is just the same."

"Is it? I've only seen Compton. I don't know how co-education affects the boys, but I'm sure it's good for the girls, and the mistresses too. Of course, they're not really different to my lot, but they seemed so. They had room to move. They weren't always rubbing up against each other like apples in a basket. It all seemed so natural and jolly. Fresh air everywhere. And since I've been back, I've felt I couldn't breathe. I believe it's altered me, just seeing it all; and I can't make Clare understand. She thinks I liked Dene because I wanted to flirt."

" That type would."

" Yes, I know you think that," she answered uneasily, " but she isn't—that horrid type. That's why it hurts so that she can't understand. As if I ever thought of such a thing until she talked of it ! Only I like talking to men, you know, Roger; because they've often got quite interesting minds, and it's easier to find out what they really think than with women. But they bore Clare."

" Do they ? " Roger had his own opinion on the question. But he found that it was difficult to refrain from kissing Alwynne when she looked at him with innocent eyes and made preposterous statements; so he stared at the tulips.

" You see, she thinks—we both think, that if you've got a—a really real woman friend, it's just as good as falling in love and getting married and all that—and far less commonplace. Besides the trouble—smoking, you know—and children. Clare hates children."

" Do you ? " Roger looked at her gravely.

" Me ? I love them. That's the worst of it. When I grew old, I'd meant to adopt some—only Clare wouldn't let me, I'm sure. Of course, as long as Clare wanted me, I shouldn't mind. To live with Clare all my life—oh, you know how I'd love it. I just—I love her dearly, Roger, you know I do—in spite of things I've told you. Only—oh, Roger, suppose she got tired of me. And, since I've been back, sometimes I believe she is."

" Poor old girl! "

" It's a shame to grizzle to you; it can't be interesting; and, of course, I don't mean for one moment to attack Clare; only everything I do seems wrong. When she sneers, I get nervous; and the more nervous I get, the more I do things wrong—you know, silly things, like spilling tea and knocking into furniture. And she gets furious and then we have a scene. It's simply miserable. We had one yesterday, and again this morning. It's my fault, of course—I get on her nerves."

" You never get on my nerves," said Roger suggestively.

" Not when I chop up your best pink roses ? " She looked at him sideways, dimpling a little.

" As long as you don't chop up your own pink fingers—you've got pretty fingers, Alwynne——"

" Roger, you're a comforting person. I wish—I wish Clare

would treat me as you do, sometimes. You pull me up too, but you never make me nervous. I'm sure I shouldn't disappoint her so often, if she did."

"Alwynne," he returned with a twinkle, "stop talking. I've made a discovery!"

"Well?"

"You're ten times fonder of me than you are of that good lady. Now, own up."

"Roger!" Alwynne was outraged. She made efforts to sit upright, but Roger's arm did not move. It was a strong arm and it held her, if anything, a trifle more firmly. "You're talking rot. Please let me sit up."

"You're all right. It's quite true, my child, and you know it. Ah, yes—they're a lovely colour, aren't they?"

For Alwynne was gazing at the tulips with elaborate indifference. Secretly she was a little excited. Here was a new Roger. . . . He was quite mad, of course, but rather a dear. . . . She wondered what he would say next. . . .

"To examine our evidence. You were very glad to see me—now weren't you?"

"I'm always pleased," remarked Alwynne sedately to the tulips, "to see old friends."

"Yes—but we're not old friends exactly, if you refer to length of acquaintanceship. If to age—I WAS thirty last March. I'm not doddering yet."

"I wasn't speaking of ages. Thirty is perfectly young. Clare's thirty-five. You do fish, Roger."

"Yes. I'm going to have a haul some day soon, I hope. But to resume. Firstly, you were jolly glad to see me. Secondly, you took your lecture very fairly meekly—for you! and you've already had one talking-to to-day during which, I gather, you were anything but meek."

"I never told you——"

"But there was a glint in your eye——You've no idea how invariably your face gives you away, Alwynne. Thirdly, you've hinted quite half-a-dozen times that Miss Hartill would be all the better for a few of my virtues. Tenth, and finally, you've made my coat collar thoroughly damp—you needn't try to move—and I don't exactly see you spoiling your Clare's Sunday blouse that way, often, eh?"

Alwynne was obliged to agree with the tulip.

" I thought so. Therefore I say, after considering all the evidence—in your heart of hearts you are ten times fonder of me than of Miss Clare Hartill."

The trap was attractively baited. Impossible for an Alwynne to resist analysis of her own emotions. She walked into it.

" I don't know—I wonder if you're right ? Perhaps I am *fonder* of you. I love Clare—that's quite a different thing. One couldn't be fond of Clare. That would be commonplace. She's the sort of wonderful person you just worship. She's like a cathedral—a sort of mystery. Now you're like a country cottage, Roger. Of course, one couldn't be fond of a cathedral."

" A cottage," remarked Roger to the tulips in his turn, " can be a very comfortable place. Especially if it's a good-sized one—Holt Meadows, for instance. My tenants leave in June, did you know ? There's a south wall and a croquet ground."

"Tennis? "

Roger was afraid the tulips would find it too small for tennis.

" But a court could be made in Nicholas Nye's paddock," Alwynne reminded them.

Roger thought it would be rather fun to live there, tennis or no tennis—didn't the tulips think so ?

The tulips did, rather.

" One could buy Witch Wood for a song, I believe; you know it runs along the paddock. Think of it, all Witch Wood for a wild garden."

" And no trespassers ! No trampled hyacinths any more ! Or ginger-beer bottles ! Oh, Roger ! " A delighted, delightful Alwynne was forgetting all about the tulips; but they nodded very pleasantly for all that.

" A footpath through to The Dears' garden, and my glass-houses. And chickens in a corner of the paddock. You'd have to undertake those."

" All white ones ! "

" Better have Buff Orpingtons. Lay better. Remember Jean's troubles : ' Really, the Amount of Eggs——' "

" Dear Jean. And besides, I shall want some for clutches. I adore them when they're all fluff and squeak; and ducklings too, Roger. We won't have incubators, will we ? "

" Rather not. Lord, it will be sport. You're to wear print dresses at breakfast, Alwynne—lilac, with spots."

" You're very particular——"

" Like that one you wore at the Fair—you know."

" Oh, that one ! Do you mean to say——All right. But I shall wear tea-gowns every afternoon—with lace and frilliei. Elsbeth says they're theatrical."

" All right! We'll eat muffins——"

" And read acres of books——"

" May I smoke ? "

"It'll get into the curtains——"

" I'll get you a new lot once a week——"

" And we won't ever be at home to callers——"

" Just us two."

Alwynne sighed contentedly.

" Oh, Roger, it would be rather nice. You can invent beautifully."

He laughed.

" Then we'll consider that settled."

He bent his head and kissed her.

A very light kiss—a very airy and fugitive attempt at a kiss—a kiss that suited the moment better than his mood; but Roger could be Fabian in his methods. Alwynne rather thought that it was a curl brushing her forehead : the tulips rather thought it wasn't. Roger could have settled the matter, but they did not like to appeal to him. They were all a little disturbed—more than a little uncertain how to act. The tulips' attitude was frankly alarming to Alwynne, who (if the kiss had really happened) was prepared to be dignified and indignant. The tulips, however, appeared to think a kiss a pleasant enough indiscretion. " To someone, at any rate, we are worth the kissing," quoth the tulips defiantly, with irreverent eyes on a vision of Clare's horrified face. Then, veering smartly, they reminded Alwynne, that from a patient, protective Roger it was the most brotherly and natural of sequels to their make-believe. Alwynne was not so sure; Roger was developing characteristics of which the kiss (had it taken place) was not the least exciting and alarming symptom. He was no longer the Roger of Dene days, not a month dead; or rather, the Dene Roger was proving himself but a facet of a many-sided personality—big, too—that was more than a match for a many-sided Alwynne, with moods that met and enveloped hers, as a woman's hands will catch and cover a baby's aimless fist. More than his strength, his gentleness disturbed her. So long a prisoner to Clare, ever bruising herself against the narrow walls of that labyrinthine mind—she would have been indifferent to any

harshness from him; but his kindliness, his simplicity, unnerved her. He had been right—she had her pride. Clare did not often guess when her self-control was undermined. But with Roger—what was the use of pretending to Roger? It had been comforting to have a good cry. His kiss had been comforting too. She remembered the first of Clare's rare kisses—the thin fingers that gripped her shoulders; the long, fierce pressure, mouth to mouth; the rough gesture that released her, flung her aside.

But Roger—if, indeed, she had not dreamed—had been comforting. Here the tulips broke his whimsically with the brazen suggestion that it would be delightful to put one's arms round Roger's neck and return that supposititious kiss. A remark, of course, of which no flower but a flaunting scarlet tulip could be capable. Alwynne was horrified at the tulips. Horrified by the tulips, worried by her own uncertainties, puzzled by the imperturbable face smiling down at her. Certainly not a conscience-stricken face. Probably the entire incident was a wild imagining of the tulips. She had watched those nodding spring devils long enough. Time to go home: at any rate it was time to go home.

It puzzled her anew that Roger's arm was no longer about her, that he should make no effort to detain her, or to reopen the conversation; that he should walk at her side in his usual fashion, originating nothing. Once or twice, glancing up at him, she surprised a smile of inscrutable satisfaction, but he did not speak; he merely met her eyes steadily, still smiling, till she dropped her own once more. A month ago she would have challenged that smile, cavilled and cross-examined. To-day she was quaintly intimidated by it. Indeed a new Roger! She never dreamed of a new Alwynne.

Yet for all her perplexity and very real physical fatigue, Alwynne walked with a light step and a light heart. As usual she was absurdly touched by his unconscious protective movements—the touch on her arm at crossings—the juggle of places on the fresh pathway—the little courtesies which the woman-bred girl had practised, without receiving, appealed to her enormously. She felt like a tall schoolchild, 'gentleman' perforce at all her dancing lessons, who, at her first ball, comes delightedly into her own.

She gave Roger little friendly glances as they walked home, but no words; though she could have talked had he invited.

But Roger was resolutely silent, and for some obscure reason this embarrassed her more than his previous loquacity. Gradually she grew conscious of her crumpled dress and loosened hair; that a button was missing on her glove; trifles not often wont to trouble her. She wondered if Roger had noticed the button's absence; she hoped fervently that he had not. She glanced obscurely at shop-windows, whose blurred reflections could not help her to the conviction that her hat was straight. Also it dawned upon her that Roger was weighed down by preposterous parcels; that the parcels were her own. She was sure the string was cutting his fingers. She was penitent, knowing that she would not be allowed to relieve him, and hugely annoyed with herself. She had been scolded often enough for her parcel habit, and had laughed at Elsbeth; and here was Elsbeth proved entirely right. Weighing down Roger like this! What would he think of her? He had not spoken for ten minutes. . . . Of course—he was annoyed. . . . They had better get home as quickly as might be. . . .

CHAPTER XLI

ELSBETH, sitting at the window, had seen them come down the street, and was at the door to welcome them. Alwynne was kissed, rather gravely, but Elsbeth and Roger greeted each other like the oldest of trusted friends. Alwynne's eyebrows lifted, but Elsbeth ignored her. She scolded Roger for being late, showed him his roses, revived and fragrant in their blue bowls; and when Alwynne turned to go and dress, declared that he looked starved, that supper was long overdue, and must be eaten at once. Roger seconded her, and to supper they went.

Alwynrie raged silently. What was the matter with Elsbeth? She had barely greeted her. . . . And now to be so inconsiderate. . . . To insist on sitting down to supper then and there, without giving her time to make herself decent! Couldn't she see how tired Alwynne was, how badly in need of soap and water and a brush and comb, let alone a prettier frock? It wasn't fair! Elsbeth might know she would want to look nice—with Roger there. . . . She did not choose to look a frump, however Elsbeth dressed herself. . . .

It dawned on her, however, as Elsbeth, resigning the joint to Roger, began to mix a salad under his eye, after some particular recipe of his imparting, that Elsbeth, on this occasion, was looking anything but a frump. She wore her best dress of soft, dark purple stuff, and the scarf of fine old lace, that, as Alwynne very well knew, saw the light on high and holy days only; and a bunch of Roger's roses were tucked in her belt. Her hair was piled high in a fashion new to Alwynne: a tiny black velvet bow set off its silvery grey: it was waved, too, and clustered becomingly at the temples. Alwynne, gasping, realized that Elsbeth must have paid a visit to the local coiffeur. She realized also, for the first time, how pretty, so delicate, pink-may fashion, her aunt must once have been.

At any other time Alwynne would have been delighted at the

improvement, for she was proud of Elsbeth, in daughterly fashion, and had wrestled untiringly with her indifference to dress. She knew she should have hailed the change, but, to her own annoyance, she found it irritating. It displeased her that she herself should be dishevelled and day-worn, while Elsbeth faced her, cool and dainty and dignified. Roger was so obviously impressed. . . . Roger, to whom Elsbeth had been so carefully, so deprecatingly explained. . . . It made Alwynne look such a fool. . . . How was she to know that Elsbeth would have this whim? She had never guessed that Elsbeth could make herself look so charming. . . . And she to be in her street clothes . . . with her hair like a mouse's nest! it was too bad! However, it didn't seem to matter. . . . Roger, it was clear enough, had no eyes for her. . . .

Her resentment grew. She attempted to join in the conversation, but though Roger listened gravely, and answered politely—she never caught the twinkle in his eye—he invariably flung back the ball to Elsbeth as quickly as might be. She mentioned Dene; made intimate allusions to their walks and adventures; and he turned to explain them, to include Elsbeth, with a pointedness that made Alwynne pink with vexation. She began to long to get him to herself . . . to quarrel or make peace, as he pleased . . . but anyhow to get him to herself. . . . Couldn't one have a moment's conversation without dragging Elsbeth into it? So absurd of Roger. . . .

Slowly she realized that neither Roger nor Elsbeth were finding her indispensable, and her surprise was only rivalled by her indignation. Elsbeth particularly—it was simply beastly of Elsbeth—was being, in her impalpable way, unapproachable. . . . She was angry about something. . . . Alwynne knew the signs. . . . She, Alwynne, supposed that she ought to have written. . . . But she did write a post-card. . . . One couldn't be everlastingly writing letters. . . . Any one but Elsbeth would have waived the matter, with a visitor present, but Elsbeth was so vindictive. . . . Here Alwynne's rebellious conscience allied itself with her sense of humour, to protest against the picture of a vindictive Elsbeth. They bubbled with tender laughter at the idea. Alwynne must needs laugh with them, a trifle remorsefully, and admit that the idea was fantastic; that Elsbeth, in all the years she had known her, had been the most meek and forgiving of guardians; and that she, Alwynne, had been wdeniably negligent. Nevertheless,

why must Elsbeth show Roger the kitchen? What was he saying to her out there? And why were they both laughing like that?

"Cackle, cackle, cackle," muttered Alwynne viciously; "awfully funny, isn't it?"

She continued her reflections.

Fussing over clearing the supper still! One of Elsbeth's absurd ideas, just because it was the maid's evening out. . . . Let her do it when she came back! Such a fuss and excitement always! What would Roger think of them? What a long time they were! She might take the opportunity of going to change her frock. . . . She hesitated. What was that? What was Roger saying? She caught the murmur of his deep voice and her aunt's staccato in answer, but the words were blurred.

After all—why should she bother to change? Elsbeth would be sure to make unnecessary remarks. . . . And Roger wouldn't care—he was too occupied with Elsbeth. . . . Nobody cared—nobody wanted her. . . . She would go back to Clare to-morrow. . . . But if Clare were in to-day's humour still?

What a wretched week it had been. . . . Even if Clare had not been so moody, Alwynne would have felt ill at ease. . . . she had known perfectly well that she owed the first weeks of her return to her aunt. . . . but at a hint from Clare she had stifled her conscience and stayed. . . . And now Elsbeth, she could tell, was deeply hurt. . . . Once away from Clare, Alwynne could reflect and be sorry. . . . She wouldn't have believed that she could be so careless of Elsbeth's feelings. . . . She was suddenly and generously furious with herself. How selfish, how abominably selfish she had been. . . . No wonder Roger had been shocked! Of course neither he nor Elsbeth could ever understand how difficult it was to withstand Clare. . . . It had been possible once. . . . Her thoughts strayed to that early Christmas when she had resisted all Clare's arguments. . . . But now she had no choice. . . . However determined one might be beforehand—and she had intended to return that first day—one's will was beaten aside, blown about like a straw in a strong wind. . . . If only Roger would understand that. . . . She hated him to think her BO selfish. . . . Elsbeth needn't have told him, she thought resentfully. . . . it was not like Elsbeth to give her away. . . . She supposed she had hurt Elsbeth's feelings pretty badly. . . . Why, oh why, hadn't she been firmer with Clare? She had only to say, quite quietly,

that she must do what she felt to be right. . . . Clare couldn't have eaten her. . . .

She began to rehearse the conversation; it soothed her to compose the telling phrases she might have uttered. They sounded all right . . . but, of course, face to face with Clare she could never have said them. . . . Clare, in indifference, displeasure or appeal, would have conquered without battle given . . . in her heart she knew that.

She moved uneasily about the room, deep in thought. For the first time her attitude to Clare struck her as contemptible. . . . What had Roger said? 'Like a dog after a thrashing,' Intolerable! She flung up her head, her pride writhing under the phrase. So that was how it struck outsiders! Outsiders? She didn't care a dead leaf for outsiders. . . . Let them think what they chose! But Roger? And Elsbeth? Did they really think her weak and enslaved? It stung her that Roger should think so meanly of her. She told herself that the loss of his opinion in no way affected her—and instantly began to revolve within herself phrases, explanations, actions, wherewith to regain it. And there was Elsbeth. . . . He had thought her unkind to Elsbeth. . . . He was right there! She saw, remorsefully, with her usual thoroughness, that she had been, for many a long year, as the plagues of Egypt to her Elsbeth.

She flung herself on the prim little sofa, and stared at the closed door uncertainly. She was too proud to do what she wanted to do—invalidate the kitchen, and regardless of Roger's eyes and presence, confess to Elsbeth, and receive absolution. A word, she knew, would be enough. . . . If Elsbeth felt as miserable as she did—a word would be more than enough. . . .

Elsbeth and Roger, returning to the sitting-room, ended her indecision. Their manner had changed—Roger was quieter—less talkative—but Elsbeth was so radiant that Alwynnc decided that contrition could wait. More than ever she realized that two were company. . . .

Her anger grew again as she watched and listened.

Elsbeth had produced cards, and suggested three-handed bridge. Alwynne excused herself, and Roger, who had been her partner on occasion at Dene, was obviously relieved. His Alwynne was the One Woman—but she could not play bridge!

He settled down to double-dummy with Elsbeth. The conversation became a rapt and technical duet, punctuated with interminable pauses.

Alwynne fumed.

So this was Elsbeth's idea of a really pleasant evening ! Cards ! Beastly, idiotic cards ! Roger, her Roger, had come up all the way from Dene to play cards with Elsbeth ! Had he just ? All right then ! He should have all the cards he wanted—and more ! As for Elsbeth—catch Alwynne telling her she was sorry now !

The striking of the clock gave her her opportunity. She rose, yawning elaborately.

" I'm going to bed," she remarked to the card-table.

" Are you, dear ? " said Elsbeth.

" Oh ! Oh, good-night," said Roger casually, rising and sitting down again. " Your shout, Elsbeth."

Elsbeth went " no trumps."

Alwynne lingered.

" Of course the kitchen fire's out ? " she said, with sour suggestiveness,

" Do you want a bath ? Yes, of course. Do you know, my dear, you're looking rather grubby ? " Elsbeth paid her sweetly. " I expect the water will still be hot, if you're quick. Don't forget to turn the light off, will you, when you've finished ? "

Alwynne made no answer, but she still lingered. Elsbeth, finishing her hand, spoke over her shoulder—

" Alwynne, dear, either go out, or come in and sit down. There's such a draught."

There was a swish of skirts, and all the innumerable ornaments rattled on their shelves. Alwynne had permitted herself the luxury of banging the door.

Roger laughed like a schoolboy.

" ' All is not well ! ' " he quoted.

Elsbeth laughed too, yet half against her will.

" My poor Alwynne ! She hates me to be annoyed with her. It infuriates her. She'll be awfully penitent to-morrow. It's really rather comical, you know. She'll take criticism from any one else—but I must approve implicitly ! And you being there didn't improve matters. She was longing to be nice, and I didn't help her. She was quite aware that she was showing you her worst side, and quite unable to get out of the mood. I knew, bless her heart ! "

She looked at him with a quick little gesture of appeal.

" Roger—you do understand ! That—tantrum—meant—nothing. She's such an impulsive child."

He smiled.

"I know. Don't you worry. Besides, it was my fault. I was teasing her all the evening. It was not what she expected. Oh, I'm growing subtle enough to please even you, Elsbeth. You know, she's had rather a full day. Evidently a scorching afternoon with that delightful friend of hers, to start with——"

"Ah ? " said Elsbeth, her eyes brightening.

"Oh yes; she was distinctly chastened. I improved the occasion, and you've about finished her off, the poor old girl! I was expecting that little exhibition."

"I believe—I believe you enjoy upsetting her," began Elsbeth, rather indignantly.

"Of course I do. It's as good as a play ! "

Elsbeth sighed.

"Well—I suppose it's all right. You'll have to manage her for the future, not I."

"Oh, she'll do all the managing," said Roger ruefully. "I foresee that this is my last stand. She's just a trifle in awe of me, at present, you know, though she doesn't know it. But it won't last. And then—heaven help me ! But, you know, Cousin Elsbeth—to be henpecked by Alwynne—don't you think it will be quite pleasant ? "

"It is. She's bullied me since she was three. Oh, Roger, I shall miss her." She blinked rapidly.

Roger stared away from her in awkward sympathy.

"You shan't, not very much," he said. "We'll fix things. You'll have to come and settle near us."

Elsbeth fidgeted.

"You know, you took my breath away in the kitchen just now," she said. "Are you quite sure it's all right ? Does Alwynne *know* she's engaged to you ? "

He perpended.

"Well, frankly—I don't think she did quite take it in."

"Roger ! "

"But I'm buying the engagement ring to-morrow," he added hastily. "That'll clear things up."

Elsbeth looked at him helplessly.

"Roger, either you're a genius or a lunatic. I'm not sure which—but, I think, a lunatic."

"Oh, well! We shall know to-morrow," he observed consolingly. "I shall turn up about eleven. Keep Alwynne for me, won't you ? "

Elsbeth struck her hands together.

"It's Clare Hartill's birthday! I'd almost forgotten her! Alwynne will be engrossed. Oh, Roger! You've been telling me fairy tales. We've forgotten Clare Hartill."[>]

Roger picked up the scattered cards. With immense caution he poised a couple, tent fashion, and builded about them, till a house was complete. He added storey after storey, frowning and absorbed. At the sixth, the structure collapsed. He looked up and met Elsbeth's eyes.

"People in card-houses shouldn't raise Cain. It's an expensive habit," he remarked sententiously. "Elsbeth, don't worry! But keep Alwynne till I come to-morrow, won't you?" "I'll try."

"Of course, if she's still in a temper——Hulloa!"

The door had been softly opened. Alwynne, in her gay dressing-gown stood on the threshold. Her hair was knotted on the top of her head, and small damp curls strayed about her forehead. The folds of her wrapper, humped across her arm, with elaborate care, hinted at the towels and sponges concealed beneath. She looked, in spite of her bigness, like an extremely small child masquerading as a grown-up person.

Her eyes sought her aunt's appealingly. Roger, she ignored.

"Elsbeth," she said meekly, "please won't you come and tuck me up?"

She disappeared again.

Elsbeth laughed as she rose.

"I knew she wouldn't be content. Isn't she a dear, Roger, for all her little ways?"

"She's all right," said Roger, with immense conviction.

CHAPTER XLIT

ALWYNNB was spending a contented morning. She had made her peace with Elsbeth over-night, and at the ensuing breakfast had been something of a feasted prodigal. Elsbeth had made no objection to her plans for the afternoon, but had suggested that, as Roger was coming to lunch, Alwynne might take him for a walk in the morning. He was sure to arrive by twelve. Alwynne, her head full of Clare's birthday and Clare's birthday present, acquiesced graciously. Indeed, she was herself anxious to talk to him again, to show him how completely she and Elsbeth were in accord, to prove to him, once and for all, though with kindly firmness, how uncalled for his comments had been. She believed that they had not parted the best of friends last night. . . . A pity—Roger could be such a dear when he chose. . . . Yesterday afternoon, for instance. . . . She found herself blushing hotly, as she recalled the details of yesterday afternoon.

Her thoughts were divided evenly between Roger and Clare as she sat at her work-table, running the last ribbon through the foamy laces and embroideries. She was proud of her work, and thrilled with pleasurable anticipations of Clare's comments. Clare would be pleased, wouldn't she ?

Elsbeth, helping her to fold the dainty garment, and wondering wistfully if Alwynne would ever be found spending a tenth of the time and trouble on her own trousseau that she lavished on presents for people who did not appreciate them, was quite sure that Clare would be more than pleased. She could not cloud Alwynne's happy face; but she hoped to goodness that Roger would come soon. . . . She was sick of the word Clare.

Alwynne despatched her parcel by messenger-boy. She would not trust it to the post—yet it must arrive before she did. Clare hated to be confronted with you and your gift together. She hoped that Clare would not be in a mood when gifts were anathema. You never knew with Clare.

She paid the boy with a bright shilling and a slice of inviolate

company cake, and was guiltily endeavouring so to squeeze and compress its girth, that Elsbeth would not notice the enlarged grp at tea-time, when Roger arrived.

She slid the tin hastily back into the cupboard.

"I won't shake hands," she said. "But it's stickiness, not? ill-feeling."

Roger frowned aside the remark. He was looking excited, extremely pleased with himself, yet a trifle worried. He had the air of a man who had been priding himself on doing the right thing, and is suddenly stricken with doubt as to whether after all, he had not made a mess of the business. He confronted her.

"I expect I've got it wrong," he remarked, with gloomy triumph. "I hate coloured stones myself."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Alwynne.

"Which is it, anyhow?"

"Which is what?"

"Which is your favourite stone?"

Alwynne gazed at him blankly.

"What on earth——?" she began.

Roger frowned anew.

"Don't argue with me. Which is your favourite stone?"

"I don't know—emeralds, I think."

He gave a sigh of relief, not entirely make-believe.

"Of course! I knew I was right. Elsbeth swore to pearls."

"Oh, I've always coveted her string. She's going to give it me when I'm forty. I'd like to know what you're talking about, Roger, if you don't mind?"

"Why forty?"

"Years of discretion! You are tidy and never lose anything once you're forty. But why? Were you having a bet?"

"Not exactly." Roger searched his pockets. "Here, catch hold!"

He had produced a small package, gay with sealing-wax and coloured string. He handed it to her awkwardly, with immense detachment.

She opened it curiously.

In a little white kid case lay an emerald, round and shining like a safety signal. It was set in silver, quaintly oarven.

Alwynne exclaimed.

"Oh, Roger! How gorgeous! How perfectly ripping! flfaere did you pick it up? Was it awfully expensive?"

Roger had been beaming in a gratified fashion, but at her question his jaw dropped.

" Well," he began. " Well—I——"

His expression struck her.

" Do you mind my asking ? It's only because it is so exactly what I've always longed to give Clare. I'm saving. I'm going to, some day. Clare loves emeralds."

" Perhaps," said Roger, with elaborate irony, " you'd like to give her this ? Don't mind me."

She glanced up at him, startled, puzzled.

" This ? "

" It happens to be your engagement ring," he remarked offensively.

Alwynrie began to laugh, but a trifle uncertainly. To laugh without accompaniment or encouragement is uneasy work, and Roger's face was entirely expressionless. She felt that her laughter was sounding affected, and ceased abruptly, her foot tapping the floor, a glint of annoyance in her eye.

" What are you talking about ? " she attacked him.

" Your engagement ring, wasn't it ? " he said.

" Are you by any chance serious ? "

" Perfectly." Roger's schoolboy awkwardness, due to his encounter with an unexpectedly facetious jeweller, was wearing off.

" My engagement ring ? "

" We'll change it, of course," he said, with maddening politeness, " if you really prefer pearls."

" Presupposing an engagement ? " Alwynne was on her high horse.

" To me. That was the idea, I think. Elsbeth is delighted."

Alwynne dismounted hastily again, though she kept a hand on the bridle.

" Roger—this is beyond a joke. What have you been saying to Elsbeth ? "

" Why, my dear," he said gently, " very much what I told you yesterday afternoon."

Alwynne grew scarlet.

" Roger—we were in fun yesterday. We were joking. I forget what it was all about. There was nothing to tell Elsbeth."

" Yes, you do forget," he said.

" Yes. I have. I want to," she answered unsteadily. " You know you weren't serious. Why, you were laughing at me—you know you were."

" Do you never laugh when you're serious ? "

" Never ! " said Alwynne earnestly.

" Well, then, we're like the Cheshire cat and dog. But I laugh when I'm most amazingly serious sometimes, Alwynne. I was yesterday, and I think you knew it."

" I didn't," said Alwynne stubbornly. " We only just talked nonsense. All about Holt Meadows—you know it was nonsense."

" I didn't," said Roger, with equal stubbornness.

" You did," said Alwynne.

" I didn't," said Roger.

" Oh, of course, if you're going to lose your temper——" cried Alwynne.

Roger shrugged his shoulders. It was deadlock.

Alwynne looked at him. He was grave enough now.

" I didn't mean to be rude," she said unhappily.

" Didn't you ? " He was all polite surprise.

" I expect I was——" she ventured.

" It all depends on what one's used to," he returned philosophically.

" Yes, I know I was. But you are so horrid to-day."

" Sorry," said Roger stiffly.

She turned to him impulsively.

" Roger—I've missed you awfully since I came back. It was quite absurd, when I'd got Clare all to myself. But I did. It was so nice seeing you. I was simply miserable yesterday, and then you turned up and were perfectly sweet. It cheered me up. And then you turned horrid. All the evening you were horrid. And now you're horrid, quarrelling and arguing. Why can't you be nice to me always ? "

She was very close to him. Her hand was on the arm of his chair. Her skirts swished against his knee.

" Alwynne, you're too illogical for a school-marm. Haven't you been bullying me since I came, on account of yesterday ? "

" Roger," she said unsteadily, " don't tease me. I do so want to be friends with you."

He put his arms about her as she stood beside him, and looked up at her, with laughing, tender eyes.

" And I do so want to marry you. Why not, Miss La Creevy ? *Let's be a comfortable couple.*¹"

She struggled away from him.

" No, Roger ! No. No. I don't want to get married. Why

aren't you content to be friends, as we were at Dene ? Friendship's a lot. If I can see you very often, and write to you twice a week, and tell you everything—I should be awfully content. Wouldn't you ? "

He looked at her with amusement.

" Your idea of friendship is pretty comprehensive. What's wrong with getting married, Alwynne ? "

" Oh—I don't know."

" What's wrong with getting married, Alwynne ? "

" How can I get married," cried Alwynne, in sudden exasperation, " when I'm not in love with you ? You're silly sometimes, Roger."

" I suppose you're quite sure about it," he ventured cautiously.

" Oh, yes."

He looked entirely unconvinced.

" Why, I've hardly ever even dreamed about you," she remonstrated. " And I know all your faults."

" Oh, you do, do you ? Out with the list."

" It would take too long." Alwynne dimpled.

" Love must be blind—is that the idea ? Couldn't the fee got over ? One uses blinkers, you know, in double harness. I never dream, Alwynne, normally. Must I eat lobster salad every night ? "

¹¹ There—you see ! " Alwynne waved her hand complacently, ". "

" You're just as bad. You couldn't talk like that if——"

" If what ? "

" Nothing ! "

" If what ? "

Alwynne looked at him.

" If what, Alwynne ? " Roger's tone was a little stern.

She had taken a rose from the bowl at her elbow, and was slowly pulling off the petals. Her eyes were on her work.

He waited.

Her hands cupped the little pile of rose-leaves. She buried her face in them—watching him an instant, through her fingers.

" They are very sweet, Roger—are they from home—from Dene, I mean ? Smell ! "

She held out her hands to him.

He caught them in his own. The red petals fluttered noiselessly to the ground.

" If what, Alwynne ? " he insisted.

" Oh, Roger ! Do you really care—so much ? "

" Yes, dear," he said soberly, " so much."

Alwynne looked up at him anxiously. She was very conscious of the big warm hands that held hers so firmly. She wished that he would not look so intent and grave; he made her feel frightened and unhappy. No—not frightened, exactly. There was something strong and serene about him, that upheld her, even when she opposed him; but certainly, unhappy. She realized suddenly how immensely she liked him—how entirely his nature satisfied hers.

" Oh, Roger!" she said wistfully. " I do like you. It isn't that I wouldn't like to marry you."

His face lit up.

" Would—liking awfully—do, Roger? Would it be fair? Must one be in love like a book? "

His face relaxed.

" I shall be content," he said. Then, impetuously, " Alwynne, I'll make you so happy. You shall do—nearly everything—you want to. Alwynne, if you only knew——"

She stopped him hurriedly, pulling away her hands.

" Don't, Roger ! Don't! I didn't mean that. I only meant I'd like to. But I can't, of course. Of course, I can't. There's Clare,"

" Clare ! " His tone abolished Clare.

Alwynne flushed.

" Why do you sneer at Clare? You always sneer. I won't have it."

Her tone, in spite of her sudden anger, was unconsciously and comically proprietary. He repressed a smile as he answered her.

" All right, dear. But I wasn't sneering—not at Clare."

" At me, then? "

" Not sneering—chuckling. My dear, what has Clare—oh, yes, she's your dearest friend—but what has any friend, any woman, got to say to us two? We're going to get married."

" We're not. It's no good, Roger." Alwynne spoke slowly and emphatically, as one explaining things to a foreigner. " Why won't you understand? Clare wants me. We've been friends for years."

" Two years !" he interjected contemptuously.

" Well! You needn't talk ! I've known you two months," she flashed out. " Do you think I'm going to desert Clare for you, even if—even if——" She stopped suddenly.

He beamed.

" You do. Don't you, darling ? " he said.

" I don't. I don't. I don't want to. I mustn't. I don't know why I'm even talking to you like this. It's ridiculous. Of course, there can never be any one but Clare."

" Yes, it is ridiculous," he said impatiently.

She faced him angrily.

" Yes, very ridiculous, isn't it ? Not to leave a person in the lurch—a person whom you love dearly, and who loves you. You can laugh. It's easy to laugh at women being friends. Men always do. They think it funny, to pretend women are always catty, and spiteful, and disloyal to each other."

" I've never said so or thought so," said Roger.

" You have ! You do ! Look at the way you've talked about Clare. That looks as if you thought me loyal and a good friend, doesn't it ? What would Clare think of me—when I've let her be sure she can have me always—when I've promised her——"

" At nineteen! Miss Hartill's generous to allow you to sacrifice yourself——"

" It's no sacrifice ! Can't you understand that I care for her—awfully. Why—I owe her everything. I was a silly, ignorant schoolgirl, and she took me, and taught me—pictures, books, everything. She made me understand. Of course, I love my dear old Elsbeth—but Clare woke me up, Roger. You don't know how good she's been to me. I owe her—all my mind——"

" And your peace? " he asked significantly.

She softened.

" You know I'm grateful. I don't forget. But she's such a dreadfully lonely person. You've got The Dears, at least. She's queer. She can't help it. She doesn't make friends, though every one adores her. She's only got me. She wants me. How could I go when she wants me—when she's so good to me?"

" Is she ? " he said. " Yesterday——"

" I was a fool yesterday," said Alwynne quickly. " Of course, I get on her nerves sometimes. But it's always my fault—honestly. You don't know what she's like, Roger, or you wouldn't say such things. I hate you to misunderstand her. How could I care for her so, if she were what you and Elsbeth think \ "

He looked at her innocent, anxious face, and sighed.

" All right, my dear. Stick to your Clare. As long as you're happy, I suppose it's all right. Well, I'd better be off. Where's Elsbeth ? "

" Be off ? Where ? " Alwynne looked startled.

" To pack my traps. I'm going home."

" Oh, Roger, you're not angry with me ? "

" I am, rather," he said. " But you needn't mind me. You don't, do you ? "

She looked at him piteously.

" Good-bye," he said. He shook hands perfunctorily and turned away.

" You are angry—oh, you are ! " cried Alwynne, following him.

He laughed.

" You can't pay Clare without robbing Roger. Don't worry, Alwyime."

" Are you really going ? " she said wistfully.

" Yes. Any message ? "

" You'll write to me, won't you ? "

" Good Lord, no ! " said Roger, with immense decision.

Alwynne jumped. It was not the answer she had expected.

" But—but you must write to me," she stammered. " How shall I know about you, if you don't write to ine ? "

He was silent.

A new idea struck Alwynne.

" D'you mean—you don't want to hear from me either ? " she asked incredulously.

" I think it would be better," he said.

" Oh, Roger—why ? Aren't you going to be friends ? "

Alwynne was looking alarmed.

" I wonder," he began, with elaborate patience, " if you could contrive, without straining yourself, to look at things from my point of view—for a moment—only a moment ? "

" That's mean. You make me feel a beast."

" That won't hurt you——"

" Roger! "

" Alwynne ? "

" You're being very rude."

" You kick at the privilege of friendship already ? I knew you would. Let's drop it, ^JFyojie. TcuVe got your good lady: you're quite satisfied. **I've not** f;ot you : I'm not.

So the best thing I can do is to go back to Dene and forget about you."

"If you can," said Alwynne's widening, indignant eyes.

"After all," he said meditatively, "you're a dear, but you aren't the only woman in the world, are you?"

"Oh no," said Alwynne.

"I might go back to America," he said, "for a time. I've heaps of friends out there."

"Oh?" said Alwynne.

"Yes, I shall get over it," he concluded comfortably. "You mustn't worry, my child. Well, good-bye again—wish me good luck, Alwynne."

"Good luck," said Alwynne.

He took up his hat—looked at her—smiled a little, and walked to the door.

But before he could open it, he felt a touch on his arm.

"Roger," said a soft and wheedling voice, "wouldn't you *like* to write to me? Now and then, Roger?"

He dissented with admirable gravity.

"All right! Don't then!" cried Alwynne wrathfully. She turned her back on him and sat down.

The luncheon-bell tinkled across the ensuing pause, like a peal of puckish laughter.

CHAPTER XLIII

ELSBJDTH'S voice, raised tactfully at the further end of the passage, warned them of her approach.

Said Alwynne over her shoulder—

" Anyhow, you must stay to lunch now, Elsbeth would be furious if you went. She'll say I've driven you away or something. Unless you want to get me into another row ? "

She spoke ungraciously enough, for she disliked having to ask a favour of him at such a juncture; but she disliked even more the notion of a *tête-d-tête* lunch with Elsbeth. Elsbeth, by right of aunthood, would ask questions, demand confession. . . . Elsbeth, she knew instinctively, would be on Roger's side. . . . She told herself that she did not mind being bullied by Roger, because, after all, it was Roger's affair; but she would not be otherwise interfered with, . . . Elsbeth had a way of putting you in the wrong. . . . She would rather not talk with Elsbeth until she had seen Clare. . . . Clare would fortify her. . . . If only Roger would keep Elsbeth occupied till she got away to Clare. . . .

" You must stay, you know," she repeated uneasily.

" You made me forget about lunch," he said cheerfully.

" Of course I must! You know, you're a terror, Alwynne. I never know which makes me hungrier, a football match or an argument with you. I'm ravenous."

Alwynne was speechless.

"Is no one coming in to lunch ? " asked Elsbeth, entering. She looked quickly from one to the other. Alwynne was at the glass, tidying her hair, and Roger seemed cheerful. Elsbeth smiled a significant smile : her eyebrows were question-marks,

Roger shook his head, but not before Elsbeth had caught sight of the scattered rose and disarranged v?ses. She was instantly engaged in restoring order, and missed the movement.

Suddenly she exclaimed, and pounced on a small object lying on the floor, half hidden in petals.

" Oh ! Oh, how lovely ! What an exquisite ring ! Why, Roger—why, Alwynne—look ! *I* might have trodden on it. How careless of you both."

But she beamed on them with immense satisfaction, as she held out the emerald ring.

¹¹ " It's not mine," said Alwynne icily.

" Nothing to do with me," Roger assured her.

Elsbeth looked bewildered.

" One of you must have dropped it," she began.

" No ! " said Alwynne.

⁴¹ " Oh no ! " said Roger.

But there was a glimmer of fun in his eye, that enlightened Elsbeth, or she thought, at least, that it did.

" In my young days," she remarked severely, " young people didn't leave a valuable engagement ring lying about on the floor."

" A disengaged engagement ring," he corrected her sadly. " At least, it's disengaged at present."

" I think, Elsbeth," said Alwynne firmly, " that the lunch must be getting cold." And preceded them in all dignity to the dining-room.

Alwynne found the meal a trying one. Roger was talkative, and Elsbeth, though obviously puzzled, was too much occupied with him, to be critical of her niece. Alwynne was divided between gratitude to Roger for relieving the situation, and pique that he could be equal to so doing. A man in his position should be far too crushed by disappointment for social amenities. She would have been genuinely distressed, yet undeniably gratified, if his appetite had failed him; but she noticed that he was able to eat a hearty meal. He could laugh, too, with Elsbeth, and make ridiculous jokes, and draw Alwynne, silent and unwilling, into the conversation. He seemed to have no objection to catching her eye, though she found it difficult to meet his. He was a queer man. . . . She supposed he wasn't very much in love with her, really, that was the truth of it. . . . She found the idea depressing. She wondered if he were really going back to Dene at once, and was relieved to hear her aunt challenging his decision. Elsbeth was expostulating. She had plans for the next day . . . there was a concert that evening. . . . Roger appeared to waver. Alwynne, contemptuous that he could be so easily turned, annoyed that Elsbeth should sway him where she herself had failed, was yet conscious

of a feeling of relief. At least she should see him again, if only to quarrel with him. . . . She was due to supper with Clare as well as tea, though she had not told Elsbeth so. . . . It would be quite simple—she would run round to Clare at once, and spend a long afternoon, and get back for another peep at Roger in the evening. . . . Clare wouldn't mind. . . .

She hesitated. Clare would be rather surprised if she didn't stay. . . . She had never been known to curtail a visit to Clare before. . . . But she would explain things to her. . . . Clare would be as sorry for Roger as she herself . . . for, of course, she must tell Clare all about it. . . . She hoped Clare would not say she had been flirting. . . . But she must make her at least understand what a dear Roger was. . . . She should like Clare to appreciate Roger . . . she was afraid she would never be able to make Roger appreciate Clare. . . . It was a great pity! . . . If it had not been for Roger's unlucky prejudice, she might have introduced them to each other, and it would have all been so jolly. . . . She would have loved to show Clare to Roger, if Clare had been in a good mood, and had worn her new peacock-coloured frock and had looked and been as adorable as she sometimes could be. They might have gone to-day—and now Roger had spoiled everything. . . . But at least he was not going till to-morrow. . . . She would slip away at once while he and Elsbeth were talking—she would be back all the sooner. . . .

She left the pair at their coflee, and hurried to her room to put on her new coat and skirt and her prettiest hat. It was Clare's birthday . . . and Clare liked her to be fine. . . . She wondered, with a little skip of excitement, if Clare had got her parcel yet 1

She was no sooner gone than Roger turned to Elsbeth, his laughing manner dropped from him like a mask.

"It's all off, Elsbeth," he said. "You were right. It's that woman. She's infatuated."

The pleasure died out of Elsbeth's face.

"I was afraid so," she said. "I saw something had happened. But you were so comical, I couldn't be sure."

"I didn't want an explanation just then——"

"Of course not," she interpolated hastily.

"But I think I'll go straight bevck to Dene. Have you a time-table?"

"Have you quarrelled badly?"

" Not exactly ! AlWynne's rather annoyed with me, though."

" Annoyed ? With you ? "

" Well, you see," he explained, with a touch of amusement,
" I think she rather wants to retain me as a tame cat——"

" Oh, but AlWynne's not like that," Elsbeth protested.

" Don't you think every woman is, if she gets the chance ?
She has to kow-tow to the Hartill woman, and it would be a relief to have some one to do the same to her—as well as an amusement. But she's had to understand that I won't be her friend's whipping-boy. I decline the post."

" Ob, well, if you put it that way—but it's hardly fair to Alwynne. Of course, you're angry and disappointed——"

" I'm not!" he protested heatedly.

" Oh, but you are. Don't pretend you're not human. I don't blame you; I'm angry too. But you must be fair. Alwynne's motives are obvious enough. There's no cat-and-mouse business about it. She simply can't bear the idea of losing you."

" Yet she won't marry me."

" She would, if it weren't for Clare. Didn't you get that impression ? Roger, if you really care, wait here a little longer. Stay with us. Let her have a chance of contrasting you with Clare Hartill."

" No, I won't," he said obstinately.

" You care more for your own dignity than for Alwynne, I think," said Elsbeth, in her lowest voice.

" Cousin Elsbeth, I care more for Alwynne than for anything else in the world. You know that. Also, though you'll call me a conceited ass, I believe I know your ewe-lamb ten thousand times better than you do. And I've simply got to sit tight for a bib. The less she sees of me at present, the more she'll think of me—in two senses. If I can make her miss me, it'll be a profitable exile. Oh, you dear, worried woman," he cried, laughing at her intent face, " do you think I want to go away from Alwynne ? Nevertheless—where's the time-table ? "

She rose and fetched it, and gave it him, without a word.

He ran his ringer down the page.

" There's a four o'clock," he announced.

" If only I could do something," mused Elsbeth.

He smiled at her gratefully.

" You're a pretty staunch friend," he said. " What more can one ask ? "

" Oh, but I ought to think of something," she said impatiently. " I sit here and let you go—I see two people's lives being spoiled—for the want of a——"

" What ? "

" That's it ! What ? What can I do ? Nothing, nothing, nothing. Oh, Roger, it's hard. It's very hard to see people you love unhappy, and not to be able to help them. It's the hardest thing I know. It would be such happiness to be allowed to bear things for them. But to watch. . . . It's harder for us than for men, you know—we're such born meddlers. We think it's our mission to put things to rights."

" When we've made a mess of 'em. I'm not sure that it isn't! "

" I've got to do something," she went on, without heeding him. " There you'll be at Dene, miserable—you will be miserable, Roger ? " she interrupted herself, with a faint twinkle.

" Don't you worry," he reassured her. " It was bad enough when she left. She's managed to make every nook and corner of the place remind one of her. I don't know how she does it. Oh, it will be rotten, all right."

" Then there will be Alwynne here," she continued, " pretending she doesn't care. Working herself into a fever each time Clare is unkind to her—and pretending she doesn't care. Watching the posts for a letter from you—I know her—and pretending she doesn't care. Thoroughly miserable, and quite satisfied that I see nothing, as long as she laughs and jokes at meals. Oh, life's a comedy," cried Elsbeth. " You young folk have your troubles, and think we are too old and blind to see them; and we old folk have our troubles, and know you are too young and blind to see them. Yes, Roger—I'm having a grumble, and it's doing me good. One suffers vicariously as one gets older, but one suffers just the same. You children forget that."

" Do we ? " he said gently. " I won't again—we won't, later on, Elsbeth—Alwynne and I."

" I want you two to be happy," she cried piteously. " I want it so. Oh, Roger, what can I do ? "

" Nothing," he said.

She was silenced. But he was touched and a little amused to see how entirely she was unconvinced. He admired her persistence, and wondered if she had fought as vehemently for her own happiness, as she now fought for Alwynne's. Failure

was instinct in her, in her faded colouring and eager, unassured manner. He thought it probable that the memory of failure was spurring her now.

He roused her gently.

"Elsbeth! It's past three o'clock. Will you come and see me off? I must go back to the White Horse for my bag first. Shall I call for you? I shan't be more than twenty minutes."

She nodded assent and promised to be ready.

Left to herself, she went to her room and dressed with mechanical care. Her mind tossed the while like an oarless boat in the sea of her restless thoughts.

What could she do? Wait—wait and hope, and watch things go wrong. . . . Roger was in love now, and prepared to be patient; but Roger was only a man. . . . He would get over it in time; and Alwynne, finally released from Clare's influence—that, too, surely, was only a question of time—would find out what she had lost. . . . She understood Alwynne well enough to know that if she cared, however unconsciously, for Roger, she would never be content to attach herself to any later comer. . . . Alwynne was terribly tenacious. So she, too, would waste and spoil her life; and for the sake of an infatuation, a piece of girlish quixotry. . . . It was criminal of Clare Hartill to allow it. . . . She supposed that the situation amused Clare; at least, if Alwynne's version had allowed her to guess it. . . . She wondered exactly how much Alwynne would tell Clare. . . .

Suddenly and wonderfully she was illumined by an idea.

Roger, returning punctually with his bag, found Elsbeth awaiting him on the step, in calling costume, pulling and patting at a new pair of gloves with extraordinary energy. Her cheeks were bright; she had the air of frightened bravery of a cornered sheep.

"Come away quickly, Roger," she whispered, with a glance at the windows. "I don't want Alwynne to catch me. I can't come with you to the station, Roger. I'm going to see Clare Hartill."

CHAPTER XLIV

ALWYNNB, for all her eagerness, took more than her usual breathless ten minutes in reaching Clare Hart-ill's flat. Underneath her pleasure at seeing Clare again ran a little current of uneasiness. There was so much to be told, not only in deference to the intimacy of their relationship, but in order to procure the proof that had never before seemed necessary, that Roger's, and incidentally Elsbeth's, view of that relationship was wrong. . . . Clare, of course, was reserved, undemonstrative, not, Alwynne was prepared to admit, so kindly or considerate a companion as—well, as Roger. . . . But why it should therefore follow that Roger loved her better, and was more worthy—preposterous word—of her own love, Alwynne could not see. . . . Clare Hartill cared for her, had told her so, had—had not as yet proved it, because there had been no need of proof. . . . Alwynne could love for two. . . . But to-day she felt only an aching desire that Clare should realize the importance of what she had just done; should reward her sacrifice with little softening and intimacies, some such signs as she had shown her in the earlier days of their friendship, of affection and sympathy. . . . She did not ask much, she told herself; if Clare were only a little kind, she should not miss Roger. Even as she so decided, her cheek flushing at the idea of Clare's kindness, at the possibility of a return to their earlier relationship, she saw suddenly, with flashlight distinctness, how much, even then, she should miss Roger, how great her sacrifice would still be. . . . She saw, as in a vision, the man and woman drowning in waste seas, and she herself at rescue work with room for one and one only in the boat beside her. . . . She felt herself torn by the agony of choice, knowing the while, that a year ago it had not been so; that a year ago she would have outstretched arms for Clare alone; that even now, Elsbeth, The Dears, all alike might drown in that dream sea, so long as Clare were saved. . . . She acknowledged, she exulted in the narrowness of her affection. . . .

Clare before the world ! But Clare before Roger ? Clare safe and Roger drowning ? She chuckled as it occurred to her that Roger would certainly be able to swim. . . . Yes, he would swim comfortably alongside and spare her the fantastic trouble of a choice. . . . Blessed old Roger !

As she passed the little kiosk at the corner of Friar's Lane, where a red-haired girl sat behind branches of white and mauve lilac, and high-piled mounds of violets, she hesitated and turned back. It was a breaking of unwritten rules, and Clare would give her no thanks, but to-day at least she would not scold. . . . She would say nothing, but how big her dear eyes would grow at sight of that armful of scented colour ! She bought lavishly, and forgot to stay for change, for she was picturing her own arrival as she hurried on : the open door ; the pell-mell of flowers and sunlight ; Clare's smile ; Clare's kiss. In spite of moods Clare could not do without her ! She tore up the stairs and pealed the bell, with never another thought of Roger.

Clare was at her writing-table and had but a bare nod for Alwynne, as she stood in the doorway, flushed, smiling, expectant. The girl was accustomed to finding her pre-occupied ; there was a time, indeed, when there had been subtle flattery in the cavalier welcome, when the lack of ceremony had seemed but a proof of intimacy, and she would bide her time happily enough, exploring book-shelves, darning stockings, tiptoeing from parlour to pantry to refill vases and valet neglected plants, or, curled in the big arm-chair, would sketch upon imaginary canvases Clare's profile, dark against the sun-filled window, or stare half-hypnotized, at the twinkling diamond on her finger. But to-day, for the first time, Clare's reception of her jarred.

She sat down quietly, the flowers in a heap at her feet, her excitement subsiding and leaving her jaded and sore-hearted. She felt herself disregarded, reduced to the level of an importunate schoolgirl. . . . She wondered how much longer Clare intended to write, and told herself, with a little, petulant shrug, that for two pins she would surprise Clare, wrench away her pen, take her by the shoulders and anger her into attention. Roger was right. . . . One could be too meek. . . . She rose with a little quiver of excitement, her irrepressible phantasy limning with lightning speed an imaginary Clare—a Clare beleaguered, with barriers down, a Clare with wide maternal arms, enclosing, comforting, sufficing. . . .

The real Clare shifted in her seat and Alwynne sank back again. No, that was not the way to take Clare. . . . One must be patient, only patient, like Roger. . . . Clare would give all one needed, that was sure, but in her own time, her own way. . . . One must be patient. . . .

She loosed her coat. . . . How close the room was. . . . She would have liked to fling open the window, but Clare always protested. . . . She heard Elsbeth's voice : ' Fresh air ? Her idea of fresh air is an electric fan.' . . . Queer, how those two jarred ! But Elsbeth was not just. . . .

Her head throbbed. Listlessly she picked up a spray of lilac and crushed it against her face. It was deliciously cool. . . . She supposed that the lilacs were out by now at Dene. . . .

Tic, tac i Tic, tao I The tick of the clock would not keep time with the scratch of Clare's pen. . . . How stupid ! Stupid, stu—pid, stu—pid, stu—

" Clare ! " she cried desperately, " won't you even talk to me ? "

Clare wrote on for a moment as if she had not heard her, finished her letter, blotted it, stamped and addressed the cover and wiped her pen deliberately; then she rose, smiling a little. She had been perfectly conscious of Alwynne's unrest.

" What is it ! " she said. Alwynne flushed and gathered up her flowers.

" It's your birthday," she apologized. " Look, Clare, aren't they darlings ? I know you hate the school fusses, but your own birthday is important. Must you go on writing ? It ought to be a holiday. May I get vases ? Clare, I've such heaps to tell you, heaps and heaps, only I can't if you stand and look at me from such a long way off. Won't you sit down and smell your lilacs and let me talk to you comfortably ? "

With enormous daring she put her arm round Clare and drew her on to the sofa. Clare made no resistance, but she sat stiffly, unsupported, still smiling, her eyes glittering oddly. But the acquiescence was enough for Alwynne and she slid to the ground and sat there sorting her flowers, her face level with Clare's knee, radiant and fearless again.

" I wonder what you will say ? It's about Roger."

Clare raised her eyebrows.

" Oh, Clare, don't you know ? I wrote such a lot about him from Dene."

" I am to remember every detail of your epistles ? "

Alwynne looked up quaintly—

"I suppose there is a good deal to wade through. There always seems so much to say to you. Do you really mind ? "

" You remind me that I've letters to finish."

Alwynne looked at the clock in sudden alarm.

" Am I awfully early ? You did expect me to tea ? "

"And you're never on the late side, are you ? " Clare was still smiling, but her tone stung.

Alwynne got up quickly.

"I'm very sorry. Don't bother about me. I'll arrange these things while you finish. I didn't know you were really busy."

Clare put out her hand to the table behind her.

" I'm not busy. It seems one mayn't tease you since you've stayed at Dene."

Alwynne's eyes flashed.

" That's not fair. It's only that—that sometimes now you tease with needles—you used to tease with straws."

" So I had better not tease at all ? "

" You know I don't mean that."

Clare lifted an opened parcel from the table. Alwynne recognized it and beamed. So Clare was pleased !

" If I tease with needles," she smoothed the paper and began to straighten the little heap of knotted string, " it's because you annoy me so often. Why did you send me this, Alwynne ? "

She shrugged her shoulders.

" It was your birthday."

" I hate birthdays."

" I know." She spoke flatly, a lump in her throat. She might have known and saved herself her trouble and her pleasure. . . . She thought of the weeks of careful work and her delight in it; of the little sacrifices; the early rising; the walks with Roger curtailed and foregone. . . . Everybody had admired it, even Elsbeth had been sure that Clare would be charmed. . . . But Clare was angry. . . . Perhaps it was only that Clare did not understand. . . . She roused herself.

" Clare, it's different. Don't you remember ? "

Clare gave no sign. She had disentangled the string and was retying it with elaborate care. Alwynne spoke with eyes fixed upon the dexterous fingers—

" You challenged me, don't you remember, Clare ? When Marion showed us the things she was making for her sister's trousseau ? And you said, would I **ever** have the patience,

let alone my clumsy fingers ? And I said I could, and you said you would wear all I made. And you did laugh at me so. So I thought I'd surprise you, and Elsbeth taught me the pillow-lace, and I was frightfully careful. It's taken months and months, and you love lace, and oh, Clare ! *I* thought you would be a little bit pleased."

Her lip quivered; she was very childlike in her eagerness and disappointment.

" Did you think I should wear it ? "

Alwynne dimpled.

" It's your size, Clare. Wouldn't you just try it ? "

Clare looked at her inscrutably.

" You've taken great pains," she said. " I've been pleased to see it. But you've shown it to me and I've told you that you've learned to work well, so it has fulfilled its purpose, hasn't it ? And now you'd better take it back with you. I'm sure you will be able to use it."

She held out the neatly fastened package.

Alwynne's face hardened. She put her hands behind her back.

" I shall do nothing of the kind," she said.

Clare did not seem ruffled.

" Of course you will. And you'll look very pretty in it." She smiled amiably.

But Alwynne's face did not relax.

" I won't take it back. I gave it to you. I made it to give you pleasure. If you don't want it, burn it, give it to your maid, throw it away. Do you think I care what becomes of it ? But I won't take it back. That is an insult. You say that to hurt me."

" You'll take it back because I wish you to."

" I won't. You shouldn't wish me to."

" You know I dislike presents."

" I never labelled it a present in my mind. You talk as if we were strangers."

" Perhaps, then," murmured Clare, still smiling, " I dislike the hint that you consider my wardrobe inadequate."

Alwynne caught her breath. For the last ten minutes she had been growing angry, not in her usual summer-tempest fashion, but with a slow, cold anger that was pain. She felt Clare's attitude an indelicacy—the discussion a degradation. She sickened at its pettiness. She seemed to be defending, not

herself, but some shrinking, weaponless creature, from attack and outrage. . . . The fight had been sudden, desperate; but at Clare's last sentence she knew herself vanquished, knew that the first love of her life had been most mortally wounded.

She turned blindly. She had no tears, no regret: her sensations were purely physical. She was numbed, breathless, choking, conscious only of an overpowering desire for fresh air, for escape into the open. But first she must say good-bye, head erect, betraying nothing . . . say good-bye to the dark figure that was no longer Clare. . . . A sentence from a child's book danced through her mind in endless repetition: *They rubbed her eyes with the ointment, and she saw it was only a stock.* Of course! And now she must go away quickly. . . . She should choke if she could not get into the air. . .

She heard her own voice, flat and tiny—

"Have you finished with me? May I go now?"

Clare's laugh was quite unforced.

"You're not to go yet!"

"Yes. Yes—I think so. May I go now, please?"

She had retreated to the door and clung to the handle looking back with blank eyes.

"But, you foolish child, you've had no tea. Why are you running away? Are you going to spoil my afternoon?"

She lied blunderingly, mad to escape.

"But I told you I couldn't stay long. Because—because of Elsbeth. She's to meet me. I only ran up for a minute. Really, I have to go." She made a tremendous effort: "I—I can come back later."

Clare shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, very well. Will you come supper?"

Alwynne forced a smile.

"Yes." She crossed the threshold, Clare watching from the doorway.

"I shall wait for you, we'll have a lazy evening. Supper at eight."

There was no answer. Alwynne was stumbling down into the darkness of the stairs and did not seem to hear. Clare turned back into her flat, hesitated uneasily, and came out again. She leaned far over the balustrade, peering down.

"Alwynne I" she cried. "Alwynne) Wait a moment, Alwynne!"

But Alwynne was gone, gone beyond recall.

CHAPTER XLV

ALWYNSTE fled down Friar's Lane in amazement, conscious only of the need of escape. She had heard the outer door of the flat close behind her, yet she felt herself pursued. Clare's voice rang in her ears. Momently she awaited the touch of Clare's hand upon her shoulder. She felt herself exhausted; knew that, once overtaken, she would be powerless to resist; that she would be led back; would submit to reconciliation and caresses. And yet she was sure that she would never willingly see Clare again. She was free, and her terror of recapture taught her what liberty meant to her. There was the whole world before her, and Elsbeth—and Roger. . . . She must find Roger. . . . She was capable of no clear thought, but very sure that with him was safety.

She hurried along in the shadow of the overhanging lilac-hedge, ears a-prick, eyes glancing to right and left. Oblivious of probabilities she saw Clare in every passer-by. At the turn of the blind lane she ran into a woman, walking towards her. She bit back a cry.

But it was only Elsbeth—Elsbeth in her Sunday gown, very determined, gripping her card-case as if it were a dagger. She spoke between relief and distress.

" Alwyrme ! Why did you disappear ? Where have you been ? "

" With Clare."

" It was more than rude. You could surely have foregone one afternoon. No one to see Roger off ! After all his kindness to you at Dene ! "

" See Roger off ? "

Elsbeth was pleased to see her concern.

" I should have gone myself, of course, but he would not allow it. The heat—as I have to pay a call. So he saw me on my way and then went off by himself, poor Roger ! "

" Where is he going ? Why is he going ? "

"Back to Dene. The four-five. I am afraid, AJivynne, he has been hurt and upset. Alwynne! "

But Alwynne, tugging at her watch-chain, was already running down the road with undignified speed. The four-five! Another ten minutes . . . no, nine and a half. . . . Cutting through the gardens she might do it yet. . . . She prayed for her watch to be fast—the tram late. She ran steadily, doggedly, oblivious of the passers-by, oblivious of heat and dust and choking breathlessness, of everything but the idea that Roger was deserting her.

As she bent round the sweep of the station yard past the shelter with its nodding cabmen, and ran down the little wall-flower-bordered asphalt path, she heard the engine's valedictory puff. The platform was noisy and crowded, alive with shouting porters, crates of poultry and burdened women, but at the upper end was Roger, his foot on the step of the carriage, obviously bribing a guard.

She pushed past the outraged ticket collector, and darted up the platform.

Roger had disappeared when she reached the door of his compartment, and the whistle had sounded, but the door was still a-swing. The train began to move as she scrambled in. The door banged upon their privacy.

" Roger ! " cried Alwynne. " Roger ! "

She was shaking with breathlessness and relief.

" You were right. I was wrong. It's you I want. I will do everything you want, always. I've been simply miserable. Oh, Roger—be good to me."

And for the rest of his life Roger was good to her.

CHAPTER XLVT

CLARE had paused a moment, half expecting Alwynne to return; but it was draughty on the landing and she did not wait long. Silly of Alwynne to dash off like that. . . . She had wanted to discuss Miss Marsham's letter with her before writing her answer. . . . Not that she was really undecided, of course. . . . The offer was an excellent one no doubt, and it was fitting that it should have been made. . . . But to accept the head mistress-ship was another matter. , , . Life was pleasant enough as it was. . . . She had plenty of money and Alwynne was hobby enough. . . . She wondered what Alwynne would say to it ... urge her to accept, probably. . . . Alwynne was so terribly energetic. . . . Well, she would let Alwynne talk . . . (she picked up her pen) and when she had expended herself, Clare would produce her already written refusal. . . . Alwynne would pout and be annoyed. . . . Alwynne hated being made to look a fool. , , . Clare laughed as she bent over her letter.

She had achieved preliminary compliments and was hesitating as to how she should continue, when a violent rat-tat, hushing immediately to a tremulous tat-a-tat-tat, as if the success of the attack upon Clare's door had proved a little startling to the knocker, announced a visitor, and to their mutual astonishment, Elsbeth Loveday fluttered into the room. Though Elsbeth's naive amazement at herself and her own courage was more apparent, it was scarcely greater than Clare's politely veiled surprise at the invasion, for since Alwynne's attempts to reconcile the oil and water of their reluctant personalities had ceased with her absence, there had been practically no intercourse between them. With a crooked smile for her first fleeting conviction of the imminence of a church bazaar or Sunday-school treat on gargantuan lines, Clare applied herself to the preparation of Elsbeth's tea, in no great hurry for the disclosure of the visit's object, but already slightly amused at her visitor's unease, and foreseeing a whimsical half-hour in watching her pant and stumble, unassisted, to her point.

Elsbeth was dimly aware of her hostess's attitude, and not a little nettled by it. She waved away cake and toast with a vague idea of breaking no bread in the enemy's house, but she was not the woman to resist tea, though Hecate's self brewed it. Fortified, she returned the empty cup; readjusted her veil, and opened fire.

"My dear Miss Hartill," she began, a shade too cordially, "I've come round—I do hope you're not too busy; I know how occupied you always are,"

Clare was not at all busy; entirely at Miss Loveday's service.

"Ah, well, I confess I came round in the hope of finding you alone—in the hope of a quiet chat——"

Clare was expecting no visitors. But would not Miss Loveday take another cup of tea?

"Oh no, thank you. Though I enjoyed my cup immensely—delicious flavour. China, isn't it? Alwynne always quotes your tea. Poor Alwynne—she can't convert me. I've always drunk the other, you know. Not but that China tea is to be preferred for those who like it, of course. An acquired taste, perhaps—at least——" She finished with an indistinct murmur uncomfortably aware that she had not been particularly lucid in her compliments to Clare's tea.

Might Clare order a cup of Indian tea to be made for Miss Loveday? It would be no trouble; her maid drank it, she believed.

"Oh, please don't. I shouldn't dream——You know, I didn't originally intend to come to tea. But you are so very kind. I am sure you are wondering what brings me."

Clare disclaimed civilly.

"Well, to tell you the truth—I am afraid you will think me extremely roundabout, Miss Hartill——"

Clare's mouth twitched.

"But it is not an easy subject to begin. I'm somewhat worried about Alwynne——"

"Again?" Clare had stiffened, but Elsbeth was too nervous to be observant.

"Oh, not her health. She is splendidly well again—Dene did wonders." Clare found Elsbeth's quick little unexplained smile irritating. "No, this is—well, it certainly has something to do with Dene, too!"

"Indeed," said Clare.

Elsbeth continued, delicately tactless: she was always at her worst with her former pupil.

"I daresay you are surprised that I consult you, for we need not pretend, need we, that we have ever quite agreed over Alwynne? You, I know, consider me old-fashioned——" She paused a moment for a disclaimer, but Clare was merely attentive. With a little less suavity she resumed: "And of course I've always thought that you——But that, after all, has nothing to do with the matter."

"Nothing whatever," said Clare.

"Exactly. But knowing that you are fond of Alwynne, and realizing your great, your very great, influence with her, I felt——indeed we both felt——that if you once realized——"

"We?"

"Boger. Mr. Lumsden."

"Oh, the gardener at Dene."

¹ My cousin, Miss Hartill."

¹ Oh. Oh, really. But what has he to do with Alwynne?"

¹ My dear, he Tvaiits to marry her. Didn't she tell you?"

Elsbeth had the satisfaction of seeing Clare look startled. "Now I was sure Alwynne had confided the matter to you. Hasn't she just been here? That is really why I came. I was so afraid that you, with the best of motives, of course, might in-line her to refuse him. And you know, Miss Hartill, she mustn't. The very man for Alwynne? He suits her in every way. Devoted to her, of course, but not in the least weak with her, and you know I always say that Alwynne needs a firm hand. And between ourselves, though I am the last person to consider such a thing, he is an extremely good match. I can't tell you, Miss Hartill, the joy it was to me, the engagement. I had been anxious—I quite foresaw that Alwynne would be difficult, though I am convinced she is attached to him——underneath, you know. So I made up my mind to come to you. I said to myself: 'I am sure—I am quite sure——Miss Hartill would not misunderstand the situation. I am quite sure Miss Hartill would not intend to stand in the child's light. She is far too fond of Alwynne to allow her personal feelings——' After all, feminine friendship is all very well, very delightful, of course, and I am only too sensible of your goodneee to Alwynne—and taking her to Italy too—but when it is a question of Marriage—oh, Miss Hartill, surely you see what I mean?"

Clare frowned.

" I think so. The gard——This Mr. Lumpkin——•"

" Lumsden."

" Of course. I was confusing him——Mr. Lumsden has proposed to Alwynne. She has refused him, and you now wish for my help in coercing her into an apparently distasteful engagement? "

" Oh no, Miss Hartill! No question of coercion. I think there is no possible doubt that she is fond of him, and if it were not for you——But Alwynne is so quixotic."

Clare lifted her eyebrows, politely blank.

" Oh, Miss Hartill——why beat about the bush? You know your influence with Alwynne. It is very difficult for me to talk to you. Please believe that I intend nothing personal——but Alwynne is so swayed by you, so entirely under your thumb; you know what a loyal, affectionate child she is, and as far as I can gather from what Roger let fall——for she is in one of her moods and will not confide in me——she considers herself bound to you by——by the terms of your friendship. All she would say to Roger was, 'Clare comes first. Clare must come first'——which, of course, is perfectly ridiculous."

Clare reddened.

" You mean that I, or you, for that matter, who have known Alwynne for years, must step aside, must dutifully foster this liking for a comparative stranger."

Elsbeth smiled.

" Well, naturally. He's a man."

" I am sorry I can't agree. Alwynne is a free agent. If she prefers my friendship to Mr. Lumsden's adorations——"

" But I've told you already, it's a question of Marriage, Miss Hartill. Surely you see the difference? How can you weigh the most intimate, the most ideal friendship against the chance of getting married? " Elsbeth was wholly in earnest.

Clare mounted her high horse.

" I can——I do. There are better things in life than marriage."

" For the average woman? Do you sincerely say so? The brilliant woman——the rich woman——I don't count them, and there are other exceptions, of course; but when her youth is over, what is the average single woman? A derelict, drifting aimlessly on the high seas of life. Oh——I'm not very clear; it's easy to make fun of me; but I know what I mean and so do you. We're not children. We both know that an unmatcd woman——she's a failure——she's unfulfilled."

Clare was elaborately bored.

¹¹ Really, Miss Loveday, the subject does not interest me."

"It must, for Alwynne's sake. Don't you realize your enormous responsibility? Don't you realize that when you keep Alwynne entangled in your apron strings, blind to other interests, when you cram her with poetry and emotional literature, when you allow her to attach herself passionately to you, you are feeding, and at the same time deflecting from its natural channel, the strongest impulse of her life—of any girl's life? Alwynne needs a good concrete husband to love, not a fantastic ideal that she calls friendship and clothes in your face and figure. You are doing her a deep injury, Miss Hartill—unconsciously, I know, or I should not be here—but doing it, none the less. If you will consider her happiness——"

Clare broke in angrily—

"I do consider her happiness. Alwynne tells you that I am essential to her happiness."

"She may believe so. But she's not happy. She has not been happy for a long time. But she believes herself to be so, I grant you that. But consider the future. Shall she never break away? Shall she oscillate indefinitely between you and me, spend her whole youth in sustaining two old maids? Oh, Miss Hartill, she must have her chance. We must give her what we've missed ourselves."

Clare appeared to be occupied in stifling a yawn. Her eyes were danger signals, but Elsbeth was not Alwynne to remark them.

"In one thing, at least, I do thoroughly agree with you. I don't think there is the faintest likelihood of Alwynne's wishing to marry at all at present, but I do feel, with you, that it is unfair to expect her to oscillate, as you rhetorically put it, between two old maids. I agree, too, that I have responsibilities in connection with her. In fact, I think she would be happier if she were with me altogether, and I intend to ask her to come and live here. I shall ask her to-night. Don't you think she will be pleased?"

Clare's aim was good. Elsbeth clutched at the arms of her chair.

"You wouldn't do such a thing?"

Clare laughed shrilly.

"I shall do exactly what your Mr. Lumsden wants to do. I'm not poor. I can give her a home as well as he, if you are

so anxious to get her off your hands. She seems to be going begging,"

Elsbeth rose.

"I'm wasting time. I'll say good-bye, Miss Hartil. I shouldn't have come. But it was for Alwynne's sake. I hoped to touch you, to persuade you to forego, for her future's sake, for the sake of her ultimate happiness, the hold you have on her. I sympathized with you. I knew it would be a sacrifice. I knew, because I made the same sacrifice two years ago, when you first began to attract her. I thought you would develop her. I am not a clever woman, Miss Hartill, and you are; so I made no stand against you; but it was hard for me. Alwynne did not make it easier. She was not always kind. But hearing you to-day, I understand. You made Alwynne suffer more than I guessed. I don't blame her if sometimes it recoiled on me. You were always cruel. I remember you. The others were always snails for you to throw salt upon. I might have known you'd never change. Do you think I don't know your effect on the children at the school? Oh, you are a good teacher! You force them successfully; but all the while you eat up their souls. Sneer if you like! Have you forgotten Louise? I tell you, it's vampirism. And now you are to take Alwynne. And when she is squeezed dry and flung aside, who will the next victim be? And the next, and the next? You grow greedier as you grow older, I suppose. One day you'll be old. What will you do when your glamour's gone? I tell you, Clare Hartill, you'll die of hunger in the end."

The small relentless voice ceased. There was a silence. Clare, who had remained quiescent for sheer amaze at the attack from so negligible a quarter, pulled herself together. Rather white, she began to clap her hands gently, as a critic surprised into applause.

"My dear woman, you're magnificent! Really you are. I never thought you had it in you. The Law and the Prophets incarnate. How Alwynne will laugh when I tell her. I wish she'd been here. You ought to be on the stage, you know, or in the pulpit. Have you quite finished? Quite? Do unburden yourself completely, you won't be given another opportunity. You understand that, of course? If Alwynne wishes to see you, she must make arrangements to do so elsewhere. That is the one condition I shall make. This is the way out."

Elsbeth rose. She was furious with herself that her lips must

tremble and her hands shake, as she gathered up scarf and reticule ; but she followed her hostess with sufficient dignity.

Clare flung open the door with a gesture a shade too ample.

Elsbeth laughed tremulously as she passed her and crossed the hall.

" Oh, you are not altered," she said, and bent to fumble at the latch. " But it doesn't impress me. You've not won yet. You count too much on Alwynne. And you have still to reckon with Mr. Lumsden."

" And his three acres and a cow ! " Clare watched her contemptuously. It did not seem worth while to keep her dignity with Elsbeth. She felt that it would be a relief to lose her temper completely, to override this opponent by sheer, crude invective. She let herself go.

" What a fool you are ! Do you flatter yourself that you understand Alwynne ? Go back to your Coclebs and tell him from Alwynne—I tell you I speak for Alwynne—that he's wasting his time. Let him take his goods to another market: Alwynne won't buy. I've other plans for her—she has other plans for yourself. She doesn't want a husband. She doesn't want a home. She doesn't want children. She wants me—and all I stand for. She wants to use her talents—and she shall—through me. She wants success—she shall have it—through me. She wants friendship—can't I give it ? Affection ? Haven't I given it ? What more can she want ? A home ? I'm well-off. A brat to play with ? Let her adopt one, and I'll house it. I'll give her anything she wants. What more can your man offer ? But I won't let her go. I tell you, we suffice each other. Thank God, there are some women who can do without marriage—marriage—marriage ! "

Elsbeth, as if she heard nothing, tugged at the catch. The door swung open, and she stepped quietly into the sunny passage. Then she turned to Clare, a grey, angry shadow in the dusk of the hall.

" Poor Clare ! " she said. " Are the grapes very sour ? "

She pulled-to the door behind her.

Later in the evening, as she sat, flushed, tremulous, utterly joyful over Roger's telegram, she considered the manner of her exit and was shocked at herself.

" I don't know what possessed me," said Elsbeth apologetically. " And if I had only known. It was unladylike—it was

unwomanly—it was unchristian." She shook her head at her mild self in the glass. " But she made me so angry ! If I'd only known that this was coming ! " She fingered the pink envelope. " She'll think I knew. She'll always think I knew. And then to say what I did ! It was unpardonable."

" But I was right, all the same," cried Elsbeth incorrigibly; " and I don't care. I'm glad I said it—I'm glad—I'm glad ! "

CHAPTER XLVII

THE sun slid over the edge of the sweating earth. Its red-hot plunge into the sea behind the hills was almost audible. The black cloud, fuming up from its setting-place, was as the steam of the collision. In great clots and coils it rolled upwards, spreading as it thinned, till it was a pall of vapour that sheeted all the lemon-coloured sky. Suddenly a cold wind sprang up, raced down the silent heavens, and, by way of Eastern Europe and the North Sea and the straight Roman road that drives down England, tore along the Utterbridge byways, and into the open window of Clare HartilFs parlour. A touch of its cold lips on her hair, and brow, and breast, and it was out again, driving the dust before it.

Clare shivered. She was very tired of waiting. . . . It was Inexplicable that Alwynne should be late; but Clare with a half laugh, promised Alwynne to forego her scolding if she would but come. . . . The dusk and the wind and the silence were getting on her nerves. . . . The tick of the hall clock, for instance, was aggressive, insistent, maddening in its precise monotony. . . . Oh, unbearable ! With a gesture that was hysterical in its abandonment, Clare rose suddenly and flung into the hall, plucked open the clock door, and removed the pendulum. The released wire wagged foolishly into silence, like an idiot, tongue a-loll.

As the quiet hunted Clare into her sitting-room again, a little silver wire flickered down the sky like a scared snake, and for an instant she saw herself reflected in a convex mirror, a Clare bleached and shining and askew, like a St. Michael in a gtained-glass window. Dusk and the thunder followed. The Btorm was beginning.

Clare moved about restlessly. She disliked storms. Her eyes ached, and she was cramped with waiting, and Alwynne had not come. She would, of course. . . . That woman had detained her, purposely, no doubt, and now there was the storm to delay her. . . . But Alwynne would come. . . . Clare smiled securely,

Again the lightning whipped across the heavens, and thunder roared in its wake.

Clare went to the window and watched the sky. The pane of glass was grateful to her hot forehead. She was too tired, too bruised and shaken by her own recent anger to arrange her thoughts, to pose for the moment, even to herself—of all audiences the most critical. The interview with Elsbeth Loveday rehearsed itself incessantly, pricking, probing, bludgeoning, in crescendo of intonation, innuendo, open attack, to the final triumphant insult. Triumphant, because true. The insult could cut through her defences and strike at her very self, because it was true. Her pride agonized. She had thought herself shrouded, invulnerable. And yet Elsbeth, whom of all women she had reckoned negligible, had guessed, had pitied. . . . Yet even her enemy was forgotten, as she sat and shuddered at the wound dealt; plucked and shrank, and plucked again at the arrow-tip rankling in it still.

The hours had passed in an evil mazement. But Alwynne was to come. . . . She thought of Alwynne with shifting passions of relief and longing and sheer crude lust for revenge. Alwynne would come. . . . Alwynne would soothe and comfort, intuitive, never waiting for the cry for help.

And Alwynne should pay. . . . Oho ! Alwynne should pay Elsbeth's debts . . . should wince, and shrink, and whiten. *Scientific vivisection of one nerve*— Wait a little, Alwynne !

Ah, Alwynne—th' dearest—the beloved—the light and laughter of one's life. . . . What fool is whispering that Clare can hurt her ? . . . Alwynne shall see when she comes, who loves her. . . . There shall be a welcome, the royalest welcome she has ever had. . . . For what in all the world has Clare but Alwynne, and having Alwynne, has not Clare the world ?

Ah, well. . . . Perhaps she had not been always good to Alwynne. . . . To-day, for instance, she might have been kinder. . . . But Alwynne always understood. . . . That was the comfort of Alwynne, that she always understood. . . . Why didn't she come ? Wasn't there an echo of a step far down the street ?

When Alwynne came, they would make plans. . . . It would not be easy to wean the girl from her aunt, at least while they lived in the same town, the same country. . . . But one could travel, could take Alwynne quite away. . . . Italy. . . . Greece. . . . Egypt . . . they would go round the world together, shake off

the school and all it stood for. . . . In a new world, begin a new life. . . . Why not ? She had money enough to burn. . . . It would not be hard to persuade Alwynne, adventurous, infatuate. . . . Onoe gone, Elsbeth might whistle for her niece. . . . They would talk it over to-morrow . . . to-night . . . as soon as Alwynne came. . . .

Was that thunder or a knocking? Rat-tat! Ral-tat! She had not been mistaken after all. . . . Alwynne ! Alwynne !

And Clare, with an appearance on her that even Alwynne had never seen, ran like a child to open the door.

On the threshold stood a messenger boy, proffering a telegram. She took it.

" Any answer, Miss ? " for she had offered to close the door.

" Oh, of course ! " She frowned, and pulled open the flimsy sheet.

The boy waited. He peered past her, interested in the odd pictures on the walls, and the glimpse of a table luxuriously set. The minutes sped. He had soon seen all he could, and began to fidget.

" Any answer, Miss ? " he hinted.

" Oh ! " said Clare vaguely. " Answer ? No. No answer. No answer at all."

The boy knuckled his forehead and clattered away down the staircase.

Mechanically Clare shut the door, locked and bolted it and secured it with the chain. Then she returned to the sitting room and crossed to her former station by the open window.

The storm was ending in a downpour of furious tropical rain. It beat in unheeded upon her thin dress and bare neck and the open telegram in her hands, as, with lips parted and a faint, puzzled pucker between her brows, she conned over the message—

I cannot come fa-night. I have gone to Dene. I am going to marry Roger.

She read it and re-read, twisting it this way and that, for it was barely visible in the wet dusk. It seemed an eternity before its full meaning dawned upon her. And yet she had known all there was to know when she confronted the messenger boy (Oh, Destiny is up to date) and took her sentence from his grimy hand.

, " *am going to marry Roger.*

" Very well, Alwynne ! " Clare flung up her head, up and back.

Her face was drowned in the shadows of the crimson curtain, but her neck caught the last of the light, shone like old marble. The whole soul of her showed for an instant in its defiant outline, in the involuntary pulsation that quivered across its rigidity, in the uncontrollable flutter beneath the chin.

The thin, capable fingers twisted and clenched over the sodden paper.

She moved at last, spoke into space. Passion, anger, and the cool contempt of the school-mistress for a mutinous class, mingled grotesquely in her voice.

"Very well, Alwynne ! Just as you please, of course. There is no more to be said." She tossed away the little ball of paper as she spoke.

She wandered aimlessly about the room; turned to her bookshelves after a while, arid stood a long time, pulling out volume after volume, opening each at random, reading a page, closing the book again, letting it slide from her hand, never troubling to replace it. She was tired at last and turned to her writing-table.

It was piled high with exercise-books, and she corrected a couple before she swept them also aside.

The rain had not faltered in its swishing downfall. It beat against the panes, and on to the sill, and dripped down into a pool beneath the open window.

"She will have to come back en Monday," said Clare suddenly "She can't go off like that. There's the school——" She broke off abruptly, as a gust of wind soughed by.

"I cannot come. I have gone to Dene. I am going to marry Roger." She could hear Alwynne's voice in it, answering.

"But why?" cried Clare piteously. "Why? What is it? What have I done?"

"S'hush!" sighed the rain. "S'hush!"

"I loved her," cried Clare. "I loved her. What have I done?"

"S'hush!" sobbed the rain. "S'hush! S'hush!"

She turned to the darkening windows, and started, and shuddered away again, stricken dumb and shaking. A pool of something red and wet was spreading over the polished boards, and a thin trickle was stealing forward to her feet.

Blood?

Fool. . . . The red of the curtains reflected, tingeing a pool of rain-water. . . . Blood, nevertheless. . . . She had forgotten Louise. . . ,

What had Alwynne heard? A garbled version of that last interview? Fool again—unless the dead can speak. . . . But Alwynne Ki,"ew. . . . Something had been revealed to her, suddenly, during their idle talk. . . . But when? But how? She had come as a lover . . . she had left as a stranger . . . what in any god's name, had she guessed? Clare's subconscious memory reproduced for her instantly, with photographic accuracy, details of the scene that she had not ever known she had observed. Alwynne had changed, in an instant between a word and a reply. . . . What was it that Clare had said—what trifling, teasing nothing, flung out in pure wantonness? But Alwynne's face, her dear face, had become, for an instant—Clare strained to the memory—as the face of Louise. . . . Louise had looked at her like that, that other day. . . . What had they seen then, both of them? Was she Gorgon to bring that look into their their faces? Louise—yes—she could understand Louise. . . . She did not care to think about Louise. . . . But Alwynne—what had she ever done to Alwynne? At least Alwynne might tell her what she had done. . . . She would not submit to it. . . . She would not be put aside. . . . She would at least have justice. . . .

" am going to marry Roger.

Useless! All useless! The struggle was over before she had known she was fighting. . . . She knew that in Alwynne's life there was no longer any part for her. And Clare had travelled far that evening, to phrase it thus. Sharing was a strange word for her to use. But she recognized dully that even sharing was out of her power. What had she to do with a husband, and housewifery, and the bearing of children? Alwynne married was Alwynne dead.

Alwynne in love. . . . Alwynne married. . . . Alwynne putting any living thing before Clare! She broke into bitter laughter at the idea. What had happened? What had Clare done or left undone? She realized grimly that of this at least she might be sure—it had been her own doing. . . . No influence could have wrought against her own. . . . Alwynne, at least, was where she was, because Clare had sent her, not because another had beckoned. . . . And that was the comfort she had stored up for herself, to last her in the lean years to come. . . .

What was the use of regretting?

Alwynne was gone. . . . Then forget her. . . . There were other fish in the sea. . . . There was a promising class this term.

. . . That child in the Fourth. . . She wondered if Alwynne had noticed her. . . She must ask Alwynne. . . Alwynne had gone away, had gone to Dene, was going to marry Roger. . .

Well, there was always work. . . Where was that letter to Miss Marsham?

She moved stiffly in her seat, lit a candle, and drew towards her the half-written sheet that lay open on the blotter. She re-read it.

You will, I am sure, understand how much I appreciate your offer of the partnership, but after much consideration I have decided—

She hesitated, crossed out the *but* and wrote an *and* above it, and continued—

—to accept it. I will come to tea to-morrow, as you kindly suggest.

She finished the letter, signed it, stamped and addressed, and sat idle at last, staring down at it.

The neat handwriting danced, and flickered, and grew dim.

With an awkward gesture she put her hands to her eyes, and brought them away again, wet. She smiled at that, a twisted, mocking smile. She supposed she was crying. . . . She did not remember ever having done such a thing. . . .

So her future was decided. . . . It was to be work and loneliness—loneliness and work . . . because, it seemed, she had no friends left. . . . Yet Alwynne had promised many things. . . . What had she done to Alwynne? What had she done?

She turned within herself and reviewed her life as she remembered it, thought by thought, word by word, action by action. Faces rose about her, whispering reminders, forgotten faces of the many who had loved her: from her old nurse, dead long ago, to Louise, and Alwynne, and foolish Oh'via Prmg.

The candle at her elbow flared and dribbled, and died at last with a splutter and a gasp. She paid no heed.

When the dawn came, she was still sitting there, thinking—thinking.

March 1914—September 1915.

The Lover

A TALE from *Wandering Stars*

"We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the «.hings which are not been are eternal."—II CORINTHIANS.

THE LOVER

SHE was frightened.

She had said to herself, excusing him—' If we had had children——' and for the first time in her married life the phrase had failed her.

For twenty years she had steadied thus the gallant cockle-boat of her belief in him—He's a coming man. He's outgrown me. . . . But if we had had children——and so continued to dwell tenderly on him as he should have been, as he would have been, as he was, to her humble and hopeful eyes. If he had had a happier childhood, a less burdened youth ... if success had come less suddenly . . . if—always it slipped back to that woman's remedy—if there had been children. . . .

Why, she demanded of her shaken heart, why on this moonlit night of summer should she suddenly become aware that she had lost belief in the articles of her creed? Why should her glance at him have so cruelly enlightened her? Or was it no new revelation—had she indeed lived these twenty years wilfully and resolutely blind?

She contemplated him, stretched out before her

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in his slouch chair on the other side of the drowsing hearth. His chin was on his breast: his cigar had slipped from his lips and rolled itself, scattering its length of ash, into a crease of unbuttoned waist-coat. He was flushed and flabby and breathed noisily in his sleep. Her eyes dwelt upon his short-fingered, well-kept hands, upon his small mouth that even in after-dinner stupor shut itself firmly: dwelt upon them as desperately as an emigrant dwells upon his last glimpses of familiar land. Those hands, that precise and close-shutting mouth, belonged to the man she had married; but was this the rest of him? What had this flesh and blood to do with the dear likeness that she had received into her heart, that hung there still, the altarpiece of a chapel ardent? This was—what? Her revolting mind flung out in answer epithets which shocked her—' Gross,' ' brutish,' ' bestial ' —' If you stripped *off* his clothes it would be—a pinkish beast lying there—out of a sty. . . . '

' They hunted and they hollered and the next thing they did find,

Was a fat pig smiling in a ditch and that they left behind. . . . '

And then to her shuddering soul—' Oh, stop ! Stop thinking ! For pity's sake ! This isn't he ! Harry, this isn't you ! Harry ! '

' His head dropped forward, his preliminary to

THE LOVER

waking. She called again to him in thought with the whole strength and passion of her spirit—
‘ Harry ! Harry ! ’

He regarded her with glazed eyes for a moment and nodded anew.

She watched him breathlessly. On the hard-trodden surfaces of her nature, do what life would to seal them, the small cracks were ever reappearing through which would spurt up from the depths odd fumes and flickers of phantasy or surmise or belief. They were no more to be got rid of than the untidy streamers of soft hair about her forehead were to be confined in the hair-net she wore and caught on bushes in the garden, or twitched off with the hard straw hat she had forgotten to line. And, though she was a simple woman who knew not Flammarion and had never heard of Freud, the flamelet that most warmed her was the belief that if, as she phrased it, she ⁴ ‘ thought hard enough,’ she would somehow, some day, ‘ get through to Harry,’ and in spite of the shackles that her very love for him had laid upon her, in spite of his inhibiting silences and increasing absorption in a life he would not allow her to share, be at last enabled to discover the secrets of his personality and her own, to marry him in the spirit as well as in the flesh.

WANDERING STARS

The hope never left her. It supported her days and dramatized her nights. She had dreamed only the night before (she was one of your regular and fantastic dreamers) a nightmare medley of mediaeval prisons and Harry on his road to the scaffold. And she had run at his side between the corridors of faces weeping bitterly, not daring to implore—what? of him in his dream agony: till he had turned and said roughly—' Well, what do you *want* me to say then ? That I love you, I suppose! ' And she heard herself answer, her tongue loosened—' No, no, no! Only that you know I love you. I don't expect any more. I understand you and you understand me. Don't we understand each other ? ' ' That's it! ' he had nodded, his death upon him, and she had caught his hand and covered it with kisses ere the nightmare closed in upon them again in shadows and distortion. But when she woke with swollen cheeks to see him beside her on the pillow, she wept anew in hopeless grief that even in the house of sleep she could not find courage to declare her desires, that even in dreams she was doomed to hold him only by feigned acquiescence in their unequal and unfair bargain.

' Was it not an unfair bargain ? Was it not ? ' she demanded passionately of the relaxed figure

THE LOVER

opposite, and resumed her intent watch of him
unable to believe that such outcry of her side
should go unheard by him. But it was the telephone
bell that woke them, the one from his sleep,
other from her dreams.

He jerked his head towards the receiver.

" See what it is! "

She obeyed. A woman's voice came through—

"That you, Harry?" And then—" CT
you?"

She said gently—

" What number do you want? "

" Who are you? " the voice

She was obstinate—

" What number do you

The voice conceded it
er—I want Mr. Peile—

She held out the receiver

" Some lady wants "

from his chair, suddenly
again, not listening
followed. Harmless
but she had seen
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WANDERING STARS

xplanations to her, as he hung up the instrument
'ain, would have hurt her till the answering,
lieving smile grew stiff upon her face; but that
was past. She was ready and waiting for his—
^11, I'm going out! ' at the end of them. But
r heart she said—' He's going to that woman,"
Veil, I'm going out."

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er as he went out

THE LOVER

" Harry! " she called again softly after him.

He did not hear. In another moment the front door had slammed.

She sat a little while staring at his empty chair.

The tragedy of everyday life is, in effect, its lack of tragedy, the infinite protraction of its catastrophe. The death of love and lovers in three acts can always quicken our pulses; but the love that will not die when the last curtain falls, that continues to cling tenaciously to existence that will maul and bruise and batter till no outline of its spring shape of beauty remains, till it becomes a mere tentacle of the will and yet still clings in death grips with its oppressor, that is a death of love in five, ten, fifteen, twenty acts, unsuited to the muse. It becomes the mere suburban movie-show of a thousand households, too common a happening to stir our sympathies or to find a place upon our stage.

Yet precisely this monotonous tragedy was in her household, she thought, reaching its long delayed last act. The telephone bell had rung the curtain up. When he returned she was minded to let him find it rung down again for ever. He had gone to that woman. . . . What woman? . . . She did not know: she would not enquire. For—five acts, was it, or more?—five acts, five years, to her

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certain knowledge there had been a ' that woman! ' between them. If there had been children she might have kept him, she told herself; but he had been too poor to afford children in those early days. ' Am I not better to thee than ten sons ? ' he had said to her in his own way, not in words,, with the look in his eyes, with his gesture, his smile. And she had rejoiced that he knew her heart, rejoiced because speech was difficult to them both, and to her, in her awe of his beauty and power, doubly difficult. She was so stammeringly anxious to please him, and he was not easy to please. In the cowardice of her love she let herself rely on his to act as her interpreter until the auspicious moment should arrive. ' When we are married we shall be able to talk," And they were married and they did not talk. He led: she followed. He directed: she obeyed. He was busy: she did not disturb him. In a trice the lines of their life were laid down. They did not talk. He knew no more of her than he had learned in the brief forgotten months of their prologue: and she continued to know him as two personalities who would not merge, as the almost legendary lover of her girlhood and as the husband whom she fed by day and comforted by night, until he made money enough to buy his foods and comforts where he

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what he means. . . . Oh, my God, and I love him so ! You'd think I'd be cured after fifteen years. I wish I were dead—oh, I wish I were dead! . . .

She stared at the staring mirror till her tears blurred the sight of her own image.

She thought—It's the bother of dying I dread. I'm so crazily tired. . . . I don't want a fuss. . . . And, of course, I don't want him worried; but if I got out he'd marry her—that woman. She might give him something I can't. . . . Stuff like aspirin would do it if you took enough. . . . But that's too much trouble, too, when there's a window . . . leaning out to pick roses . . . so easy . . .

Said her husband's voice at her ear—

"Hetty! Hetty! *Don't!*"

With a scream she regained her balance and turned to face him.

" I—I was only just picking a rose. So sweet ——" she faltered, to avert, if it might be, the rapped out, contemptuous words of reproof that she dreaded more than a stoning; for his voice had held acute and terrifying comprehension of her purpose. Then, her voice jumping an octave—" Harry, where are you? Harry! "

The room was empty.

She said after a moment, slowly—

" I'm going mad. That's what it is: I'm so

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miserable that I'm going mad. You know, I thought I heard Harry calling. He's out. I locked the door myself. He hasn't called me Hetty for years."

" Hetty! Hetty darling! " said his voice.

She turned this way and that, knees knocking together. The boat of the moon, dimming and brightening the air with each dip in and out of the cloud banks, the shadows of the leaves capering across the wall-paper as the wind pounced like a kitten at the trails of roses it had already shaken clear of the casement, the sudden airs puffing out the curtains and stirring the hangings of the bed, all helped to create confusion in her mind. She wanted to switch on the electric lights, the hard practical lights that no ghost or whimsey of the night can stand up against, but to reach them she must pass the mirror: and the mirror frightened her. The surface shone brightly, but behind its polish the reflection of herself was curiously indistinct, was, not so much losing its lines as—doubling them!

She thought—It's the tears on my eyelashes . . . and wiped them hastily away. But the doubled images only grew clearer. Then she cried shrilly—

" Harry, if you're hiding anywhere, it's a bad joke! Come out! You're frightening me! "

THE LOVER

" Coming! " said his voice.

The mirror blurred as if it had been breathed upon from within. Her own reflection was gone, and gone the double of window-frame and curtain, of dancing grey roses and uneasy moon; but within the veiled surface something, she knew, moved and speedily would emerge. She could feel and follow its motions as clearly as she could feel and discern, though she could not see, the progress of the moon behind the triple fleeces which for the moment, only for the moment, had extinguished it. It would reappear in glory, it would arise and shine again. A phrase from nowhere ran in her head like a song of triumph—' At eventide there shall be light! ' Suddenly all fear left her. She was shaken with tremors of delight as she stood, her hands still clutching at the wall behind her for the support she did not need; for she was waiting for the moon to burst its bondage and her own, for the moon and the mirror—for the mirror—?

Then the moon's rim found a tatter in the clouds, and across the dulled surface that she watched in such unaccountable expectation its reflected radiance spread like a smile and grew in brightness till she was forced to shut her dazzled eyes.

When she opened them again the husband of

WANDERING STARS

her heart was standing in front of her, laughing and holding out his hands.

She did not stop to think, to question, to analyse: she ran to him, content to be held close and kissed and soothed as she steadied her shaking body against him. He was solid and warm under her clutching fingers: that was enough for her. But all the while he was the upright youthful man of fifteen years ago, with tanned firm cheeks, thick hair, and no more than the beginning of his stoop; but all the while he looked at her as if—the old clumsy longing phrase shot triumphantly through her mind—as if she mattered to him; but all the while his voice—his voice—what was this warming change in his voice? She shook herself free and caught him in turn by the shoulders, as the words tumbled from her with schoolgirl vehemence—

" Answer me! When you're going somewhere, anywhere, to your friends, and I ask you to take me, what do you say, Harry ? "

His eyes teased her—

" Come, if you like, of course! "

" You'd want me to come ? " she triumphed.

He dropped lazily into a chair—

" Bridge doesn't amuse you, does it? Let's stay here."

She said weakly, staring down at him, her finger

THE LOVER

at her lip in the childish gesture that had always annoyed Harry—

" I don't understand,"

" Why try? " said he with, yes, unbelievably, with the twinkle he had first mislaid in the rubber boom of 1910. " We're happy enough as we are,"

She said—

" But—but—you're Harry? "

"Sure!" It was the trick he had picked up during their honeymoon trip to the States, a trick long ago lost again.

" But Harry—but Harry's out! "

" Oh, him! " said the boy, her husband, contemptuously.

" Oh! " she cried, stretching out her childless arms to him, " what are you, what are you ? "

His eyes spoke to her, not his voice—

" The man you married."

And at that—

" I knew it! " she whispered, awed. "I always believed, always——"

" I shouldn't be here if you hadn't," he told her.

She confessed, shamefaced—

" To-night I didn't. I lost faith. I was going to kill myself."

" Yes," he said, " that's why you see me. You put me out, out of yourself. You turned me out.

WANDERING STARS

And if you'd killed yourself, what should I have done?"

" Oh! " she cried painfully, " you'd have cared then ? It would have hurt you ? "

He said with his familiar air of washing his hands of all responsibility, even for himself—

“ Where should I have gone ? ”

She told him, her eyes rejoicing in him with every glance, every movement of her lips a caress for him as well as a word spoken—

" Everybody must love you! Everybody must want you! That's why I can never blame him—blame you, I mean. You—him—my Harry! Oh, it's so absurd! But people have always wanted him."

He shook his head. His voice was a tune in her ears, delightful to listen to as he answered her—

" Nobody wants me but you. Nobody sees me but you. Homeless, bodiless, deaf, dumb, blind—that's me—except when I'm with you. That's why I love you."

" Do you love me ? Do you, Harry ? Did you never stop? "

His eyes told her that he had never stopped. But she could not believe it. It was too exquisite to be true. She held out her bare palms to him—

THE LOVER

"Oh!" she cried, " then why have you hurt me so—so many times? "

"Not I!" he said.

" He," she corrected, " he and you."

" Your fault," he told her.

" Mine? He and you, you were one person once. Not my fault."

" Your fault. You drew me."

" Out of him? "

" Into your heart. He and I, we were one man, one ordinary man. Good enough, you know. Good enough to go round. But you, you wouldn't believe that. You left him nothing. You took the best of him out of him, out, away, into yourself."

"To make my son with, Harry!" she cried suddenly, pitifully. "Can't you understand? I wanted your child so when I was young. All you were to me—oh, you were God to me!—I took into my heart to look at, to think about, a pattern to make my children from. Harry of the day-time, the shop, the business—he hadn't time for me. He wasn't you."

" He was once," he said, his head in his hands.

She stared at him, her face very white.

" Perhaps," she said, " it's—been my fault—as well."

WANDERING STARS

" Perhaps! " said the living thought that she had fashioned.

She peered through shadows at that shadow.

" Don't go away from me! " she cried shrilly.
" Not yet! Give me time! "

" I'm yours—your own," The voice was full of all the tones she had willed and hungered for.

She was as one wrestling in prayer—

" Til make it all right. I'll make it up to him. I'll get him back—himself—himself again. But don't go yet! I'm not strong enough—not yet. Stay now I've got you, a little while. I've wanted you so. Oh, I've been unhappy! I want a little peace." And then, with a start, as she saw him lift his head, listening, " What is it? "

He said—

"Harry! He's walking down the road. In a moment he'll turn in at the gate."

" How do you know? "

Again he smiled at her, his quick beloved smile at her slow ways.

" Why," said he, « I'm Harry."

She caught at him. She could not but think him real when he held her so close.

" Fairy-tales—" she cried hysterically—" I don't believe in them. But I believe in you."

" Good enough! " he said, and, stooping, kissed

THE LOVER

her. Indeed, ghost or no ghost, dream or no dream, she thought that he kissed her. She felt his lips on her mouth. It went blissfully through her mind that she was wrong, that here, indeed, she was awake, that those steps she could hear, clearer, closer, clearer, were part of the dream and not the waking. Familiar steps they were, coming heavily up the stairs. But the quiver, at those sounds, that went through the substance she grasped, the stir in him and straining forth from her, as of a flag at the signal of its winds, were enough to bring her into a new state of being. She passed in the instant from the exquisite repose of a wild creature sunning itself, to the same creature surprised, still as a stone, nostrils dilated, its very eyeballs motionless with alarm.

The handle turned. She flung out a guardian arm between him and the mirror, as if it were a pit into which he might fall.

" You shan't go again. Stay with me! I tell you he shan't come in,"

He said, smiling—

" Let him come! No harm,"

But she held him the faster—

" If he comes in I shall lose you again——"
And then, still holding him, turned as the handle rattled, to face the door. But she should not have

WANDERING STARS

taken her eyes from him. In an instant, as in a dream, he had escaped her. The room was empty once more save for her bewildered self and her husband's voice muffled by the woodwork. He was knocking and shouting at once—

"What's the matter? I tell you to let me in! "

And then from beneath her window—and her tautened sense could detect no difference of note—

"Come into the garden! Come out to me! Hetty, come! "

"Coming! Coming! " she answered them both, with a command of the incredible situation of which she herself was delightedly conscious—
"Coming! "—and for the first time that she could remember, kept her man waiting her good pleasure while she snatched a wrap from a seldom opened drawer and by some unaccountable impulse veiled her head and shoulders in the long forgotten fashion of her youth. Ay, and paused before the mirror to let it show her to herself with eyes that shone like the silver cracks and pools upon its ancient surface, with flaming cheeks and grey hair hidden away beneath the faded rosy chiffon. Then she turned the key.

Her husband brushed angrily by her.

"In the dark—in the dark? " he began: and then, as he switched on the lights—"Dressed?

THE LOVER

At this hour? What are you doing? Why did you lock the door? Why do you stand there staring as if you were crazy? "

" I *am* crazy," she told him delightedly. Her smile was as broad as that of a child in mischief. " It's the moon. I believe I'll go for a walk."

" You'll come to bed," said he. But she was back at the window once more, staring out and down into the black and white garden. The minutes passed in a silence broken only by his movements about the room.

" Come along now! " he repeated impatiently. And then, as she neither stirred nor spoke—"What are you looking for? What's the matter with you? "

" I'm happy," she said.

"Is that something new?" There was pure injury in his tone.

" Quite new." She turned to him, still smiling. " Entirely new." And then, as she slipped away across the room—" I *am* going out, Harry. The moonlight's too mad to miss. 'Night! "

" Turn on those lights! " he commanded; for, as she spoke, she had slipped out a hand with a gesture that reminded him, in its graceful and deliberate perversity, of a scene upon the stage, and had plunged him blinking into darkness

WANDERING STARS

again, a darkness in which he could discern no more of her than a half outline, a silver edge of head and neck and drapery framed against the pitch black of the passage way like a double of the sickle moon framed in the window-square of night.

"Hester! D'you hear me? Put that light on! " he began, and saw her full face for a moment, still moonlike, as she turned her head. There was a silver glint of teeth as her lips parted in a laugh.

"Come if you like! " she said: stood a moment, as if listening, and was gone.

He said hotly—

"Woman's crazy! " but he did not follow her. Indeed, with her going, she passed for the moment from his mind. He had worries enough of his own, he told himself, as he pulled his shirt over his head. He had a heavy day's work behind him and another in front. He wished he had not gone out. Isabel had no sense of time and place. He had told her that it was a full week with him, yet she must dance him out in the evening on a whim. . . . And then her rooms were full. . . . Mackail had been there. . . . She knew he wished to avoid Mackail. . . . And the service was bad. When a man paid for his comforts, he at least expected—but Isabel could never keep servants. Not that he blamed them: to serve

THE LOVER

Isabel was like serving a cockatoo. And now, when he came home to a little peace and quiet . . . but women were all alike! . . .

He got into bed.

But for some time he could not rest. His wife's absence disturbed him: he missed her warmth at his side. The curtains flapped incessantly to and fro, running the moonlight on and off his face like quicksilver. He had never known before that birds woke and chirruped in the night. Once he got up and went to the window because he thought he heard his wife's voice answering someone. But she was alone when he looked out, wandering up and down among the ghostly hollyhocks on the other side of the lawn, like a new-made shade amid the long-accustomed dead. And yet, no sooner did he drowse again than again he half heard, half dreamed the hum of continuous speech. Once he could have sworn that his own name floated up to him—" Harry! dear Harry! "

He strained his ears, raising himself on his elbow; but ever as the sounds neared his window they were merged again in the rustle of the roses, in the whimpering of unknown creatures of the night.

He could stand it no longer.

" Do you know it's three o'clock? " he called to

WANDERING STARS

her, his eye on the luminous watch beside him. And this time she answered him from beneath the window with such everyday distinctness that he shrugged at himself for dreaming that the dim sounds he had heard could have been indeed her voice.

" I'll come! Pm coming! " she cried up to him; and a moment later she stole in.

Drowsily he watched her slip off her clothes and prepare for bed. It occurred to him that Isabel would have looked ridiculous in that plain white garment that had no scent to it but the scent of washed linen. He watched her brush out her hair with long soft stroking gestures that were oddly soothing to follow. Presently she lay down beside him. Satisfied, he turned on his pillow and fell asleep.

II

Hester Peile on her thirty-seventh birthday felt fifty and looked it.

'Poor Hester Peile! Money isn't everything. They say, you know, that he——Yes. In Maida Vale. At least, that's what my husband——Of course, Peile's got the brains. And you can't get away from it, she is boring—no sparkle—very

THE LOVER

sweet, of course, but you've got to be up to a man nowadays. She can't see that—poor Hester!—poor Hester Peile! '

Yet Hester Peile on her thirty-eighth birthday looked thirty-five and felt——? But Hester Peile had never taken anyone into her confidence as to her feelings: that was what troubled the neighbourhood. A woman cannot talk to her acquaintances as if she saw them through glasses, peering down upon them from the ramparts of an enchanted castle half-hidden in shining mists: a woman cannot continue her daily life as she has lived it in all the neighbours' sight and yet simultaneously manage to enwrap herself in new and delicate dignity: a woman cannot, in short, dance her way widdershins to youth and happiness without having to choose between comments and a confidant.

' What did Mrs. Peile do with herself all day long? Did anyone know? Why had she ceased to pay her dreary little calls upon you? Where had she acquired that ridiculous air of satisfaction? And why did she buy so many new clothes—and from Lucille?—Why did she forget sometimes to bow to you when she met you in the street? Why—to sum it all up—did she behave like a school-girl newly fallen in love? '

WANDERING STARS

The neighbourhood did not like it—could not be expected to like it.

⁴ And what was this last tale of a man seen—no, not seen, *heard* about the house whenever Mr. Peile was away? Poor Mr. Peile! Of course, I never pay any attention to servants, but really—Oh, I know I used to be sorry for Hester Peile; but there's a limit. She must be forty if she's a day. And in such execrable taste, don't you think? My dear, they were seen, actually seen together late at night!—No, nobody knows who it is—shadows, you know, on the blind! It's the husband I'm sorry for. Oh, entirely unsuspecting!—He ought to be told! '

And told in the end he was.

It was Isabel, Isabel of the sofa cushions and the diamonded fingers who at last sounded the rumours in his ears, and in the doing snapped their long frayed relationship for ever. Isabel had always intended to marry him eventually. He knew it without disturbance. If she would not take his explanation that it was out of the question, so much the worse for her. But lately she had wearied him with her hints and suppositions and cajolings, though for the sake of the poor muddy passion she had once stirred up in him he was ready to spare her vanity, even when she forced

THE LOVER

him with a direct question. He would say to her no more than—"Divorce me? My dear Isabel, I can't afford to let her. I'm standing for Parliament at the next election." And then one day, and fatally for her, she had said to him, with a glance of her eyes like the flick of a lead pellet—"Why not get one from her?" and then, as his face crimsoned to an outrage beyond her comprehension, outrage so immense that speech was choked in his mouth, she had added—"My dear boy? surely you must know——" and broken off with the croaking laugh which had once attracted him.

He felt himself tremble with a sick chill, angry as he was.

"Know what?" he said. He would not meet her eyes nor respond to the appeasing smile she gave him. He only knew that he had long endured her merely, and that now he hated her. But she was eager—

"Lord knows, I'm not one to tell tales. I suppose she's had something to bear. But it's you I'm thinking of, Harry. With everyone talking, it's a shame you shouldn't know."

"Know what?"

"My dear, you're hurting me. My rings are cutting into me. Look! "

WANDERING STARS

"Know what? What do they say about my wife?"

"And at her age, too! Mind, I'm not sure that I believe it, but *everyone* says so."

"Says what? "

"Well, if you must know—she—she's sly, Harry! Harry, you could divorce her: it could be done. She's got a lover. Ask anyone! "

He stared at her with such complete lack of expression that she was emboldened—

"Harry, dear, it's a shock to you, of course. You're too good. You believe in everyone. But I always knew. She's not good enough for you—honest. Harry! Harry, darling! Harry, don't look like that! " And so descended lovingly upon him, all fluttering hands and eyelids, settling upon him like a flock of pigeons, arms about his neck, to draw him down. But he shook off her touch with a roughness that almost overbalanced her and she fell back awkwardly among the cushions. He made no effort to help her, but stood regarding her, dispassionately, as if she were a spectacle on a stage, a spectacle that held his eyes but not his thoughts. His heavy face was darkly flushed, his obstinate mouth set. She had risen to her feet again and was straightening her gown with furious shaking fingers before he said, paying out his

THE LOVER

words as if they were gold—" I'm fed up with lies 1" and with no more farewell turned and left the room'

"Watch for yourself, then! " she shrilled after him. But if he heard he made no answer.

She waited a moment as if expecting his return, then, crossing to the window, peered out. He was crossing the street with his solid air of shouldering the traffic aside.

" He *is* a man! " she said, with a shrug that was half temper, half sensuous pleasure. " You wouldn't have thought now that he'd get so jealous—and of *her*\ " Her disordered hair caught her eye as she turned into the room and she fell to patting it into place, reassuring herself as she did so—" He'll come back. He couldn't break off like that, just for a word——"

For all that, with uneasy consciousness that the little scene had not gone as she had rehearsed it, she sat down before the guests of the evening came and wrote to him. She flattered herself as she clicketed down to the pillar-box in her high-heeled golden shoes that she could write a letter. It was barely five o'clock. It ought to reach him that night.

But Harry Peile did not go home that night. That would mean altering his plans, and in his new fury of contempt for her he would not permit

WANDERING STARS

anything Isabel might say to alter them, not now nor at any future time. It was his wife that she had attacked—his own wife! Slandorous nonsense! And absurd, too, to anyone who knew Hester as he and he only could know her. Poor Hester; poor inert Hester to be accused of flightiness and worse! . . . The whole matter, of course, was not worth a thought, and not another thought would he give it. He would not! Not another thought! . . . True, he himself, now he came to consider it, had not been unaware of a certain change in Hester in the last few months—very slight—probably a question of health. She was certainly looking better. . . . Younger. . . . For his part he was glad to see her taking an interest in life, if not in him. He thought, with an uneasy chuckle, that at least he was not burdened with a jealous wife as well as a—ah, well! Isabel had been fond of him. That excused her much. Hester never asked where he went—nor cared. Why, night after night lately she had left him to himself and gone off—where? He supposed her nine o'clock headaches *were* genuine? What did Isabel—Isabel was outrageous! He would not waste another thought. Yes, yes, he had said all that before. . . .

He smouldered through the long hot week

THE LOVER

of business and pleasure like a slow fuse, and coming down by the packed five o'clock train on the last Friday of a merciless July he himself felt that an explosion was overdue. And the car had not been sent to meet him! There was not a taxi to be had. That meant twenty minutes' walk in the heat, in the terrible heat! Now why had Hester forgotten to order the car? . . . The omission at that moment damned her more than all Isabel's chatter.

But, heat or no heat, his splendid shrubberies and his ordered trees greeted him at last, and between them his ample house showed a sunlit face. But Hester was in none of the rooms. The maid hadn't seen Mrs. Peile since breakfast, sir. Mrs. Peile often went out for the whole day. "Yes, sir, took her lunch. Would you be in to dinner, sir? No, sir, no orders." And then, in afterthought—⁴⁴ If you please, sir, Mrs. Peile sometimes goes out through the little wood."

He nodded dismissal. So that was why Hester had not ordered the car! . . . Out all day, was she, neglecting her house and her duties? Not that he grudged her her pleasures. . . . Not he. . . . Not any reasonable pleasures. But this gipsying out all day and every day—it was unsuitable. What would the staff think? Come to think of it,

WANDERING STARS

the girl's manner had been, not exactly impertinent, but—odd . . . unsatisfactory. . . .

He turned into the lobby. Through the wire-blinded 'windows he could dimly overlook the servants' quarters. The voices of the maids at work came up to him. They had carried out one of the wooden tables and were sitting round it under the mulberry tree. Watching them absently, as he rinsed his hands, he saw the girl who had waited on him go running out, streamers flying. The cook shelled peas continuously, but her interest was all for the newcomer, as her open mouth showed. The other maids leaned forward, elbows planted squarely, chins on fists. Followed laughter and a pantomime of hand and glance vaguely familiar, and it dawned on him after a moment that the girl was rehearsing to her fellows the conversation with himself. But what had he said to her that needed so much re-telling? Suddenly and distinctly a sentence disentangled itself and floated up to him—"And every night, too, mark you! Regular as clockwork! I don't hold with such goings-on."

Once more, for all the evening was breathless with heat, a sick familiar chill stole over him. He folded the towel with great precision and hung it once more upon the rail. Servants' gossip! . . .

THE LOVER

Nothing to do with him. . . . Was he to play eavesdropper on servants? He turned, uneasy and ashamed, and hurried out of the house.

His steps took him the accustomed way. He was proud of his glass. He was standing in the first of the houses, the greenhouse that ran level with the drive, when a man, an under-gardener of his own, came up on his bicycle, dismounted, leant it carelessly against the laden boughs of a plum, entered whistling, saw him, and ridiculously, inexplicably started, whitening under his weather-beaten tan. He noticed the oddity of it even as he said angrily—

"The plum, Hirst! The plum! What are you dreaming of? Propping your bicycle on the plum!"

But the man only gulped and stared the more as he answered—

"Lord, sir, you did come along quick, sirl You give me quite a turn! "

He frowned. He liked life orderly and to the point. In an underling, agitation, particularly unexplained agitation, was entirely out of place.

"I told you to lift your bicycle. It's breaking the branch." Then, with a sudden recollection of the lad's position as a foundling of Hester's, as a youngster with a doleful little wife and a doleful

WANDERING STARS

little past, he added suspiciously—" Here, what's the matter with you? "

But his eyes were met resentfully:

"Nothing, sir! I haven't touched a drop. But I saw you myself not five minutes ago down by the mistress's wood, talking to the mistress." He mopped his streaming face. " It's seeing you here so sudden-like, beat me. Don't know how you got here, sir! I come along pretty quick! "

That was it, he thought, drunk! Drunk, of course! There was no helping these people. . . . Then, with a sudden terrible quickening of interest, dismissed that sanity of conclusion:

" Is your mistress——? "

" Down in the wood, sir! On the little bench. Where you always sit."

" Always sit? "

" Beg pardon, sir! Seen you down there most evenings through the trees. Beats me, though, how you——" He checked himself respectfully. For a moment he waited as if for an answer, then he began to busy himself with the thick growing tomato plants to right and left of them, and mechanically Harry Peile followed his example, nipping away the useless shoots, deftly, three to the gardener's one, though his mind, occupied with his problem, knew nothing of the pleasant-

THE LOVER

smelling green stuff he crushed between his fingers.

What was he to do? ... He could not say to his servant—"Describe him, this man you mistook for me! How often have you seen him before? Have you never seen his face? Have you met him elsewhere? What did they talk about? Were you near enough to hear? Did your mistress——?" And so pulled himself up short. Had it come to that, that he must get his news and his proofs of the infidelity of his own wife——Again he checked himself. He was going too fast. . . . Hester was not Isabel. . . .

He said slowly, elaborately—

"I took a short cut across the beds because"—he was bad at invention—"your mistress——" Again he paused; then a bodgeful of half ripe peaches caught his eye and gave him an idea. "Your mistress had a fancy for some fruit. **I'm** taking it down."

"Not those, sir; they're stewing. I'll pick you some ripe ones, sir! "

He chafed at the man's officiousness. Nevertheless he controlled himself, for all his blind hurry of pursuit, to wait till a pottle had been fetched and a bloomy pyramid piled upon it. A gesture of impatience, a too headlong departure, would set

WANDERING STARS

the servants' hall jabbering anew. It had enough food already for its infernal gossip. He gasped at the folly, the mad folly of it, the cruel indifference to him, to his dignity, his good repute, that could let her sit there 'most evenings' so needlessly, so callously exposed to any prying servant's eye. Such blatancy was gross, grosser than the sin itself. Yet sin? And Hester? Impossible! . . . At worst it would be folly, the gentle reluctant folly of an unoccupied woman. . . . No, it was the man who was the problem. Here was some schemer, using a silly woman's sentiment for—what private end? . . . He had his enemies. He was uneasily aware that he had occasionally deserved them. Were they striking through her at him? . . . Was Isabel in it? . . . Mackail now—could it be Mackail? . . . Mackail had been at Isabel's that evening—vividly the year-old scene flashed back into his mind, more vivid in recollection than it had been in the living—that evening in which, he remembered now, it had first struck him uncomfortably that something had happened, was happening to Hester. He wished he could remember that evening more clearly. . . . What had happened? Had they quarrelled? . . . They never quarrelled. But Hester had gone into the garden late at night and then he had heard—the

THE LOVER

truth flashed blindingly through his brain—he himself had heard, with his own ears, the rumoured and incredible voice. There was something in the story then! ... It had been going on all this while and he had never guessed. . . . Yet Hester to be deceiving him? ... It was not credible. . . . Besides, it couldn't be Mackail. He had left Mackail at Isabel's. . . . Then who? Who? . . .

He realized as he searched his mind for a list of their mutual acquaintances how little he knew, after all, of his Hester, of her employments, of her friendships, of her daily life. He felt vaguely that something was wrong somewhere, that he ought to know more about her. But then, what did she know of him? . . . What interest did she take in him? Did she ever ask him questions? . ' . Did she ever concern herself with his business or his friends? . . . No, she went her own way, her own colourless way. . . . But if it were not so colourless after all? ... ⁴ She's sly, Harry. Harry, you don't know! ' Hester accused, and by Isabel? That was absurd! That was—his eyes fell on the blazing summer border as he hurried down the path, gilded and purple-barred by the evening light—that was the sunflower come to judgment on the white pinks at his feet....

WANDERING STARS

He drew a deep breath. The air was full of their sweet and delicate scent.

' Harry, you could divorce her! '... He could, could he? That was as he chose. . . . But the man? Isabel had been careful to go far, but not too far. She named no names—oh, he could imagine her saying it! ... but no doubt she knew. . . . Who was the contemporary that the gardener's unobservant glance could take for himself? Once come to grips with the man—he could deal with Hester afterwards. . . . And so arrived, the evening sun painting him scarlet as he half walked, half ran upon his way, at the cool fringes of the wood.

The trees grew far apart, slender bare stems which had straggled up between giants long since felled, to a daylight far away as beanstalk-land. The green ceiling they carried was pierced with streaming golden shafts that melted in middle air to a mellow twilight in which motes floated and the midges of the dusk danced in a maze. The path, the colour of last year's leaves, wound among those leaves, skirting the root pits, swerving out again into open land and so on, a mere dotted double line of hawksbit, to the final clump of beeches by the stile.

There, on the low bench by the path, sat his wife—alone.

THE LOVER

Her hand shaded her eyes against the level sunlight and she was looking along the path towards him as if she were following the movements of someone he could not see. Then her glance encountered his and she smiled placidly, but without surprise. That astonished him most, that she was not in any way surprised. But the basket of fruit surprised her. She was as pleased as a child.

" Harry! For me? Did you bring them for me? Why, I was just saying——" She corrected herself with an odd flicker of the eyelids, " I was just thinking how thirsty I was."

He dumped the basket on to the seat beside her with a jerk of the wrist that sent the sunset fruit that crowned it rolling along the slats to the ground. She stooped after them.

" Who were you telling? Who was with you? " he demanded.

She said, her face flushed from the exertion—

" No-one has been here but you. Why? "

" Hirst saw you," he said, kicking at a tripping rootlet in his way. His anger had suddenly cooled into embarrassment. Face to face with his wife his own thoughts of her encumbered him. He had expected—he wasn't sure what he had expected—but he did not expect her to enjoy her peach with-

WANDERING STARS

out so much as an answer: he did not expect her to push the basket towards him, as if inviting him to enjoy one too. Moodily he watched her finish it and lay up the others in their nest, put away her handkerchief, rise and shake out her frock.

He began again, oddly helpless—

" Hirst——"

" Poor Hirst! " she said, and with that moved leisurely forwards towards the house. He found himself moving with her, saying no more than—

" But look here, Hetty——"

" Well, Harry? " she answered, smiling, smiling at the flowers on either side of them, at the golden sky above them, at the flirting wagtail in their path, smiling at all the world save him.

" Nothing," said he, suddenly sullen. And they walked on in silence. It was not till they reached the terrace, not till he could see through the French window the parlour-maid laying the meal, not till he caught, or imagined that he caught an inquisitive turn of the girl's head in their direction, that his wife, half stopping, turned her face to him and, still smiling, spoke—

" There was no-one there but you, Harry. Who else should there be? "

She waited as if for an answer. But at this stage, he told himself, what could he answer?

THE LOVER

He made a brusque gesture, as one abandoning the matter, and would have passed on. But at that she caught him by the arm, half turning him so that he must needs face her, and repeated with a full-eyed, steady look at him and no smile left—

" Harry! Who should there be? "

For a moment their eyes held each other upon that word. Then she released him, and as if by mutual agreement, they went on together into the house.

On the tray among the dusty cards on the hall table—he noticed with fresh uneasiness that it was a long time since Hester had had callers—lay a letter with a week-old stamp, a letter in a handwriting which he knew. He caught it up furtively with a glance at his wife. Before her back had disappeared round the curve of the landing he had read it: before the gong had rung a second time, had sat down at his private desk, written three lines on a sheet of notepaper, signed a cheque, sealed and stamped an envelope, and despatched a startled maid to the post. Mr. Peile out of humour was not pleasant to serve. So much for Isabel. . . . So much for Isabel!

But though he could wipe Isabel from his mind as easily as he could wipe mud from his boots, as easily as he could tear a leaf from his cheque-book,

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he could not wipe from his mind her letter. All through the hot August weeks he brooded, watching his wife in all her comings and goings, matching her against its phrases. Curiously, their very grossness eased him. Impossible that that quiet face should ever have been the model for the portrait Isabel had drawn! But he was none the less disturbed. He moved in a mystery and he did not like it. He felt as if he had been in an accident: he was shaken, bewildered, bruised. He had no peace away from his home, yet in it—what peace had he? He wished he had never seen Isabel. . . . He wished his wife would talk to him. . . .

But summer had melted into autumn and they were once more using the smoking-room with its roaring chimney and deep chairs, before he got his wish.

Dinner was over and he was sitting by the fire, his paper in his hand, but his jealous eye on the movements of his wife. The clock had struck nine. She always went away upon the stroke. . . . Stop her? Why should he stop her? She was a free agent. But to-night as she passed his chair she stopped of her own accord.

" What's the matter, Harry? " she said.

He lifted his heavy eyes and shrugged his shoulders without speaking. She hesitated. Inside

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herself she was saying—' I've given him his dinner. He's got his paper; he's got his whisky and water; he's got his cigars. I'm free to go. Ah, and Harry's waiting for me! ' And thrilled to the picture in her mind of her quiet room, and Harry waiting for her in the starlight. Yet she made no movement. She remained staring down at him uneasily—

"Harry, are you worried?" she ventured again.

"Not at all! " he told her defiantly, but his lip quivered like an angry child's.

An extraordinary impulse took her. She came quite close to him and leaned over the back of his chair, a hand on either shoulder.

"What is it, my dear? " she said again. But to herself—' What will he do now? Will he push me away? '

But he did not repulse her. His hands flipped nervously at his papers.

" Is it the business? " She was slipping into a seat on the arm of his chair.

" Partly."

"Are we spending too much? I could cut down——"

" It's not that. D'you want money? Because I can let you have——"

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" I don't. On the contrary, I thought that you might."

He laughed shortly:

" The money's all right. You spend what you want, my girl! D'you hear? Have all you want] "

She made no answer. He glanced at her sharply. Then, with a note in his voice that moved her, so anxious was it, so unassured—

"You've had all you want, haven't you? Always? I've never stinted you, have I? Hetty, you'd say I'd been good to you? "

Still she was silent, searching for her answer amid the broken hopes, the quenched desires, the rotted flowers, the useless lumber of the past. She had weapons enough to wound him with, she thought, laid up within herself. Then a great wave of pity for him swept over Rer and engulfed those memories.

" It's all right, old man," she reassured him. " I'm quite happy." And then, as the remembrance of her secret bliss returned—" Oh, I'm very happy! " and so rose, restless again, wanting to be gone, to cease wasting the minutes with her heart upstairs. But his hand upon her knee pressed her back into her seat:

" You're always going off by yourself," he

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grumbled: and then, suspiciously—"What do you do all by yourself?"

A side thought, threading the main plait of her consciousness, wondered if he needed a holiday? He was thinner, too thin, though it suited him, made him, at any rate, look younger. He used to be such a hop-pole. . . . Well, she must take him away somewhere . . . the south of France . . . even Brighton for a week would be better than nothing. . . . And with that the idle wifely thought snapped off short, leaving unchequered once more the woof of pity and pain. She said, between laughter and tears, between joy of her secret kingdom and contempt for this disinherited one who might have been its king—

"I think about old times,"

He said, surprising her—

"So do I, sometimes. Often lately. Hester, you remind me sometimes of——"

"Old times?" she said quietly.

"You were a pretty girl," said he, to himself more than to her.

"And you were——" She stopped herself. Amazing that memory, this late o' day, could sting her to the old delighting glow! What did the shell of him matter when she had the kernel so safe? Need the shell move her? Yet her eyes

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were smarting as she watched him get up abruptly and stare at himself in the glass over the mantel, consciously, as a schoolboy does, peering for signs of his moustache.

" Yes, I've changed," he decided, while she formed, laughter-ridden, a " No " with her lips. Harry was waiting for her in the dreamy darkness above them. . . . Harry had not changed. . . .

" D'you mind? " he asked her, still examining himself. " Do women mind? Grey hair, and little of it? Things like this?" he touched the puffed and wrinkled flesh about his eyes.

But she shook her head, saying slowly—

" If you love a man, you keep him—so young—in your heart."

His face softened. He looked at her with that momentary, that strange physical dilation and darkening of the eyes which always meant, she knew, that he was greatly moved. A third, invisible, watching the pair of them, comparing their shining glances, would have said that for an instant they resembled one another, as old lovers sometimes do.

" Pm always sure of you," said her husband at last, staring down at her: and then, as with an ugly uprush the disquiet of the last weeks, the chatter of the maids, the barbs of Isabel returned

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to him, he added with a roughness which did not hurt her, did not frighten her—"Sure of you whatever they say, damn them!" and so fell to staring at her again.

At that, if she had been innocent, as he craved to believe her, as, deep down in his puzzled heart, he did believe her, there should have been bewilderment in her face at least. Questions, indignant words, he was prepared for, meek as he knew her to be; but not for the conscious colour that flooded her till her ears, her neck, even the soft white circle at the pit of her throat, grew pink; not for the sparkle of pleasure in her eyes and her lips parted in laughter, still less was he prepared for the pat of her finger-tips on his cheek in a little stroking gesture new to him, a touch soft as a smile, tender as a kiss; less than ever for the movement that released her from his hand and sped her from the room in a quick flurry of escape.

"Hester!" he cried. But he did not follow her. He was not sufficiently sure of himself, sure of what he wanted to say or do, for that. Besides, she had flouted him. What was happening to them? *She* to laugh at him! That was ten o'clock striking. He was heavy from missing his after-dinner nap . . . not well lately . . . what with the worry, worry, worry! Had she laughed at him? What was she

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doing upstairs? ... ' My dear boy, she's got a lover! ' Crude — crude — worthy of Isabel! Worthy, he thought, with a bitter shiver of disgust, of him and Isabel! . . . Yet that blush of hers—what did it mean? And how far it took him back. . . . Old times indeed! ... A lover—a lover! His delicate wife with a lover! . . . The phrase shocked him, and the thought. ' And every night, mark you! Regular as clockwork! I don't hold with such goings-on! ' The words, the gestures, the snickering laughs, hummed in his mind like a brood of blow-flies. Irresolutely he opened the door and stood looking up the staircase. All was silent. All dark. There was no light under his wife's door, their door. What was she doing up there in the dark? . . . A middle-aged Juliet on a Chislehurst balcony? Well, it was easy to find out, . . . Key-holes, eh? No! . . . He had his faults, he told himself, but for that he was not ready. And so turned back into the room, angry, unhappy, fighting with himself, calling himself alternately a fool to submit, a brute to suspect; but always recurring to the entirely absurd idea that it would be a comfort, if it were not so impossible, to call Hetty down to him and talk the whole miserable matter out. . . . Surely, if they talked to each other, they could find a way

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out from, the trouble, whatever it was. . . » . But Hester would never talk to him, he reflected resentfully. Always a dumb devil when you went against her, even in the old days, the first days. . . . Ah, the first days, the summer days! . . .

His mind began to run backwards jerkily along that track, rusty with disuse. He remembered such odd trifles. He remembered, for instance, much more clearly than he remembered his wedding-day, buying her a bunch of flowers—white lilac, wasn't it?—all because the seller's face had reminded him of Hetty. Drooping flowers—the woman had cheated him—but Hetty had carried them all that evening in her cool hands, and days later they were still alive, for he had come upon her trimming the stalks. . . . Funny how things came back to you from years ago. . . . Funny how it rested you to go back into yourself. . . . Good old days! . . . If anybody had told him then that he and Hester—he and Hetty. . . . Oh, it was hard, hard on a man to be at this pass after so many years. . . .

He turned his head from left to right, uneasily, like a bull shaking off flies. His throat hurt him, and his eyes were full of tears.

He would not go up to her. . . . He would not call. . . . He would not budge an inch. . . . He

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would not suspect and he would not disprove. . . . But most desperately he wanted to hear her foot on the stairs. A scene, a quarrel, anything he would accept, but he would not be left alone. . . . Surely she ought to know—surely she ought to feel how he wanted her to come.

But Hester Peile, the blessed closure of the door in her ears, Hester Peile, gliding up the staircase like a woman gliding into sleep, sweetly, leaving the dust of the day behind her, Hester Peile on her enchanted threshold, had no thought of the room she had left. She had done her duty all the evening: now her good hour had come.

" Harry!" she whispered, searching the shadows with her eyes, " Harry, I've got'tway! Harry, where are you? *Harry?*" and with that stopped, because her heart for an instant missed its beat. He was not there.

" Harry! " she cried again wildly, " Harry! For God's sake !"

' At that she thought she heard his voice, but she endured an intolerable minute, a desolating eternity of a minute, before he became visible, first as a shadow where nothing had been upon the brightness of the looking-glass, and then a solid presence where a moment earlier there had been but the shadow. It frightened her horribly, as it

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had not frightened her at their first reunion, to see him thus grow from nothing into life at her call.

"Not there? Not——? Not——?" She swayed into his arms; and yet, as if indeed she subconsciously distrusted his reality, put out a hand and steadied herself against the reality of the chair.

"You *are* here? I'm not dreaming? You're here?" she said, thinking the words, not speaking them. It was her test of his quality.

"Always!" he answered aloud, laughing.

To her amazement she found his boyish readiness to laugh away her earthbound bewilderments suddenly, and for the first time, irritating. It was as if she carried along with her something of the oppressed and heavy spirit of the man downstairs, as if on his behalf and her own she resented the wings of this creature which between them they had created, imprisoned, maltreated, and released.

"You were not there!" She was passionate, injurious, resentful. "You were not there, not waiting when I came, when I wanted you. You were not in the room."

Again he laughed at her:

"I was with you."

"I wasn't here."

"No. You were late."

"Harry wanted me," she told him with a faintest,

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furtive challenge in her voice, as if she defied him to disapprove. But he only nodded agreement.

" Yes, I wanted you." His arm had slipped about her, pulling her down to a seat on the elbow of his chair. But though she yielded, it was absently, with the thought in her mind—This has happened before! When did all this happen before? Then, as she belatedly became conscious of the meaning of his words, she shook her head—

" Not you. Harry . . . my old Harry! He wanted me—he truly did. He—something's happened to him, I think. He's changing,"

"Ah? "he smiled.

"Younger," she said, only realizing the fact as she found her word for it. " More like——"

" Me? " Again the laugh that had vexed her rang out. She turned on his knee to stare at him, at him, through him, searching, proving him with wistful eyes.

" Sometimes," she said slowly, " I wish—I wish——"

" What do you wish ?"

She shook her head doubtfully.

" What do you wish? "

She said uneasily, her glance wandering from him to range the well known room with its silent, intimate reminders of her married life—

THE LOVER

"Wish? I don't know."

" Sure? " said he.

Something in the voice caught her attention. Sharply she turned her head, and in the doing surprised a look which startled her, a look so familiar, so lately and pitifully espied upon another face that involuntarily her hand tightened on his sleeve as if to assure herself of his identity.

" Harry 1 " she whispered, "You *are* you? Sometimes I get confused."

He did not answer. More than ever his eyes, darkening and dilating, his fine eyes with never a line nor a sag to hint where life had touched him, fixed and fascinated her. She put up a finger, timidly, exploring his face as a child will.

" Well? "he said, still laughing at her. Oh, that he would but be grave for once—a man and not a boy!

She answered, touching him as if her fingers were a pencil—

" Here — I miss something. Here — there should be——"

"What? "

" Little human—wrinkles. Tired lines——"

" Do you want me to grow *old*! " he asked her.

" *I'm* old," she evaded.

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" And I'm a dream," he told her. " Dream me as you please."

She said, still touching him—

" Can I? Be—a little older then." And, at that, rising irresolutely—" Harry, I can't stay to-night. He—downstairs—he's all alone."

She was honest. She meant to go. But, womanly, she would have liked him to try and keep her, to protest a little as a lover should. But he said nothing. She had reached the door before she turned for a last look at him and saw him once more as she had seen him at her first entrance, fading again from man to shadow. That hurt her, though she accepted it quite naturally as part of the condition of the dream.

" Come too! Come too! " she said. But it was more wish than invitation. The last thing she expected to hear out of the darkness was his voice answering her—

" I always do."

She laughed at that good joke as, unwillingly, she closed the door on him and stole back to the smoking-room she had so abruptly forsaken. Yet, when she found her husband still standing where she had left him, so like in his turn in pose, in darkened eyes, in strained expectant look, to the shadow upstairs who in turn had resembled him,

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she had for an instant the vividest impression, not merely that her lover had come upon his promise, but that he had stolen a march, that he had preceded her. She cast, absurd as she felt it to be, a glance of applause upon her husband, applause of such admirable masquerade. Her amused mouth appreciated, invited confidence; but the look she received in her turn, still so dark and defenceless, sobered her. This was reality: this was the old Harry she had left. He did not know her with a twinkle in her eyes; she was merely adding to his disquiet. She mustn't do that. He was ill and tired. He should not be any longer worried and disturbed—poor Harry, poor old Harry!

Casting about her as an actress might, for the properties that would enable her to continue the comedy (for so far had she come in the last year from the blackest night of her life that she could label their misshapen relationship comedy, not tragedy, now) she got out her patience cards and, sitting down, set them out in neat rows on the patterned table-cloth, and heard with delicate inward laughter his sigh of relief at this resumption of the normal on her part. But he did not return to his paper. He walked about the room. He adjusted the clock. He poked the fire. He came to anchor at last behind her and watched her play.

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When she laid her knave by the king it was time for him to interfere. He did so. His hand, steadying himself on her shoulder as he leaned over her, stayed there, heavy but not too heavy, pleasing her, till the patience was played out. It was full twelve before they went to bed, and though she hurried on ahead, leaving him to lock the front door and extinguish the lights, there was no shadow waiting for her on the landing, no quick movement, no whisper, no kiss. Yet, as she lay awake thinking it all over, she decided that she had had a pleasant evening, peaceful, with secret thoughts of tears and laughter dealt out among the absurd faces of the kings and queens. It couldn't have been pleasanter if Harry had been there.

III

It is well to have a business that brings you easy money and insists that pleasant trips to Paris and Berlin are part of the day's work. It is well to have friends who are good company, powerful friends, not to be offended for this same business' sake. It is well to have a team of interests and driver's hands. But the underlings who envy you never think of what you sacrifice. . . . Have you not your wife and your home as well as they? ... Who

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cares to be called and kept away for a month on end out of telephone reach just when his wife—he and his wife———And he hated writing letters. . . . It had always been understood between them that Hester was not to expect letters. After all, what was there to say?

Yet he wrote to her, twice, in the first week of his absence, and she knew when he reached Spain because he sent her, of all things, a white lace shawl, heavy and silken, fit for a girl, with a milliner's pink rose caught among the folds. She unwrapped it (she was not alone when she unwrapped it) between laughter and—tears of laughter? What possessed Harry? He must have chosen it himself. Nice of him, poor Harry! But—wasn't it funny?

Was it? Her companion thought it pretty, a pretty thing. He liked the rose.

"But Harry——!" And she explained why a woman of thirty-eight avoids pink roses, and what she wears instead.

Oh? He didn't know.

She stopped, struck by a whimsical idea.

"Harry! You're not hurt? You didn't choose it!"

No, no! Of course not!

"And besides, I do like it. It was sweet of Harry."

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That was all right then: she was to put it on,
And the next week came yet another letter.
She was not to have a lonely Christmas after all.
Harry was tired of Spain. Harry was bored with
Paris. Harry was coming home.

Though he had given her the date and the trains
she did not meet him at the station. But, as he told
himself, he had never expected her to meet him.
Look at the weather! A good foot of snow. Why
should she meet him?

Yet he did not arrive unnoticed at the big
entrance gates. The shriek of delight might have
warmed him, if he had had ears for the welcome it
implied:

"Hullo, Uncle! She said you were coming.
I've made a snow-man down by the rubbish heap.
Come and see it! Do! Now! You'll never come
out if you go in."

He recognized his nephew—Hester's nephew
rather—and resigned himself to deserting the car
and being led, as it were, in a triumphal procession
of one, in search of much that he had no desire
to see. A hard-wearing and unsnubbable young-
ster this, who followed him about on their occa-
sional meetings with the fatal devotion of a kitten
for the man who dislikes cats. Not that he disliked
the child—oh, no! And Hester was fond of him.

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" So you've been keeping your aunt company, eh?" He moved his arm awkwardly without managing to dislodge the five stone odd that swung from it.

" Yes. Been here a week."

"Oh!"

" Going to-morrow,"

"Oh!"

" Aunt Hester wishes I wasn't. Wishes there were two of me."

" Twins, eh? " He never knew how to talk to children.

" No, two of *me*. One to be here, you know, and one at home. She said she didn't see why not. It would be a score at Christmas. Uncle? "

" Yes."

" Shall I take you for a Christmas present? Had you better be standing or sitting down? "

" Take me?"

" Didn't you know? I've got a V.P.K. Swapped it with Ohlsen for my watch. It didn't go, I've taken thousands of photographs. Got a beauty of Hirst. Clear as clear. Til print you one of him if you like. It's better than Aunt Hetty."

" Oh, so you photographed your aunt, did you?" He was staring out over the wide fields, enjoying the red light of the sunset on the snow. Better

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than Spain, this.... Nothing like your own woods
and fields....

"Yes, only it's not come out very well. He
moved."

He recalled himself with a start.

"Who moved?"

"That gentleman. You know—the one who
stays here."

He kept himself perfectly still after that one
start.

"While I'm away? What is he like, Ronnie?
Was he here long?"

"I don't know. Only saw him that once. Shouldn't
have tried a time exposure. But they'd been
sitting so still till then."

He said, in an extraordinary, strangled voice—

"Did you ask your aunt to sit?"

"Why no, Uncle! For Christmas! It's a
surprise." And then as they turned into the field—

"Look, that's the snow-man! Pretty good, isn't
it? Hirst helped me. I like Hirst."

He said—

"If you like to give it to me, Til—I'll get that—
photograph—framed for you,"¹

The child was in ecstasies:

"Will you, I'll get it. It's in the tool-shed.
She said I might develop in the tool-shed, I'll

THE LOVER

get it now," And with that there was a scatter of snow, a whoop or two, and he was alone'

He said foolishly—

" Out of the mouths—out of the mouths——" and sat down on a fallen log, shakily, like a sick man. He realized that until that minute he had never believed, never for all his irritation and disquiet, in his innermost heart believed that there was authentic flame behind the smoke that teased him. But now, it appeared, he was to have his proof.

The small figure reappeared, breathless, important, both hands full.

" This is Hirst. Isn't he good? This is Mrs. Hirst. That's the baby. Did you know they'd got it? Oh, that's a sunset. It didn't work."

He said only—

" Show me—show me——" and got no further.

" That's Aunt Hetty by herself. It's really better than the other one, only her eyes are screwed up. Perhaps we'd better have that framed, d'you think, instead? "

He said—

" Show me the other one," and bent over the curling oblong laid in his hand as if it were a death warrant.

There sat Hester, as he had oesn her three

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months ago, placidly, hands in lap, looking so pretty, looking so happy, and beside her, leaning over her——Oh, but the thing was a fake! He turned in a black rage——

" Who put you up to this ? "

He got no answer. The small boy stared at him open-mouthed.

"Where did you get it? You've been at the albums. Who gave you leave to touch the photographs? You'll tell me who put you up to it, or Til send you home." And on that was instantly confronted with an experience outside his range, an alarmed and tearful youngster distressingly in need of a pocket-handkerchief.

"Didn't——Haven't——Took it for a surprise."

" From the album in the drawing-room? "

" Not touched any old album." The sobs were subsiding into a succession of plaintive hiccoughs.

" It's Aunt Hetty. I know it isn't very good."

He looked at the photograph once more. Was he then mistaken ? The figure had seemed to him in that first glance to be his own. Pose, outline, height—all were his own as they had been recorded in the honeymoon photograph from New York. It was in the family album still, a ludicrous relic of the age of genteel sentiment. An amazing

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accidental likeness . . . but, peering again, peering closer, a likeness and no more. . . . He had been a fool to be startled, a fool to frighten the child. . . . Why, the face was a mere smudge, the figure fogged and out of focus. It was, he could now understand, not even the pose that had deceived him, but rather the association of ideas, the effect of Hester's smile and her familiar upward glance. He said, awkwardly—

" Here—here, you know—you mustn't cry. It's all right—all right, eh?" and fumbled in his pocket for pence. How else was one to comfort a child ?

Yet somehow he succeeded. Jove is not Jove without his lightnings, and much is permitted to the uncle of a heart. It was not too long before his nephew was racing down the path once more on an enterprise calculated to wipe the slate clean for good and all of the affair of the photograph.

Yes, Ronnie might ask Hirst, if he could find him, to take him to the town. Yes, a red lamp—twenty red lamps. Hirst was to put it down. A developing dish? Certainly. Anything he liked—if he would run along now and leave Uncle Harry alone. Yes, very tired. " Oh, and Ronnie, don't tell your Aunt Hester! That's it. I want to surprise her! " and so was left alone under the

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frost-bound trees to stare once more, and long, and long, at the evidence provided.

For, absurd as his first impression had been, it was none the less evidence.

It was strange to him, at that moment, how little anger he felt. It was as if all keen feeling were merged in a sense of emptiness and abstract loss. He imagined that he would feel much the same if Hester were dead. The lover—ah, there the fires began to glow again!—but he had no anger for Hester. He found himself remembering vividly a discussion in which he had once joined on the conduct of an acquaintance, a married man. Two co-respondents—yet he had taken his wife back. He, Harry Peile, had had no mercy then; but now—was it possible that he would do as much, if needs were, by Hester?

His eyes roved over the wide silent spaces of the garden. Even as he watched, the sun, darkly red against the brilliant snow, dropped behind the sky-line like a hot cinder dropping through the bottom of a grate, and, from the place of its falling, red afterlights glowed up into the apple-green and primrose of the dusk. The air was quite warm. Every few minutes a rustle and soft rush broke the numb quiet, as a bent bough was eased of its load of snow, but there was no other sound, no other

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movement. It was as if all nature were waiting, breathless, for the thaw.

But he only thought, as he sat on in the thickening lilac darkness, how strange it was that the world could be so peaceful when he was thus wretched. The pure fields, the motionless trees, the sweep of the skyline, like the flourish of a gigantic signature, the bottomless heavens fretted already with the pin-head light of worlds, all these wonders could so closely affect him, could prove to him how small he was, how lonely, without being themselves any more aware of him than a window is aware of the fly crawling on its pane. Was not that terrible? Here he was, carrying within himself a world of thought, a convulsed world of grief and perplexity and wrong, and—nobody guessed it, nobody cared! How was he to continue to cope, unaided, with such an existence? Hester—yes, it was Hester that he needed. What though he had never needed her before? He had had her there, at hand^ in his home, ready. That had been to him her value, her reason for existence: he knew that now. Home? The crushed photograph slipped from his numbed fingers as he rose, and he bent stiffly to recover it. Yes, he would go home. Call it home for another night. To-night would decide

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it one way or another. No more hole and corner! He would have it out with Hester once and for all.

And so, treading heavily, shoulders bowed to the lead weight of that wrinkled toy of paper, he came down the noiseless paths to the house; and never guessed that his wife watched every step.

She was sitting at the window above him, crying softly to herself as a woman will, because love was coming to her—for all it was the love so long, so passionately desired, the answer to bent knees and a century of prayers. She listened while she watched and wept to the familiar murmur in her ears, a murmur that was fainter than it used to be, as of a voice speaking from far away, as far away as her husband's figure, a black stroke upon the universal whiteness.

" Hetty, Hetty, Hetty! Fool you are to cry! Isn't it better so? "

" Much better," she said.

" Dear—we don't lose. We gain."

" We gain," she repeated obediently; and then—" Harry, we *do* gain? You—you won't alter? You won't forget? "

Again the murmur filled her ears—

" Look at me! Look round! "

She turned with a little helpless movement of the hands, her eyes filling anew,

THE LOVER

" I can hardly see you. It's all shadows. *Is it you? Come closer!* "

" I'm close."

"It's all shadows," she said again; and then, with a faint, awkward laugh, as if she were ashamed of her fine phrase—" Night-time in heaven—and good-bye! "

" Has it been heaven? "

" Yes."

He said again—

" Look at me! " And then, as she sought for him like a woman half blind—" Are you satisfied? Have you seen? Do I stoop enough at last? Grey hair?"

She cried out at that, like an angry, fluttering bird—

" You shan't laugh at me! It isn't you. It's he who's grown young. Oh, I'm so proud of him—of you. He and you—mine! "

" Well then! " She had not yet robbed him of his laughter, not yet heard it upon her husband's lips. " Well, then, why must you cry? "

She said—

" Because I love you so."

"Will you to-morrow?" The shadowy hands were about her, the shadowy lips thin as breath against her cheek—" Will you? Hetty, have you

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thought? I shall see you every day. I shall wake up in the morning——"

She was brought to a smile at that.

"Silly ! Pm half dressed before you wake." And then, flushing for no reason—"It will be strange——"

"Breakfast now——"

But she stole his turn at talking.

"——won't be easy. Oh, Harry! To keep it up—to keep a straight face before him!" And so was won to laughter.

"Before me—me! "

"Before you, my darling! " Then, with a changing face and a voice that wavered between exaltation and terror—"What's that? On the stairs! Harry! D'you hear it? It's coming at last. It's the end for us. Harry, Harry! I can't feel you any more! *Harry!* "

But he said only—

"Wait! It's a good end,"

"A good end! " There was a triumph in the voice that drove the panting listener without into a frenzy. How long he had stood there in the darkness, pressed against the door-jamb, listening and hating them, he did not know nor care. Listening: May not a man have freedom in his own house to go where he will? . . . They were

THE LOVER

not even lowered, those shameless voices: they did not even trouble to preserve the hushed conventions of guilt. The sentences were broken merely, as is the speech of friends who use words from habit and not at all from need. Yet he learned enough, he told himself, he learned from them enough.

" Good-bye—love you so—see you every day—wake in the morning——" and the soft answering laughter of the woman, his wife. " Strange—breakfast—keep it up—keep a straight face—" before *him*\ " And then the deeper tones, hateful, yet unaccountably familiar—"Before me—*me*\ " And at that again, again, her damnable laughter.

This was the end! . . . Hetty was laughing at him with a strange man. . . . Hetty was making a mock of him to divert her lover. . . . This was Hetty lost to him indeed. Hetty lost? This was the loss of himself, of his own soul. His righteous and enormous sense of injury, his very anger drained away at that conviction of loss so that he put up his hand to his heart, as if he had been struck full in the breast. It ached with an anguish so keen that for the moment he believed that his heart was indeed bleeding, physically bleeding, from the intolerable wound that had been dealt him. Dizzily he caught at the loose handle of the

WANDERING STARS

unclosed door, and with no more ado reeled, not an avenger of honour, but a dazed, half blinded man, into the room that held his happiness, his future, the whole worth of his life to come, in pawn.

There they stood, the two who had wrecked him. Even in the darkness he could see his wife's face, so white it was, so shining, so serene. But what was the shadow that slipped from the shelter of her arms, that receded as he stumbled forward with ugly phrases on his lips?

"Caught you at last—not such a fool. You, Hetty! *Tou*, by God! Damn you, stand up to me!" And then—"Lights! I will see you! Lights!"

In the silence, incredibly, his wife struck a match, and, as if by a conjuring trick, the room sprang into being.

He was standing in its centre, facing the mirror on the wall some six feet away, and before it, in it, *of it*—but all happened so swiftly that which it was he could not distinguish—the shadow he had hunted faced him at last, faced him hands on heart, as one transfixed there by an arrow. Shouting, he flung himself forward and as he moved that which opposed him moved also, leapt forward, met, enveloped, passed into and possessed

THE LOVER

him, even as his murderous hands struck and scrabbled harmlessly against the chill metal of the glass.

" You! You! " he cried chokingly as he recoiled from that impact. "You!" And on the word was stricken dumb.

He was staring at his own reflection.

Then the match went out, suddenly, as if it had been dropped and trodden on.

He took no heed. He was shaking all over, with an emotion so intense that it seared out as it passed the very memory of its own passage. He was conscious only, following on a paralysis of fear, of ecstatic well-being. It was to him in that moment as if he had drunk down a great cupful of wine, wine divine and legendary, wine that fulfilled him body and soul. The faint starlight was high noon to him as he stood there, and he the centre of all the sunshine that heaven in summer-time pours down. The doubts, the torments, the mysteries, the griefs, all these dwindled and fled from him like shadows, and with them fled also the knowledge that ever they had been.

" I'm myself again! " he shouted, " That's it! I'm myself! I'm myself again!" and with that stretched out his arms, yawning mightily like a sleeper awakened, and laughed. His double in

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the glass laughed back at him. He stared at it, brows caught suddenly together.

" Myself! " he said again, his voice dropping to a whisper: and then, uncertainly—" Hetty ! Where's Hetty? Hetty, I want you! "

Close, close behind him in the darkness he heard the quick breathing of the woman he loved.

JULY—SEPTEMBER 1922

A "Bill of Divorcement

A PLAY

This play was produced by the Reandean Company
on Monday, March 14th, 1921, at the St. Martm'e
Theatre, with the following cast:

MARGARET FAIRFIELD	Miss LILIAN BRAITHWAITR
Miss HESTER FAIRFIELD	Miss AGNES THOMAS
SYDNEY FAIRFIELD	Miss MEGGIK ALBANESI
BASSETT	Miss DOROTHY MARTIN
GRAY MERKDB	MR. C. AUBREY SMITH
KIT PoMFHRE ¹¹	MR. IAN HUNTER
HILARY FAIRFIELD	MR, MALCOLM KEEN
DR. ALLIOT	MR. STANLEY LATHBQRY
THE RKV. CHRISTOPHER	
PUMPHRKY	MR. FEWLASa LLEWELLYN

The Play was produced by BASIL DEAN.

THE PEOPLE OF THE PLAY

in the *order of their appearance.*

MARGABET FAIRFIELD.

Miss HESTICU FAIRFIELD.

SYDNEY FAIRFIELD.

BASSETT,

GRAY MEREDITH.

KIT PUMPHRET.

HILARY FAIRFIELD.

DR. ALLIOT.

THE REV. CHRISTOPHER PUMPHREY.

SCENE.—*A small house in the country. The action passes on Christmas Day, 193\$. The audience is asked to imagine that the recommendations **of** the Majority Report of the Royal Commission on Divorce v. Matrimonial Causes have become the law of the land.*

ACT I.—THE HALL. MORNING.

ACT II.—THE DRAWING ROOM. EARLY AFTER-
NOON.

ACT III.—THE HALL. LATE AFTERNOON.

ACT I.

The curtain rises on the hall, obviously used as the common-room of a country house. On the right (of the audience) is the outer door and a staircase that runs down from an upper landing towards the middle of the room, half hiding what has once been a separate smaller room with a baize door at the back. In the corner a French window opens on to a snow-bound garden. On the left, facing the entrance, a log fire is blazing. Staircase, pictures, grandfather clock, etc., are wreathed with holly and mistletoe. At the breakfast table, which is laid for three and littered with paper and string, sit Miss HESTER FAIRFIELD and MARGARET FAIRFIELD, her niece by marriage. The third chair has two Or three parcels piled up on it.

HESTER FAIRFIELD is onj of those tivitcliing, high-minded, elderly ladies in black, who keep a grievance as they might keep a pet dog—as 'oon as it dies they replace it by another. The grievance of the moment seems to be the empty third cfair, and MARGARET FAIRFIBLD is, as "#ual, on the defensive. Such a little, pretty,

helpless-looking woman as MARGARET has generally half a dozen big sons and a husband to bully; but MARGARET has only a daughter, and her way of looking at even the chair on which that daughter ought to be sitting^ is the way of a child whose doll has suddenly come to life. For the rest, she is so youthfully anxious and simple and charming that the streak of grey in her hair puzzles you. You wonder what trouble has fingered it. It does not occur to you that she is quite thirty-five.

MARGARET. [*Apologising*] Yea, she is late

Miss FAIRFIELD. As usual I

MARGARET. Oh, well, she was dancing tin three. I hadn't the heart to wake her.

Miss FAIRFIELD. Till three, was she? Who brought her home?

MARGARET. Kit, of course.

Miss FAIRFIELD. Three o'clock on Christmas morning I wonder what the Hector said to that.

MARGARET. Oh, Kit's on holiday.

Miss FAIRFIELD. I heard you tell her myself to be in by twelve. If anything could make me approve of this marriage of yours—

MARGARET. Oh, don't begin it again, Auntie!

Miss FAIRFIELD. —it's that the child will have a strong hand over her at last. A step-father's better than nothing—if you can call him a step-father when her father's still alive.

MARGARET. Oh, don't!

Miss FAIRFIELD. What's the use of saying "don't"? He *is* alive. You can't get away from that.

MARGARET. Aunt Hester—*please!*

Miss FAIRFIELD. Well, I'm only telling you—if it's got to be, I'm not sorry it's Gray Meredith.

MARGARET. [*Smiling*] Yes, Sydney knows just how far she may go with Gray.

Miss FAIRFIELD. I see nothing to laugh at in that.

MARGARET. It's so funny to think how circum-spect you all are with him. He's the one person I've always felt perfectly safe with. I'd ask anything of Gray.

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*Grimly*] You always have, my dear!

MARGARET. I don't know why you should be unkind to me on Christmas morning.

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*With a sort of grudging affection*] I suppose it's because I've only got another week to be unkind to you in.

MARGARET. [*Restlessly*] Oh, I wish you didn't hate it so.

Miss FAIRFIELD. My dear, when you see a person you care for, and she your own nephew's wife, on the brink of deadly sin—

MARGARET. Must we begin at again?

Miss FAIRFIELD. I do my duty. If you'd done your's your daughter wouldn't be late for breakfast, and I shouldn't be given the opportunity

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MARGARET. Perhaps I *had* better call her.

Miss FAIRFIELD. Everything getting cold—and so disrespectful 1 She ought to be taught.

MARGARET. [*Rising with a sigh*] You're quite right. [*Calling at the foot of the stairs*] Sydney, darling, shall I bring you up your coffee?

SYDNEY'S VOICE. [*Answering*] It's all right, Mother ! I'm coming.

Miss FAIRFIELD. And I suppose that's all you'll say.

SYDNEY comes out of her room. She is physically a bigger, fairer edition of MARGARET, but there the likeness ends. Her manner is brisk and decided. She is very sure of herself, but when she loses her temper, as she often does, she loses her aplomb and reveals the schoolgirl. Her attitude to the world is that of justice, untempered, except where her mother is in question, by mercy. But she is very fond of her mother.

SYDNEY. [*Running down the stairs*] Merry Christmas, everyone ! I'm not late, am I ? Morning, Auntie ! What, no post ?

MARGARET. It gets later every year.

Miss FAIRFIELD. I'm very much obliged to you, Sydney, for the—card-case.

SYDNEY. [*Undoing her parcels*] It's a cigarette case, Auntie dear. You see, I thought if you gave me a Prayer-book again we might do a deal. Ah,

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I thought so 1 Thanks most awfully. It's sweet of you. Shall we ?

Miss FAIRFIELD. What?

SYDNEY. Swop.

MARGARET. Sydney, dear, that's rather rude'

SYDNEY. [*Swiftly*] Well, Mother, I hate being hinted at.

MARGARET. [*Bewildered*] Hint ? What hint ?

SYDNEY. Oh, Mother you're such a lamb. You never see anything. [*To Miss FAIRFIELD*] Fm sorry, Auntie, but I'in seventeen, and I've left school, and I'm not going to church to-day, or any day any more ever, except to chaperon Mother and Gray next week, bless 'em !

Miss FAIRFIELD. I do think, Margaret, she ought at least to call him Uncle.

MARGARET. Aren't you coming with us to-day, darling ? Christmas Day?

SYDNEY. Sorry, Mother. It's against my principles. I refuse to kneel down and say I'm a miserable sinner. I'm not miserable and I'm not a sinner, and I cannot tell a lie to please any old—prayer-book. Besides, I'm expecting Kit.

Miss FAIRFIELD. You'll find that Kit takes his mother to church. *She* hasn't lost all her influence—

SYDNEY. [*Darkly*] She'll be finding herself up against me soon.

MARGARET. [*Like a schoolgirl*] Oh, Sydaey, has he?—

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SYDNEY. He's trying his hardest to, but I like to sort of *spread* my jam.

MARGARET. Then—then—?

SYDNEY. Tin not actually engaged, if you mean that—[*Watching their faces mischievously*] but I'm going to be.

Miss FAIRFIELD. Engaged at seventeen Preposterous !

SYDNEY. [*Instantly*] Mother was married at seventeen.

MARGARET. That was the war.

SYDNEY. I don't see what that's got to do with it.

MARGARET. [*Timidly*] Sydney—at seventeen, one doesn't know enough—

SYDNEY. One doesn't know the same things, I dare say.

MARGARET. One doesn't know anything afc all.

SYDNEY. Yes, but think of the hopeless sort of world you were seventeen in—even you. As for poor Auntie, as far as knowing things goes—

MARGARET. Sydney, my dear, be good !

SYDNEY. I am being good. I'm returning hint for hint.

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*Ruffling*] Is this the way you let your daughter speak to me, Margaret ?

SYDNEY. [*Closing with her*] You see, ahs doesn't enjoy being hinted at either,

MARGARET. [*Between the upper and the nether mill-atone*] I don't know what you mean, Sydney, but *don't I*

SYDNEY. I mean that I'm not going to let **Aunt** Hester interfere in my affairs like she does in yours. That's what mean.

Miss FAIRFIELD. These are the manners they teach you at your fine school, I suppose I

SYDNEY. Never mind, Auntie, I've had my lessons in the holidays too. You needn't think I haven't watched the life you've led Mother over this divorce business.

MARGARET. [*Distressed at the discussion*] Sydney! Sydney!

SYDNEY. [*Remorselessly*] Well, hasn't she ? What prevented you from marrying Gray ages ago ? Father's been out of his mind long enough, poor man ! You knew you were free to be free. You knew you were making Gray miserable and yourself miserable—and yet, though that divorce law has been in force for years, it's taken you all this time to fight your scruples. At least, you call them scruples I What you really mean is Aunt Hester and her prayer-book. And now, when you have at last consented to give yourself a chance of being happy—when it's Christinas Day and you're going to be married at New Year—still you let Aunt Hester sit at your own breakfast table and insult you with talk about deadly sin. It's no use pretending you didn't Auntie, because Mother left my door open and I heard you.

MARGARET. [*With a certain dignity*] Sydney, I can take care of myself.

SYDNEY. [*Oblivious of it*] Take care of yourself I As if everybody didn't ride rough-shod over you when I'm not there.

MARGARET. Yes, but my pet, you mustn't break out like this. Of course your aunt knows you don't really mean to be rude—

SYDNEY. I do mean to be rude to her when she's rude to you.

MARGARET. My dear, you quite misunderstand your aunt.

SYDNEY. Oh, no, I don't Mother! [MARGARET shrugs her shoulders helplessly and sits down on the sofa to the left of the fireplace.]

Miss FAIRFIKLD. [*Rising*] I'm afraid you'll have to go to church without me, Margaret. I'm thoroughly up set. You've brought up your daughter to ignore me, and I know why. I'm the wrong side of the family. I'm the one person in this house who remembers poor Hilary. I shall read the service in the drawing-room. [*She goes out.*]

SYDNEY, [*Looking after her*] She owes me something. She's been dying for an excuse, with that cold. [*She turns to the sofa and says more gently*] What's the use of crying, Mother? If Gray finds out there'll be a row, and then Aunt Hester'll be sorry she ever was born.

MARGARET. It isn't that. You get so excited, Sydney 1 You remind me—your father was so excitable. I don't like to see it.

*SYDNEY' I'm not really. I needn't let myself go if I don't want to.

MARGARET. You mustn't get impatient with your aunt. She can't get accustomed to the new ways, that's all. I—I can't myself, sometimes. [*Restlessly*] I hope I'm doing right.

SYDNEY. Oh, I do think it's morbid to have a conscience. If Father had been dead fifteen years, would you say, "I hope I'm doing right"? And he is dead. His mind's dead. You know you've done all you can. And you're frightfully in love with Gray—

MARGARET. [*Flushing*] Don't, Sydney !

SYDNEY. Well, you are, and so he is with you. So what's the worry about ? Aunt Hester ! What people like Aunt Hester choose to think ! I call it morbid.

MARGARET. [*Whimsically*] I suppose I haven't brought you up properly. Your aunt's quite right !

SYDNEY. Yes. That's what it always comes back to. "Your aunt's quite right I " I can argue with you by the hour—

MARGARET. [*Hastily*] Oh, not this morning, darling, will you ?

SYDNEY. —and Gray can argue with you by the hour—

MARGARET. [*Smiling*] Ah, but he never does.

SYDNEY. —and you pretend to agree with us; but underneath your common sense, your mind's really thinking—" Your aunt's quite right !"

MARGARET. She stands for the old ways, Sydney.

SYDNEY. She stands for Noah and the flood. She'd no business to go dragging up Father and the divorce on Christmas morning to upset you.

MARGARET. It wasn't your aunt,

SYDNEY. Then it was me, I suppose I " If I could only control my tongue and my temper," and all the rest of it 1

MARGARET. [*Quietly*] No, it was about Kit.

SYDNEY. Kit? Oh, that's all right, Mother. Don't you worry about me and Kit,

MARGARET. I do.

SYDNEY. You needn't.

MARGARET. [*Shyly*] You see, I thought I was in love at seventeen, too,

SYDNEY. Oh, but I quite know what I'm doing.

MARGARET. And now I know I didn't know much about it. I don't want you to be—rushed.

SYDNEY. Nobody could make me do what I didn't want to do.

MARGARET. [*Forgetting SYDNEY*] It was nobody's fault. It was the war— [*She sits, dreaming.*]

SYDNEY. It's extraordinary to me—whenever you middle-aged people want to excuse yourselves for anything you've done that you know you oughtn't to have done, you say it was the war. How could war make you get married if you didn't want to?

MARGARET. [*Groping for words*] It was the feel in the air. They say the smell of blood sends horses crazy. That was the feel. One did mad

things. Hilary—your father—he was going out—the trenches—to be hurt. And he was so fond of ice he frightened me. I was so sorry. I thought I cared. Can't you understand?

SYDNEY. No. Either you care or you don't.

MARGARET. [*Passionately*] How can you know until it happens to you? How was I to know there was more to it than keeping house and looking after Hilary—and you? How was I to know?

SYDNEY, [*Doubtfully*] Is there so much more to it?

MARGARET. Yes.

SYDNEY. I don't believe there is for some people. Why it's just what I want—to look after Kit and a house of my own, »nd—oh, at least half a dozen kids.

MARGARET. [*Uncomfortably*] Sydney, dear!

SYDNEY. Oh, Kit's as keen as I am on eugenics, He's doing a paper for his debating society.

MARGARET. Well, I found you quite enough to manage.

SYDNEY. [*Leaning over the back of the sofa*] I believe you were scared of me when I was little—[MARGARET *nods*] and even now—

MARGARET. [*Quickly*] What?

SYDNEY. [*Quite good-humoured about it*] Well, if you had to choose between me and Gray, it wouldn't be Gray who'd lose you.

MARGARET. [*Confronted with the idea*] I hope I'd do what's light.

SYDNEY. [*Airily*] There you are 1

MARGARET. [*As it goes home*] It's not true. You've no right to make me out a heartless mother. But -

SYDNEY. [*Her arm round her mother's neck*] Well—heartless Mother ?

MARGARET. [*Clutching at the arm*] Oh, Sydney—what should I do if Gray—if Gray—

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother I [*There is the sound of a motor driving up*] There is Gray.

MARGARET. [*Jumping up hurriedly*] Oh, and I'm not dressed. Say 111 be do\vn in a minute. [*She runs upstairs.*]

SYDNEY. You've plenty of time. The bells haven't begun yet.

MARGARET. [*From the gallery*] Tell Bassett to clear away.

SYDNEY *rings the bell. The elderly maid enters through the baize door.*

BASSETT. Yes, Miss?

SYDNEY. You can clear, Bassett !

While she is speaking GRAY MEREDITH comes in through the hall door. He is about forty, tall, dark and quiet, very sure of himself, and quite indifferent to the effect he makes on other people. As he is a man who never has room in his head for more than on' idea at a time, and as for the last five years that idea has been MARGARET,

the rest of the world doesn't get much out of him. But mention her and he behaves exactly like a fire being poked.

GRAY. [*Patting down " box he carries*] Where's your mother?

SYDNEY. [*Folding her hands*] Good morning, dear Sydney I A merry Christmas to you, and so many thanks for the tie that, with the help of your devoted aunfc, you so thoughtfully—

GRAY. Stop it, there's a good child 1 I haven't missed her, have I ?

SYDNEY. Pray accept in return as a small token of esteem and total dependency—

GRAY. I asked you if your mother had started.

SYDNEY. [*In her natural voice*] It's true, you know. You simply daren't cope with me yet.

GRAY. [*Twinkling in spite of himself*] Hm ! A time will come—

SYDNEY. Wouldn't it warm the cockles of Aunt Hester's heart to hear you 1 What are cockles, Gray ? Gray, she says I ought to call you Uncle ! Gray, d'you think you have brought me what I think you have for a Christmas present ?

GRAY. You'd better go and look. It's **in** the motor with Kit'

SYDNEY. It?

GRAY. He.

SYDNEY. By Viscount out of **Viron ?**

GRAY. Really, Sydney!

SYDNEY. Dear Uncle Hester 1

GRAY. Yes, but Sydney—?

SYDNEY. *[At the door]* Oh, didn't I tell you? Mother says she'll be down in a minute. *[She lets in the sound of the church bells as she goes out.]*

GRAY walks about the room, then, going to the foot of the staircase, he calls softly.

GRAY. Margaret 1 *[He wails a moment: then he calls again]* Margaret!

He listens, takes another turn about the room, then, coming back to the staircase, stands, leaning against the foot of the balusters. MARGARET comes softly down the stairs, and bending over, puts her hands on his shoulders.

MARGARUT. A merry Christmas!

GRAY. *[Turning round and kissing her]* And a happy New Year I

MARGARET. It will be—oh, it will be!

GRAY. I almost think it will sometimes. *[Holding her at arms length]* New frock?

MARGARET' Like it ?

GRAY. Oh, I've seen it already.

MAROARKT. Why, it's the first time *I've* Put it on.

GRAY. *[Untying the box on the table as he tpeaks]* Sydney carted it along with her last week when we went to choose—this.

MARGARET. *[Like a child with a new toy]* For me, Gray ?

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GRAY. Looks like it.

MARGARET. Oh, I hope you haven't been extravagant.

GRAY. [*Opening the lid*] Well, Sydney said—

MARGARET. Silver fox! Oh, my dear, you shouldn't.

GRAY. Put 'em on. Sydney's quite a wise child.

MARGARET. [*Luxuriously*] Oh, I do love being spoiled.

GRAY. You haven't had so much of it, have you, Meg?

MARGARET. [*With a complete change of manner*] Don't!

GRAY. What?

MARGARET. Don't call me Meg.

GRAY. Why not?

MARGARET. You never have before.

GRAY. Don't you see, I want a name for you that no-one else uses.

MARGARET. [*Close to him*] Yes, yes, that no-one else has ever used. Not Meg. Not Margaret. Make a name of your own for me—new—new.

GRAY. Well, you're getting one new name pretty soon, anyhow.

MARGARET. Yea. New year—new name—new life. [*In his arms*] Oh, Gray, is thirty-five very old?

GRAY. Not when you say it.

MARGARET. Oh, Gray, we've **time for every** thing still?

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GRAY. Time for everything. *[He laughs]* Except church, my child ! Do you really insist on going? .

MARGARET. Aunt Hester will be horrified if I don't. Besides— *[She comes back to the table and begins putting the papers together.]*

GRAY. What?

MARGARET. I suppose you'll think me a fool—

GRAY. Shall I?

MARGARET. Oh, Gray, for the first time in my life I'm happy' I want to say—

GRAY. What does she want to say?

MARGARET. "Humble and hearty thanks—"

SYDNEY *runs in with a puppy in her arms. She is followed by KIT. KIT is a good-looking, fair-haired boy who may be twenty-two, but is nevertheless much younger than SYDNEY, whom he takes as seriously as he takes everything else in life. It is part of her charm for him that he finds it a little difficult to keep up with her.*

SYDNEY. Mother! Mother! Look what Gray's brought me !

MARGARET. Oh, Sydney, your aunt isn't fond of dogs. Merry Christmas, Kit I

KIT. Merry Christmas, Mrs. Fairfield !

SYDNEY. Yes, but isn't he an angel? And Kit's giveii me a collar for him. *[She goes up to GRAY]*

ACT I A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT IT

You know, Gray, it's so sweet of **you** that in return
ru-

GRAY. Well?

SYDNEY. [*Conspiratorial*] Make Kit late for church if you like.

GRAY. [*Putting himself in her hands*] I did promise him a lift.

SYDNEY. [*Settling it*] He can cut across the fields. [*Aloud*] Kit, what about a bone for the angel? You might go and make love to Bassett. *She puts the dog into his arms. They stroll off together into the inner room.*]

KIT. [*Earnestly, as he goes out through the baize door*] He ought to be kept to biscuits.

SYDNEY. [*Calling to him*] Just one to gnaw. [*Then, over her shoulder*] Mother, the bells have been going quite a while.

MARGARET. [*To GRAY*] Listen, don't you love them?

GRAY. Church bells?

MARGARET. Wedding bells.

GRAY. Margaret, you've stepped straight out of a Trollope novel'

MARGARET. [*Flushing*] I suppose you think I'm sentimental.

GRAY. JSto, but you're pure nineteenth century.

MARGARET' I'm not. [*Telephone bell rings*] Oh 1

GRAY. There goes the twentieth. Don't you **see** how it makes you jump?

SYDNEY *has gone to the telephone.*

SYDNEY. Hullo I Hullo ! . . . You rang *me* up. [*tike hangs up the receiver*] " Sorry you have been trubbled ! " And it's sure to be someone trying to get on.

GRAY. On Christmas morning ? Hardly ! I say, come along I The bells have stopped.

MARGARET. [*In a strange voice*] Yes, they stopped when that other bell rang.

SYDNEY. Why, Mother, what's the matter ?

MARGARET. [*Blindly*] They stopped.

SYDNEY. I told you, darling, you're late.

MARGARET. Give me my furs. I'm cold. [GRAY *helps her on with them.*]

SYDNEY, [*Proud of her*] They are lovely.

MARGARET. [*At the door, wistfully*] It isn't too good to be true, is it ?

GRAY. The furs ?

MARGARET. Everything! You—oh, what a fool I am ! [*^tt hear GRAY'S laugh auwveriny hers as they go out together, and the sound of the motor driving away.*]

SYDNEY. [*Subsiding on the sofa, to KIT, who has come in as the others go*] I thought they'd nover get off. Mother has a way of standing around and gently fussing—I tall y^u I'll be glad when next week's over.

KIT. So'll I. I haven't had a look in lately.

SYDNEY, [*With an intimate glance*] Not last night ? But it *has* been a job, running Mother. I'm bridesmaid and best man and family lawyer and

ACT I A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT 1»

Juliet's nurse all rolled into one—and a sort of lightning conductor for Aunt Hester into the bargain. That's why I've had so little time for you. It's quite true what Gray was saying just now—Mother is nineteenth century. She's sweet and helpless, but she's obstinate too. My word, the time she took making up her mind to get that divorce 1

KIT. It's just about that that I've been wanting to talk to you. You see—

SYDNEY. Well?

KIT. You see—

SYDNEY. Hurry up, old thing !

KIT. Well, you see, when I got home last night the governor was sitting up for me.

SYDNEY. He would be.

KIT. And in the course of the row—you came in to it.

SYDNEY. Oh, but he likes me.

KIT. Yes, he was quite soothed when I said we were engaged.

SYDNEY. Liarl

KIT. [*Serenely*] Oh, well—

SYDNEY. [*She finds his chuckle infectious*] What did he say ?

KIT. Oh, lots of rot, of course, about being too young. But he was quite bucked really until—

SYDNEY. Well?

KIT. Well, I was a fool. I said something, quite **by** chance, about your father' Then the fur began

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bo fly. You see, it seems he thought your mother
was a widow—

SYDNEY, [*Ruffling up*] What's it got to do with
him?

KIT. Well, you see—

SYDNEY. If you'd only mak« me see instead of
you-seeing me all the time'

KIT. Tin afiaid of hurting your feelings.

SYDNKY. I'm not nineteenth century.

KIT. [*Desperately*] Well, my people are.

SYDNEY. Well?

KIT. That's the trouble—my people are I Father
promptly began about not seeing his way to—

SYDNEY. To what, Kit?

KIT. To—to marrying them.

SYDNEY. But I've never heard of anything so
crazy.

KIT. Of course, you know, there's nothing to
worry about. There are heaps of clergymen who
will.

SYDNEY. My dear boy, if Mother isn't married in
her own parish church shell think she's living in sin.

KIT. Well, there) it is!

SYDNEY. But look here, the old rector knew all
about it. Do you mean to say that a new man can
come into our parish and insult Mother just because
his beastly conscience doesn't work the same way
the old rector's did? The divorce is perfectly
legal.

KIT. [*In great discomfort*] Yes, Father knows all

that. [*Hopefully*] Of course, I don't see myself why a registry office—

SYDNEY. If it were me I'd prefer it. Much less fuss. But Mother wouldn't.

KIT. But she ought to see—

SYDNEY. But she won't. It's no use reckoning on what people ought to be. You've got to deal with them as they are.

KIT. [*Guiltily*] Well, I'm awfully sorry.

SYDNEY. It's no use being sorry. We've got to do something.

KIT. [*Hovelesaly*] When once the old man gets an idea into his head—

SYDNEY. He'd better not let it out in front of Mother. Gray'd half kill him if he did. And I tell you this, Kit, what Gray leaves I'll account for, even if he is your father. Poor little Mother!

KIT. Well I'm all on your side, you know that. But of course, Sydney, a clergyman needn't re-marry divorced people. It's in that bill. The governor was quoting it to-day.

SYDNEY. But doesn't he know the circumstances.

KIT. He only knows what I do.

SYDNEY. One doesn't shout things at people, naturally. But it's nothing to be ashamed of. It's only that my unfortunate father has been in an asylum ever since I can remember. Shell-shock. It began before I was born. He never came home again. Mother had to give up going to see him oven. It seemed to make him worse.

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KIT. Pretty tragic.

SYDNEY. Oh, for years now he hasn't known anyone, luckily. And he's well looked after. He's quite all right.

KIT. [*Uncomfortably*] You're a queer girl.

SYDNEY. Bub he is.

KIT. Yes—but—

SYDNEY. What?

KIT. Your own father—

SYDNEY. [*Impatiently*] My dear boy, I've never even seen him. Oh, of course it's very sad, but I can't go about with my handkerchief to my eyes all the time, can I?

KIT. Yes—but—•

SYDNEY. I hate cant.

KIT. [*Leaning over the back of the sofa, his hands playing with her chain*] You little brute—you're as hard as nails, aren't you?

SYDNEY. [*Putting up her face to him*] Am I? [*They kiss.*]

Miss FAIBFIELD. [*Passing through*] Really Sydney ! Before lunch !

KIT. You know, old thing, sometimes I don't feel as if I should ever really get on with your aunt.

SYDNEY. [*Dimpling*] You'll have to if—

KIT. Good Lord ! You don't want her in the house !

SYDNEY. [*Calmly*] I must take her off Mother sometimes. That's only fair. But she shan't worry you.

KIT. *I* say, you're going to have things your own way, aren't you?

•SYDNEY. But of course I am, darling.

KIT. [*Heavily*] But look here—marriage is a sort of mutual show, isn't; it? We've got to pull together.

SYDNEY. Of course.

KIT. But suppose we come to a cross-roads, so to speak,"

SYDNEY. Well, somebody'll have to give way, won't they, darling?

KIT. Hnil

SYDNEY. My dear boy, if you want a door-mat you'd better look out for someone—someone like poor dear Mother, for instance.

KIT. [*Wiser than he knows*] But you *are* like her, Sydney 1

SYDNEY. Me? Do you think I'd let my daughter run mo the way I run Mother? Not much 1

Miss FAIKFIELD. [*Re-entering*] I think I left my—[*murmurs*].

SYDNEY, [*^Isid^*] It's no good. She's doing this on purpose because I cheeked her. You'd better go, old man. Besides, they must be well through the anthem.

KIT. [*Disturbed*] Good Lord! I should think I had better go 1

SYDNEY. [*Going with him to the door*] I say, keep your father quiet till I've had time to talk to Gray,

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KIT. Bight 1 *[He goes out.]*

SYDNEY. *[Galling]* Kit!

KIT. *[Reappearing]* Yes?

SYDNEY. Come round in the afteruoon.

KIT. Right I *[lie goes out.]*

SYDNEY. *[Calling]* Kit 1

KIT. *[Reappearing]* Yes?

SYDNEY. I don't suppose there'll ever bo any cross-roads.

KIT. Darling! *[A scuffle. SYDNEY reappears pulling her hair.]*

Miss FAIRFIELD. I'm afraid I disturbed a *Mte-b-tete*.

SYDNEY. *[Sweetly]* Oh, Auntie, whatever made you think that ?

Miss FAIRFIELD. But I really couldn't sit in the drawing-room. There's no fire. *[She sits down and opens her book]*

SYDNEY. *[In a soft little voice, hums']* "When we are married we'll have sausages for tea."

Miss FAIRFIELD. Do you mind being quiet while I read the service ?

SYDNEY. Sorry 1 *[She takes up some knitting.]*

Miss FAIRFIELD. What are you doing ?

SYDNEY. Tie for Kit.

Miss FAIRFTELD, Sydney 1 Needlework on Sundayi

SYDNEY. Well, I can't sit in the drawing-room either if there's no fire.

Miss FAIRFIELD. There's no need to lose your temper.

SYDNEY. [*Out of patience*] Here, I'm going. [*As she makes for the staircase the telephone gives a broken tinkle.*]

Miss FAIRFIELD. Sydney, I believe that telephone's going off!

SYDNEY. Yes, I'm sure it's someone trying to get on. They've rung up once already.

Miss FAIRFIELD. Sydney, I won't be left to deal with it. [*The telephone rings deafeningly.*] There, I told you so.

SYDNEY. Well, it's not my fault! [*She takes off the receiver*] Hello! Hello! . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . [*To her aunt*] It's a trunk call.

Miss FAIRFIELD. Who on earth—?

SYDNEY. Yes . . . Hello! . . . Yes . . . Mrs. Fairfield's out. Shall I take a message? . . . This is Miss Fairfield speaking . . . All right, I'll hold on . . . [*To her aunt*] Auntie, it's from Bedford. It's about Father. [*Into the telephone*] Yes . . . This is Miss Fairfield speaking, . . . What? . . . Good Lord!

Miss FAIRFIELD. Sydney, don't say "Good Lord"!

SYDNEY. But you should have let Mrs. Fairfield know I . . . Only this morning? Oh, I see . . . No, we've heard nothing. When did you find out? . . . What makes you—? I see . . . No, he's not here . . . Of course we'd let you know . . . Then you'll let us know at once if anything . . .

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yes . . . Miss Fairfield. Mrs. Fairfield is going away very soon . . . Thank you . . . Good-bye.

SYDNEY *hangs up the receiver and turns round.*

MISS FAIRFIELD. Well ?

SYDNEY. Father's got away,

Miss FAIRFIELD. What ? Who spoke to you ?

SYDNEY. The head man—what's his name ?
Rogers I Frightfully upset.

Miss FAIRFIELD. I should think BO. Why, the poor fellow's dangerous.

SYDNEY. Apparently he's been very much better lately, and this last week, a marked change, he says,

Miss FAIRFIELD. *\Agitated* You mean he's getting well ?

SYDNEY. Looks like it. Rogers was awfully guarded but—apparently they'd already written to Uncle Hugh and the solicitors.

Miss FAIRFIELD. They ought to have written to me.

SYDNEY. Of course, they wouldn't write to Mother—now—but we ought to have heard.

Miss FAIRFIELD. When did they miss him ?

SYDNEY. This morning. Then a lot about its being inexplicable and the precautions they had taken and so on. The fact remains that he has managed to get away.

Miss FAIRFIELD. It's disgraceful carelessness.

SYDNEY. Their theory is that he has suddenly

come to himself. Is it possible, Auntie? Can it happen?

Miss FAIRFIELD. It's quite possible. It does. It was the same with my poor sister, Grace. After ten years that was.

SYDNBY. But the doctors said incurable.

Miss FAIRFIELD. The Almighty's greater than the doctors. And nerves—nerves are queer things. I nursed your Aunt Grace. Well, I always told your mother to wait.

SYDNEY. [*Struck*] Is that a fact about Aunt Grace? Was she out of her mind too?

Miss FAIRFIELD. She never had to be sent away.

SYDNEY. Nobody ever told me.

Miss FAIRFIELD. There's something in most families.

SYDNEY. But with Father—wasn't it shell-shock?

Miss FAIRFIELD. It was brought on by shell-shock.

SYDNEY. D'you mean that in our family there's insanity?

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*Fidgeting*] That's not the way to talk. But we're nervy, all of us, we're nervy. Your poor father would have been no worse than the rest if it hadn't been for the war.

SYDNEY. [*Slowly*] What do you mean, "nervy"?

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*With a sidelong glance*] I mean the way you're taking this.

SYDNBY. [*Sharply*] How am I taking it?

Misft FAIRFIBLD. [*Irritated*] Well, look at you now.

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SYDNEY. [*Coldly*] I'm perfectly under control.

M^w FAIRFIELD. That's it. It's not natural.

SYDNEY. [*Slowly*] You mean, I shouldn't bother to control myself if—

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*Hastily*] You're too young to think about such things.

SYDNEY, —if I weren't afraid, you mean. Did Mother know—when she married?

Miss FAIRFIELD. I tell you there are troubles in every family, but one doesn't talk about them.

SYDNEY. But did she *know* the trouble was insanity?

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*Shortly*] I don't know.

SYDNEY. Did Father?

Miss FAIRFIELD. One always knows in a general sort of way.

SYDNEY. [*Relentlessly*] Am I nervy?

Miss FAIRFIELD. Young people don't have nerves.

SYDNEY. Insanity *I* A thing you can hand on ! And I told Kit it was shell-shock !

Miss FAIRFIELD. I don't see what difference it makes to Christopher.

SYDNEY. You don't see what difference—? You don't see—? [*To herself*] But ,," see [*There is a pause* Aunt Hester, suppose Father really gets well—?

Miss FAIRFIELD. Well?

SYDNEY. Whatever will he do?

Miss FAIRFIELD. Its a question **of** what your mother will do.

SYDNEY. But it won't have anything to do with Mother.

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*Grimly*] Won't it?

SYDNEY. What on earth are you driving at?

Miss FAIRFIELD. I can't discuss it with you.

SYDNEY. Why not?

Miss FAIRFIELD. You're too young.

SYDNEY. I'm old enough to be engaged.

Miss FAIRFIELD. You're not engaged.

SYDNEY. [*Insolently*] Kissed then. You saw that half an hour ago, didn't you? I might just as well say I can't discuss it with you because you're too old.

Miss FAIRFIELD. How dare you speak to me like that?

SYDNEY. [*Beside herself*] Oh, are all old people such stone walls? Here's a shadow, here's a trouble, here's a ghost in the house—and when I ask you what shall I do, you talk about your blessed dignity!

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*Hisiny*] This is the second time in one morning that you have driven me out of the room.

SYDNEY. [*Wringing her hands*] Well, I'm sorry! But I'm so worried. Don't you see I've got to keep it off Mother? and Kit! Oh, I've got to tell Kit! [*Following her irresolutely*] Auntie, if you'd only be decent [*But Miss FAIRFIELD has gone out.* SYDNEY turns back into the room] If I only knew what to do!

She stands hesitating. Then she goes to the telephone: makes a movement as if to take it down but checks herself, shaking her head. She comes back to the sofa at last and flings herself down on it, fidgeting with the cushions and frowning. She is roused by the click of a latch as the French window in the inner room is softly opened, and HILARY FAIRFIELD steps over the threshold, he is a big, fresh-coloured man with grey hair and bowed shoulders. In speech and movements he is quick and jerky, inclined to be boisterous, but pathetically easy to check. This he knows himself, and he has, indeed, an air of being always in rebellion against his own habit of cberfience. He comes in, treading softly, his bright eyes dancing with excitement, like a child getting ready to spring a surprise on somebody. Something in the fashion of the empty room (for he does not see SYDNEY crouching in the cushions) disconcerts him. He hesitates. The happy little smile fades. His eye wanders from one object to another and he moves about, recognising a picture here, fingering there an unfamiliar hanging, aft it were losing and finding himself a dozen times in his progress round the room. He comes to a stand at last before the fire-place, warming his hand'. Then he takes out a pipe and with the other

hand feels absently along the mantel-piece for the matches. SYDNEY, who has been watching him with a sort of breathless sympathy^ says softly:—

SYDNEY. What are you looking for ?

HILARY. They've moved my—*[with a start]* eh?
[He turns sharply and sees her] Meg ! It's Meg !
[With a rush] Oh, my own darling !

SYDNEY. *[Her confidence in her power to deal with the situation suddenly gone]* I—I'm not Meg.

HILARY. *[Boisterously]* Not Meg ! Tell me I don't know Meg ! *[SYDNEY gives a nervous schoolgirl giggle]* Eh? *[Then, his voice changing completely]* No, it's not Meg. *[Uneasily]* I beg your pardon. I thought you were—another girl. I've been away a long time.

SYDNEY. Whom do you want?

HILARY. *[Startled again]* There, you see, it's her voice too. Who are you ?

SYDNEY. *[Fencing]* How did you get in.

HILARY. Tool-shed gate. *[Louder]* Who are you ?

SYDNEY. Where have you come from ?

HILARY. Bedford. Took a car. *[Lashing himself into an agitation]* Who are you ?

SYDNEY. Whom do you want to see ?

HILARY. *[Losing all control]* Who are you ?

SYDNEY. *[Slowly]* I think I'm your daughter.
[HILARY stares at her blankly. Then he bursts out laughing.]

HILARY. Daughter 1 Daughter 1 By God, that a good 1 My wife isn't my wife, she's my daughter ! And my daughter's seventeen and I'm twenty-two.

SYDNEY. You're forgetting what years and years—

HILARY. Yes, of course. It's years and years. It's a life-time. It's my daughter's life-time. What's your name—daughter?

SYDNEY. Sydney.

HILARY. Sydney. Sydney, eh ? My mother was Sydney. I like Sydney. I—[*Catching at his dignity*] I suppose we're rather a shock to each other—Sydney.

SYDNEY. No. You're not a shock to me. But I'm afraid—

HILARY. [*Breaking in*] Is my—? Is your—J Where's Margaret ?

SYDNEY. At church.

HILARY. Back soon, eh ?

SYDNEY. Yes, that's why I'm afraid—

HILARY. [*Unheeding*] I might go to meet her, eh?

SYDNEY. [*Quickly*] Oh, I wouldn't. Come and sit down and wait for her and talk.

HILARY. [*Obediently*] Very well. [*He sits down beside her on the sofa. They look at each other. He says shyly*] I say, isn't this queer?

SYDNEY. It makes we want to cry.

HILARY. Why? That's all over. Laugh 1 Laugh! That's the thing to do. What a lovely room this is I I can't say I like the new paper—or the curtains!

SYDNEY. [*Quickly*] Yes, I liked the old red ones, too. [*Then, with an effort*] Those—aren't—the only changes. Everything changes—

HILARY. [*Swiftly*] Bet you Aunt Hester hasn't, eh? [*They look at each other and laugh,*] And I bet you—I say, is your mother such a darling still?

SYDNEY. [*Recalled to the business before her, brusquely*] Look here—Father—

HILARY. [*Savouring it*] "Father 1" "Father I" Well?

SYDNEY, We've got to talk. We've got to get things straight before she comes back.

HILARY. [*His eye and his attention beginning to wander*] Back soon, eh? Why has Meg moved the clock? It was much better where we put it. Must get it put back. Nearly one. She's late, isn't she? I—I really think, you know, I'll go out and meet your mother.

SYDNEY. [*Authoritatively*] You're to stay here.

HILARY. [*Beginning obediently*] Very well—
[*He flares suddejily*] 111 do as I like about that.

SYDNEY. [*Passionately*] I'll not have you frighten her.

HILARY. I? [*He smiles securely.*]

SYDNEY. Can't you realise what the shock—?

HILARY. [*Blissfully*] Never known anyone die of joy yet!

SYDNEY. Father, you don't understand 1 You and mother—

HILARY. [*Getting irritated*] Look here, this is nothing to do with you—

SYDNEY. But you mustn't—

HILARY. [*Violently*] Now I tell you I'm not going to be hectored. I won't stand it. I've had enough of it. D'you hear? I've had enough of it.

SYDNEY. If you talk to my mother like this—

HILARY. [*Softening*] Meg understands.

SYDNEY. [*Jealously*] So do I understand.

HILARY. I believe you do. You got wild all in a moment. That's my way, too. It means nothing. Meg can't see that it means nothing. But it makes a man wild, you know, to be dragooned when he's as sane as—my God, I *am* sano! That's all over, isn't it? I am sane. Daughter!

SYDNEY. [*Watching him*] Father?

HILARY. Don't let me get—that way. It's bad. Help me to go slow. I'm as well as you are, you know. But it's new. It only happened to-day—like a curtain lifting. [*Gonjfade7itially*] You see I was standing in the garden—

SYDNEY. I can't conceive how you got away.

HILARY. Led. Like Peter out of prison. I went through the gate, openly. Their eyes wrre blinded. [*With a complete change of tone*] Pure luck, you know, There were visitors going out—and I nipped along with them, talking. No-one spotted me. I wouldn't have believed it possible. Heaps of us—of them, I mean—have tried, you know'

SYDNEY. But you'd no money.

HILARY. [*Whimsically*] I took the first taxi I saw. Promised him double. He's at the lower gate now, waiting to be paid.

SYDNEY. Father, *dear*! Ticking away the tuppences! We're not millionaires!

HILARY. [*Carelessly*] Your mother'll see to it. [*Sound of a motor horn*] That's him! I suppose he's got tired of waiting and come round.

SYDNEY. No, no! That'll be Mother. You mustn't stop here. You must let me tell her. You must let me tell her first. [*She goes out hurriedly.*]

HILARY. Your mother, is it? Your mother, eh? Here—child—a minute, give me a minute! give me a minute!

MARGARET, [*As she comes in*] No—he couldn't. But he's coming round directly after lunch—Hilary!

HILARY. [*Like a man who can't see*] Meg! Is it Meg? Meg, I've come home.

MARGARET. [*Terrified*] Sydney, don't go away!

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother!

HILARY. Meg!

MARGARET. But they said—they said—incurable. They shouldn't have said—incurable.

HILARY. What does it matter? I'm well. I'm well, Meg! I tell you—it came over me like a lantern flash—like a face turning to you. I was in the garden, you know—lost. I was a lost soul—outcast! No hope. I can make anyone

understand. I was never like the rest of them. I was sane, always—but—the face was turned away.

SYDNEY. What face ?

HILARY, The face of God,

MARGARET. Sydney—is he—?

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother 1 That isn't madness. He's come to himself.

MARGARET. Then—then—what am I to do ?

HILARY. What's that? [,"e comes nearer.]

MARGARET, I—I—

HILARY. [*Staring at her*] You don't say a word. One would think you weren't glad to see me. Aren't you glad to see me ?

MARGARET. Of course—glad—you poor Hilary I

HILARY. If you knew what it is to say to myself—I'm at home ! That place— 1

MARGARET. [*Mechanically*] Oh, but there was every comfort.

HILARY. Hell! Hell 1

MARGARET. [*Insisting*] But they were good to you?

HILARY. Good enough.

MARGARET, [*In acute distress*]. They didn't—ill-treat—?

SYDNEY. Mother, you know you did the very best—

HILARY. If it had been heaven—what difference does it make ? I was a dead man. Do you know what the dead do in heaven ? They sit on thei'

golden chairs and sicken for home. Why did you never come ?

MARGARET. They wouldn't let me. It made you worse

HILARY. Because I wanted you so.

MARGARET. But you didn't know me.

HILARY. My voice didn't—and my speech and my actions didn't. But," knew you. Meg—behind the curtain—behind the dreams and the noises, and the abandonment of God—I wanted you. I wanted—I wanted— [*He puts his hand to his head.*] Look here—I tell you we mustn't talk of these things. It's not safe, I tell you. Is how I talk I see a black hand reaching up through the floor—do you see ? there—through the widening crack of the floor—to catch me by the ankle and drag—drag—

SYDNEY. Father—Father—go slow !

MARGARET. [*Terrified*] Sydney !

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother ! We'll manage.

HILARY. [*Turning to her*] Yes, you tell your mother. I'm all right ! You understand that, don't you ? Once it was a real hand. Now I know it's in my mind. I tell you, Meg, I'm well. But it's not safe to think about anything but— Oh, my dear, the holly and the crackle of the fire and the snow like a veil of peace on me—and you like the snow—so still—

He comes to ktt' with outstretched arm',

MARGARET [*Faintly*] No—no—no—

HILARY. [*Exalted*] Yes—yes—yes 1 [*He catches her to him.*']

MARGARET. For pity's sake, Hilary— !

BASSETT. [*Entering*] Lunch is served, Ma'am !

MARGARET. [*Helplessly,*"] Sydney ?

SYDNEY. Lay an extra cover. This—my—this gentleman is staying to lunch.

HILARY. [*Boisterously*] Staying to lunch 1 to lunch ! That's a good joke, isn't it ? I say, listen ! I'm laughing. Do you know, I'm laughing ? It's blessed to laugh. Staying to lunch I Yes, my girl ! Lunch and tea and supper and breakfast, thank God I and for many a long day 1

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

The curtain rises on MARGARET'S drawing-room. It is prettily furnished in a gentle, white-ivalled, water-colour-in-gold-frame fashion, and is full of flowers. In one corner is a parrot in a cage, and near it Miss FAIRFIELD'S arm-chair and foot-stool and work-table. The fire-place has a white sheepskin in front of it, and brass fire-irons : on the mantel-piece is a gilt clock and many photographs. At right angles to the fire a low empire couch runs out into the room. There is a hint of SYDNEY in the ultra-modern cushionry with which it is piled. As the curtain goes up BASSETT is showing in GRAY MEREDITH.

BASSETT. They're still at lunch, Sir.

GRAY. [*Glancing at the clock*] They're late,

BASSETT. It's the visitor, Sir. He's kept them talking.

GRAY. Visitor?

BASSETT. Yes, Sir, a strange gentleman. Will you take coffee, Sir?

GRAY. I may as well go in and have it with them.

BASSETT. The mistress said, would you not, Sir. She'd come to you.

GRAY, [*-4 little surprised*] Oh, very well.

BASSETT. I'll tell Miss Sydney you've come, Sir.

GRAY. [*Lifting his eyebrows*] Tell Mrs. Fairfield.

BASSETT, Miss Sydney said I was to tell her too, Sir, quietly.

GRAY. [*Puzzled*] Is—? [*He checks an impulse to question the servant*] All right 1

BASSETT. Thank you, Sir.

She goes out, leaving the door open. There is a slight pause. MARGARET comes in hurriedly, shutting the door behind her.

GRAY. [*Smiling*] Well, what's the mystery?

MARGARET. Gray, he's come back!

GRAY. Who?

MARGARET. Hilary!

GRAY. [*Lightly*] Hilary? What Hilary? *Hilary!*

MARGARET. Yes.

GRAY. Good God!

MARGARET. He got away. He came straight here. I found him with Sydney.

GRAY. Don't be frightened. I'm here. Is he dangerous?

MARGARET. No, no, poor fellow!

GRAY. You can't be sure. Anyway, I'd better take charge of him while you phone the asylum. No, that won't do, there are no trains. We must ring up the authorities.

MARGARET. Oh, no, Gray 1

GRAY. It's not pleasant, but it's the only thing to do.

MARGARET. You don't understand.

GRAY. There's only one way to deal with an escaped lunatic.

MARGARET. But he's not. He's well.

GRAY. What's that ?

MARGARET. He's well. He knows me. Ho—

GRAY. I don't believe it.

MARGARET. Do you think I want to believe it?
Oh, what a ghastly thing to say !

GRAY. This has nothing to do with you. He has nothing to do with you. Leave me to deal with him. [*lie goes towards the door.*]

MARGARET. Where are you going?

GRAY. 'Phoning for Dr. Alliot to begin with.

MARGARET. Sydney's done that already.

GRAY. Sydney's head's on her shoulders.

MARGARET. Hell be here as soon as he can. He could always manage Hilary.

GRAY. You'd better go up to your room.

MARGARET. No.

GRAY. Don't take it too hard. It'll be over in an hour. Well get him away quietly, poor devil.

MARGARET. But it's no good, Gray, he's well. We've been on to the asylum already. They say we should have heard in a day or two even if he hadn't got away.

GRAY. Really well?

MARGARET. The old Hilary—voice and ways and—oh, my God ! what am I to do ?

GRAY. Do? You?

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MARGARET. Don't you see, he knows nothing? **His** hair's grey and he talks as he talked at twenty. It's horrible.

GRAY, What do you mean, he knows nothing?

MARGARET. About the divorce. About you and me. He thinks it's all—as he left it.

GRAY. [*Incredulously*] YouVe said nothing?

MARGARET. He's like a lost child come homo. Do you think I want to send him crazy again? He—

GRAY. [*With a certain anger*] YouVe said nothing?

MARGARET. Not yet.

GRAY. You'll come away with me at once.

MARGARET. I can't. I've got to think of Hilary.

GRAY. You've got to think of me.

MARGARET. I *am* you. But I've done him so much injury—•

GRAY. You've done Fairfield injury? You little saint!

MARGARET. Saint? I'm a wicked woman. I'm wishing he hadn't got well. I'm wishing the doctors will say it's not true. In my wicked heart I'm calling down desolation on my own husband.

GRAY. You have no husband. You're marrying me in a week. You're mine.

MARGARET. I'm afraid—•

GRAY. Whose are you? Answer me,

MARGARET. Yours.

GRAY, You know it?

MARGARET. I know it.

GRAY. Then never be afraid again.

MARGARET. No, not when you're here. I'm not afraid when you're here. But I must be good to Hilary. You see that?

GRAY. What good is "good" to him, poor devil?

MARGARET. At least I'll break it gently.

GRAY. Gently? That's just like a woman. All you can do for him is to come away now.

MARGARET. How can I? He's got to be told.

GRAY. Then let me tell him.

MARGARET. No, no! From you, just from you, it would be wanton. I won't have cruelty.

GRAY. We'll go straight up to town and get married at once. That'll settle everything.

MARGARET. You mustn't rush me. I've got to do what's right.

GRAY. It is right. There's nothing else to be done. You can't stay here.

MARGARET. No, I can't stay here. Don't let me stay here.

GRAY. Come with me. The car's outside. You say Allcott will be here in ten minutes. Leave him a note. He's an old friend as well as a doctor. Let him deal with it if you won't let me.

MARGARET. Oh, can't you see that I must tell Hilary myself?

GRAY. [*Angrily*] Women are incomprehensible!

MARGARET. It's men who are uncomprehending. Can't you feel that it'll hurt him less from me?

GRAY, It'll hurt him ten thousand times more.

MARGARET. But differently. It's tho things om might have said that fester. At least I'll spare him that torment. He shall say all he wants to say.

GRAY. [*Blackly*] I suppose the truth is that there's something in the very best of women that enjoys a scene.

MARGARET. That's the first bitter thing you've ever said to me.

GRAY. [*Breaking out*] Can't you see what it does to me to know you are in the same house with him ? For God's sake come out of it 1

MARGARET. [*Close to him*] I want to come, now, this moment. I want to be forced to come.

GRAY. That settles it.

MARGARET. [*Eluding him*] But I mustn't I Don't you see that I mustn't ? I can't leave Sydney to lay my past for me.

GRAY. Your past is dead.

MARGARET, It's ghost's awake and walking.

HILARY'S VOICE. Meg! Meg!

MARGARET. [*Clinging to him*] Listen, it's calling to me.

HILARY'S VOICE. Meg, where are you ?

MARGARET. It's too latei I'm too old I I shall never get away from him. I told you it was too good to be be true.

GRAY. [*Deliberately matter-of-fact*] Listen to me 1 I am going home now. There are orders to be given. I must jfet some money and papers. But

I shall be back here in an hour. I give you just that hour to tell him what you choose. After that you'll be ready to come.

MARGARET. If—if I've managed—

GRAY. There's no if. You're coming.

MARGARET. Am I coming, Gray?

HILARY. [*Entering from the hall*] Meg, Sydney said you'd gone to your room. Hulloo! What's this? Who's this? Doctor, eh? I've been expecting them down on me. [*To GRAY*] It's no good, you know. I'm as fit as you are. Any test you like.

MARGARET. Mr. Meredith called to see me, Hilary! He's just going.

HILARY. Oh, sorry! [*He walks to the fire and stands warming his hands, but watching them over his shoulder.*]

GRAY. [*At the door, in a low voice to MARGARET*] I don't like leaving you.

MARGARET. You must! It's better! But—come back quickly!

GRAY. You'll be ready?

MARGARET. I will. [*GRAY goes out.*]

HILARY. [*Uneasily*] Who's that man?

MARGARET. His name's Gray Meredith.

HILARY. What's he doing here?

MARGARET. He's an old friend.

HILARY. I don't know him, do I?

MARGARET. It's since you were ill. It's a tnt' ifttf' five years.

HILARY. He's in love with you I I tell you, the man's in love with you! Do you think I'm so dazed and crazed I can't see that? You shouldn't let him, Meg! You're such a child you don't know what you're doing when you look and smile—

MARGARET. [*In a strained voice*] I do know. [*She stands quite still in the middle of the room, her head lifted, a beautiful woman.*]

HILARY. [*Staring at her*] Lord, I don't wonder at him, poor brute I [*Still staring*] Meg, you've changed.

MARGARET. [*Catching at the opening*] Yea, Hilary.

HILARY. Taller, more beautiful—and yet I miss something.

MARGARET. [*Urging him on*] Yes, Hilary.

HILARY. [*Wistfully*] —something you used to have—kind—a kind way with you. The child's got it. Sydney—my daughter, Sydney! She's more you than you are. You—you've grown right up—away—beyond me—haven't you?

MARGARET. Yes, Hilary.

HILARY. But I'm going to catch up' You'll help me to catch up with you—Meg? [*She doesn't answer.*] Meg! wait for me! Meg, where are you? Why don't you hold out your hands?

MARGARET. [*Wrung for him*] I can't Hilary 1
M fiands are full.

HILARY. [*His tone lightening into relief*] What

Sydney? She'll be off in no time. She's told me about the boy—what's his name—Kit—already.

MARGARET. It's not Sydney.

HILARY. What? [*Crescendo*] Eh? What are you driving at? What are you trying to tell me? What's changed you? Why do you look at me side ways? Why do you flinch when I speak loudly? Yes—and when I kissed you— It's that man! [*He goes up to her and takes her by the wrist, staring into her face.*] Is it true? You?

MARGARET. [*Pitifully*] I've done nothing wrong. I'm trying to tell you. I only want to tell you and make you understand. Hilary, fifteen years is a long time—

HILARY. [*Dully*] Yes. I suppose it's a long time for a woman to be faithful.

MARGARET. That's it! That's the whole thing! If I'd loved you it wouldn't have been long—

HILARY. [*Violently, crying her down*] You did love me once.

MARGARET. [*Beaten*] Did I—once⁹¹ I don't know—

There is a silence.

HILARY. [*Without expression*] What do you expect me to do? Forgive you?

MARGARET. [*Stung*] There's nothing to forgive. [*Softening*] Oh, so much, Hilary, to forgive each other; but not that.

HILARY. [*More and more roughly as he los'\$*

control of himself] Divorce you then? Because I'll not do that! I'll have no dirty linen washed in the courts.

MARGARET. [*Forced into the open*] Hilary, I divorced you twelve months ago.

HILARY. [*Shouting*] What? What? What?

MARGARET. I divorced you—

HILARY. [*Beside himself*] You're mad! You couldn't do it! You'd no cause! D'you think I'm to be put off with your lies? Am I a child? You'd no cause! Oh, I see what you're at. You want to confuse me. You want to pull wool over my eyes. You want to drive me off my head—drive me mad again. You devil! You devil! You shan't do it. I've got friends— Sydney! Where's that girl [*Shouting*] Sydney! Hester! All of you! Come here! Come here, I say! [*SYDNEY opens the drawing-room door.*]

SYDNEY, Mother, what is it? [*She enters, followed by Miss FAIRFIELD. To HILARY—*] What are you doing? You're frightening her.

HILARY. [*Wildly*] No, no! You're not on her side. You're little Sydney—kind—my Sydney! What did you say—go slow, eh! Keep your hand here—cool, cool. [*Then as SYDNEY, breaking from him, makes a movement to her mother*] Stand away from that woman!

MABQARBT, Sydney, humour him!

HILARY. [*At white heat*] What ^as I calling you tor, eh? Oh, yes, a riddle. I've got a riddle for

you. There was a man at that place—used to ask riddles—the moon told 'em to him. Just such a white face whispering out of the blue—lies 1 He couldn't find the answers—sent him off his head. But I know the answer, When's a wife not a wife, eh? Want to know the answer? [*Pointing to MARGARET*] When she's *this—this—this* I [*Confidentially*] She's poisoning me.

Miss FAIRFIELD. Now, Hilary 1 Hilary 1—

HILARY. Sydney, come here 1 I'll tell you. [*SYDNEY stands torn between the two.*]

Miss FAIRFIELD. What have you done to him, Margaret?

MARGARET. I've told him the truth.

Miss FAIRFIELD. God forgive you 1

HILARY. [*Raving*] I tell you she's pouring poison into my ear. You remember that fellow in the play—and *his* wife? That's what she's done. If I told you what she said to me, you'd think I was mad. And that's what she wants you to think. She wants to get rid of me. She's got a tame cat about the place. I'm in the way. And so she comes to me, d'you see, and tells me—what do you think? She says she's not my wife. What do you think of that?

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*Gfrrrlnly*] You may well ask.

MARGARET. [*To SYDNEY*] He won't listen—

SYDNEY. Sit down, darling! You're shaking.

HARGABBT. He's always had these Y^ges, It"

my fault. I began at the wrong end. Hilary—it's not—I'm not what you think.

HILARY. Then what was that man doing in my house?

MARGARET. In a week I'm going to marry him.

HILARY. D'you hear her? To *me* she says this! Is she mad or am I?

MARGARET. [*Desperately*] I tell you there's been a law passed—

Miss FAIRFIELD. No need for him to know that now, Margaret!

SYDNEY. Of course he has to know.

Miss FAIRFIELD. Not now.

MARGARET. [*On the defensive*] I don't know what you mean, Aunt Hester!

Miss FAIRFIELD. Let us rather thank God that he has come back in time.

MARGARET. [*Uneasy*] In time? Iiitime?

Miss FAIRFIELD. To snatch a brand from the burning.

MARGARET. I'm a free woman. I've got my divorce.

Miss FAIRFIELD. Whom God hath joined let no man put asunder.

MARGARET. [*At bay*] I'm a free woman. I'm going to marry Gray Meredith. This is a trap, J Sydney!

Miss FAIRFIELD. Is this talk for a young girl to hear?

MARGARET. Sydney, you're to fetch Gray.

HILARY. [*With weak violence*] If he comes here Til kill him.

MARGARET, [*Catching SYDNEY back*] No, no I D'you hear him? What am I to do?

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother! We'll manage somehow.

BASSETT. [*Entering*] Dr. Alliofc is in the hall, ma'am.

MARGARET. [*With a gasp of relief*] Ask him to come in here. At once.

DR. ALLIOT trots in. *He is a pleasant, round-about, clean little old man, with a twinkling face and brisk chubby movements of the hands. He is upright and his voice is strong. He wears his seventy odd years like a good joke that he expects you to keep up, in spite of the fact that he is really your own age and understands you better than you do yourself. But behind his comfortable manner is a hint of authority which has its effect, especially on HILARY.*

DR. ALLIOT. What's all this I hear? Well, well! Good afternoon, Mrs. Fairfield ! Good afternoon, Miss Fairfield ! Merry Christmas, Sydney ! Now then, now for him ! Welcome back, Fairfield ! Welcome back, my boy !

HILARY. It's—it's old Alliot, isn't it ?

DR, ALLIOT. Your memory's all right I see.

HILARY. I suppose they've sent for you—

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DR. ALLIOT. Well, well, you see, you've arrived rather unconventionally. I've been in touch with—

HILARY. That place ?

DK. ALLIOT. Why, yes ! You may have to go back, you know. Formalities ! Formalities !

HILARY. I don't mind. I'm well. I'm well, Alliot! I'm not afraid of what you'll say. I'm not afraid of any of you.

DR. ALLIOT. Well, well, well! that sounds hopeful.

HILARY. But I can't go yet, Doctor.

DR. ALLIOT. Only for a day or two.

HILARY. It's my wife. I lost my temper. I do lose my temper. It means nothing, Go slow, eh? My wife's ill, Doctor. She's not right in her head.

DR. ALLIOT. [*Alert*] Ah !

HILARY. [*With a wave of his hand*] So are the rest of them. Mad as hatters.

DR. ALLIOT. Hm !

HILARY. [*Checked, glances at him keenly a moment. Then chuckling*] Oh, you're thinking that's a delusion.

DR. ALLIOT. [*Humouring him*] Between you and me, it's a common one.

HILARY. [*Half flattered*] At., we know, don't wo? Served in the same shop, eh? Only the counter between us.

DR. ALLIOT. [*Feeling his way*] Well, well—

HILARY. But look here I She says she's not my wife.

DR. ALLIOT. [*Enlightened*] Oh 1 Oh, that's the trouble!

HILARY. She says she's not my wife.

DR. ALLIOT. [*Soberly*] It's a hard case, Fairfield.

HILARY. What d'you mean by that?

DR, ALLIOT. It's the old wisdom of the scapegoat—it is expedient—how does it go? expedient—?

SYDNEY. " It is expedient that one man should die for the people."

DR. ALLIOT. That's it I A hard word, but a true one.

HILARY. What has that got to do with me?

DR. ALLIOT. Well, the situation is this—

HILARY. There is no situation. I married Meg. I fell ill. Now I'm well again. I want my wife.

DR. ALLIOT. Why, yes—yes—

HILARY. [*Picking it up irritably*] " Yes—yes—" " Yes—yes—" I suppose that's what you call humouring a lunatic.

DR. ALLIOT. Why, I hope to be convinced, Fairfield, that that trouble's over, but—

HILARY. But you're going to lock me up again because I want my wife.

DR. ALLIOT. [*Patiently*] Will you let me put the case to you?

HILARY. You can put fifty cases. It makes no difference.

SYDNEY. [*At his elbow^ softly~*] Father, I'd listen.

HILARY. [*Slipping his arm through hers*] Eh? Sydney? that you? You're not against rae, Sydney?

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and too fast altogether 1 Before ladies ! It's not nice. It's enough to call down a judgment.

BASBETT. \Entwing~\ Mr. Pumphrey to see you, ma'am. [To SYDNEY] And Mr, Kit.

Miss FAIRFIELD. [Justified] Ah !

MARGARET. I can't see anyone.

BASSETT. He said, ma'am, it was important.

HILARY. Who? Who?

Miss FAIRFIELD. Tho Rector. I expect he's heard about you.

HILARY. I can't see him. I won't see him. Let me go. I've met the Levites. Spare me the priest. *[He breaks away froin them and goes stumbling out at the other door.]*

SYDNEY, *[Following him anxiously]* Father!

DR. ALLIOT. *[Preventing her]* No, no, my child ! I'll look after him. [*He goes out quickly.*]

The R,"ECTOR is an insignificant man, lolth an important manner and a plum in hia mouth. He enters with KIT, who is flushed and perturbed.

RECTOR. Ah, good afternoon, Mrs. Fairfield««-Miss Fairfield—

MARGARET. *[Mechanically. She is very tired and inattentive]* A happy Christmas, Mr. Pumphrey!

RECTOR. Ah 1 Just so! Christmas afternoon. An unusual day to call, Mrs. Fairfield, and, I fear, an inconvenient hour—

MARGARET. Not at all, Mr. Pumphrey.

HECTOR. I can give myself [*he takes out his watch*] till three fifteen, no longer. The children's service is at three thirty.

MARGARET, [*Turning to the bell*] Mayn't I order you an early cup of tea?

RECTOR. Thank you, thank you, no. Busy as I am, I should not have disturbed you—•

Miss FAIRFIELD. Rector, it's as if you had been sent!

RECTOR. Ah ! gratifying ! I did not see you at the morning service, Miss Fair field. But last night—*late* last night—

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*With a look at SYDNEY*] Three A.M., Rector?

RECTOR. Three fifteen, Miss Fairfield.

KIT. Look here, Father—

RECTOR. I received certain information from my son—

KIT. No, you don't, Father. I'll have my say first. It's just this, Mrs. Fan-field—

RECTOR. [*Fussed*] Christopher? Christopher?

KIT. [*He is very much in earnest and he addresses himself solely to MARGARET*] I want you to know that it is nothing to do with me, Mrs. Fair field. I don't agree with my father. [*Confidentially*] You wouldn't think it but I never do.

RECTOR. Christopher?

KIT. [*Ignoring him*] And it was only coming up

fche drive that he sprung on me why ho wanted to see you, or I wouldn t have come—

MARGARET. [*Liking him*] I think Sydney would have been sorry, Kit.

KIT. [*JFitfA a touch of his father's manner*] Yes, well, Sydney and I have talked it over—and I know **I'm** going into the church myself—but I think he's all wrong, Mrs. Fail-field. [*Unconscious of plagiarism'*] I'm not nineteenth century. \Bu{ SYDNEY giggles.}]

Miss FAIRFIELD. Rector, what's the matter with the young man?

KIT. [*Forging ahead*] You see, I'm pretty keen about Sydney, and so, naturally, I'm pretty keen about you, Mrs. Fairfield ?

RECTOR. Miss Fairfield, I'm without words.

KIT. [*Burdened*] —and I just wanted to tell you that I can't toll you what I think of my father over this business. It makes me wild.

SYDNEY. Kit, you'd better shut up.

KIT. [*Turning to SYDNEY*] Well, I only wanted her to understand that I'm not responsible for my father—that he's not my own choice, if you know what I mean, [*They talk aside.*]

RECTOR. His mother's right hand 1 I don't know what's come over him.

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*Grimly*] A pretty face, Rector 1

RECTOR. Ahl the very point 1 I shall be glad to see you alone, Mrs. Fail-field —not you, of course,

Miss Fairfield, but—er— [*He glances at KIT and SYDNEY.*]

MARGARET. *Designedly*] Sydney, have you shown Kit all your presents ?

SYDNEY. [*Reluctantly taking the hint, but continuing the conversation as they go out*] What did you let him come for? Oh, you're no good! [*The door bangs behind them.*]

MARGARET. [*Half smiling*] Well, Mr. Pumphrey. I suppose it's about Sydney and Kit ?

RECTOR. Mrs. Fairfield until last night we encouraged, we were gratified—

MARGARET. Last night? Oh, the dance !

RECTOR. I sat up for my son until three fifteen oC Christmas morning. His excuse was your daughter—

MARGARET, [*With dignity*] Do you take objection to Sydney, Mr. Pumphrey?

RECTOR. Now, my dear lady, you mustn't misunderstand me—

MARGARET. [*Quietly*] To me, then?

RECTOR. Mrs. Fairfield, I beg— But in the course of a slight—er—altercation between Christopher and myself it transpired—

MARGARET. [*She has been prepared for it*] I see, It's her father—

RECTOR. I am grieved—grieved for yon.

MARGARET. But his illness was no secret.

RECTOR. My heart, Mrs. Fairfield, and Mrs. Pumphrey's heart has gone out to you in your affliction. When the light of reason—

MARGARET. Then you did know. *Then* 1 doir' follow.

RECTOR. But according to Christopher—

MARGARET. Well?

HECTOR. Mrs. Fairfield, is your husband alive or dead?

MARGARET. My former husband is alive.

RECTOR. *[With a half deprecatory, half triumphant gesture]* Out of your own mouth, Mrs. Fairfield—

MARGARET. *[Bewildered]* But you say you knew he was insane?

RECTOR. But I didn't know he was alive.

Miss FAIRFIELD. *[Irritated]* Don't be so foolish, Margaret. It's not the insanity, it's the divorce.

RECTOR. When I realised that I had been within a week of re-marrying a divorced person—

MARGARET. *[Coldly]* Why didn't you go to Mr. Meredith?

RECTOR. Mr. Meredith is—er—a difficult man to—er—approach. I felt that an appeal to your feelings, as a Christian, as a mother—

MARGARET. You mean you'll prevent Kit marrying Sydney—

RECTOR. It depends on you, Mrs. Fairfield. I won't let him marry the child of a woman who remarries while her husband is alive.

MARGARET. But the church allows it?

Miss FAIRFIELD. *[Correcting her]* Winks at iv Margaret.

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RECTOR. [*With dignity*] "Winks" is hardly the word—

MARGARET. Then what word would you use, Mr. Pumphrey?

RECTOR. I am not concerned with words.

MARGARET. But I want to know. I care about my church. It lets me and it doesn't let me—what does it mean?

RECTOR. [*Much moved*] I am not concerned with meanings, Mrs. Fairfield. I am concerned with my own conscience.

Miss FAIRFIELD. Margaret—you've no business to upset the Rector. Why don't you tell him that the situation has changed?

MARGARET. Nothing has changed.

RECTOR. Changed?

Miss FAIRFIELD. My nephew has recovered—returned. He's in the house now.

RECTOR. Providence ! It's providence ! [*With enthusiasm*] I never knew anything like providence. Changed indeed, Miss Fairfield ! My objection goes. Dear little Sydney ! Ah, Mrs. Fairfield, in a year you and your husband will look back on this—episode as on a dream—a bad dream—

MARGARET. [*Stonily*] I have no husband.

RECTOR. Ah ! the re-marriage—a more formality—

Miss FAIRFIELD. Simpler still—the decree can be rescinded.

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MARGARET, [*Stunned*] Aunt Hester, knowing hia history, knowing mine, is it possible that you expect me to go back to him ?

Miss FAIRFIELD. He's come back to you'

HECTOR. A wife's duty—

MARGARET. [*Slowly*] I think you're wicked. I think you're both wicked.

HECTOR. Mrs. Fairfield I

Miss FAIRFIELD. Control yourself, Margaret I

MARGARET. [*With a touch of wildness in her manner*] You—do you love your wife ?

RECTOR. Mrs. Fairfield I

MARGARET. Do you ?

REGLOR. Mrs. Pumphrey and I—most attached—

MARGARET. Suppose you weren't. Think of it—to want so desperately to feel—and to feel nothing. Do you know what it means to dread a person who loves you ? To stiffen at the look in their eyes ? To pity and—shudder ? You should not judge.

HILARY, *unseen*, opens the door and shuts *it* again quickly.

RECTOR, I—I—

Miss FAIRFIELD. There it is, you see, Rector I She doesn't care *what* she says.

DR. ALLIOT *enters*.

DR. ALLIOT. [*Gravely, holding the door behind him*] Margaret, my child— [*lie sees the jthers and his voice changes*] Hullo, Pumphrey 1 You hero Ptil? Well, well—you're cutting it fine.

RECTOR. The service 1 [*He pulls out his watch, stricken.*']

DR. ALLIOT. I'll run you down there if you'll wait a minute. [*To MARGARET, privately, poking a twise forefinger*] What you want, my child, is a good cry and a cup of tea.

RECTOR. [*Coming up to MARGARET, stiffly*] Good-day, Mrs. Fairfield I You will not—reconsider—?

MARGARET. I will not.

RECTOR. I regret—I regret— [*To Miss FAIRFIELD*] My dear lady, you have my sympathy. I think I left my hat— [*Miss FAIRFIELD escorts him into the hall.*]

DR. ALLIOT. Hilary's coming home with me, Margaret. He wants a word with you first. Can you manage that?

MARGARET. Of course.

DR. ALLIOT. [*Abruptly*] Where's Meredith?

MARGARET. [*Kagerly*] He's coming. He's taking me away.

DR. ALLIOT. Good. The sooner the better.

RECTOR. [*JKappearing at the door*] Dr. Alliot—it now wants seven minutes to the half.

DR. ALLIOT. Coming 1 Coming 1 See now—you can be gentle with him—

MARGARET. Of course,

DR. ALLIOT. [*With a keen look at her*] Nor yet too gentle. Well, well, God be with you, child' [*He trots out.*]

HILARY *comes in, hesitating. If he is without dignity, he is, nevertheless, too much like a hectored, forlorn child to be ludicrous.*

HILARY. Have they gone ? *[Reassuring her]* It's all right. I'm going too. *[He waits for her to answer. She says nothing]* I'm going. I've got to, I see that. He's made me see.

MARGARET. Dr. Alliot?

HILARY. Tin going to stay with him till I can look round. He's going to make It right with that place.

MARGARET. I'm glad you've got a good friend, Hilary.

HILARY. Yes, he's a good chap. He talked to me. He's made me see. *[He comes a little closer.]* He says—and I do see— It's too late, of course— *[his look at her is a petition, but she makes no sign]* isn't it ? *[He comes nearer.]* Yes—it's too late. It wouldn't be fair—to ask you—*[again the look]* would it ?

MARGARET. *[Imploringly]* Oh, Hilary, Hilary !

HILARY. *[Encouraged to come closer]* No woman could be expected—you couldn't bo expected—*[she makes no sign]* could you ? *[Repeating his lesson]* It's what he says—you've made a new life for yourself—*[he waits]* haven't you ? There's no room in it—for mo—is there ? *[He is close to her. She does not move.]* So it's just a case of—saying good-byo and going, because—because—I quite sco—there's no chance— *[Suddenly he throws himself*

doion beside her, catching at her hands, clinging to her knees'] Oh 1 Meg, Meg, Meg 1 isn't there just a chance ?

MARGARET, [*Faintly*] Hilary, I can't stand it.

HILARY. [*And from now to the end of the scene h' is at full pelt, tumbling over his words, frantic*] Yes, but listen to me ! Listen to me I You don't listen. Listen to me ! I've been alone so long—

MARGARET. Gray 1 Gray 1 Why don't you come ?

HILARY. I'll not trouble you. I'll not get in your way—but—don't leave me all alone. Give me something—the rustle of your dress, the cushion where you've lain—your voice about the house. You can't deny me such little things, that you give your servant and your dog.

MARGARET. It's madness—

HILARY. It's naked need 1

MARGARET. What good should I be to you ? I don't love you, Hilary—poor Hilary. I love him. never think of anything but him.

HILARY. But it's me you married. You promised—you promised—better or worse—in sickness in health— You can't go back on your promise,

MARGARET. It isn't fair,

HILARY. Anything's fair 1 You don't know what misery means.

MARGARET. I'm learning.

HILARY. But you don't *know*. You couldn't leave me to it if you knew. Why, I've never known you hurt '• creature in all your life ! Remember

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the rat-hunts in the barn, the way we used to chaff you? and the starling? and the kitten you found? Why, I've seen you step aside for a little creeping green thing on the path. You've never hurt anything. Then how can you hurt me so? You can't have changed since yesterday—

MARGARET. [*In despairing protest*] It's half my life ago—

HILARY. It's yesterday, it's yesterday I

MARGARET. [*With the fleeting courage of a half caught bird*] Yes, it is yesterday. It's how you took me—yesterday—and now you're doing it again I

HILARY. [*Catching at the hope of it*] Am I? Am I? Is it yesterday? yesterday come back again?

MARGARET. [*In the toils*] No—no I Hilary, I can't!

HILARY. [*At white heat*] No, you can't. You can't leave me. You can't do it to me. You can't drive me out—the wilderness—alone—alone—alone. You can't do it, Meg—you can't do it—you can't I

MARGARET. [*Beaten*] I suppose—I can't,

HILARY. You—you'll stay with me? [*Breaking down utterly*] Oh, God bless you, Meg, God bless you, God bless you—

*She resign' her hands to him while she sits,
flattened against the back of her chair,
quivering a little^ like a crucified moth.*

MARGARET. [*Puzzling it out*] You mean—God help me?

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

The scene is the same as in ACT I. Miss PAIRFIELD sits reading. SYDNEY is fidgeting about the room. BASSETT comes in and begins to lay the cloth. KIT, who enters unseen behind her, sees Miss FAIRFIELD and makes hastily up the stairs on tip toe.

SYDNEY. *[Turning]* Oh, Bassett, isn't it rather early for tea? Lunch was so late.

BASSETT. *[Desisting]* Oh, very well, miss.

Miss FAIRFIELD. Now, Sydney I Always trying to upset things I I'm more than ready for my tea. Bring it in at once, Bassett.

BASSETT. Very well, ma'am 1

SYDNEY. Auntie, I know Mother won't want to be disturbed.

Miss FAIRFIELD. It's high time she was. Talk! Talk! No consideration. She'll tire Hilary out. *[She goes toward' the drawing-room.]*

SYDNEY. *[Worried]* Auntie, I think—

Miss FAIRFIELD. Then you shouldn't! *[She goes out.]*

BASSETT. Shall I bring in tea, Mias Sydney ?

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SYDNEY. [*With a twinkle*] I think we'll wait half an hour.

BASSETT. [*With an answering twinkle*] Very well, miss.

SYDNEY. Oh—Bassett—tell Mr. Kit that—er—that the coast's clear.

BASSETT. He didn't stay out with us, miss. Him and the puppy together was a bit too much for cook, with the turkey on her hands. [*Looking round*] He's here somewhere, miss. [*She goes out.*]

SYDNEY. [*Addressing space*] Kit, you idiot, come out 1

KIT. [*Appearing at the head of the stairs*] I spend half my life dodging your aunt. [*As he runs down-stairs he rakes a bunch of mistletoe from the top of a picture*] She spoils the whole effect this morning, but now— [*He advances on SYDNEY.*]

SYDNEY. [*Enjoying herself*] What do you want now ?

KIT. [*Chanting*] " The mistletoe hung in the old oak hall 1 "—

SYDNEY. [*Eluding him*] Shut up, Kit! [*They dodge and scuffle like two puppies till the drawing-room door opens, letting in the sound of voices.*]

KIT. Sst! [*He dashes up the stairs and comes down again much more soberly as SYDNEY says over her shoulder—*]

SYDNEY. It's only Mother.

MARGARET comes dragging into the room, shutting the door behind her.

SYDNEY. [*The laughter dying out of her*] Oh, Mother, how white you look!

MARGARET. Has Kit gone?

SYDNEY. No, but I can get rid of him if you want me to.

MARGARET. I want him to wait. I want him to take a letter for me to Gray.

SYDNEY. Do you want Gray to come here?

MARGARET. I want him not to come here.

SYDNEY. Oh, I see, not till after Father's gong.

MARGARET. He's not going.

SYDNEY. Mother!

MARGARET *looks at her with twitching lips.*

SYDNEY. Mother, you haven't—

MARGARET. I can't talk to you now, Sydney.

SYDNEY. But Mother—

MARGARET. Please.

SYDNEY. But Mother—

MARGARET. Ask Kit to wait a few minutes.

SYDNEY. But—

MARGARET *goes into the inner room and sits down to write at a little desk near the window. Her back is turned to them and she is soon absorbed in her letter. SYDNEY stands deep in thought.*

KIT. [*At the foot of the stairs*] All serene?

SYDNEY *makes no answer. KIT prances up behind her with the bunch of mistletoe.*

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KIT. [*Repeating his success*] "The mistletoe hung in the old oak hall 1 "

SYDNEY. [*Violently*] Oh, for God's sake, stop it I

KIT. [*Quenched*] What's the row?

SYDNEY. You never know when to stop.

KIT. Well, you needn't snap out at a person—

SYDNEY. [*Impulsively*] Sorry 1 Oh, sorry, old man 1 I'm jumpy to-day.

KIT. [*Chaffing her*] Nervy old thing I

SYDNEY [*Stricken*] I—I suppose I am.

KIT. One minute you'ie as nice as pie, and then you fizz up like a seidlitz powder, all about nothing.

SYDNEY. All about nothing. Sorry, my old Kit, sorry I [*She flings herself down on the sofa. Then with an effort*] Come and talk. What's the news?

KIT. I told you it all this morning. What's your's?

SYDNEY. I like your's better. How's the pamphlet going?

KIT. Nearly done. I put in all your stuff.

SYDNEY. [*Absently*] Good.

KIT. Though you know, I don't agree with it. What I feel is—you're not listening.

SYDNEY. [*Slowly*] Kit, talking of that paper—I read somewhere—suppose now—is it true it can skip a generation?

KIT. It? What?

SYDNEY. Oh—any illness. Consumption or—well, say insanity. Suppose—you, for instance—guppose you were a queer family—a little, .you

know. Say your mother or your father was queer—and you weren't. You were perfectly fit, you understand, perfectly fit—

KIT. Well?

SYDNEY. What about the children?

KIT. I wouldn't risk it. Thank the Lord your father's only shell-shock.

SYDNEY. Why?

KIT. You can't pass on shell-shock

SYDNEY. Then you can pass on insanity—even if you're fib yourself?

KIT. Of course you can.

SYDNEY. It would be very wicked, wouldn't it—to children? Oh, it would be wicked. I suppose when people are in love they don't think.

KIT. Won't think.

SYDNEY. But isn't there a school that says there's no such thing as heredity?

KIT. Well, all I know is I wouldn't risk it,

SYDNEY. It—it's hard on people.

KIT. My word, yes. They say that's why old Alliot never married.

SYDNEY. [*High and mightily*] Oh, village gossip.

KIT. [*Apologetically*] Well, you know what the matter is.

SYDNEY. *Abandoning her dignity* Who **was** it, Kit?

KIT. Old Miss Kobson.

SYDNEY. Rot I

KIT. *Exit.*

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SYDNEY. But she's all right.

KIT. Had a game sister.

SYDNEY. Of course I I just remember her. She used to scare me.

KIT. Oh, it must be true. They're such tremendous pals still.

SYDNEY. Poor old things I

KIT. Rotten for her,

SYDNEY. Ilottener for him! What did she go on being pals with him for?

KIT. Why shouldn't she?

SYDNEY. Well it stopped him marrying anyone else. She oughtn't to hare Jet him.

KIT. You can't stop a person being fond of you.

SYDNEY. When it's a man you can.

KIT. My dear girl, you don't know what you're talking about.

SYDNEY. My dear boy, if a girl finds out that it's not right for her uo marry ' man, it's up to her to choke him off.

KIT. Koti

SYDNEY. Well, I think so.

KIT. Couldn't be done.

SYDNEY. Couldn't it just?

KIT. Any man would see through it.

SYDNEY. As it any man ever saw through anything I As if I couldn't choke you off in five minutes if I wanted to !

KIT. I'd like to see you try !

SYDNEY. Would you ?

KIT. My dear girl, we're not all fools where women are concerned.

SYDNEY. I admire your air of conviction.

KIT. Don't be clever-clever, old thing. Be—
[His arm slips round her.]

SYDNEY. [Edging away] Don't.

KIT. [He glances round hastily at MARGARET, but she is deep in writing] Why not?

SYDNEY, [Deliberately] I hate being pawed. [4 pause]

KIT. Look here, Sydney, d'you call this a way of spending Christmas afternoon?

SYDNEY. [Her lip quivering] It isn't much of a way, is it?

KIT. Well then, old thing! [Again the arm.]

SYDNEY. [Icily] I told you to leave me alone.

KIT. [Rising, huffed] Oh, well, if you can't be decent, I'm going.

SYDNEY. [Sweetly] Counter attraction?

KIT. [Wheeling round on her] Now, my dear old thing, look here. I know it's only a sort of way you've got into; but when you say—"men I"—with a sort of sneer, and "other attractions"—like that, in that voice, it just sounds cheap. I hate it. It's not like you. I wish you wouldn't.

SYDNEY. Dear me!

KIT. Now I suppose you're annoyed.

SYDNEY. Oh, no, I'm only amused.

KIT. [Heavily] There's nothing amusing about me, Sydney. I'm in earnest.

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SYDNEY. I'm **sure** you are. You got out of **answering** an innocent little question quite neatly. It looks like practice.

KIT [*Harried*] Now, look here, Sydney, I swear to **you**—

SYDNEY. [*Like the ghost in Hamlet*] Swear 1

KIT. If you're thinking of Alice Hewitt, I've only met her four times.

SYDNEY. Oh, so her name's Alice 1

KIT. Didn't you **know**?

SYDNEY. Never heard of her till this minute.

KIT. Then what on earth have you been **driving** at.

SYDNEY. Trying an **experiment**.

KIT. If it's because you're **jealous**—

SYDNEY. Jealous 1 Jealous of a— What colour are her eyes?

KIT. [*Carelessly*] How'd 1 know?

SYDNEY. [*With a sudden spurt of suspicion*]
Kit 1 What colour are mine?

KIT. [*Helplessly*] Oh, er—oh—

SYDNEY. [*Terribly*] Kit 1 What colour are mine?
[*Relenting*] Look at my frock, you donkey 1 What do you suppose I wear blue **for**? So Alice has got blue eyes 1

KIT. How do you know?

SYDNEY. I know you, Kit. **You're** conservative.

KIT. **As** a matter of fact, **she** isn't unlike you. **That's** what made me talk to her.

SYDNEY. Oh, you've talked to **her**—

KIT. [*Warming*] Oh, yea--quite a lot. She'i a friend of my sister's.

SYDNEY She always is.

KIT. What d'you mean—"she always is"¹¹? I tell you I've only met her four times. I can't make you out.

SYDNEY. No?

KIT. I wish I couM make you out.

SYDNEY. [*An ache in her voice*] Oh, I wish you could.

KIT. [*Responding instantly*] I say, old thing, is anything really the matter?

SYDNEY. [*With a glance at MARQARRT*] I'm worried.

KIT. Oh, that 1 Yes, it's beastly for your mother.

SYDNEY. Oh, it'a not that. At least—

KIT. What?

SYDNEY. [*Lightly*] Oh, I don't know,

KIT. [*Puzzled'*] Can't you tell me?

SYDNEY. No, old man.

KIT. [*As in ACT. I.*] But—look here—marriage has got to be a sort of mutual show, hasn't it? Confidence, and all that?

SYDNEY *goes off into a peal of laughter.*

KIT. What's the matter now?

SYDNEY. Do you preach this sort of sermon to Alice?

KIT. Sydney — that'? — that's rude — thut'a — that's—

SYDNEY. Take time, darling 1

KIT. You're being simply insulting.

SYDNEY. Too bad ! I should go and tell Alice.

KIT. Damn Alice I

SYDNEY. Oh, no, Kit, she's got blue eyes,

KIT. [*Storming*] Look here, what's up?

SYDNEY. Nix.

KIT. Have you really got your back up? What's the matter with you, Sydney?

SYDNEY. D'you want to know ?

KIT. [*With a certain dignity*] I think I'd better.

SYDNEY. Well, it's [*yaiwnny*] "jam to-morrow, jam yesterday, but—" Surely you know how it ends?

KIT. I don't. And I don't want to.

SYDNEY. [*Drearily*] "But never jam to-day,"¹

KIT. [*Startled*] Why, Sydney 1

SYDNEY. [*Recovering herself, lightly*] D'you know what that's out of?

KIT. No.

SYDNEY. [*Mischievously*] You ought to—"Alice"—

KIT *makes a furious gesture.*

SYDNEY. [*Appeasing him*] No, no, no 1 " Alice through the Looking-glass 1" [*More soberly*] I can't help it, Kit. When I look in the looking-glass I see—Alice.

KIT. Once and for all, Sydney, will you shut up about Alice?

SYDNEY. Can't. It's her jam to-day.

KIT. I wish you'd talk **sense** for a change.

SYDNEY, But I am. I'm conveying to you **as** nicely and tactfully **as** possible that I'm—

KIT. [*Apprehensive at last*] What, Sydney?

SYDNEY. Tired of jam.

KIT. [*Heavily*] D'you mean you're tired of **me**?

SYDNEY. That would be **putting** it crudely.

KIT. **What's** got into you? I don't know you.

SYDNEY. P'raps you're beginning to.

KIT. But what hare I **done**?

SYDNEY. [*Flaring effectively*] Well, for one thing you **shouldn't** have told your father wo were engaged. What girl, do you suppose, would **stand it**? You ask Alice.

KIT. [*Flaring in reality*] If you're not jolly careful I will.

SYDNEY. [*Egging him on*] Good for you I

KIT. [*Furious*] And if I do I'll ask her more than that.

SYDNEY. [*Clapping her hands*] I should go and do it now, if I were you. Strike while the iron's hot.

KIT. You're mad.

SYDNEY. [*With intense bitterness*] Yes, I **suppose** **that's** the right word to fling at me.

KIT. [*Between injury and distress*] I never meant that. You're **twisting** the **words** in my mouth. You're **just** picking a quarrel.

SYDNEY. [*Lazily*] Well, **what's** one to do with a little boy who **won't** take his medicine? I tried to **give** it you in jam.

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KIT. *[Curt]* You want me to go ?

SYDNEY. Yes.

KIT. For good?

SYDNEY. Yes.

KIT. Honest?

SYDNEY. Yes.

KIT, Right. *[If she turns from her and f,"om out.]*

MARGARET *[Looking ?,";>]* Was that Kit? Sydney, don't let him. go.

SYDNEY. Kit! Ki-it !

KIT. *[Returning joyfully]* Yes! Yes, old thing?

SYDNEY. *[Impassively]* Mother wants you.

MARGARET. Oh, Kit—would you take this for me? It's for Mr Meredith. I expect you'll meet him, but if not, I want you to take it on. At once, Kit.

KIT. Right, Mrs. Fairfield i

MARGARET. *[Detaining him]* What's the matter, Kit?

KIT. *[His head up]* Nothing, Mrs. Fairfield.

SYDNEY. Mother, Kit's got to go.

KIT. *[Resentfully]* It's all right. I'm going. You needn't worry.

MARGARET. *[Humorously, washing her hands of the,"a]* Oh, you two !

She turns away from them and stands, her arm on the mantel-piece, staring into the fire. KIT marches to the door.

SYDNEY. *[In spite of herself, softly]* Kit 1

KIT. [*Quickly*] Yes?

SYDNEY. [*Recovering herself, impishly*] You'll give her my love?

KIT. You Ye a beast, Sydney Fair fie Id I [*He goes out with a slam.*]

SYDNEY. [*In a changed voice*] You'll give her my love. [*Running to the door*] Kit I [*The door opens again, but it is GRAY MEREDITH who comes in.*]

GRAY. Sydney, what's wrong with Kit? He went past me like a gust of wind.

MARGARET. [*Coming up to them*] He didn't give you my note?

GRAY. He never looked at me. What note?

MARGARET. I—

GRAY. Aren't you ready? Why aren't you dressed?

MARGARET. I—

GRAY. You **must** be quick, dearest.

MARGARET. I— [*She sways where she stands.*]

GRAY *goes to her, and half clinging to him, half repulsing him, she sits down with her arm on the table and her head on her arm.*

GRAY. Of course I Worn out I You should have come an hour ago.

MARGARET. Yes.

GRAY. Never mind that now. Sydney, get your mother's wraps.

MARGARET. [*Agitated*] Sydney—wait—no.

GRAY. Warm things. It's bitter, driving.

SYDNEY. [*Uncertainly*] Gray, I think—

GRAY. Get them, please,

After a tiny pause and look at him SYDNEY obeys. *You see her go upstairs and disappear along the gallery.*

GRAY. [*Solicitous*] I was afraid it would come hard on you. Has he—? But you can tell me all that later.

MARGARET. I must tell it you now.

GRAY. Be quick, then. We've got a fifty mile drive before us.

MARGARET. [*Not looking at him*] I—I'm not coming.

GRAY. [*Smiling¹*] Not? There, sit quiet a moment. My dear—my dear heart—you're all to pieces.

MARGARET. I'm not coming.

GRAY. [*Checking what she takes for hysteria*] Margaret—Margaret—

MARGARET. I'm not coming. It's Hilary,

GRAY. What? Collapsed again? I thought as much.

MARGARET. I—

GRAY. Tragic 1 But—it simplifies his problem, poor devil. Has Alliot charge of him?

MARGARET. No, no. It's not that. He's not ill. He's well. That's it. He's well—and—he won't let me go.

GRAY. He won't, won't he? [*He turns from her.*]

MARGARET. Where are you going?

GRAY. To settle this matter. Where is he?

MARGARET. Leave him alone. It's me you must punish. I've made up my mind. Oh, how am I to tell you? He convinced me. He—cried, Gray. *[Then, as GBAY make' a quick gesture]* You mustn't sneer. You must understand. He's so unhappy. And there's Sydney to think of. And Gray, he won't marry us.

GRAY. What's that?

MARGARET, The Rector. He's been here.

GRAY. *[Furious]* My God, why wasn't I?

MARGARET. And Aunt Hester—she made it worse *[Despairingly]* You see what it is—they all think I'm wicked.

GRAY. Damned insolence!

MARGARET. But it's not them—it's Hilary, I did fight them. I can't fight Hilary. I see it. It's my own fault. I ought never to have let myself care for you.

GRAY. Talk sense.

MARGARET. But there it is. It's too much for me. I've got to stay with him.

GRAY, *[for the first time taking her seriously]* Say that again, Margaret, if you dare—

MARGARET. I've got to—stay— *[With a sharp crying note in her voice]* Gray, Gray, don't look at me like that!

He turns abruptly away from her and walks across to the hearth. He stands a moment deep in thought^ takes out and lights a cigarette, realises what he is doing, and

*twith an exclamation flings it into the fire.
Then he comes to MARGARET, who has
not moved.*

GRAY. [*Very quietly*] This—this is rather an extraordinary statement, isn't it?

MARGARET, [*Shrinking*] Don't use—that tone.

GRAY. I am being as patient as I can. But—it's not easy.

MARGARET. Easy—?

GRAY. Do you mind telling me exactly what you mean?

MARGARET. I can't talk. You know I'm not clever. I'm trying to do what's right—

GRAY. Then shall I tell you?

*MARGARET makes a little quick movement
with her hands, but she say3 nothing.*

GRAY. [*Watching her keenly while he speaks*] You mean that you've made a mistake—

MARGARET. [*Misunderstanding*] Yea.

GRAY, —that the last five years goes for nothing—that you don't care for me.

MARGARET. Gray!

GRAY. Wait. That you've never cared for me—that you don't want to marry me—

MARGARET. How can you say these things to me?

GRAY. But aren't they true?

MARGARET. You know—you know they're not true.

GRAY. Then what do you mean when you say, "I won't come?"

MARGARET. I mean—Hilary. I've got to put him first because—because he a weak. You- you're strong.

GRAY. Not strong enough to do without my birth-right. I want my wife and my children. I've waited a long while for you, Now you must come.

SYDNEY *covirs down the stairs, a red furred cloak over her ami. She pauses a fow steps from the bottom, afraid to break in on them.*

MARGARET. If Hilary's left alone he'll go mad again,

GRAY. Margaret—come.

MARGARET. How can I?

GRAY. Margaret, my own heart—come.

MARGARET. You dughtn't to torture me. I've got to do what's right.

GRAY. [*Darkening*] Are you coming with me? ! shan't ask it again.

MARGARET. Oh, God—You hear him ! What am I to do?

SYDNEY *cornea down another step.*

GRAY. Why, you're to do as you choose. I shau't force you. I'm not your turn-key. I'm not your beggar. We're free people, you and I. It's for you to say if you'll keep your—conscience, do yon call it ?- and lose—

MARGARET. I've lost what I love. There's no more to lose.

GRAY, You sing as sweetly as a toy nightingale. Almost *I'd* think you were real.

MARGARET [*Wounded*] I don't know what you mean.

GRAY. "What you love!" You don't know the meaning of the notes you use.

MARGARET. [*Very white, but her voice is steady*] Don't deceive yourself. I love you. I ache and faint for you. I starve —

SYDNEY. [*Appalled, whispering*] What is it? I don't know her.

MARGARET. I'm withering without you like cut grass in the sun. I love you. I love you. Can't you see how it is with me? But—

GRAY. There's no "but" in love.

MARGARET, What is it in me? There's a thing I can't do. I can't see such pain.

GRAY. [*Hoarsely*] Do you think, "can't suffer?"

MARGARET. I *am* you. But he—he's so defenceless. It's vivisection — like cutting a dumb beast about to make me well. I can't do it. I'd rather die of my cancer.

GRAY, [*The storm breaking*] Die then — you fool — you fool!

SYDNEY *descends another step. The cloak slides from her hands on to the baluster.*

GRAY. [*Without expression*] Good-bye.

MARGARET. [*Blindly*] Forgive—

GRAY. How can I ?

MARGARET. I would you—

GRAY. D'you think I bear you malice? It's not I. Why, to deny me, that's a little thing. I'll not go under because you're faithless. But what you're doing is the sin without forgiveness. You're denying—not me—but life. You're denying the spirit of life. You're denying—you're denying your mate.

SYDNEY [*Strung up to breaking point*] Mother, you shall not.

MARGARET. [*As they both turn*] Sydney !

SYDNEY. [*Corning down to them*] I tell you—I tell you, you shall not.

MARGARET. [*Sitting down, with a listless gesture*] I must. There's no way out.

SYDNEY. There is. For *you* there is. I've thought it all along, and now I know. Father—he's my job, not yours.

MARGARET. [*With a last flicker of passion*] D'you think I'll make a scapegoat of my own child?

SYDNEY. [*Sternly*] Can you help it? I'm his child. [*She throws herself down beside her*] Mother I Mother darling, don't you see? You're no good to him. You're scared of him. But I'm his own flesh and blood. I know how he feels. I'll make him happier than you can. Be glad for me. Be glad I'm wanted somewhere.

MARGARET. [*Struggling against the hope that u flooding her*] But Kit, Sydney—Kit?

SYDNEY. [*With a queer little laugh that ends, though it does not begin, quite naturally*] Bless him, I'll be dancing at his wedding in six months.

MARGARET. But all you ought to have—

SYDNEY. [*Jumping up flippantly*] Oh, I'm off getting married. I'm going to have a career.

MARGARET. —the love—the children—

SYDNEY. [*Strained*] No children for me, Mother. No children for me. I've lost my chance for ever.

MARGARET. [*Weakly*] No—no—

SYDNEY. [*Smiling down at her*] But you—you take it. I give it to you.

MARGARET. But—

SYDNEY. [*Dominant*] What's the use of arguing? I've made up my mind.

MARGARET. But if your father—

SYDNEY. [*At the end of her endurance*] Go away, Mother. Go away quickly. This is my job, not yours. [*She turns abruptly from them to the window, and stands staring out into the darkening garden.*]

MARGARET. [*Dazed*] So—so— [*She sways, hesitating, unbelieving, like a bird at the open door of its cage*] So—I can come,

GRAY *makes no answer.*

MARGARET. [*With a new full note in her voice*] Gray, I can come.

GRAY. [*Without moving*] Can you, Margaret?

MARGARET. [*In heaven*] I can come.

GRAY. [*Impassively*] Are you sure?

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MAKGARBT. [*In quick alarm*] What do you mean?

GRAY, [*Stonily*] Why, you could deny me. You've chopped and changed. I want proof that you've still a right to come.

MARGARET. [*Like a child*] You're angry with me?

GRAY. No.

MARGARET. You're angry with me.

GRAY. I want proof.

MARGARBT. I get frightened. I'm made so. Always I've been afraid—of Hilary—of everyone—of life. But now—you—you're angry, you're so angry, you're very angry with me—and I— [*She goes steadily across the room to him. He makes no movement*] I'm not afraid. [*She puts up her hands, and drawing him down to her kisses him on the mouth.*] Is that proof?

GRAY. [*Quietly*] Proof enough. Come.

He takes the cloak and throws it round her. They go out together. As SYDNEY, forgotten, stands looking after them, BASSETT enters with the tea-tray. She puts it down on the table and turns up the lights.

BASSETT. Is the gentleman staying to tea, miss?

SYDNEY. [*Correcting her*] Mr. Fairfield. It's my father, Bassett.

BASSETT. We thought so, miss?

SYDNEY. [*Smiling faintly*] Did you, Bassett?

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BASSBTT. He's got your way, miss 1 Quick-like !
[*She opens the drauring-room door*] Tea's ready,
ma'am, [*Outside the motor drives away.*]

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*Entering with HILARY*] Tea's
very late. [BASSETT *goes out.*]

HILARY. I thought I heard the sound of a car.
[*Suspiciously*] Where's your mother ?

SYDNEY. She's gone away.

HILARY. [*Stricken*] Gone?

SYDNEY. Gone away for good.

HILARY. Whore?

SYDNEY. Out of our lives.

HILARY. With—?

SYDNEY. [*Quickly*] Out of our lives.

Miss FAIRFIELD. [*Furiously*] This is your doing,
Sydney.

HILARY. [*Dazed*] Gone. Everything gone.

SYDNEY. I'm not gone.

HILARY. But that boy—?

SYDNEY. That's done with'

Miss FAIRFIBLD. TouVe jilted him V

SYDNBY. Yes.

Miss FAIRFIELD. Like mother, like daughter.

SYDNEY. Just so.

Miss FAIRFIBLD. I pray you get your punishment.

SYDNBY. Your prayers will surely be answered,
Auntie.

HILARY. [*Slowly*] It was a oruel thing to do.

SYDNEY, He'll get over it. Men—they're not Hkn

HILARY. [*Timidly*] You loved him?

SYDNEY. What's that to anyone but me?

HILARY. [*Peering at her*] You're crying.

SYDNEY. I'm not.

HILARY. You love him?

SYDNEY. I suppose so.

HILARY. Then why? Then why?

SYDNEY. We're in the same boat, Father.

Miss FAIRFIELD. Yes, that's the way they talk now, Hilary. They know too much, the young women. It upsets everything.

HILARY *sits down on the sofa*

HILARY. [*Broken*] I don't see ahead. I don't see what's to become of me. There's no-one.

SYDNEY. There's me.

HILARY. [*Not looking at her*] I should think you hate me.

SYDNEY. I need you just as badly as you need me.

HILARY. [*Fiercely*] It's your damn-clever doing that she went. D'you think I can't hate you?

SYDNEY. [*Close to him*] No, no, Father, you want me too much. We'll make a good job of it yet.

HILARY. [*His head in his hands*] What job?

SYDNEY. [*Petting him, coaxing him, loving him, her hands quieting his twitching hands, her strong will already controlling him*] Living. I've got such plans already, Father—Father dear. We'll do things. We'll have a good time somehow, you and I—you and I. Didn't you know you'd got a clever

daughter? Writing—painting—acting 1 We'll go on tour together. We'll make a lot of money. We'll have a cottage somewhere. You see, I'll make it up to you. I'll make you proud of me.

Miss FAIUFIELD. [*Surveying them.*] Proud of her 3 D'you see, Hilary? That's all she tl'inks of—self—self—self 1 Money, ambition—and sends that poor boy away. A parson's son 1 Not good enough for hor, that's what it is. She's like the rest of thx young women. Hard as nails ! Haid as nails !

SYDNEY [*Crying out*] Don t you listen to her, Father 1 Father, don't believe her 1 I'm not hard. I'm not hard.

*His arm goes round her with a gesture,
awkward, timid> yet fatherly,*

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

May-June, 1920.

Legend

A NOVEL

BEETHOVEN, Op. 57.



LEGEND

Messrs. Mitchell and Bent will shortly issue ' *The Life of Madaia Grey*' by Anita Serle: a critical biography based largely on private correspondence and intimate personal knowledge.

That was in *The Times* a fortnight ago. And now the reviews are beginning—

The Cult of Madaia Grey. . . .

The Problem of Madaia Grey. . . .

The Secret of Madaia Grey. . . .

I wish they wouldn't. Oh, I wish they wouldn't.

No admirer of the late Madaia Grey's arresting art can fail to be absorbed by these intimate and unexpected revelations . . .

Delicately, unerringly, Miss Serle traces to its source the inspiration of that remarkable writer. . . . And—this will please Anita most of all—

We ourselves have never joined in the chorus of praise that, a decade ago, greeted the appearance of ' *Eden Walls* ' and its successors, and in our opinion Miss Serle, in her biographical enthusiasm, uses the word *genius* a little too often and too easily. Madaia Grey has yet to be tried by that subtlest of literary critics, the *Man with the Scythe*. But whether or not we agree with Miss Serle¹'s estimate of her heroine, there can be no two questions as to the literary value of the ' *Life*' itself. It definitely places Miss Serle

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among the Boswells, and as we close its fascinating pages we find ourselves wondering whether our grandchildren will remember Miss Serle as the biographer of Madala Grey, or Madala Grey as the subject matter merely, of a chronicle that has become a classic.

That is to say—*La reine est morte. Vive la reine !* Anita will certainly be pleased. Well, I suppose she's got what she wants, what she's always wanted. She isn't a woman to change. The new portrait in the *Bookman* might have been taken when I knew her : the mouth's a trifle harder, the hair a trifle greyer; but no real change. But it amuses me that there should be her portrait in all the papers, and none of Madala Grey; not even in the *Life* itself. I can hear Anita's regretful explanations in her soft, convincing voice. She will make a useful little paragraph out of it—

Miss Serle, whose ' Life of Madala Grey ' is causing no small stir in literary circles, tells us that the brilliant novelist had so great a dislike of being photographed that there is no record of her features in existence. An odd foible in one who, in our own recollection[^] was not only a popular writer but a stnkingly beautiful woman.

And yet, from her heavy, solitary frame (we have no other pictures in our den) that ' beautiful woman,' with her flowered scarf and her handful of cowslips, is looking down at this moment at me—at me, and the press cuttings, and *The Times*, and Anita's t«ateful book. And she says, unmistakeably—

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⁴ Does it matter? What does it matter? ' laughing a little as she says it.

Then I laugh too, because Anita knows all about the portrait.

After all, does it matter? Does it matter what Anita says and does and writes? And why should I of all people grudge Anita her success? Honestly, I don't. And I don't doubt that the book is well written: not that I shall read it. There's no need: I know exactly what she will have written: I know how convincing it will be. But it won't be true. It won't be Madala Grey.

Of course Anita would say—' My dear Jenny, what do you know about it? You never even met her. You heard us, her friends, her intimates, talking about her for—how long? An hour? Two hours? And on the strength of that—that eaves-dropping five years ago ' (I can hear the nip in her voice still) ' you are so amusing as to challenge my personal knowledge of my dearest friend. Possibly you contemplate writing the story of Madala Grey yourself? If so, prny send me a copy.' And then the swish of her skirt. She always wore trains in those days, and she always glided away before one could answer.

But I could answer. I remember that evening so well. I don't believe I've forgotten a word or a movement, and if I could only write it down, those two hours would tell, as Anita's book never will, the story of Madala Grey.

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I ought to be able to write; because Anita is my mother's cousin; though I never saw her till I was eighteen.

Mother died when I was eighteen.

If she had not been ill so long it would have been harder. As it was—but there's no use in writing down that black time. Afterwards I didn't know what to do. The pension had stopped, of course. I'd managed to teach myself typing, though Mother couldn't be left much; but I didn't know shorthand, and I couldn't get work, and my money was dwindling, and I was getting scared. I was ready to worship Anita when her letter came. She was sorry about Mother and she wanted a secretary. If I could type I could come.

I remember how excited I was. I'd always lived in such a tiny place and we couldn't afford Mudie's. To go to London, and meet interesting people, and live with a real writer, seemed too good to be true. And it helped that Anita and her mother were relations. Mother used to stay with Great-aunt Serle when she was little. Somehow that made things easier to me when I was missing Mother more than usual.

In the end, after all those expectations, I was only three weeks with Anita. They were a queer three weeks. I was afraid of her. She was one of those people who make you feel guilty. But she was kind to me. I typed most of the day, for she was a fluent worker and never spared either of us; but

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she took me to the theatre once, and I used to pour out when interesting people came to tea. In the first fortnight I met nine novelists and a poet; but I never found out who they were, because they all called each other by their Christian names and you couldn't ask Anita questions. She had such a way of asking you why you asked. She used to glide about the room in a cloud of chiffon and cigarette smoke—she had half-shut pale eyes just the colour of the smoke—and pour out a stream of beautiful English in a pure cool voice; but if they interrupted her she used to stiffen and stop dead and in a minute she had glided away and begun to talk to someone else. Old Mrs. Serle used to sit in a corner and knit. She never dropped a stitch; but she always had her eyes on Anita. She was different from the rest of my people. She had an accent, not cockney exactly, but odd. She had had a hard life, I believe. Mother said of her once that her courage made up for everything. But she never told me what the everything was. Great-aunt's memory was shaky. One day she would scarcely know you, and another day she would be sensible and kind, very kind. She liked parties. People used to come and talk to her because she made them laugh; but every now and then, when Anita was being brilliant about something, she would put up her long gnarled finger and say—'Hush ! Listen to my daughter !' and her eyes would twinkle. But I never knew if she were proud of her or not.

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Everybody said that Anita was brilliant. She could take a book to pieces so that you saw every good bit and every bad bit separated away into little compartments. But she spoiled things for you, books and people, at least she did for me. She sneered, She said of the Baxter girl once, for instance—' She's really too tactful. If you go to tea with her you are sure to be introduced to your oldest friend.' And again—' She always likes the right people for the wrong reasons.'

Of course one knows what she meant, but I liked the Baxter girl all the same. Beryl Baxter—but everyone called her the Baxter girl. She was kind to me because I was Anita's cousin, and she used to talk to me when Anita wasn't in the mood for her. She asked me to call her ' Beryl' almost at once. Anita used to be awfully rude to her sometimes, and then again she would have her to supper and spend an evening going through her MSS. and I could tell that she was giving her valuable help. The Baxter girl used to listen and agree so eagerly and take it away to re-write. I thought she was dreadfully grateful. I hated to hear her. And when she was gone Anita would lean back in her chair with a dead look on her face and say—

⁴⁴ God help her renders ! Jenny, open the window. That girl reeks of patchouli." And then—" Why do I waste my time? "

And Great-aunt Serle in her corner would chuckle and poke and mutter, but not loud—

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" Why does she waste her time ? Listen to my daughter ! "

The next time the Baxter gir' came Anita would hardly speak to her.

The Baxter girl seemed to take it as a matter of course. But once she said to me, with a look on her face as if she were defending herself—

⁴⁴ Ah—but you don't write. You're not keen. You don't know what it means to be in the set."

⁴⁴ But such heaps of people come to see Anita," I said, " people she hardly knows."

" They're only the fringes," said the Baxter girl complacently. " They're riot in the Grey set. They don't come to the Nights. At least, only a few. Jasper Flood, of course—you've met him, haven't you?—and Lila Howe—*Masquerade*, you know, and *Sir Fortinbras*" The Baxter girl always ticketed everyone she mentioned. " And the Whitrieys. She used to stay with the Whitneys. And Roy Huth. And of course Kent Rehan."

" Kent Rehan ? "

" *The Kent Rehan*," said the Baxter girl.

Then I remembered. The vicar's wife always sent Mother the Academy catalogue after she had been up to town. I used to cut out the pictures I liked, and I liked Kent Rehan's. They had wind blowing through them, and sunshine, and jolly blobs that I knew must be raw colour, and always the same woman. But you could never see her face, only a cheek curve or a shoulder line. They were

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in the catalogue every year, and so I told the Baxter girl. She laughed.

" Yes, he's always on the line. Anita says that's the worst she knows of him. And of course the veiled lady——" she laughed again, knowingly, ⁴⁴ " But there is one full face, I believe. *The Spring Song* he calls it. But it's never been shown. Anita's seen it. She told me. He keeps it locked away in his studio. They say he's in love with her."

" With whom ? "

" Madala Grey, of course."

I said—

" Who is Madala Grey ? "

The Baxter girl had sunk into the cushions until she was prone. I had been wondering with the bit of mind that wasn't listening what the people at home would have said to her, with her cobweb stockings (it was November) and her coloured combs and her sprawl. It was a relief to see her sit up suddenly.

" ' Who's Madala Grey ! ' " Her mouth stayed open after she'd finished the sentence.

" Yes," I said. " Who is she ? "

" You mean to say you've never heard of Madala Grey? You've never read *Eden Walls*? Is there anyone in England who hasn't read *Eden Walls* ? "

" Heaps," I said. She annoyed me. She—they—they all thought me a fool at Anita's.

The Baxter girl sighed luxuriously.

" My word, I envy you 1 I wish I was reading

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Eden Walls for the first time—or *Ploughed Fields*. I don't care so much about *The Resting-place*" She laughed. "At least—one's not supposed to care about *The Resting-place*, you know. It's as much as one's life's worth—one's literary life."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Sentimental. Anita says so. She says she doesn't know what happened to her over *The Resting-place*."

"I like the title," I said.

"Yes, so do I. And I love the opening where— Oh, but you haven't read it. And you're Anita's cousin! What a comedy! Just like Anita though, not to speak of her."

"Why? Doesn't Anita like her?"

The Baxter girl was flat on the cushions again. She looked at me with those furtive eyes that always so strangely qualified her garrulity.

"Are you shrewd? Or was that chance?"

"What?"

"Doesn't Anita like her?"

"Doesn't she then?"

"Ah, now you're asking! Officially, very much. Too much," should say. And too much is just the same as the other thing, I think. Would you like Anita for your bosom friend?"

Naturally I said—

"Anita's been very kind to me." Anita's my cousin, after all. I didn't like the Baxter girl's tone.

"Oh, she's been kind to me." The Baxter girl

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caught me up quickly. She was like a sensitive plant for all her crudity. " Oh, I admire Anita. She's the finest judge of style in England. Jasper Flood says so. You mustn't think I say a word against Anita. Very kind to me she's been." Then, innocently, but her eyes were flickering again—" She was kind to Madala too, till——"

⁴⁴ Well?" I demanded

⁴⁴ Till Madala was kind to her. Madala's one of those big people. She'll never forget what she owes Anita—what Anita told her she owed her. After she made her own name, she made Anita's. Anita, being Anita, doesn't forget that."

⁴⁴ How d'you mean—made Anita's name? "

⁴⁴ Well, look at the people who come here—the people who count. What do you think the draw was? Anita? Oh yes, *now*. But they came first for Madala. Oh, those early days when *Eden Walls* was just out ! Of course Anita had sense for ten. She ran Madala for all she was worth."

⁴⁴ Then you do like Madala Grey? "

⁴⁴ I? " The Baxter girl looked at me oddly. ⁴⁴ She read my book. She wrote to me. That's why Anita took me up. She Jet me come to the Nights. She started them, you know. Somebody reads a story or a poem, and then it's talk till the milkman comes. Good times ! But now Madala's married she doesn't come often. Anita carries on like grim death, of course. But it's not the same. Last month it was dreary."

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" Is it every month ? "

" Yes. It's tomorrow again. Tomorrow's Sunday, isn't it ? It'll amuse you. You'll come, of course, as you're in the house."

"Will she? Herself?" I found myself reproducing the Baxter girl's eagerness.

" Not now." The common voice had deepened queerly. " She's very ill." She hesitated. " That's why I came today. I thought Anita might have heard. Not my business, of course, but——" She made an awkward, violent gesture with her hands. " Oh, a genius oughtn't to marry. It's wicked waste. Well, so long ! See you tomorrow night ! "

She left me abruptly.

I found myself marking time, as it were, all through that morrow, as if the evening were of great importance. The Baxter girl was always unsettling, or it may have been Anita's restlessness that affected me. Anita was on edge. She was writing, writing, all the morning. She was at her desk when I came down. There was a mass of packets and papers in front of her and an empty coffee cup. I believe she had been writing all night. She had that white look round her eyes. But she didn't need any typing done. Early in the afternoon she went out and at once Great-aunt, in her corner, put down her knitting with a little catch of her breath. But she didn't talk : she sat watching the door. I had been half the day at the window, fascinated by the

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fog. I'd never seen a London fog before. I found myself writing a letter in my head to Mother about it, about the way it would change from black to yellow and then clear off to let in daylight and sparrow-talk and the tramp-tramp of feet, and then back again to silence, and the sun like a ball that you could reach up to with your hand and hold. I was deep in my description—and then, of a sudden, I remembered that she wasn't there to write to any more. It was so hard to remember always that she was dead. I got up quickly and went to Anita's shelves" for a book. Great-aunt hadn't noticed anything. She was still watching the door.

The little back room that opened on to the staircase was lined to the ceiling with books, all so tidy and alphabetical. Anita lived for books, but I used to wonder why. She didn't love them. Her books never opened friendlily at special places, and they hadn't the proper smell. I ran my finger along the ' G's ' and pulled out *Eden Walls*.

I began in the middle of course. One always falls into the middle of a real person's life, and a book *is* a person. There's always time to find out their beginning afterwards when you've decided to be friends. It isn't always worth while. But it was with *Eden Walls*. I liked the voice in which the story was being told. Soon I began to feel happier. Then I began to feel excited. It said things I'd always thought, you know. It was extraordinary that it knew how I felt about things.

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There's a bit where the heroine comes to town and the streets scare her, because they go on, and on, and on, always in straight lines, like a corridor in a dream. Now how did she know of that dream? I turned back to the first page and began to read steadily.

When Anita's voice jerked me back to real life it was nearly dark. She was speaking to Great-aunt as she took off her wraps—

"The fog's confusing. I had to take a taxi to the tube. A trunk call is an endless business."

⁴⁶ Well? " said Great-aunt.

"Nothing fresh."

"Did *he* answer?"

Anita nodded.

"Was he——? Is she——? Did you ask——? What did he tell you, Anita?"

Anita stabbed at her hat with her long pins. She was flushing.

"The usual details. He spares you nothing. Have you had tea, Mother?" She rang the bell.

Great-aunt beat her hand on the arm of her chair in a feeble, restless way. When I brought her tea she said to me in her confidential whisper—

"Give it to my daughter. She's tired. She'll tell us when she's not so tired."

She settled herself again to watch; but she watched Anita, not the door.

And in a few minutes Anita did say, as the Baxter girl had said—

AC^

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" She's very ill." And then—" I always told you we ought to have a telephone. I can't be running out all the evening."

" Do they come tonight ? " said Great-aunt Serle.

Anita answered her coldly—

" They do. Why not ? "

Great-aunt tittered.

" Why not? Why not? Listen, little Jenny ! "

Anita, as usual, was quite patient.

" Mother, you mustn't excite yourself. Jenny, give Mother some more tea. What good would it do Madala to upset my arrangements? Besides, Kent will have the latest news. I think you may trust him." She gave that little laugh that was Great-aunt's titter grown musical. Then she turned to me.

" By the way, Jenny, I expect friends tonight. You needn't change, as you're in mourning. You'll see to the coffee, please. We'll hav^ the door open and the coffee in the little room. You might do it now while I dress."

The big drawing-room was divided from the little outer room by a curtained door. It was closed in the day-time for cosiness' sake, but when it was flung back the room was a splendid one. The small room held the books and a chair or two, and a chesterfield facing the door that opened on to the passage and the narrow twisting stairs. They were so dark that Anita kept a candle and matches in the hall; but one seldom troubled to light it. It

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was quicker to fumble one's way. Anita used to long for electric light; but she would not install it. Anita had good taste. The house was old, and old-fashioned it should stay.

I fastened back the door and re-arranged the furniture, and was sitting down to *Eden Walls* again when Great-aunt beckoned me.

" Go and dress, my dear ! "

" But Anita said——" I began.

She held me by the wrist, all nods and smiles and hoarse whispers.

" The pretty dress—to show a pretty throat—isn't there a pretty dress somewhere? I know! Put it on. Put it on. What a white throat I've a necklace somewhere—but then Anita would know. Mustn't tell Anita ! "

She pulled me down to her with fumbling, shaky hands.

" Tell me, Jenny, where's my daughter? "

" Upstairs, Auntie."

" Tell me, Jenny — any news? Any news, Jenny?"

I didn't know what to say to her. I was afraid of hurting her. She was so shaking and pitiful.

" Is it about Miss Grey, Auntie? "

¹⁴ Carey, Jenny—Carey, ^rs. John Carey. Good name. Good man. But Anita don't like MEL, Anita won't tell me. You tell me, Jenny ! "

" Auntie, it's all right. It's all right. She'll tell you, of course, when she hears again." And I

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soothed her as well as I could, till she let me loosen her hand from my wrist, and kiss her, and start her at her knitting again, so that I could finish making ready the room. But as I went to wash my hands she called to me once more.

" Yes, Auntie? "

" Put it on, Jenny. Don't ask my daughter. Pul it on."

She was a queer old woman. She made me want to cry sometimes. She was so frightened always, and yet so game.

But I went upstairs after supper and put on the frock she liked. Black, of course, but with Mother's lace fichu I liked myself in it too. I did rny hair high. I don't know why I took so much trouble except that I wanted to cheer myself up. It had been a depressing day in spite of *Eden Walls*. I looked forward to the stir of visitors. And then I was curious to see Kent Rehan.

When I came down the Baxter girl was already ihere, standing all by herself at the fire. She was strikingly dressed; but she looked stranded. I Pondered if Anita had been snubbing her.

Anita was shaking hands with Mr. Flood and with a lady whom 1 had not seen before. She was Monde, with greenish-golden hair and round eyes, rery black eyes that had no lights in them, not even *when* she smiled. She often smiled. She had a drawling voice and hardly spoke at all, except to Mr. Flood. If he talked to anyone else or walked

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away from her, she would watch him for a minute, and then say—'Jasper' with a sort of purr, not troubling to raise her voice. But he always heard and came. She wore a wonderful Chinese sha "vl, white, with gold dragons worked on it, and whenever she moved it set the dragons crawling. She was powdered and red-lipped like a clown, and I didn't really like her, but nevertheless there was something about her that was queerly attractive. When she smiled at me because I gave her coffee, I felt quite elated. But I didn't like her. Mr. Flood called her 'Blanche,' I never heard her other name.

Anita seemed very pleased to see them. I caught scraps.

"Am so glad—one's friends about one—such a strain waiting for news. I phoned this afternoon. No, the usual phrases. Anxious, of course, but I should certainly have heard if——Good of you to come! No chance of the Whitneys, I'm afraid—too much fog. And what are you reading to us?"

The Baxter girl, as I greeted her, stripped and re-dressed me with one swift look.

"My dear, it suits you! I wish I could look Victorian. But I'm vile in black. Have you seen Lila? I met her on the step. They've turned down *Sir Fortinbras* in America. Isn't it rotten luck? Anita said they would. Anita's always right. Any more news of Madala?"

Anita overheard her. She was suddenly gracious to the Baxter girl.

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" You may be sure I should always let you know at once. And what is this I hear about Lila ? Poor Lila ! It's the last chapter, I'm afraid. I advised her from the beginning that the American public will not tolerate—but dear Lila is a law unto herself." And then, as Miss Howe came in—" Lila, my dear ! How good of you to venture ! A night like this makes me wonder why I continue in London. Madala has urged me to move out ever since——No. No news. But Jasper's been energetic——" She circled mazily about them while I brought the coffee.

" Kent coming? " said Mr. Flood, fumbling with his papers.

Anita shrugged her shoulders.

" Who can account for Kent? It may dawn on him that he's due here—and again, it may not. It depends as usual, I suppose, on the new picture."

" Oh yes, there's a new one," recollected the Baxter girl carefully.

" There must be 1 He was literally flocculent yesterday." Miss Howe chuckled. " That can only mean one of two things. Art or——"

" —the lady ! Who can doubt? Well, if Carey doesn't object to his brotherly love continuing, I'm sure I don't. But I wish it need not involve his missing his appointments." Mr. Flood eyed his typescript impatiently.

Anita was instantly all tact.

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" Oh, we won't wait. Certainly not. Pull in to the fire. Now, Jasper ! "

But Miss Howe, as she swirled into Anita's special chair, her skirts overflowing either arm, abolished Mr. Flood and his typescript with a movement of her soft dimply hands.

" Oh, I'm not in the mood even for Jasper's efforts. I want to let myself go. I want to damn publishers—and husbands ! Damn them ! Damn them ! There! Am I shocking you, Miss Summer?" She smiled at me over their heads. She was always polite to me. I liked her. She was like a fat, pink paeony.

" Well, if you take my advice——" began Anita.

" My darling, I love you, but I don't want your advice. I only want one person's advice—ever—and she has got married and is doing her duty in that state of life——Hence I say—Damn husbands ! I tell you I want Madala to soothe me, and storm at the injustice of publishers for me, and then—no, not give me a brilliant idea for the last chapter, but make me tell her one, and then applaud me for it. *You* know, Anita ! " She dug at her openly.

I caught a movement in Great-aunt's corner,

" Coffee, Auntie?"

She gave me a goblin glance.

" My daughter ! " She had an air of introducing her triumphantly, " Listen' She don't like fat women."

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We listened. Anita's voice was mellow with cordiality.

" Yes indeed. Madala has often said to me that she thought you well worth encouraging."

Miss Howe laughed jollily.

" I admire your articles, Nita. I wilt when you review me. But you'll never write novels, darling. You've not the ear. Madala may have said that, but she didn't say it in that way."

" She certainly said it."

" Some day I'll ask her."

" Some day ! Oh, some day ! " The Baxter girl was staring at the fire. " Shall we ever get her back?"

" In a year I Let us give her a year!" Mr. Flood looked up at the lady beside him with a thin smile. I couldn't bear him. He sat on the floor, and he called you ' dear lady,' and sometimes he would take hold of your watch-chain and finger it as he talked to you. But he was awfully clever, I believe. He wrote reviews and very difficult poetry that didn't rhyme. Anita was generally mellifluous to him and she quoted him a good deal. She turned to him with just the same smile—

" Ah, of course ! You've met John Carey too."

" For my sins, dear lady—for my sins."

" Not the same sins, surely," breathed the blonde lady.

" As the virtuous Carey's ? Don't be rude to me I It's a fact—the man's a churchwarden. He

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carries a little tin plate on Sundays ! Didn't you tell me so, Anita ? No—we give her a year. Don't we, Anita ?"

" But what did she marry him for ? " wailed the Baxter girl.

They all laughed.

"Copy, dear lady, copy 1 " Mr. Flood was enjoying himself. " Why will you have ideals ? Carey was a new type."

" But she needn't have married him ! " insisted the Baxter girl. The argument was evidently an old one.

" She, if I read her aright, could have dispensed with the ceremony, but the churchwarden had his views. Obviously ! Can't you imagine him—all whiskers and wedding-ring ? "

" But I thought he was clean-shaven ! I thought he was good-looking ! " I sympathized with the Baxter girl's dismay.

" Ah—I speak in parables——"

" You do hate him, don't you ? " said Miss Howe with her wide, benevolent smile. " Now, I wonder——"

Mr. Flood flushed into disclaimers, while the woman beside him looked at Miss Howe with half-closed eyes.

" I ? How could I ? Our orbits don't touch.," approved, I assure you. An invaluable experience for our Madala ! A year of wedded love, another of wedded boredom, and then — a master-piece,

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dear people ! Madala Grey back to us, a giantess refreshed. Gods ! what a book it will be ! "

⁴¹ " I wonder," said Miss Howe vaguely.

Anita answered her with that queer movement of the head that always reminded me of a pouncing lizard.

" No need ! I've watched Madala Grey's career from the beginning."

" For this I maintain—" Mr. Flood ignored her—" *Eden Walls* and *Ploughed Fields* may be amazing (*The Resting-place* I cut out. It's an indiscretion. Madala caught napping) but they're preliminaries, dear people! mere preliminaries, believe me."

" I sometimes wonder——" Miss Howe made me think of Saladin's cushion in *The Talisman*. She always went on so softly and imperviously with her own thoughts—" Suppose now, that she's written herself out, and knows it? "

The Baxter girl gave a little gasp of horrified appreciation.

" So the marriage——? "

" An emergency exit."

But Anita pitied them aloud—

" It shows how little you know Madala, either of you."

" Does anyone? Do you?"

Anita smiled securely.

" The type's clear, at least." Mr. Flood looked round the circle. His eyes shone. " *Une grande*

LEGEND

amour&use—that I've always maintained. Carey may be the first—but he won't be the last."

"Is he the first? How did she come to write *Tht Resting-place* then? Tell me that!" Anita thrust at him with her forefinger and behind her, in the corner I saw the gesture duplicated.

"So I will when I've read the new book, dear lady."

"If ever it writes itself," Miss Howe underlined him.

"As to that—I give her a year, as I say. Once this business is over—" his voice mellowed into kindness—"and good luck to her, dear woman——"

"Ah, good luck!" said Miss Howe and smiled at him.

"Once it's over, I say——"

"But she *will* be all right, won't she?" said the Baxter girl.

"I should certainly have been told——" began Anita.

Miss Howe harangued them—

"Have you ever known Madala Grey fail yet? She'll be all right. She'll pull it off—triumphantly. You see! But as for the book—if it comes——"

"When it comes," corrected Mr. Flood.

"What's that?" said Anita sharply.

There was a sound in the passage, a heavy sound of feet. It caught at my heart. It was a sound that I knew. They had come tramping up the stairs like that when they fetched away Mother

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Thud—stumble—thud I shivered. But as the steps came nearer they belonged to but one man. The door opened and the fog and the man entered together. Everyone turned to him with a queer long flash of faces.

"Kent!" cried Anita, welcoming him. Then her voice changed. "Kent! What's wrong? What is it?"

He shut the door behind him and stood, his back against it, staring at us, like a man stupified.

The Baxter girl broke in shrilly—

"He's wired. He's had a wire!" She pointed at his clenched hand.

Then he, too, looked down at his own hand. His fingers relaxed slowly and a crush of red and grey-paper slid to the floor.

"A son," he said dully.

"Ah!" A cry from the corner by the fire eased the tension. Great-aunt Serle was clapping her hands together. Her face was wrinkled all over with delight. "The good girl! The pretty— And a son too! A little son! Oh, the good girl!"

Anita turned on her, her voice like a scourge—

"Be quiet, Mother!" Then—"Well, Kent? Well?"

"Well?" he repeated after her.

"Madala? How's Madala? What about Madala Grey?"

"Dead!" he said.

Dead. The word fell amongst the group of us

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in the circle of lamp-light, like a plummet into a pool. *Dead.* For an instant one could hear the blank drop of it. Then we broke up into gestures and little cries, into a babel of dismay and concern and rather horrible excitement.

Instinctively I separated myself from them. It was neither bad news nor good news to me, but it recalled to me certain hours, and they—it was as if they enjoyed the importance of bereavement. Anita talked. Miss Howe was gulping, and dabbing at her eyes. The Baxter girl kept on saying—'Dead?' 'Dead?' under her breath, and with that wide nervous smile that you sometimes see on people's faces when they are far enough away from laughter. Great-aunt had shrunk into her corner. I could barely see her. The blonde lady had her hand on her heart and was panting a little, as if she had been running, and yet, as always, she watched Mr. Flood. He had pulled out a note-book and a fountain-pen and was shaking at it furiously, while his little eyes flickered from one to another—even to me. I felt his observance pursue me to the very edge of the ring of light, and drop again, baulked by the dazzle, as I slipped past him into the swinging shadows beyond. It's odd how lamp-light cuts a room in two: I could see every corner of the light and shadow alike, and even the outer room was not too dim for me to move about it easily; but to those directly under the lamp I knew I had become all but invisible, a blur among

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the other blurs that were curtains and pictures and chairs. They remembered me as little as, absorbed and clamorous, they remembered the man who had brought them their news, and then had brushed his way through question and comment to the deep alcove of the window in the outer room and there stood, rigid and withdrawn, staring out through the uncurtained pane at the solid night beyond. I could not see his face, only the outline of a big and clumsy body, and a hand that twitched and fumbled at the tassel of the blind.

And all the while Anita, white as paper, was talking, talking, talking, saying how great the shock was, and how much Miss Grey had been to her—a stream of sorrow and self-assertion. It was just as if she said—⁴ Don't forget that this is far worse for me than for any of you. Don't forget——'

But the others went on with their own thoughts.

"Dead? Gone? It's not possible." Miss Howe was all blubbered and deplorable. "What shall we do without her?"

"Yes—that's it!" The Baxter girl edged-in her chair to her like a young dog asking for comfort.

"For that matter, from the point of view of literature," Anita's voice grated, "she died a year ago."

"It's not possible! That's what I say—it's not possible!" It was strange how even the Baxter girl ignored Anita. "Dead! I can't grasp it. It's—it's too awful. She was so vivid."

LEGEND

"Awful?" Mr. Flood was biting his fingers. "Awful? Nothing of the kind. You know that Holbein cut—no, it's earlier stuff—'Death and the Lady,' crude, preposterous. And *that's* what it is. Ola Bones and Madala Grey? That's not tragedy, that's farce! Farce, dear people, farce!" Then his high tripping voice broke suddenly. "Dead? Why, she wasn't thirty!"

"She was twenty-six last June," said Anita finally. "Midsummer Day. I know."

"June!" He caught it up. "Just so—June! Isn't that characteristic? Isn't that Madala all over? Of course she was born in June. She would be. She *was* June. June——

Her lips and her roses yet maiden,
A summer of storm in her eyes——"

Miss Howe winced.

"For God's sake don't Swinburnize, Jasper! She's not your meat. Oh, I want to cry—I want to cry! Dead—at twenty-six——"

"In child-bed," finished Anita bitterly, and her voice made it an unclean and shameful end.

Mr. Flood's glance felt its way over her, hatefully. It never lifted to her face.

"Of course from your point of view, dear lady——" he began, and smiled as he made his little bow of attention.

I thought him insolent, and so, I believe, did Miss Howe. She lifted her head sharply and I thought she would have spoken; but Anita gave her no time.

LEGEND

There was always a sort of thick-skinned valliance about Anita.

" Oh, but you all know my point of view. She knew it herself. I never concealed it. You know how I devoted myself—"

" A bye-word, a bye-word I" said Miss Howe under her breath.

" —but not so much to her as to her gift. I should never allow a personal sentiment to overpower me. I haven't the time for it. But she had the call, she had the gift, and because she had it I say, as I have always said, that for Madala Grey, marriage——"

" And all it implies——" Mr. Flood was still smiling.

She accepted it.

" Marriage and all that it implies was apostasy, I stand for Literature."

" And Literature," with a glance at the others, " is honoured."

They wearied me. It seemed to me that they sparked and fizzled and whirred with the sham life of machinery: and like machinery they affected me. For at first I could not hear anything but them, and then they confused and tired me, and last of all they faded into a mere wall-paper of sound, and I forgot that they were there, save that I wondered now and then, as stray sentences shrilled out of the buzz, that they were not yet oppressed into silence.

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For there was grief abroad—a grief without shape, without sound, without expression—a quality, a pulsing essence, a distillation of pure pain. From some centre it rayed out, it spread, it settled upon the room, imperceptibly, like the fall of dust. It reached me. I felt it. It soaked into me. I ached with it. I could not sit quiet. I was not drawn, I was impelled. *Dead*—the dull bewildered voice was still in my ears. *That* I heard. But it was statement, not appeal. It was not his suffering that demanded relief, but some responding capacity for pain in me that awoke and cried out restlessly that such anguish was unlawful, beyond endurance, that still it I must, I must!

I rose. I looked round me. Then I went very softly into the outer room.

He was still standing at the window. The street lamp, level with the sill, was quenched to a yellow gloom. It lit up the wet striped branches and dead bobbins of the plane-tree beside it, and the sickly undersides of its shrivelled last leaves. I never thought a tree could look so ghastly. Against that unnatural glitter and the luminous thick air the man and the half-drawn curtain stood out in solid, unfamiliar bulk of black.

I came and stood just behind him. He was so big that I only reached his shoulder. He may have heard me: I think he did; but he did not turn. I was not frightened of him. That was so queer, because as a rule I can't talk to strangers. I get

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nervous and red, and foolish-tongued, especially with men. Of course I knew all the usual men, the doctor at home, and the church people, and husbands that came back by the five-thirty, and now all Anita's friends, and Mr. Flood; but I never had anything to say to them or they to me. But with Kent Rehan, somehow, it was different. He was different. I never thought—'This is a strange man.' I never thought—'He doesn't know me: it's impertinent to break in upon him: what will he think?' I never thought of all that. I never thought about myself at all. I was just passionately desiring to help him and I didn't know how to do it.

I think I stood there for four or five minutes, trying to find words, opening my lips, and then catching back the phrase before a sound came, because it seemed so poor and meaningless. And all the while the Baxter girl's words were running in my head—'They say he was in love with her.'

With her—with Madala Grey. She was the key. I had the strangest pang of interest in this unknown woman. Who was she? What was she? What had she been? What had she done so to centre herself in so many, in such alien lives? What had she in common for them all? Books, books, books—*Pd* never heard of her books! And she was married. Yet the loss of her, unpossessed, could bring such a look (as he turned restlessly from the window at last) such a look to Kent Rehan's face.

LEGEND

I was filled with a sort of anger against that dead woman, and I envied her. I never saw a man look so—as if his very soul had been bruised. It was not, it was never, a weak face, and it was not a young one; yet in that instant I saw in it, and clearly, its own forgotten childhood, bewildered by its first encounter with pain. It was that fleeting look that touched me so and gave me courage, so that I found myself saying to him, very low and quickly, and with a queer authority—

"It won't always hurt so much. It will get easier. I promise you it will. It does. Truly it does. In six months—I *do* know."

He looked down at me strangely.

I went on because I had to, but it was difficult. It was desperately difficult. I could hear myself blundering and stammering, and using hateful slangy phrases that I never used as a rule.

"I had to tell you. It isn't cheek. I know—it hurts like fun. It'll be worst out of doors. You see them coming, you see them just ahead of you, and then it isn't them. But it won't always hurt so horribly. I promise you. One manages. One gets used to living with it. I know."

He looked at my black dress.

"Your husband?"

"No. Mother."

He said no more. But he did not go away from me. We stood side by side at the window.

The voices in the other room insisted themselves

LEGEND

into my mind again, against my will, like the ticking of a clock in the night. I was thinking about him, not them. But Anita called to me to put coal on the fire and, once among them, I did not like to go back to him again.

They had re-grouped themselves at the hearth. Miss Howe was in the chair with the chintz cover that was as pink and white and blue-ribboned as she herself. The Baxter girl crouched on the pouf and the fire-light danced over her by fits and starts till, what with her violet dress and her black boy's head with the green band in it and that orange glow upon her, she looked like one of the posters in the Tube. The blonde lady had pushed back her chair to the edge of the lamp-light, so that her face was a blur and her white dress yellow-grey. Her knees made a back for Mr. Flood sitting cross-legged at her feet, and watching the Baxter girl as if he admired her. Once the blonde lady put her hand on his shoulder, and he caught it and played with the rings on it while he listened to her, and yet still watched the Baxter girl. She went on whispering, her hand in his, till at last he put back his head and caught her eye and laughed. Then she leaned back again as if she were satisfied. But I thought—'How I should hate to have that dank hair rubbing against my skirt.' Beside Mr. Flood lay the MS. he had brought, but I think Anita had forgotten it. She, sitting at the table in her high-backed chair (she never lolled), was still

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talking, indeed they were all talking about this Madala Grey. Anita's voice was as pinched as her face.

" Oh, I knew from the first what it would be ! She could never do anything by halves. She had no moderation. The writing, the work, all that made her what she was, tossed aside, for a whim, for a madness, for a man. I can't help it—it makes me bitter."

" Do you grudge it her so?" The Baxter girl looked at her wonderingly. " I kicked at it too, of course. We all did, didn't we? But now, I like to think how happy she looked the last time she came here. Do you remember? I liked that blue frock. And the scarf with the roses—I gave her that. Liberty. She was thin though. She always worked too hard. Poor Madala ! Heigh-ho, the gods are jealous gods."

Anita stared in front of her.

" Just gods. She served two masters. She was bound to pay."

" You are hard," said the Baxter girl in a low voice.

Miss Howe rocked herself.

"But don't you know how she feels? I do. It's the helplessness——"

Anita's pale eye met and held her glance as if she resented that sympathy. Then, as if indeed she were suddenly grown weak, she acquiesced.

" I suppose so. Yes, it's the helplessness. ' If

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this didn't happen '—' If that weren't so '—Little things, little things—and they govern one. A broken doll—a cowslip ball—stronger than all my strength. And she needn't have met Carey. It was just a chance. If I'd known—that day ! I used to ask her questions, just to make her talk. I remember asking her about her old home—more to set her off than anything. I said I'd like to see it some day. It was true. I was interested. But it was only to make her talk. But she—oh, you know how she foamed up about a thing. ' My old home ! Would you, Anita? Would you like to come? Wouldn't it bore you, Anita? It's all spoiled, you know. But I go down now and then. Nobody remembers me. It's like being a ghost. Oh, *I feel* for ghosts. Would you really like to come? Shall we go soon? Shall we go *today*? ' And then, of course, down we go. And then we meet Carey. And then the play begins."

Miss Howe shook her head.

" Ends."

Anita accepted it.

" Ends. Then the play ends." And then, frowning—" If I'd known that day—if I'd known I was warned, too. That's strange. I've never thought of it from that day to this. If I were an old wife now——" She shivered.

" What happened? " said the Baxter girl curiously.

" Oh well, off we went! We had a carriage to ourselves. I was glad. I thought she might talk."

LEGEND

" And you always tried to make her talk," said Miss Howe softly.

Anita went on without answering her.

" She grew quite excited as we travelled down, talking about her ' youth.' She always spoke as if she were a hundred."

" She put something into that youth of hers, I shouldn't wonder," said Miss Howe.

" She did. The things she told me that day. I knew she had been in America, but I never dreamed——She landed there, if you please, without a penny in her pocket, without a friend in the world."

" I never understood why she went to America," said Miss Howe. " I asked her once."

" What did she say? " said Anita curiously.

" To make her fortune. But I never got any details out of her."

" Didn't you know? " said Anita. " Her people emigrated. The father failed. It happened when Madala was eighteen, and she and her mother persuaded him, expecting him, literally, to make their fortunes. The mother seems to have been an erratic person. Irish, I believe. Beautiful. Extravagant. I have always imagined that it was her extravagance—but Madala and the husband seem to have adored her. I remember Madala saying once that her father had been born unlucky,⁴ except when he married Mother! ' I suspect, myself, that that was the beginning of his ill-luck.

LEGEND

Anyhow, when the crash came, they gathered together what they had and started off on some romantic notion of the mother's to make their fortune farming. America. Steerage. The *Sylvania*."

" *Sylvania*? That's familiar. What was it? A collision, wasn't it? "

" No, that was the *Empress of Peru*. The *Sylvania* caught fire in mid-ocean—a ghastly business. There were only about fifty survivors. Both her people were drowned."

" Oh, that's what she meant," began Miss Howe, " that time at the Academy. We were looking at a storm-scape, and she said—' People don't know. It's not like that. They wouldn't try to paint it if they knew.' She was quite white. Of course I never dreamed——Poor old Madala ! Well, what happened? "

" Oh, she reached America in what she stood up in. There was a survivors' fund, of course, but money melts in a city when you're strange to it."

" Couldn't she have come back to England? "

" I believe she had relations over here, but her mother had quarrelled with them all in turn. They didn't appreciate her mother and that was the unforgivable sin for Madala. She'd have starved sooner than ask them to help her. I shouldn't wonder if she did, too 1—half starve anyway. I shouldn't wonder if those first bare months haven't revenged themselves at last."

LEGEND

" Oh, if one had known ! " began the Baxter girl. " How is it that no-one ever knows—or cares ? "

" You ? You were a schoolgirl. Who had heard of her in those days ? But she made friends. There was a girl, a journalist, who had been sent to interview the survivors. She seems to have helped her in the beginning. She found her a lodging—oh, can't you see how she uses that lodging in *Eden Walls* ?—and gave her occasional hack jobs, typing, and now and then proof-reading. Then she got some work taken, advertisement work, little articles on soaps and scents and face-creams that she used to illustrate herself. She was comically proud of them. She kept them all."

" I suppose in her spare time she was already working at *Eden Walls* ? "

" No. I asked her. And she said—' Oh no, I was too miserable. Oh, Anita, I was miserable.' And then she began again telling funny stories about her experiences. No, she was back in England before she began *Eden Walls*. However, she seems to have made quite a little income at last, even to have saved. And then, just when she began to see her way before her to a sort of security, then she threw it all up and came home."

" Just like Madala ! But why ? "

" Heaven knows ! Home-sick, she said."

" But she hadn't got a home ! "

" It was England—the English country—the

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south country—the Westering Hill country. She used to talk about it like—like a lover."

"Isn't that more probable?" said Mr. Flood.

"What?"

"A lover?"

"Carey?"

"Not necessarily Carey."

Anita looked at him with a certain approval.

"Ah—so you've thought of that too? Now what exactly do you base it on?"

He shrugged and smiled.

"Delightfullest—my thoughts are thistledown."

"But you have your theory?" She pinned him down. "I see that you too have your theory."

"Our theory." He bowed.

"You've got wits, Jasper."

"What are you two driving at?" Miss Howe fidgeted.

"We're evolving a theory—a theory of Madala Grey. Who lived in the south country, Anita?"

"Carey, for that matter."

"Matters not. She didn't come home for Carey. You can't make books without copy. Not her sort of book. Any more than you can make bricks without straw. But she didn't make her bricks from his straw, that I'll swear."

"No, she didn't come home for Carey," said Anita. "I tell you, that was the day she met him. It's barely a year ago. She had made her name twice over by then. She was already casting about for

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her third plot. I think it was that that made her so restless. She'd grown very restless. But she certainly didn't come home for Carey."

"Then why?"

" Homesick."

" That's absurd."

" I'm telling you what she said. She insisted on it. She used a queer phrase. She said—' I longed for home till my lips ached.' "

The lady Nvith Mr. Flood stirred in her shadows.

" She didn't imagine that. That happens. That is how one longs——" She broke off.

"For home?" he said, with that smile of his that ended at his mouth and left his eyes like chips of quartz.

She answered him slowly, him only—

" I suppose, with some women, it could be for home. If she says so——That is what confounds one in her. She knows—she proves that she knows, in a phrase like that, things that (when one thinks of her personality) she *can't* know—couldn't know. It's inexplicable. ' Till one's lips ache '— Oh, Lord ! " She laughed harshly.

Anita looked at them uncertainly.

" Well, that's what she said. And to judge from her description Westering was something to be homesick for. I expected a paradise."

" Westering? That's quite a town."

" Yes, I know. There's a summer colony. Madala mourned over it. She was absurd. She

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raced me out of the station and up the hill, and would scarcely let me look about me till we were at the top, because the lower end of the village had been built over. It might have been the sack of Rome to hear her—' Asphalt paths ! Disgraceful! The grocer used to have *blue* blinds. They've spoiled the village green.' And so it went on until we reached Upper Westering."

" Oh, where they live now? "

" Yes. And then she turned to me and beamed—' *This is my country.*' It certainly is a pretty place. There's a fine view over the downs; but too hilly for me. We climbed up and down lanes and picked ridiculous bits of twig and green stuff till I protested. Then she took me into the churchyard. We wandered about: very pleasant it was : such a hot spring day, and pretty pinkish flowers—what did she call the stuff?—cuckoo-pint, springing from the graves—and daffodils. Then we sat down in the shadow of the church to eat our lunch. We began to discuss architecture and I was growing interested, really beginning to enjoy myself—some of it was pre-Norman—when a man climbed over the stile from the field behind the church, and came down the path towards us. As he passed, Madala looked up and he looked down, and up she jumped in a moment. ' Why,' she said, ⁴ I do believe—I do believe—' You know that little chuckly rise in her voice when she's pleased—' I do believe it's you I' ' Oh, Madala,' I said, ' the sandwiches 1 1'

LEGEND

They were in a paper on her lap, you know. She had scattered them right and left. But I might have talked to the wind. I must say he had perfectly respectable manners. He turned back at once, and smiled at her, and hesitated, and began to pick up the sandwiches, though he evidently didn't know her. 'Oh,' she said, "'don't you remember? Aren't you Dr. Carey? You mended my camel when I was little. I'm Madala!' She was literally brimming over with pleasure. But, you know, such a silly way to put it! If she had said ⁴ Madala Grey' he would have known in a moment. There were a couple of *Eden Walls* on the bookstall as we went through. I saw them. However, he remembered her then. He certainly seemed pleased to see her, in his awkward way. He stood looking down at her, amused and interested. People always got so interested in Madala. Haven't you noticed it? Even people in trams. Though I thought to myself at the time—'How absurd Madala is! What can they have in common?' Yes, I thought it even then."

"Well, what had they in common?"

"Heaven knew! She was ten and he was twenty-five when they last met. He knew her grand-people: he had mended her dolls for her: he lived in her old home: that, according to her, was all that mattered. She said to me afterwards, I remember, 'Just imagine seeing him! I was pleased to see him. He belongs in, you know.'

LEGEND

' No, Madala,' I said, ' I don't know. Such a fuss about a man you haven't seen since you were a child I call it affectation. It's a slight on your real friends.' ' Oh,' she said, ' but he belongs in.' She looked quite chastened. She said—' Nita, it wasn't affectation. I believe he was pleased too—honestly f' He was. Who wouldn't be? You know the effect she used to make."

" What did he say? " asked the Baxter girl.

" Oh, he looked down at her as if he were shy. Then he said—'You've a lorrng memory, Madala 1 ' Yes, he called her Madala from the first. It annoyed me. She said—' Oh, do you remember when Mother was so ill once? You were very kind to me then.' Then she said something which amazed me. I'd known her for two years before she told me anything about that *Sylvania* tragedy, but to him she spoke at once. ' They're dead,' she said, ' Mother and Father. They're drowned. There isn't anyone.' But her voice t It made me quite nervous. I thought she was going to break down. He said, with a stiff sort of effort—' Yes. I heard.' That was all. Nothing sympathetic. He just stood and looked at her."

" Well? " said Miss Howe impatiently.

" Oh—nothing else. I finished picking up the sandwiches. She introduced me, but I don't think he realized who I was. It annoyed me very much that she insisted on his eating lunch with us. As I said to her afterwards, it wasn't suitable. Buns

LEGEND

in a bag 1 Rut there he sat on a damp stone, (he gave Madala his overcoat to sit upon) perfectly contented. I confess I wasn't cordial. But he noticed nothing. Obtuse I That was how I summed him up from the first—obtuse ! And no conversation whatever. Madala did the talking- I believe she asked after every cat and dog for twenty miles round. And her lack of reticence to a comparative stranger was amazing. She told him more about herself in half an hour than she had told me in four years. But she was an unaccountable creature.

" Yes, that's just it. One never knew what Madala would do next, and yet when she'd done it, one said—' Of course ! Just what Madala *would* do ! ' But it wasn't like her to neglect you, Nita 1 "

" Oh, she noticed after a time. She began to be uncomfortable. I—withdrew myself, as it were, You know my way. She didn't like that. She tried—I will say that for her—she did try to direct the conversation towards my subjects. Useless, of course. He was, not illiterate—no, you can't say illiterate—but curiously unintellectual. Socialism now—somehow we got on to socialism. That roused him. I must say, though he expressed himself clumsily, that he had ideas. But so limited, He had never heard of Marx' Bernard Shaw was barely a name to him. Socialism—his socialism—when we disentangled **it**, was only another word for the proper feeding of **the** local infants—drains—

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measles—the village schools. Beyond that he was mute. But Madala chimed in with details of American slum life, and roused him at once. They grew quite eloquent. But not one word, if you please, of her own work. Anything and everything but her work. He did ask her what she was doing. 'Oh,' said she in an offhand way, 'I scribble. Stories.' And then—'It earns money, and it kills time.' Yes, that's exactly how she put it. 'Madala!' I said, 'that's not the spirit—I'd never heard her use such a tone before. She had such high ideals of art. It jarred me. I thought that she ought to have known better. But she looked at me in such a curious way—defiant almost. She said—'It's my own spirit, Nita. Oh, let me have a holiday!' And at that up she jumped and left us sitting there, and wandered off to the stile and was over it in a second. We sat still. The hedge hid her. Then we heard her call—'Cowslips! Oh, cowslips!' I thought he would go when she called, but he sat where he was, listening. It was one of those hot, still days, you know. There was a sort of spell on things. There were bees about. We heard a cart roll up the road. I wanted to get up and talk, make some kind of diversion, and yet I couldn't. We heard her call again—'Hundreds of cowslips! I'm going to make a cowslip ball.' Her voice sounded far away, but very clear. And there was a scent of may in the air, and dust—an intoxicating smell.

LEGEND

It made me quite sleepy. It was just as if time stood still. Three o'clock's a drowsy time, I suppose. And he never stirred—just sat there stupidly. But I was too sleepy to be bored with him. Presently hack she came. She had picked up her skirt and her petticoat showed—it war, that lavender silk you gave her, Lila. So unsuitaole, you know, on those dirty roads. And her skirt was full of cowslips. She was just a dark figure against the sky until she was close to us; hut then, I thought that she looked pretty, extremely pretty. Bright cheeks, you know, and her eyes so blue——"

" Grey—•" said Mr. Flood, " the grey eyes of a goddess."

" They looked blue, and she didn't look like a goddess. She looked like a little girl. Well, there she stood, with her grey skirt and her lavender silk, and her cowslips—you know they have a sweet smell, cowslips, a very sweet smell—and tumbled them all down on the tombstone. Then she wanted string. Carey seemed to wake up at that. He'd been looking at her as if he had dreamed her. He produced string. He was that sort of man. Then she made her cowslip ball. I held one end of the string and he held the other, and she nipped the stalks off the flowers and strung them athwart it. That is the way to make a cowslip ball."

" Nita, I love you ! " cried Miss Howe for the second time, and the others laughed.

She stopped. She stiffened.

LEGEND

⁴¹ I don't know what you mean."

" Ne' mind 1 Go on 1 "

She said offendedly—

" There's nothing more to tell. We got up and came away."

But as we sat silently by, still waiting, the storyteller crept back into her face.

" Oh, yes—" up went her forefinger. " It was then that it happened. We went stumbling over the graves, round to the east end, to see the lepers' window, a particularly interesting one. Ruskin mentions it. Yes, Carey came with us. There's a little bit of bare lawn under the window before the stones begin again, and as we crossed it Madala gave a kind of shuddering start. He said—' Cold ? ' smiling at her. She shivered again, in spite of herself as it were, for she'd been joking and laughing, and said—' Someone must be walking over my grave.' And at that he gave her such a look, and said loudly in a great rough voice—' Rubbish ! don't talk such rubbish ! ^J Really, you know, the tone ! And I thought to myself then as I've thought many times since—' At heart the man's a bully—that's what the man is.' But Madala laughed. We didn't stay long after that. The window was a disappointment—restored. There was nothing further to see and Madala was quite right—it was chilly. The sky had clouded over and there was a wind. I thought it time to go. Madala made no objection. She had grown curiously quiet. She

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tired easily, you know. And he didn't say another word. Quite time to *go*. I thought we might try for the earlier train, so we went off at last in a hurry. No, he didn't come with us: we shook hands at the gate. And when I looked back a minute later he had turned away. We caught our train."

There was a little paustf that Miss Howe ended.

" Queef 1 " she said.

Anita stared at them. Her hands twitched.

" Oh, I'm a practical person, but—' You're walking on my grave,' she said. And there or thereabouts, I suppose, she'll lie."

" Coincidence," said Mr. Flood quickly.

" Of course. I never thought of it again. Nor did Madala for that matter, though she was quiet enough in the train. There she sat, looking out of the window and smiling to herself. But then she was always like that after any little excitement, very quiet for an hour, re-living it—literally. I think, you know," she hesitated, " that that was the secret of her genius. Her genius was her memory. *She liked whatever stie looked on——*"

" And her looks were certainly everywhere," said the blonde lady in her drawling voice.

" Just so. But it didn't end there. She remembered. She remembered uncannily. She was like a child picking up pebbles from the beach every holiday, and spending all the rest of its year polishing. She turned them into jewels. The process

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used to fascinate me—professionally, you know. You could see her mind at work on some trifling incident, fidgeting with it, twisting it, dropping it, picking it up again, till one wearied. And then a year later, or two years, or three years, or ten years maybe, you'll pick up a novel or a story, and there you'll find it, cut, graved, polished, set in diamonds, but—the same pebble, if one has the wit to see,"

"Well, what did she say?" Miss Howe cut through the theory impatiently.

Anita frowned. She disliked being hurried.

"Oh, that day? very little. I was surprised. She usually enjoyed pouring herself out to me. But no, she just sat and smiled. It irritated me. ⁴ What is it, Madala? ' I said at last. She stared at me as if she had never seen me before. ' I don't know,' she said in her vague way. And then—¹ Wasn't it a lovely day? ' I waited. I knew she would go on sooner or later. Presently she said—' That stone we sat on was damp. He was quite right.' Then she said, thinking aloud as it were—' You know, if a man has a really pleasant voice, I like it better than women's voices. It's so steady.' And then—⁴ What did you think of him, Anita? ' "

Miss Howe chuckled.

"And you said?"

"Oh, I said what I could. I didn't want to hurt her feelings. It was so obvious that the place and everyone in it was beglamoured for her. I said that he seemed a worthy, harmless person, or some-

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thing to that effect. I forget exactly how I phrased it—I was tactful, of course. Oh, I remember, I said that she ought to put him into a book—that the old country doctors were disappearing, like the farmers and the parsons. I'm sure I appeared interested. But all she said was—' Old ? He's not old. Would you call him old ? ' ' That was a figure of speech,' I said. ⁴ I was thinking of the type. But all the same you can't describe him as young, Madala.' ' Oh, he's not a boy," she said. ' No-one ever said he was a *boy*S She didn't say any more. But just as we were getting out at Victoria she cried—' My cowslips ! Anita, my cowslips ! I've forgotten my cowslip ball.⁵ I told her that it wouldn't have lasted anyway, with the stalks nipped off so short. But she lobked as if she had lost a kingdom."

" I believe I know that cowslip ball." Miss Howe looked amused. " A cowslip ball, anyway. She had one sent to her once when I was there. I thought it was from her slum children."

" Yes, he sent it on." My cousin went on quickly with her own story. ^{4t} How he knew the address puzzled me. Her publishers wouldn't have given it and I know she didn't."

" Telephone book," said the Baxter girl, as one experienced.

" Ah, possibly. I went round to her that morning, and—yes, you were there, Lila," she conceded, " for I remember I wondered how Madala could compose herself to work with anyone else in the

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room. I always left her to herself when she stayed with me."

" She didn't mind me," said Miss Howe firmly.

" She always said that she didn't, I know. And of course I know that it is possible to withdraw oneself as it were, but I confess I disapproved. Her room was a regular clearing-house in those days. Oh, not you particularly, Lila, but——"

" You came in yourself that morning, didn't you? " said Miss Howe very softly and sweetly.

" I was telling you so. And what did I *find*? Her desk littered over with string and paper and moss and damp cardboard, and that story Hooper published (it had been freshly typed only the day before) watering into purple under my eyes, while she sat and gloated over those wretched flowers. ' Madala ! ' I said, ' your manuscript! Really, Madala J '""

" And Madala——" Miss Howe began to laugh——
" Oh, I remember now."

" What did Madala say? " demanded the Baxter girl

" It wasn't like her." Anita fidgeted. " She knew how I disliked the modern manner."

" But she said," Miss Howe caught it up——

" I don't know what possessed her," said my cousin with a rush. " She actually stamped her foot at me. Yes, she did, and then held out her wretched posy and said——' Oh, damn the manuscript, Nita ! Smell ! ' "

LEGEND

"What did Nita do?" enquired the blonde lady softly of Miss Howe.

"Sniffed," Mr. Flood struck in. "Obviously I Satisfied Madala and relieved her own feelings. That is called tact."

"And just then, you know," Miss Howe glanced over her shoulder and lowered her voice, "*he* came in."

"Kent?" The lady with Mr. Flood did not lower her voice. I believe she wanted him to hear. She was like a curious child poking at a hurt beastie. Her smile was infantine as she looked across at him. But the man at the window never stirred.

"Sh 1" Miss Howe frowned at her. And then, still whispering—"Yes, don't you remember? he had his studio in the same block all that year. He always came across to Madala when he wanted a sardine tin opened, or change for his gas, or someone to sit to him."

"Someone was saying that he couldn't keep a model." Mr. Flood glanced at them in turn.

Miss Howe flushed surprisingly.

"It's not that. You ought to know better, Jasper. It's only that he's exigent—never knows how the time goes, and—" she lowered her voice still more, "and Madala spoilt him. She could sit by the hour looking like a Madonna, and getting all her own head-work done, and never stirring a hair. Of course he doesn't like the shilling an hour type after her."

LEGEND

"I know, I know! The explanation is quite unnecessary." He smiled and waved his hand.

"Then why——?" She was still flushed and annoyed.

"One gets at other people's views. I merely wondered how the—er—partnership appeared to your—er—intelligence. Now I know."

"She did spoil him." Anita disregarded them.
"The time she wasted on him! In he came, 'You know, that day, and she went to meet him with the cowslips still in her hand, and shielding her eyes from the sun. That room of hers got all the morning sun."

"What did she wear—the blue dress?" The Baxter girl was like a child being told a story.

"I forget. Anyway he stood looking her up and down till she reddened and began to laugh at him. And then he said—'And cowslips too! What luck! Come along! Come *along!*' 'Oh, my good man!' I said, 'she's in the middle of her writing!' But it was useless to expostulate. He wanted her and so she went. I heard him as he dragged her off. 'Madam, I've got such a notion!' No, it was the great fault of her character, I consider, that she could never deny anyone, not even for her work's sake. Still, I suppose one had to forgive it in that case, for that was the beginning, you know, of *The Spring Song*. She is painted just as she stood there that morning, literally gilded over with sunshine, and the flowers in her hands."

LEGEND

" It's the best thing he's ever done, isn't it?" said the Baxter girl.

" Best thing? It's a master-piece. It's Madala Grey."

" When is he going to show it? " said Mr. Flood. Anita shrugged.

" Heaven knows ! He insists that it isn't finished. I believe he sits and prays over it. He was annoyed that Madala took me there one day. You know how touchy he is."

" He won't show it now," said the blonde lady.

" Why not? Why not? " Anita hovered, on the pounce, like a cat over a bowl of goldfish, and like a fish the blonde lady glided out of reach.

" And *she* asks ! " she appealed to the others.

Anita frowned.

" You're cryptic."

" Well, wasn't there a certain—rivalry? You should have a fellow-feeling."

" Oh—" she resented quickly, " Kent always wanted to keep her to himself, if you mean that."

The blonde lady smiled.

" And now he keeps her to himself. I mean just that. I go by your account, of course. ," haven't glimpsed *The Spring Song*."

" So that started it." The Baxter girl mused aloud. " I think that's romantic now—to make a famous picture and to pick up one's husband, all in twenty-four hours,"

" ' Pick up ! ' "

LEGEND

" You know what I mean—fall in love."

"⁴ Fall in love ! ' "

¹⁴ Nita, don't trample!" Miss Howe threw the Baxter girl a cigarette.

" I only mean—it was romantic, meeting like that so long ago and nobody knowing a word until just before they were married, except you, Miss Serle- And I don't believe you guessed ? " She questioned her with defiant eyebrows.

" How could I guess what never happened ? ' In love!' I suppose it deceived some good folks."

" It wasn't so long ago," Miss Howe soothed them. She had a funny little way of slipping people into another subject if she thought that they sounded quarrelsome. ' Let's be comfortable! ' was written all over her. And yet she could scratch. I think that a great many women are like Miss Howe.

" Long ago? Of course not I " Anita picked it up at once. " How long is it ? A year ? Eighteen months? April, wasn't it? She wrote *The Resting-place* in the next three months. Scamped. I shall always say so. She was three years over *Ploughed Fields*. Yes, April began it. *The Resting-place* was out for the Christmas sales. She married him at Easter. And now it's November. The year's not gone. But Madala Grey is gone."

" Where ? " said the Baxter girl intensely.

" Don't! " said Miss Howe.

But the Baxter girl looked as if she couldn't stop herself.

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" We—we put her into the past tense—d'you notice how easily we're doing it already?—but—is she less alive to you, less lovable, less Madala Grey to you, because of a telegram and a funeral service? is she? "

" No," said Miss Howe. " If you put it like that—no."

" Yes," said Mr. Flood. " When you put it like that—yes."

" She must be somewhere," Argued the Baxter girl. " She can't just stop."

"Why not?" said Mr. Flood, with his bored smile.

" She can't. I feel it," she said with her hand at her heart and her large eyes on him.

" I don't," he said to her, and he lost his smile.
" ' Dust to dust——' "

The woman behind him moved restlessly.

" Jasper, *dear* ! How trite ! "

"But the spirit?" said the Baxter girl, "the spirit?"

Nobody answered. The little blue flames on the hearth capered and said ' Chik-cluk ! ' Anita shivered.

" The room's getting cold," she said pharply. And then—" Jenny, is that door open? There's such a draught."

I got up and went to see. But the door was shut. When I came back they were talking **again**. Anita was answering the Baxter girl.

LEGEND

" Yes, I stayed there once. A pretty place. The sort of place she would choose. All roses. No conveniences. And what with the surgery and the socialism, the poor seemed to be always with us. Only one servant——"

" She *ought* to have made money," said Miss Howe.

" Oh, the first two books were a *succes d'ebtitne*, I wept over her contract. She did make a considerable amount of money on *The Resting-place*. But it was all put by for the child. She told me so. He, you know, a poor man's doctor ! She told me that too—flung it at me. She had an extravagant way of talking, manner more than anything, of course, but to hear her you would almost think she was proud of the life they led. She was always unpractical."

" I'd like to have gone down there once," said Miss Howe. " If I'd known—heigh-ho ! "

" I—I wished I hadn't gone," said Anita slowly. " It wasn't a success."

" The husband, I suppose," the Baxter girl hinted delicately.

" No, I hardly saw him. It was Madala herself. Changed. Affectionate—she was always that to me but——I remember sitting with her once. We had been talking, about Aphra Behn I believe, and she had grown flushed and had begun to stammer a little. You know her way? "

" I know." The Baxter girl leaned forward eagerly.

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" And she was tracing a parallel between the development of the novel and the growth of the woman's movement—her old vein. Brilliant, she was. And all at once she stopped and began staring in front of her. You know that trick she had of frowning out her thoughts. I was careful not to interrupt. I knew something big was coming. She could be—prophetic, sometimes. At last she said in a worried sort of way—⁴ 'I've a dreadful feeling that we're out of coffee and it's early closing.' No, I'm not exaggerating—her very words. And then some long rigmarole about Carey's appetite, and that if she made the coffee black strong she could persuade him to take more milk with it. Oh—pitiful! And in a moment she'd dashed off on a three-mile walk to the next village where there was a grocer that did open on Wednesdays. Oh, it was most pathetic. It made me realize the effect that he was having on her—stultifying! I always did dislike him."

" Well, I don't know," said Miss Howe.

" Just so—you don't know. Naturally, you were not so intimate with Madala. Well, that very afternoon, I remember, he came in at tea-time. That was unusual: he was generally late for seven-thirty dinner, and tlien he didn't change. I used to wonder how Madala allowed it. Well, as I was telling you, he came in, stamping through the hall, calling to her, and when he opened the drawing-room door and found that she was out, you should have seen

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his look I Spur 1 No other word ! And off he went at once to meet her, on his bicycle, though I was prepared to give him tea. They didn't come back for hours. In fact I had gone up to change. I saw them from the window, coming up the drive. And there was Madala Grey, perched on *his* bicycle, with a great bunch of that white parsley that grows in the hedges, and a string bag dangling down, while he steadied her, and both of them *talking* ! and as he helped her off, she kissed him—in front of the kitchen windows. And, if you please, not a word of apology to me. All she said was—why hadn't I seen that he had some tea before he went after her? I think it's the only time I've ever seen Madala annoyed. No, you can't say the marriage improved her." She paused, " It was so unlike her," she meditated, " as if I could help it! You know, I'd always thought her so considerate. Carey's influence, of course. Oh," she cried out suddenly and angrily, " I've got nothing against Carey. I'm not prejudiced. But if he'd been the sort of man one could approve—someone—" Her eye wandered from Kent Rehaji to Mr. Flood—" but he was dragging her down——"

Miss Howe shook her head.

" Anita, you're wrong. I've only met him a couple of times but I liked what I saw of him. An honest, straightforward sort of person. Oh, not clever, of course. He'd have bored me in a week—^——"

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" Ah? " said the woman behind Mr. Flood.

" Oh yes, dull—distinctly. But I had the impression that if I'd been one of his patients I should have done everything he told me to do."

Anita shrugged.

" Oh, I've no doubt he had every virtue, but it's idle to pretend that he made any attempt to appreciate Madala Grey."

" You don't suggest that the man didn't love his wife, do you ? " said Miss Howe in her downright way.

" I suggest nothing. But the fact remains—I give it for what it is worth—but the fact does remain that John Carey has never read one of her books—not one ! "

" What? " The Baxter girl's mouth opened and stayed so.

" You don't intend to say——" began Mr. Flood.

" I don't believe it," said Miss Howe contemptuously.

" Why not? I've known a man jealous of his wife before now. I suppose he knew enough to know that she had the brains." The blonde lady was smiling.

Anita shook her head reluctantly.

" Jealousy? Hm—it might have been, of course. But I didn't get that impression. I believe that it was a perfectly genuine lack of interest."

" Yes, but I don't believe it. How d'you know he didn't? It's not a thing he'd own to. Who told you ? "

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" Madala. Madala herself. She used to make a joke of it."

" She never showed when she was hurt," said the Baxter girl emotionally.

" Yes, but it almost seemed as if she were not hurt, as if her—her sensitiveness, her better feelings, had been blunted. I've known her use it as a *weapon* almost," said Anita conscientiously recollecting. " He—that annoyed me so—he was very peremptory with her sometimes, most rude in his manner. Of course, you know, she was dreamy. Not that that excused him for a moment. I remember a regular scene——"

" Before you?" Miss Howe cast instant doubt upon it.

" My room was next to theirs. I could hear them through the wall. I can assure you that he stormed at her in a most ungentlemanly way—"

" What about ? " said the Baxter girl breathlessly.

" Something about his razors, A parcel had come by the early post, and just because she had cut the string—but I couldn't follow it all. He was a man who was easily irritated by trifles. Well, as I say, after he had raged at her for five minutes or more, till I could have gone in and spoken to him myself, all that that patient woman said, was—

¹ Darling, have you begun *Eden Walls* yet ? ' I tell you the man never said another word."

" He didn't prevent her writing, did he?" said Miss Howe.

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" There's no doubt that he discouraged her. He was selfish. It was his wretched doctoring all day long — and you know how sensitive Madala was. I did persuade her to do some work while I was staying with them, but I soon saw that it was labour thrown away. Her heart wasn't in it. When it wasn't Carey it was the baby clothes. For the sake of her reputation," her voice hardened, " it's as well that she has died when she has."

" Anita ! "

" I mean it." She was quick and fierce. " Do you think it was a little thing for me to see that pearl of great price — oh, not Madala Grey ! I grew to hate her almost, that new Madala Grey—but the gift within her, her great, blazing genius — flung away, trampled on—"

Miss Howe turned her head in slow denial.

" No, Anita ! Not genius. Charm, if you like. Talent, as much as you please. But Madala Grey wasn't a genius, and she knew it."

Anita flung up her head.

" She will be when I've done with her. She will be when I've written the *Life* "

" Ah, the poor child ! " said Great-aunt startlingly,

Anita never heeded. She was wrapt away in some cold passion of her own, a passion that amazed me. I had always thought of her as \\\hat she looked, an ordered, steely woman, all brain and will; yet now of a sudden she revealed herself, a

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creature convulsed, writhing in flames. But they were cold flames. Cold fire, is there such a thing? Ice burns. There is phosphorus. There is the light of stars. I know what I mean if only I had the words. Star-fire—that's it. She was like a dead star. She warmed no-one, she only burned herself up.

It was the impression of a moment. When I looked again it was as if I had been withdrawn from a telescope. She was herself once more. The volcano had shrunk to a diamond twinkle, to a tiny, gesticulating creature with a needle tongue. It was bewildering : while I listened to her I was still thinking—⁴ Yes, but which is Anita? Diamond or star? What makes the glitter? Frost or flame?'

But that blonde woman in the shadows went off into noiseless laughter that woke the dragons and stirred Mr. Flood to an upward glance. Then he hunched himself closer against her knees, his chin low on his chest, so that his tiny beard and mouth and eyes were like triangles standing on their points. The pose gave him a glinting air of mockery and yet, somehow, you did not feel that he was amused. You only felt—' Oh, he's practised that at a looking-glass.'

He drawled out—

" The *Life*, dear lady? Enlighten our darkness."

" That," came the murmur behind him, " is precisely what she is going to do. How dense you are, Jasper 1 "

LEGEND

And at *the* same moment from Miss Howe—

"Be quiet, you two! Tell us, Anita! A life of her? Is that it? Ah, well, I always suspected your note-book. Did she know you Boswellized?"

"She?" There was the strangest mixture of scorn and admiration in the voice. "As if one could let her know! That was the difficulty with Madala Grey: she wouldn't take herself seriously. She had—" a pause and a search for the correct word—"what I can only call a *perverted* sense of humour. If she'd known that I—noted things, she'd have been quite capable of falsifying all her opinions, misrepresenting herself completely, just to—throw me out, as it were. Not maliciously, I don't mean that. But she teases," finished Anita petulantly.
⁴¹ She will do it. She laughs at the wrong things. Of course she's young still."

"Yes, she's young—now. She stays young now. She gains that at least," said the woman in the shadows.

Anita made a quick little sound, half titter and half gasp.

"^{ct} Oh!" she cried—and her voice was as grey as her face—"I forgot. Do you know—I forgot! It's going to be ghastly. I believe I shall always be forgetting."

I glanced up at Kent Rehan. It made me realize that I had been listening with anxiety, that I was afraid of their expressive sentences. They had words, 'those writing people. They knew what they

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thought: they could say what they thought : and what they thought could hurt. I didn't want him to be hurt. I said, under my breath—

" Oh, why do you stay here? They aren't your sort,"

But he had heard nothing. He was poring over the long tassel of the blind, weaving it into a six-strand plait. I couldn't help watching his fingers. He had the most beautiful hands that I've ever seen on a man. They looked like two alive and independent creatures. They looked as if they could do anything they chose, whether he were there to superintend or not. And he was miles away. I was glad. Anita's voice was rising like a dreary wind.

" Just that is so strange. All the time I've known her I've thought of her in the past tense. Her moods, her ways, her actions, were finished things to me—chapters of the *Life*. I wrote her all the time. But now, when she is mine, as it were, now that she exists only in my notes and papers and remembrance of her, now it comes that I'm shaken. I can't think of her as a subject any more. I shall be wanting her—herself. I can't think clearly. It's frightening me, the work there is ahead of me. Because I've got to do it without her. She's lying dead down there in Surrey—now—at this minute. And there's that man—and a child. One's overwhelmed. It's so cruel. The only creature who ever cared for me. Think of Madala, quite still,

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not answering, not lighting up when you speak to her, staring at the ceiling, staring at her own coffin-lid. In two days she'll be under the ground. Do you ever think what that means—burial—the corruption—the——"

" Stop it, Niba ! " Miss Howe's movement blotted out my cousin's face. " Do you hear? I can't stand it. Here—drink some coffee. Jasper ! Say something ! " I heard the coffee-cup dance in its saucer.

There came Aunt Serle's anxious quaver—

" Anita ! Nita ! What's the matter, my dear? What's the matter with my daughter? "

Nobody answered. She was like a tortoise as she poked her head from the hood of her chair.

" Jenny ! " she called cautiously. " Jenny ! "

I slipped across the room to her.

" What's it about, Jenny? Eh? Speak up, my dear! Not crying, is she? Temper, that's it. Don't say I said so."

" It's all right, Auntie. She—they—it's the bad news. It's upset them all."

"Bad news? Fiddlesticks! Temper, I call it. Why shouldn't the girl get married? Not much money, but a pleasant fellow. Time for her to settle. I said to her—^c My dear, you follow your heart.' But Nita tried to stop it. Nita couldn't get over it. Cried. Temper. That's it. Look at her now. 'Sh ! Don't let her see you."

But Anita wasn't looking at me and she wasn't

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crying. I suppose Great-aunt must have know" what she was talking about' but it wasn't easy to imagine my cousin soft and red-eyed like that great, good-natured Miss Howe. Her little sharp face looked as controlled as if it were carved. Yet, as she said herself, she was shaken. That showed in the jerkine«s of her movements, the sharpening of her voice, in the break-up of her accustomed flow of words into staccato, like a river that has come to some rocks : and her hands had a clock-work, incessant movement, clutch-clutch, fingers on palm, that her eyes repeated. They were everywhere at once, resting, flitting, settling again, yet seeing nothing, I think, while she listened to Mr. Flood and grew more irritated with every word.

" Why bad news?" said Great-aunt in my ear. " It's a son, isn't it ? "

I hesitated.

" Oh, Auntie, didn't you hear ? " (She had heard, you know. I had seen her shrinking back when Anita screamed at her, with that dreadful shrinking that you see in an animal threatened by a head-blow. She had been leaning forward, and eager. She must have heard.)

"Hear? They all talk," she quavered. " ⁴ Be quiet," says Anita. Ah, I've spoilt her. Now Madala——What's the time, my dear? Why don't she come?"

" Auntie—Auntie——"

" Eh? " she said. " Why don't Madala come? "

LEGEND

"Auntie—you've forgotten. She's been ill."

"Ah—and she'll be worse before she's better," said Great-aunt briskly. "'Sh! Listen to my daughter."

We listened : at least, I listened. Great-aunt cocked her head on one side, still as a bird, for a minute; then, like a bird, she was re-assured and fell to her knitting again.

Anita and Mr. Flood were quarrelling.

"Why shouldn't I? Tell me that! Is anyone better fitted? Who knows as much about her as I do? Didn't I discover her, hacking on two pounds a week? Didn't I recognize what she was? Who sent her to Mitchell and Bent? Who introduced her everywhere? Who bullied her into writing *Ploughed Fields*? Who was the best friend she ever had—even if I didn't make the parade of being fond of her that——Oh, I've no patience I What would the world know of Madala Grey if it weren't for me?"

"But—oh, of course we all know how good you were to her, Miss Serle, indeed I can guess by what you've done for me——" began the Baxter girl.

Mr. Flood's tongue tip showed between his red lips. I think he would have made some comment but for the hand pressing on his shoulder.

"But——?" said the woman behind the hand.

"I only mean—'genius will out,' won't it?"

"Genius? Big word!" said Miss Howe.

LEGEND

" Not too big." The Baxter girl reddened enthusiastically.

" ' Genius will out? ' Not Madala Grey's. She didn't know she had any. I don't believe she ever fully realized——Why, it was the merest chance that *Eden Walls* didn't go into the fire. If it hadn't been for me—if it hadn't been for me——"

" Ah—you ! " Miss Howe squared up to her. " Now just what (among friends) have you stood to gain ? Fond of her ? Oh yes, you were, Anita ! Don't tell me ! But in spite of yourself, eh ? But that wasn't what you were after. You didn't get the pleasure out of her that—I did, for instance. You used to exhaust Madala. I've seen you do it. You—you drained her."

" Yes, I did. I meant to," said Anita with her laugh. " Pleasure ! "

" And she thought you were fond of her. She used to flare if anyone attacked you. Poor Madala ! "

" Poor ? Why ? I shall give it all back." Anita gave her a long cool look. " I—I hate debts," said Anita.

Miss Howe flushed brightly.

" If you were cursed with the Artistic temperament——" She broke off and began again. " If I were a poor devil of a Bohemian in a hole, it's not to you I'd go——"

" —twice ! " said Anita.

Again they eyed each other. Miss Howe, still flushing, chose her words.

LEGEND

" Madala never lent. That wasn't in her. She gave. Time, money, love—she gave. You took, it was understood, rather than hurt her feelings by refusing. But it was always free gift."

" Not to me." Anita held her head high. " I shall pay. And interest too."

" Oh, the *Life* ! Are you really going to attempt a *Life*?" Miss Howe recovered herself with a laugh, while Mr. Flood repeated curiously—

"Yes, but then what were you after, Anita? What do you stand to gain? "

" Reflected glory," came from behind him.

She turned as if she had been stung.

" Reflected? Let her keep it! Reflected? Am I never to have anything of my own? Oh, wait ! "

" You can't get much of yourself into a life of Madala Grey though. You've too much sense of style for that," Mr. Flood insisted. " We both hate a biographer who ' I says, says I.' "

" Oh, it shall be all Madala Grey. I promise you that," she said with her thin smile.

" Humph ! It's a notion." Miss Howe was really interested, I could see—yet with a flush on her cheek still. " It's your sort of work too, Anita ! You're—happier—in critical work."

" Oh, don't hedge. Don't be delicate with me. I can't create, that's what you mean. Do you think that's news to me? Is there a critic who has failed to make it clear to me? I can record—but I can't create. Good ! I can't create. I

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can't do what she did—what you do, Jasper—what even Beryl here does. But——" she paused an instant, " you should be afraid of me for all that. I can pry. Little, nasty, mean word, isn't it? It's me!"

The Baxter girl laughed uncertainly and then stopped because Anita's eyes were on her.

" I've eyes. I——" she opened and shut her tiny hands before them—" I've claws. I can pry you open, any of you—if I choose. I haven't chosen. You've not been worth while. But—Madala!" and here she released the uneasy Baxter girl—" Madala's my chance—my chance—my chance I Madala Grey—look at her—coming into her kingdom at twenty—that babe! And me! Look at me! Do you know what my life has been, any of you? Oh, you come to my house to meet my lionets, and we're very good friends, and you're afraid of my reviews, and so I have my position, I suppose. But what do you know about me? When I was fifteen—and it's thirty years ago—I said to myself, ' Now what shall I do with my life? ' Mother—" she shot her a glance : she didn't even trouble to lower her voice, " she'd have drudged me and dressed me and married me, I suppose, to three hundred a year and the city—oh, with the best of motives. I fought. I fought. That's why I'm an ungrateful daughter. I'm supposed to be, I think. My people were so sorry for my mother,, My people thought me a fool. I saw through them. Yes,

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and I saw through myself. That's the kind of fool I was. Didn't I reckon it out? I hadn't a charm. I hadn't a talent. I had my *will*. That's all I had. I taught myself. Work? You don't know what work means, you ten and five-talented. There's not a book worth reading that I haven't read. There's not the style of a master that I haven't studied, that I Couldn't reproduce at a pinch. 'There's not a man or a woman in London today, worth knowing—from my point of view—that I haven't contrived to know. The people who've arrived—how I've studied them, the ways of them, the methods of them. And what's the end of it all? That—¹' she jerked her head to the row of her own books on the shelf behind her, " and my column in the *Matins*, and some comforting hundreds a year, and—my knowledge of myself. Oh, I've turned out good work. I know that. I have judgment. That's why I judge myself. Fvtf always been rigid with myself. And so I know when I look at my books—though I can say that they are sounder, better work, in better English, that they have more knowledge behind them, than the books of a dozen of you people who arrive—yet I know that they have failed. People don't read me. People don't want me. Why? I have my name. I've the name of a well-known critic, but—I'm only a name. I'm not alive. The public doesn't touch hands with me. Now why? Oh, how I've tormented myself. Nearly thirty yeats

LEGEND

I've given, of unremitting labour, to my art, to my career. There's not a thought or a wish that I haven't sacrificed to it. And then that child of twenty comes along, without knowledge, without training, without experience, and gets at one leap, mark you all, at one leap, more than I've achieved in thirty years. Some people, I suppose, would submit. Well, I won't. I wouldn't. Does my will go for nothing? I *will* have my share. 'Reflected glory,' yes, I've stooped to that. I've exploited her, if you like to call it that. When I think of the day I discovered her——" She paused an instant, dragging her hand wearily over her eyes——" I was at my zero that day. The *Famous Women* had been out a week. The reviews——oh, the reviews! Respectful, courteous, lukewarm. If they'd attacked me, if they'd slated, I'd have rejoiced. But they respect me and they're bored. They know it's sound work and they're bored. I bore people. I bore you—all of you. Do you think I'm blind? That night I read the manuscript of *Eden Walls*. (Wasn't it kind of me—it wasn't even typed!) And then I saw my chance. I saw how far she'd got at twenty, and I thought——' I'll take my chance. I'll take this genius. I'll make her fond of me. I'll help her. I'll worm myself into her. I'll abase myself. I'll toady. I'll do anything. But I will find out how she does it. I will find out the secret. I'll find it and I'll make it my own, I'll serve for her as Jacob served

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for Rachel; but she shall serve me in the end.' I have watched. I have studied. I have puzzled. I believe I've grasped it at last. I know myself and I know her. If genius is life—the power to give life—is it that? then I'm barren. I can't make life as Madala can. But—listen to me! Listen to me all of you ! I can take a living thing—I can cut it open alive. That's what I shall do with this life-maker—this easy genius. I've taken her to pieces, flesh and blood, bone and ligament and muscle, every secret of her mind and her heart and her soul. The life, the *real* life of Madala Grey, the rise and fall of a genius, that's what I'm going to make plain. She's been a puzzle to you all, with her gifts and her ways and her crazy marriage—she's not a mystery to me. I tell you I've got her, naked, pinned down, and now I shall make her again. Isn't it fair? She ought to thank me. 'Dead,' he says. Who's to blame? She chose to kill herself. What right had she to take risks? I—I've refrained. She couldn't. She threw away her lamp. But I—I take it. I light it again. Finding's keeping. It's mine."

Her voice ripped on the high note like a rag on a nail, and she checked, panting. Her hand went up to her throat as the fumed air rasped it.

" Mine ! " she cried again, coughing. There was wild-fire in her eyes as she challenged them.

The little space between her solitariness and their grouped attention was filled with fog and silence

LEGEND

and lamp-light, woven as it were into a fifth element. It was like a pool to be crossed. And across it, in answer, a laugh rippled out.

I don't know who it was that laughed. I did not recognize the voice. Sometimes, looking back, I think it 'vas the laugh of their collective soul.

" Oh ! " cried Anita, and stopped as if she had been awakened suddenly by a blow—as if the little wondering, wincing cry had been struck out of her by a blow on the face. She stood thus a moment, uncertain. Then she too laughed, nervously, apologetically.

" One talks," she said, " among friends."

Miss Howe made a wry face.

" Lord, we're a queer set of friends ! How we love one another ! "

" You've all of you been awfully good to me," said the Baxter girl. But her gratitude was too general to be acceptable. Even I could have told her that.

" Oh, we do our best for you," said Mr. Flood.

She looked at him from under her lashes.

" Yes, and she's thinking this minute what a nice little scene this would make for her new book—touched up, of course," said the woman behind him.

" Art — selection — Jimmy Whistler——" Mr. Flood was one indistinct murmur.

" With herself her own heroine again, eh? " Miss Howe baited her.

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" I didn't. I wasn't."

" Better folk than you do it, child ! Anita says so. Don't they, Anita? "

" Oh," said Anita heavily, " I wish Madala Grey were here. I wish she hadn't died. If she were here she wouldn't—you'd never—she wouldn't let you laugh at me."

Miss Howe looked at her intently. There was a quick little run of expression across her large handsome face, like a hand playing a scale. It showed, that easily moved, easily read face, surprise, interest, concern, and, in the end, the sentimental impulse of your kind fur-clad woman to the beggar on the curb, ' Why I believe she's cold I I don't like it! Give her tuppence, quick ! ' She was out of her chair, overwhelming Anita, in one impetuous heave of drapery.

" You're right, Nita ! We're pigs ! Something's wrong with us. 'Pologize. You know we don't mean it."

Anita endured her right-and-left kisses.

" You do mean it," was all she said.

She was shrunk to such a small grey creature flgain' I thought to myself—' Fire? It's not diamond-sparkle. She's as dull as stone.'

Miss Howe was eagerly remorseful.

" We don't. I don't know what's tonight. It's the fog. There's somet` a fog. Distorting. It yellows over c

" It isn't only tonight," said tin

LEGEND

with her sidelong, ^{fc} can-I-risk-it ? ' look at them.
" The fog's been coming on for months."

" Arid you mean——? " The blonde lady never snubbed the Baxter girl. It struck me suddenly, as their eyes met, that there was the beginning of a likeness between them. The Baxter girl at fifty—with dyed hair——? But it was only an idea of mine, I'm always seeing imaginary likenesses. I remember that those Academy pictures of Kent Rehan's always set me to work wondering—' That woman with the face turned away—I've seen her somewhere—of whom does she remind me?—where have I seen her?' And yet, of course, in those days I knew nothing of Madala Grey.

But the Baxter girl was answering—

" It—it's cheek, I know, but it's true. When I first came—" then, with a swift propitiatory glance at Anita—" when you first let me come—the Nights weren't like this. You weren't like this any of you——"

" Upon—my—word ! " said Miss Howe with her benevolent chuckle. " Nita ! Listen to the infant! "

" Like what? " Mr. Flood moved uneasily.

' Baxter girl turned to him enthusiastically.

I used to think you such wonderful
—

now? " Miss **Howe** teased her.

et be ! " said **Mr.** Flood impatiently,
ady?"

! I'd read all your stuff. I believe

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I could write out *The Orchid House* from memory still."

His eyes lit up as he challenged her—

" ' Sour!' said the fox at her feet,
 ' How can she ripen windy-high ?
 Sour I ' said the fox with his nose to the F

He was as pleased as a child with a toy capped it—

" Then a grape dropped off. It was rotten swec

There ! " she flushed at him triumphantly. Aru' then—" Now did you mean——? Who was in your mind? Were they anyone we know? I've always wanted to ask you."

But before he could answer her the blonde lady leaned forward and whispered in his ear. He turned to her with a glance of interest and amusement, but with his lips still moving and his mind still running on an answer to the Baxter girl. The blonde lady whispered again, and then he turned right round to answer her, shelving his arms on her knees. I couldn't hear what they said, but it was just as if she had beckoned him into another room. He was withdrawn from the conversation and from the Baxter girl for as long as that blonde lady chose.

Miss Howe looked at them with her broad smile.

" Tell us, Beryl ! We're listening, anyhow 1 " she said invitingly.

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But the Baxter girl's chin went up. The touch of annoyance in her voice made it twang, made her commonness suddenly noticeable. She was capable when she was in awe of them, but now she was asserting herself, and that meant that she needed to be noisy.

My opinion doesn't count, of course! —, she swung like a pendulum between her timers—"oh, I *did* enjoy myself at first, the way you all talked. You knew everyone, I'd read everything. You frothed adventures. Juicy champagne it was, meeting all the people. I used to write my head off, the week after. And you were all kind to me from the first. I suppose it was Madala. She never let one feel out of it. But I thought it was all of you. I had the feeling —⁴ the gods *aren't* jealous gods.' But now it's—" she looked at them pertly, "it's fog on Olympus." "You needn't—honour us, you know, Beryl," said Anita sharply.

She answered with her furtive look.

"I know. And I don't think—I don't want to come as much as I did."

"In that case——" Anita ruffled up.

'Fog ! Fog !' cried Miss Howe clapping her hands. And then—"All the same, Anita, people are dropping off. The Whitneys haven't been for weeks. When did Roy Huth come last ? And the Golding crowd ? I marvel that *he* turns up still." She nodded towards Kent Rehan. "Oh, you know,

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we're like a row of beads when the string's been pulled out. We lie in a line for a time, but a touch will send us rolling in all directions."

" Yes," said the Baxter girl vehemently, " the heart's out of it somehow. I'm not ungrateful. It's just because I used to love coming so."

Miss Howe looked down at Anita, not unkindly.

" Give it up, Nita ! The Nights have served their turn. It sounds ungracious, but things have to end sometime or other. Hasn't the time come ? Hasn't it come tonight? "

" But you've been coming all this year just the same," said Anita stubbornly.

Miss Howe shrugged her shoulders. It was the Baxter girl who answered—

" Ah, but there was always just a chance of seeing Madala."

At that Anita, who had been sitting as steely stiff as a needle in a pin-cushion, got up, shaking off Miss Howe's persuasive, detaining hand and the overflow of her skirts. The cushions tumbled after her on to the floor.

" As to that," she said, " and don't imagine that I haven't known what you came for, all of you——"

" Eh? "

Her voice was sharp enough to have recalled any one and it recalled Mr. Flood. He returned to the conversation with the air of dragging the blonde lady after him. She had the manner of one hanging back and protesting, and laughing still over some

LEGEND

secret understanding. " Eh? " said he. " What's that about Madala? "

Anita looked from one to another.

" I'm telling you," she said. " I've told you already, I can give you Madala Grey. Come here and I'll give you Madala Grey still. That's what you want, isn't it, to be amused? She amused you."

"She did, bless her ! " said Miss Howe.

" It was her brains," said the Baxter girl.

" A beautiful creature," said Mr. Flood slowly.

" Not she ! " The lady behind him was smiling. " She made you think so. She made men think so. But how? That intrigued me. Oh, she was prettyish: but that was all. I used to watch her——"

" Envy? " said he.

" No, not envy," said that woman slowly. ^{4C} She was too—innocent—how could one envy? She didn't know her own strength. She said—⁴ Don't hurt me,' with a sword at her side."

" Excalibur." It came from Mr. Flood. ^{4t} Magic."

" No, Madala—just Madala." Miss Howe sighed. " It's no good, Anita, you can't give us back Madala."

But my cousin, looking at them, laughed in her turn.

"Madala? You fools! You've never had her. But you shall! Oh, wait! My books are dull, aren't they? Yet you'll be here, you know, every

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month, thick as bees, to listen to me. A chapter a month, that's all I'll give to you. ," don't write three novels a year. But you'll come, you'll come. Proof? There's plenty of proof. See here."

She went swiftly across to the outer room. There was a large carved desk standing on the little table by the window. She picked it up. It was too big for her. It filled her arms so that she staggered under the weight.

" Oh, Kent! " she called.

He came back to the foggy room with a visible wrench.

" Here, that's too heavy for you. Let me." He took it from her.

" The table—here. Thank-you, oh, thank-you, Kent." She veiled her voice as she spoke to him. " It's heavy—it's so full—books—papers——"

He put it down for her and nodded, and was straying away again when she stopped him.

" Kent ! Don't sit by yourself. We—" her voice was for him alone—" we're talking about—her. I was going to show them—Kent, stay here with us."

He waited while she talked to him. And she talked very sweetly and kindly. She was the quiet, chiffony little creature again with the pretty, pure voice. ," couldn't make her out. She looked up at him and said something too low for me to catch, and then—

" There's your chair. Isn't that always your

LEGEND

chair? " And so left him and turned to the table and the box and the others.

But he did not take the saddle-bag near Anita's own seat. He looked irresolutely from one to another of the group that watched Anita fumbling with her keys. He looked, and his face softened, at Great-aunt, muttering over her needles. He looked at the empty chair beside me. He looked at me and found me watching him. Then, as I smiled at him just a little, he came to me and sat down. But he said nothing to me, and so I was quiet too.

But Anita was busy, hands and eyes and tongue all busy.

" When she married, you know, in that hole and corner fashion——" Then, as if in answer, though nobody had spoken——" Well, what else was it, when nobody knew? when even I didn't know——"

There was a movement in the chair beside me, and turning, I caught the ending of a glance towards my cousin. A new look, I found it, on that passive face, a roused and wondering and scornful look that transformed it. But, even as I caught it, it faded again to that other look of bleak indifference, a look to know and dread on any creature's face, a look that must not stay on any fellow-creature's face. I knew that well enough. So I said the first words that came, in my lowest voice, lest they should hear.

But they were talking. They did not hear.

LEGEND

" I'm sure that Great-aunt knew," Indeed I thought so. I think that Great-aunt would always be kind and guessing with a girl. Then I wondered at myself for daring it and thought nervously— ' He'll snub me. He'll be right to snub me——'

But he looked across at Great-aunt kindly and said, in just such a withdrawn voice as mine—

" Yes, of course, if ever there was a time when——" Then he half smiled. " Poor old lady ! But she's changed. She used to be so brisk and managing, more like fifty than seventy. But this year's aged her. She wanted, you know, to give some pearls— her own pearls. But pearls spell sorrow. And Anita would have objected. She told me all about it."

" She was speaking of them tonight." We both turned again and looked at her,. She had dropped her knitting, or it had slipped from her knee, and she sat in her chair staring down at it with a terrible, comical air of helplessness. Then she caught his eye and forgot the knitting and nodded at him.

" I think——" I said, " I don't think she understands. She asked me—she forgets I'm a stranger. She asked me——" I broke off. I couldn't say to him—' She asked me about Miss Grey and she doesn't realize that she's dead.' One's afraid of the brutality of words. But he understood. There was a simplicity about him that re-assured one. And he never said—' It's Anita's business. It's not your business,' as anyone else might have done. He just said, once again—

LEGEND

^{4t} Poor old lady ! " and hesitated a minute. Then he got up and went across to her and picked up her wools. I don't think the others noticed him go. Anita didn't. She was talking too fast.

" —left a trunk-full of papers and so on. I'd often stored boxes for her. Somehow it never got sent down. I came across it only yesterday. I thought to myself that there was no harm in putting things straight. You know I'm literary executor? Oh yes. She said to me soon after her marriage, half in joke, that she supposed she had got to make a will—and what about her MSS. ? ' I can't have *him* worried.' I offered at once. You see I know so exactly her attitude in literature. There's a good deal of unpublished stuff—early stuff. But all in hopeless confusion. Tumbled up with bills and programmes and one or two drafts of letters—or so I imagine. She had that annoying habit—that ugly modern habit—of beginning without any invocation, and never a date. But there's one letter—there's the draft of a letter that's important from my point of view." She broke off with a half laugh. " It sounds a ridiculous statement to make about Madala Grey of all people, but do you know that she couldn't express herself at all easily on paper ? "

Miss Howe nodded.

" Do I know? I've known her re-write a letter half a dozen times before she got it to her liking—

LEGEND

no, not business letters, letters to her intimates. A most comical trick. Scribble, scribble, scribble—slash ! and then crunch goes the sheet into a ball, into the grate, or near it, till it looked as if she were playing snow-balls, and then Madala begins again—and again—and again. Yet she talked well. She talked easily."

" Isn't that in keeping?" Mr. Flood struck in. " She didn't express so much herself in her speech as the mood of the moment."

" As the mood of the companion of the moment more likely," the blonde lady corrected.

He nodded agreement.

" But for herself—go to her books."

" Or her letters—her careful, conscientious letters. Hut she was careless about her drafts," said Anita significantly.

Mr. Flood looked at her curiously.

" What's up that sleeve of yours, Anita? "

She was quick.

" You shall read it, in its place. But the trouble is——" She hesitated. She gave the little nervous cough that always ushered in her public lectures. " We've all written books," she said, " all except you, Blanche——"

The blonde lady blinked her sleepy eyes.

" You're all so strenuous," she purred. " I love to watch you being strenuous. So soothing."

" Well, I was going to say, it's easy enough to end a book, but have you ever got to the beginning?

LEGEND

I never have. One steps backward, and backward again——"

"I know," cried the Baxter girl. "Till you get tired of it at last and begin writing from where you are, but you never really get your foot on the starting-point, on the spring-board, as you might say."

"That's it. Yes, Jasper, I've got material up my sleeve, but frankly, I don't know how to place it. I don't know where to begin. The facts of her life, her conversation, her literary work, her letters—I go on adding to my material till I am overwhelmed with all that I have got to say about her. But I don't want to begin with facts. Facts are well enough, but think how one can twist them! I want the woman behind the facts. I want the answer to the question that is the cause of a biography such as mine is to be—the question—'What was Madala Grey?' Not who, mark you, but further back, deeper into herself—'What was Madala Grey?'"

"Why, a genius," said the Baxter girl glibly.

Anita neither assented nor dissented.

"Ah——" she said frowning, "but that's not the beginning either. At once we take our step backward again—'What is genius?'"

"Isn't talent good enough?" said Mr. Flood acidly.

"But does one mean talent?" She was still frowning. "Everyone's got talent. I'm sick of

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talent. But she—she mayn't be a great one—how she'd have laughed at being called a great one !—but she makes her dolls live. And isn't that the blood-link between the greatest gods and the littlest gods ? Life-givers ? Life-makers ? Oh, I only speak for myself; but she made her book-world real to me, therefore for me she had genius. Whether or not I convince you is the test of whether my life-work, my *Life* of her—fails or succeeds."

" I suppose you wouldn't trust it to Madala ? " said Miss Howe softly.

"Trust what?"

" To convince us."

She answered, suspicious rather than comprehending, for indeed Miss Howe's tone was very smooth—

" What do you mean ? , "I'm writing her life."

Miss Howe was inscrutable.

" Of course you are. Fire ahead. Genius, wasn't it?"

Anita shrugged her shoulders.

" What's in a name ? It's the quality itself that fascinates me. I want to account for it. I want to trace it to its source. Worth doing, isn't it ? But do you realize the difficulties ? Sometimes I feel hopeless. I've known her five years, and her books I know by heart, and I'm only just beginning to decide whether to call her a romantic or a realist."

" A realist. Look at *Eden Wallis*" said the Baxter girl.

LEGEND

" A romantic. Look at *The Resting-place*" said Miss Howe.

Mr. Flood over-rode them.

" Dear ladies, you confuse the termr. It amazes me how people always confuse the terms. Your so-called realist, your writer who depicts what we call reality, the outward life, that is, of flesh and dirt and misery—don't you see that he is in truth a romantic—a man (or woman) who lives in a fair world of his own, a paradise of the imagination? Out of that secure world of his he peers curiously at ours, and writes of it as we dare not write, writes down every sordid, garish, tragi-comic detail. Your so-called realist can afford the humour of Rabelais, the horror of Dostoievsky, the cheerful flesh and blood of Fielding. Why shouldn't he be truthful? It's not his world. Don't you see? But your so-called romantic, he lives in this real world. He knows it so well that he has to shut his eyes or he would die of its reality. So he escapes into the world of romance, the world of beauty within his own mind—nowhere but in his own mind. Who is our dreamer of dreams? Shelley, the realist! Blake jogged elbows with poverty and squalor all his life, and he was the prophet and the king of all spirits. Don't you see? And Goethe—the biographers will tell you that Goethe began as a realist and ended as a romantic. I say it was the other way round. What did he know of reality in the twenties? Its discovery was the romantic

LEGEND

adventure of his young genius. But when he was old and worldly and wise—then he wrote his romances, to escape from his own knowledge. Oh, I tell you, you should turn the words round. Now take Shakespeare——"

"It's not fair to take Shakespeare," said Miss Howe. "It's the Elephant and the Crawfishes over again. Let's keep to the crawfishes! Let's keep to our own generation!"

"Well, if I were Anita I should begin by showing Madala as a romantic—as the young romantic producing the most startlingly realistic book we've had for a decade. Indeed to me, you know, her development is marked by her books in the sharpest way. It's the young, the curious, the observant Madala in *Eden Walls*. The whole book is a shout of discovery, of young, horrified discovery, of the ugliness of life. It's as if she said—'Listen! Listen! These things actually happen to some people. Isn't it awful?' She dwells on it. She insists on every detail. She can't get away from it. And yet she can hardly believe it, that young Madala. But in *Ploughed Fields* already the tone's changing. It's a pleasanter book, a more sophisticated book. It interests profoundly, but it's careful not to upset one—an advance, of course. Yet I, you know, hear our Madala's voice in it still, an uneasy voice—'Hush! Hush! These things happen to most people. Pretend not to notice.' And in the last book, in the pretty, impossible romance, there you

LEGEND

have your realist full-fledged—' Shut your eyes! Come away quickly ! These things are happening to *me!*'" He leant back again folding his arms and dropping his chin. And then, because Miss Howe was looking at him as if she were amused—" I tell you I know. I recognize the symptoms. I'm a realist myself. That's why I write romantic poetry. Have to. It's that or drugs. How else shall one get through life?"

" Jasper I " said the blonde lady. But for once he didn't turn to her. He shrugged his shoulders.

" Don't worry. Who'll believe me ? "

The Baxter girl was breathless.

" Oh, but I do. It's a new Madala, of course. Rut I believe it explains her."

" But the facts of her life don't agree," began Miss Howe.

" Ah, Anita's got to make 'em," said Mr. Flood languidly. " Isn't that the art of biography? "

But Anita was deadly serious.

" You don't begin far enough back. My spring-board is not—what is Madala ? but—what is genius ? How does it happen? Is it immaculate birth? or is it begotten of accident upon environment ? That is to say—is it inspiration or is it experience? I speak of the divine fire, you understand, not of the capacity for resolving it into words or paint or stone. That's craft, a very different thing. You say that Madala was not a genius in the big sense—yes, I'll admit that even, for the argument's sake—

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but even you will concede her the beginnuls of it. So my difficulty is just the same. I've never believed in instinctive genius. Yet how can she, at twenty, have had the experience (that she had the craft is amazing enough) to cope with *Eden Walls*? Romantic curiosity isn't enough explanation, Jasper! Look at her certainty of touch. Look at her detail. Look how she gets inside that woman's mind. That's the fascination of it. It's such a document. Now how docs she know it? That's what intrigues me. Madala and a street woman! Where's the connection? How does she get inside her? Because she does get inside her."

" Oh, it's real enough," said the blonde lady.

" It must be. You should have seen the letters she received ! Amazing, some of them."

" Anita, they amazed *her*. I remember her getting one while she was staying with us. She looked thoroughly frightened. She said—' But Lila, I didn't realize—it was just a story. But this poor thing, she says it's true ! She says it's happened to her ! What are we to do ? ' You know, she was nearly crying. It was some hysterical woman who had read the book. But Madala always believed in people. I know she wrote to her. I believe she helped her. But she never told you much about her doings."

" Oh, her sentimental side doesn't interest me. What I ask myself is—how does she know, as she

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obviously does know, all that her wretched drab of a heroine thought and felt and suffered? "

" Instinct! Imagination ! " said the Baxter girl. " It must be the explanation."

" It isn't. It isn't. Oh, I've puzzled it out. I'm convinced that from the beginning it's experience. Don't flare, Lila, I don't mean literal experience. Not in *Eden Watts*, anyhow. Later, of course—but we're discussing *Eden Walls*. Imagination, do you say, Beryl? But the imagination must have a fact for its root. I'll grant you that imagination is so essentially a quality of youth that the merest rootlet of a reality is enough to set a young artist beanstalk climbing. But the older he grows, the wiser, the more versed in reality, the less he trusts his imagination, the more, in consequence, his imagination Hags and withers; till he ends—one sees it happen again and again—as the recorder merely of his own actual experiences and emotions. It's only the greatest who escape that decay of the imagination. Do you think Hint Madala did? Look at *Eden Walls*. Remember what we know about her. Can't you see that the skeleton of *Eden Walls* is Madala's own life? Consider her history. She leaves what seems to have been a happy childhood behind her and sets out on adventure—very young. So does the woman in *Eden Walls*. The parallel's exact. Madala's Westering Hill and the *Breckonridge* of the novel are the same place. The house, the lane, the

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country-side, she doesn't trouble to disguise them. Again—Madala's adventure is ushered in by calamity : and tragedy—(you can see the artist transmuting the mere physical calamity into tragedy) tragedy happens to the woman in *Eden Walls*. Remember how much more Madala dwelt on the sense of loneliness and lovcllessness, on the anguish of the loss of something to love her, than on what one might call the—er—official emotions of a betrayed woman. Didn't it strike you? Doesn't that show that she was depending on her experience rather than on her imagination, fitting her own private grief to an imaginary case? Then, in America, she has the struggle for meat and drink, for mere existence. So does the woman in *Eden Walls*. Madala does not go under. The woman in *Eden Walls* does. It's the first real difference. But I maintain that in reality the parallel still continues, that, in imagination, Madala did go under over and over again : that she had ever in front of her the 'suppose, suppose,' that, in drawing the woman in *Eden Walls*, she is saying to herself—'Here, but for the grace of God, go I.' And then, you know, when you think of her, hating that big city, saving up her pennies, and coming home at last in a passion of homesickness (if it was homesickness—sickness anyhow), can't you see how it makes her write of that other woman? It's the gift, the genius, stirring in her—: born, not immaculately, but of her own literal experience. Jasper's

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right—you can always make facts fit if you think them out: and because T possess that underlying shadow-work (I admit it's no more) of fact to guide me in deciphering her method in the first book, therefore, in the second book and the third book, I find it safe to *deduce* facts to cover the stories, even when I don't possess them. I consider that I'm justified, that *Eden Walls* justifies me. Don't you?"

"It's plausible," said Mr. Flood thoughtfully.

"Oh, it's convincing," said the Baxter girl reverently. "I feel I've never known Madala Grey before. What it will be when you get it into shape, Miss Serle——"

"In fact," said Miss Howe, "there's only one drawback——"

"And that?" said Anita swiftly.

"Only Madala's own account."

"She never discussed her methods," said Anita sharply.

"Just so! You're not the only person who's—pumped. I remember seeing her once surrounded, in her lion days. I remember her ingenuous explanations. She did her best to oblige them—'Honestly, I don't know. One just sits down and imagines.' And then—⁴ That's quite easy. But it's awfully difficult writing it down.' That's the explanation, Nita. A deliberate, even unconscious self-exploitation is all nonsense. Madala's not clever enough."

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" Not clever enough 1 "

" No. You're much cleverer than she was. Yon have twice her brains. You can't think, Anita, what brains you've got. You've got far too many to understand a simple person. I don't agree, you know, with 'genius.' I can't throw a word like that about so lightly. But as far as it went with Madala, it was the same sort of genius that makes a crocus push in the spring. Your theory—oh, it's plausible, as Jasper says, but don't you see that it destroys all the charm of her work? It's the innocence of her knowledge, the simplicity of her attitude to her own insight that to me is moving. She touches pitch, yet her fingers are clean. It's her view of her story that arrests one, not her story, not her facts, not her mere plot."

" No, the plot is conventional, I'll grant you that. She was always content with old bottles."

" Yes, and when the new wine burst them and made a mess on the carpet, Madala was always so surprised and indignant."

Mr. Flood giggled.

" Pained is the word, dear lady—surprised and pained. Do you remember when *Eden Walls* was banned? "

" I don't suppose she talked to you about it, Jasper," said Miss Howe sharply.

"I? I was never of her counsels. But I got my amusement out of the affair. Dear, delightful woman 1 She behaved like a schoolgirl sent to

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Coventry. I remember congratulating her on the advertisement, and she would hardly speak to me. But it suited her, the blush."

" *Wasn't* it an advertisement! " said the Baxter girl longingly.

" If one could have got her to see it," said Anita. " But no, she insisted on being ashamed of herself. She said to me once that the critics had ' read in ' things that she had never dreamed of—that it made her doubt her own motives—that she felt dirtied and miserable. And yet she wouldn't alter one of those scenes. Obstinate ! She could be very obstinate."

" Oh, which scenes? " The Baxter girl stuck her elbows on the table and her chin in her lists. Her eyes sparkled. " Oh, then, Miss Serle, did you—? did she come to you in the early days? Did you help her too?"

" My daughter—very kind to young people ! "

It was a mere mutter, but I recognized the swing of the phrase. Anita didn't. She was busy with the Baxter girl.

" I don't say that there would be no Madala Grey today if I——"

Hut——" said Mr. Flood.

" *But*——" said Miss Howe, " she's Anita's discovery. We're never to forget that, are we, darling?"

" Oh, I knew that," said the Baxter girl, trying to be tactful. " But *Eden Walls* was written before you knew her, wasn't it? I understood—I didn't

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know, I mean," she explained to them, " that Miss Serle had—blue-pencilled——"

" I did and I didn't." Anita laughed, as if in spite of herself. " I confess I thought at the time that it needed revision. Mind you, I never questioned the quality, but I knew what the public would stand and what it wouldn't. Of course, I didn't want the essentials altered. But there were certain cuts——However, nothing would move her."

" That's funny. She never gave me the impression that she believed in herself so strongly."

" Oh, her *pose* was diffidence," said the blonde lady.

" But she didn't believe in herself. It was obvious. When I went through her MS. and blue-pericilled, she was most grateful. She agreed to everything and took the MS. away to remodel."

" And then?"

" I heard nothing more of her—for weeks. Finally I wrote and asked her to come and see me. She came. She was delightful. I had told her, you know, about the *Anthology* the first time I met her. I remember that I was annoyed with myself afterwards. I'm not often indiscreet. But she had a—a knack—a way with her. I hardly know how to describe it."

" One told her things," said the Baxter girl.

" Just so. One told her things. And she had brought me a mass of material—some charming

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American verse (you remember? in the last section but one) that I had never come across. She had been reading for me at the British Museum in her spare time. I confess I was touched. We talked, I remember——" She sighed reminiscently. "It was not until she made a move to go that I recollected myself. 'Well,' I said, 'and how about *Eden Walls*?' She fidgeted. She looked thoroughly guilty. At last it came out. She hadn't altered a line. She had tried her utmost. She had drafted and re-drafted. She had finally given it up in despair and just got work in some obscure newspaper office—a most absorbing office! But there—you know Madala when she's interested—was interested——"

"Don't," said Miss Howe softly.

But Anita went on—

"'Well but—' I said to her—that's all very well. But you're not going to abandon *Eden Walls*, are you?' Then it all came out. Yes, she was. She knew I was right. She wasn't conceited. She quite saw that the book was useless. It just meant that she couldn't write novels and that she mustn't waste any more time. 'But my dear Miss Grey,' I said, 'you mean to say that you'd rather leave the book unpublished than alter a couple of chapters, remodel a couple of characters?' 'But I can't,' she said, 'I can't. They happened that way,' 'Then make them happen differently,' I said. But no, she couldn't. 'Oh

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well," I said at last—"if you're so absolutely sure of yourself, if you're prepared to set up your judgment——" That distressed her. I can hear her now, 'But I don't set up my judgment. I'll burn the wretched stuff to-morrow if you say it's trash. I knew it would be, in my heart. But—I can't alter it, because—because it happened that way.' Then I had an idea. 'To you?' I said. She looked at me. She laughed. She said—"Miss Serle, you've written ten books to my one. Don't pretend you don't know how a story happens." Anita nodded at us. "You see? Evasive. I think it was from that moment that I began to have my theory of her."

"Well—and what next?" demanded Miss Howe.

^{4t} She would have said good-bye if I had let her. I stopped her. ^{fc} 'Reconsider it,' I said. She beamed at me, chastened but quite cheerful. 'Oh, I'll try another some day,' she said. 'I suppose I'm not old enough. I was a fool to think I could.' At that, of course, I gave in. I wasn't going to lose sight of *Eden Walls*. I told her to bring it as it was and I'd see what I could do. As you know, Mitchell and Bent jumped at it."

"But it was banned," said the Baxter girl.

"Yes, but everybody read it. You can get it anywhere now. And I can say now—"Thank the gods she didn't touch it," "

"Then she was right?"

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"Of course she was right. I knew it all the time."

"And she didn't?"

"Of course she didn't. Mine was critical knowledge. Hers the mere instinct of—whatever you choose to call it. I was afraid of the critics. She didn't know enough to be afraid."

"There's something big about you, Anita!" said Miss Howe suddenly.

Mr. Flood gave the oblique flicker of eyes and mouth that was his smile.

"Yes," he said slowly, "it fits her quite well."

"What?" said Anita sharply.

"The mantle, dear lady."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Ah—*Gentle dullness ever loves a joke*. What, Beryl?"

"I don't see," the Baxter girl had harked back, "how you can call a book that has been banned conventional."

"Only the plot——"

"Ah, that plot!" Nobody could snub Mr. Flood. "Think, dear lady! Village maiden—faithless lover—lights o' London—unfortunate female—what more do you want?"

"Of course." Anita resumed the reins. "It's as old as *The Vicar of Wakefield*."

"Oh, *that*!" The Baxter girl looked interested. "Do you know, I've never seen it. One of Irving's shows, wasn't it?"

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I laughed. I couldn't help it. But they were all quite solemn, even Anita. But then she never did listen to the Baxter girl. She had talked straight through her sentences.

"But it's not the material. It's the way it's handled. It's never been done quite so thoroughly, from the woman's point of view—so unadornedly. People are afraid of their '*poor girls*.' There's a formula that even the Immortals follow. They are all young and beautiful, and they all die. They must. They wouldn't be tragic in continuation. But Madala's woman doesn't. That's the point. There's no pretence at making her a heroine. She's just the ordinary stupidish sheep of a creature, ⁴ gone wrong.' There's no romantic halo, no love-glamour, no pity and terror, just the chronicle of a sordid life. And yet you can't put the book down. At least I couldn't put it down.

"Do *you* like it?" I said to Kent Rehan, as he paused beside me in his eternal pacing from room to room.

He looked at me oddly.

"I respect it," he said. "I don't like it. People misjudged——"

"If it had been the recognized love story"—Mr. Flood's high voice silenced him—"the regularized irregularity, so to speak, it wouldn't have been banned. It was the absence of a love story that the British public couldn't forgive. It was cheated. It was shocked."

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" But there is a love story at the beginning, isn't there? " I said. " I haven't read far."

Instantly the Baxter girl exhibited me—

" Yes, imagine ! She hasn't read it 1 "

" I've read *The Vicar of Wakefield*," I said. And then I was annoyed that I had shown I was annoyed. But at once Miss Howe helped me. Miss Howe was always nice to me.

" How far have you got ? Where the man tires of her ? Ah, yes 1 Well, after that it's just her struggle. She—she earns her living—in the inevitable way. She grows into a miser. She hoards."

Mr. Flood looked acute.

" That's what upset them. They don't mind a Magdalen; but Magdalen unaware, unrepentant, Magdalen preserving her ill-gotten gains—no, that's not quite nice."

" Well, I don't know," said Miss Howe. " If anyone can't feel the spirit it's written in, the passion of pity—I think it's the most pitiful thing I've ever read. It made me shiver. That wretched creature, saving and sparing——" And then to me, for I suppose I showed I was interested—
" She wants to get away, you know, to get back into the country. It's her dream. The Home-sickness——"

" I suppose such a woman could——? •' said the Baxter girl.

" 1 used to argue it with Madala. Madala always

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said that, with some people, that animal craving for some special place was like love—a passion that could waste you. She said that every woman must have some devouring passion, for a man, or a child, or a place—*every* woman. And that for a beaten creature like that, it would be *place*—the homing instinct of a cat or a bird. And mixed up with it, religion—the vague shadowy ideal of peace and cleanly beauty—all that the wretched creature tries to express in her phrase—'getting out and living quiet'—that Madala typifies in the word 'Eden.' It meant much to Madala. Don't you remember that passage towards the end of the book where she meets the man, the first man, and brings him home with her—and he doesn't even recognize her, and she doesn't even care?" She picked up a bundle of tattered proofs and turned them over. "Where is it? What an appalling hand she had!" She stood a moment, reading a page and pursing her lips. "Oh, well, what's the use of reading it? We all know it." She flung it down.

"Let me see," I said to the Baxter girl. She drew it towards me. It was the first proof I'd ever seen. It was corrected till it was difficult to read. But I made it out at last.

With the closing of the door she dismissed him with one phrase for ever from her mind—

"And that's that!"

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She had long been accustomed thus to summarize her clients, dispassionately, as one classes beasts at a show; and she judged them, not by their clothing or their speech, not by the dark endured hours of their love or by the ticklish after-moment of the reckoning, but rather, as she hovered at the door with her provocative night smile dulled to a business friendliness, by their manner of leaving her.

Always there was the fever to be gone; but some went furtively, with cautious, tiptoe feet that set the stairs a-squeak with mockery. Her smile did not change for the swaggerer who stayed long and took his luck-kiss twice, but her eyes would harden. Mean, cheating mean, to kiss again and never pay again ! And some she watched and smiled upon who left her in a brutal silence. For them she had no resentment, rather the stillness beneath her smile reached out to the revulsion of their bearing as to something welcomed and akin. And some gave back her smile with kindly words—and those she hated.

But when, after his manner, the man had gone, she had, as always, her ritual

She Joeeked her easy door and pulling out the key, put it before her on the table at the bedside. Left and right of it she laid her money down, adding to the night's gains the meagre leavings of her purse. Left and right the little piles grew, one heaped high for the needs of her day and her night, for food and roof and livery, and one a thin scatter of coppers and small silver that took long weeks to change into the dear, the exquisite, the Eden-opening gold. It was the bigger pile that she thrust so carelessly back into her bag, and the scattered ha'pence that she warmed in the cup of her two hands, holding them, jingle-jingle, at her ears, dropping them to her lap again to count anew, piling them before her to a little, narrowing tower, before she

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opened the child's jewel-case beside her, and, lifting the sheaf of letters that she never read but kept still and would always keep, for the savage pain they gave her when her eyes saw them and her fingers touched them, she poured out the new treasure upon the sacred hoard beneath.

Tonpence saved—and yesterday a shilling ! Five shillings last week. Fifty pounds ! She would soon have fifty pounds !

She put away the box of money, and so, surrendering at last to the awful bodily fatigue, lay down again upon the tousled bed, not to sleep—her sleeping time was later in the day—but to shut her eyes.

For, by the amazing pity of God, a secret that is not every man's, was hers—the secret of the refuge appointed, behind shut eyes, of the return into eternity that is the shutting down of lids upon the eyes. The window glare, the screaming street below, the blank soiled ceiling with the flies, the walls, the unending pattern of the hateful walls, the clock, the finery, the beastly scents, the loathed familiars of stuff and wood and brass that blinked and creaked at her like voices crying—" Misery I misery ! misery ! "—these were her world. Yet not her only world. She, who was so dim and blunted a woman-thing, could pass, with the warm dark velvet touch of dropping lids, not into the nullity of sleep, but into the grey place, limitless, timeless, where consciousness knows nothing of the flesh.

She shut her eyes with the sigh of a tired dog, and instantly her soul lay back and floated, resting.

There was no time, no thought, no feeling. There was peace—quiet—greyness. At unmeasured intervals realization washed over her like waves, waves of peace—quiet—greyness. Greyness—she worshipped the blessed greyness. She wanted to give it a beloved name and

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knew none. 'When I am dead ! —' For ever and ever, Amen ! '—So she came nearest to 'Eternity.'

Peace—quiet—greyness : grey ness enduring for ever, that could yet be rent asunder like a temple veil and let in misery—the window glare, the reeking room, the clodding footsteps, the fingers tapping at her door—a frail eternity whose walls were slips of flesh.

She called harshly—

"Get out ! Get away ! Put it down outside then, can't you ? "

There was a mutter and the clank of a scuttle-lid, and a thud. The footsteps shuffled out of hearing.

She shut her eyes again.

Peace—quiet—greyness. The waves were rocking her.

She did not dream. There are, by that same pity of God, no dreams permitted in the place of refuge. But, as she lay in peace, she watched her own memonal thoughts rising about her, one by one, like bubbles in a glass, like cocks crowing in the dark of the dawn.

A white road . . . the hill-top wind panting down it like a runner . . . dust . . . bright blue sky . . . sky-blue succory in the gutter . . . succory is so difficult to pick . . . tough . . . it leaves a green cut on one's linger . . . succory in a pink vase on the mantel-piece . . . the fire's too hot for flowers . . . hot buttered toast . . . the armchair wants mending . . . the horse-hair tickles one's ears as one lies back in it and warms one's toes and watches the rain drowning the fields outside . . . empty winter fields, all tousled and tussocky from cow dung . . . grey skies . . . snow . . . not a soul in sight . . . and succory in a pink vase on the mantel-piece . . . because one's back in Eden . . . summer and winter are all one in Eden . . . picking buttercups in Eden as one used to do ... all the fields grown full of buttercups . . . fifty buttercups make a

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bunch . . . , fifty golden buttercups with the King's head on them . . . hurry up with the buttercups . . . one more bunch of buttercups will buy back Eden—Eden—ah!

So, with a long gasping sigh would come the end. "Eden—" and the longing would be upon her, tearing like a wild beast at her eyes and her throat and her heart—"I want to go home. Oh God, let me go home! Let me out! Let me out! I want to go home——"

The chapter ended.

"And does she?" I looked up at the Baxter girl. "I'm always afraid of a bad ending. Does she get back in the end?"

The Baxter girl fluttered through the pages.

"The money's stolen first—a man takes it—while she's asleep——Oh, it's beastly, that scene. She has to save it all up again. It takes her years, But—oh, yes, she does go back."

"The railway journey," said Miss Howe. "DC you remember?"

"If you want happy endings—" the Baxter girl flattened out the last page with a jerk—"there you are!"

I read over her shoulder. The strong scent that hung about her seemed to float between me and the page.

Here we are—where she gets to the station, 'Eden,' Madala calls it, but the woman calls it 'Breckonridge.'

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At last and at last the station-board with the familiar name flashed past her window. She thrilled. The station lamps repeated it as the train slowed down. She thought—how long the platform's grown ! . . . a bookstall ! . . . a bookstall on each side ! . . . there used not to be . . . wasn't the station smaller ? . . .

She spoke to the ticket collector shyly, blushing, like a girl going to an assignation and thinking that all the world must know it.

He answered, already catching at the ticket of the traveller behind her—

" How far to Breckonridge ? A mile, maybe—but you get the tram at the corner."

She stared. She would have questioned him again, but the throng of people pressed her forward.

A tram through the village ? . . . queer ! , . . not that it mattered to her . . . she would take the old short cut through the fields outside the station yard. . There was a stile . . . and a wild cherry tree. . . .

She left the yard, the unfamiliar yard with asphalt and motors and a great iron bridge, crossed the road, and stopped bewildered.

There were no fields.

⁴ 'Station Road.' The labelled yellow villas were like • row of faces. Eyes, nose, mouth—windows, porch, steps—steps like teeth. They grinned.

In a sort of panic she ran past them down the road, a lumbering, clumsy woman. She trod on her skirt, and recovered herself with difficulty. She heard a small boy laugh and call after her. She clambered on to the tram.

" I want to go to the village—to Breckonridge——"

" It's all Breckonridge. 'Ow far ? "

She stared.

" I don't remember. He said a mile."

" Town 'All, I expect." He took his toll and passed on.

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She turned vaguely to a neighbour,
" Town Hall ? I don't remember. The road's all different. Where are the fields ? "

The neighbour nodded.

" BuiIt over. When were you *here* last? Thirty years ? My word, you'll find changes ! I notice it even in five. Very full it's getting Good train service. My husband can get to his office under the hour."

She said dazedly—

" It was—it is—a little village."

The woman laughed.

" I daresay. But how long ago ? "

" There were fields," she said under her breath.
" There were flowers—"

⁴⁶ Here's the Town Hall. Didn't you want the Town Hall ? "

Unsteadily she rose and got out. The tram clanged forward.

She stood on an island where four roads met and looked about her. The sun stared down at her, a brazen city sun. The asphalt was hot and soft under her feet. Road-menders were at work in the fair-way. They struck alternately at the chisel between them and it was as if the rain of blows fell upon her. She felt stupid and dizzy. She did not know where to turn. There was nothing left of her village, and yet the place was familiar. There were drab houses and rows of shops and a stream of traffic, and the figures of women and rnen—menacing, impersonal figures of men—that hurried towards her down the endless streets.

" Well? " said the Baxter girl.

" Bat that's not the *end*? " I said.

The Baxter girl looked at me oddly.

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"Why not?" And then-'⁴How else could it end? How would you make it end?"

"Oh, I don't mean——" I began. I hesitated. "I don't think I quite understand," I said.

That was the truth. At the time I couldn't follow it. It moved me. It swept me along. But whether it was good or bad I didn't know. I hadn't the faintest idea of what it was driving at. I felt in a vague way that the people at home wouldn't have liked it.

"What does it mean?" I said to the Baxter girl.

"That you can't eat your cake and have it, I suppose. You can get out of Eden, but you can't get back."

Anita answered her contemptuously—

"Is that all it means to you?"

And yet we had spoken very softly. But Anita had eyes that ate up every movement in a room, and her small pretty ears never seemed to miss a significant word though ten people were talking. I had seen her glance uneasily at us and again at the two in the other room. I knew Great-aunt's mutter was too low even for her, and Kent Rehan only nodded now and then, but even that annoyed her. She lifted her own voice to be sure that they should hear all that she said, as if afraid lest, even for a moment, she should be left out of their thoughts.

"Oh!" she said loudly and contemptuously, "I tell you what," see."

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She succeeded, if that pleased her. Kent Rehan raised his head and stared across at her with that impersonal expression of attention that, I was beginning to realize, could always anger her on any face. She had said a little while ago that she only cared for Miss Grey as an artist, and I believe that she believed it. But I don't think—I shall never think it true. I think Anita depended—depends, on other people more than she dreams. Poor Anita ! I can see her now, her whole personality challenging those dark abstracted eyes. But she spoke to the Baxter girl—

"When Madala Grey chose *Eden Walls* for her title—when she flung it in the public face——"

I saw him give a shrug of fatigue or distaste—I couldn't tell which. Great-aunt, who had been sitting, her head on one side, with her sharp poll-parrot expression, crooked her finger at me. I went across to her and behind me I heard the Baxter girl—

" You talk as if she were in a passion——"

And Anita——

" So she was. I'm telling you. It's the wrongs, not of one woman, but of all women, of all ages of women, that burn behind it."

" Votes for Women 1 " It was Mr. Flood's voice.

There was a laugh and I lost an answer. I caught only a vehement blur of words, because Great-aunt had me by the wrist.

" Chatter, chatter ! I can't hear 'em. What's my daughter talking about? "

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I hesitated.

" About books, Auntie."

" Whose books? " she pounced.

" Some writer, Auntie."

"What's she saying about her, eh?" She held me bent down to her. I glanced at Kent Rchan. He was listening to us. I felt harried.

" About—oh—whether a genius—whether she was a genius——"

"Madala, eh?"

" Yes, Auntie,"

I thought I heard him sigh. And at that—why, I don't know—I turned on him. I was rude, I believe. I sounded silly and cruel, I know. Yet, heaven knows, that that was the last thing I wanted to be.

I s# 'd angrily to him—

" Oil, why do you stand there and listen ? Don't you see that I can't help myself? Why don't you go away? What good can it do you to stay here, to stay and listen to it all? "

Then I stopped because he looked at me for a moment, arid flushed, and then did turn away, back again to his old dreary post at the street window.

Great-aunt chuckled.

" That's right, little Jenny. Take your own way with them, Jenny ! "

I said—

" Let me go, Auntie dear," and I loosed her hand from my wrist and went after him; for of course

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the instant the words were out of my mouth I was ashamed of myself. I couldn't think what had possessed me. I was badly ashamed of myself.

I came to him and said—

"Mr. Rehan—I don't mean to be rude. Great-aunt—she doesn't understand. She made me talk. It wasn't rudeness; but you stood there, and I knew—I thought I knew, what you must think, must be thinking—" (but 'feeling' was the word I meant) "and I was sorry. I was angry because I was sorry. I didn't mean to be rude."

He said—

"It's all right. I didn't think you nule."

Then I said—

"But I meant it. Why do you stay? What good can it do you? Why don't you go away from it all?"

And he—

"Where is there to go? I've been tramping all day."

"Where?"

"I don't know. Up and down streets. It's—it's blinding, it's stifling——"

"The fog is," I said quickly. But we didn't mean the fog.

He let himself down into the low wicker chair. stood leaning against the sill, watching him.

"You're just dead tired," I said.

He nodded. Then, as if something in my words had stung him—

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"Where else? I've always come here. Every month. It was natural to come."

"But now—" I said (and I was so urgent with him because of all their talk that drummed still in my mind like a wasps' nest)—"I'd go away if I were you. What good does it do you? They talk. It's—it's rather hateful. I've been listening. I'd go."

"Where?" he said again. And I—

"Haven't you anyone—at home?"

But as I asked I knew that he hadn't. He had the look. Oh, he wore good clothes and I knew he wasn't poor. But it was written all over him that he looked after himself and did it expensively and badly. He had, too, that other look that goes with it—of a man who has never found anyone more interesting to him than himself. And the queer part was that it didn't seem selfish in him—and I'm sure it wasn't. It was just like the way a child takes you for granted, and tells you about its own big affairs, and never guesses that you have your own little affairs too. I suppose it was a fault in him; but it made me like him. And he talked to me simply and almost as if he needed helping out; as if he'd been just anybody. I never had to help out anyone before: it had always been the other way round. I'd thought, too, that celebrated people were always superior and brilliant and overwhelming, like Anita and Mr. Flood. But he wasn't. He was as simple as A.B.C. I liked him. I did like him.

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I felt happier, more at peace, standing there with him than I had felt since I had been in Anita's house. I think he would have gone on talking to me too, if it hadn't been for the Baxter girl. She spoiled it. She tilted back her chair yawning, and so caught sight of us, and laughed, and leaning over to Miss Howe, whispered in her ear. She was a crazy girl. At once I got up and came across to them, panic-stricken, hating her. I had to. I didn't want him worried, and you never knew what hateful thing the Baxter girl wouldn't say, and think that she was pleasing you.

But without knowing it, Anita helped me. Her voice, rising excitedly in answer to some word of Mr. Flood's, recalled the Baxter girl.

"Mystery? Of course there's a mystery I She was at the height of her promise in *Ploughed Fields*. It's as good as *Eden Walls* in matter and, technically, better still. The third book ought to have settled her place in modern literature for good and all. It ought to have been her master-piece. But what does she do? We expect a chaplet of pearls, and she gives us a daisy-chain. Isn't that a mystery worth solving? Won't people read the *Life* for that if for nothing else? Am I the only person who has asked what happened to her between her second and her third books?"

"I tell you, but you won't listen," Mr. Flood insisted. "Your romantic has become a realist and is flying from it to the resting-place of romance."

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" I do listen. Just so. You use your words and I use mine, but we mean the same thing. She's been bruising herself against facts. She has been walled up by facts. Her vision is gone. Now what was, in her case, the all-obscuring fact? "

" She was a woman," said the blonde lady. " It could only be one thing. Don't I know the signs? She even lost her sense of humour."

" Yes, she did, didn't she?" cried the Baxter girl in a voice of relief. " Oh, I remember one day, just before the engagement was announced——"

" As if that had anything to do with it," said Anita scornfully.

" —and she'd been so absent-minded I couldn't get anything out of her. I thought I knew her well enough to tease her. I had told her all *my* affairs. So——⁴'I believe you're in love,' I said. ⁴ Oh, well, you'll get over it. It's a phase." Was there any harm in that? It was only repeating what you had said to me about her, you know," she reminded the blonde lady. " But she froze instantly. She made no comment. She just changed the subject. But I felt as if I had been introduced to a new Madala. I wished I hadn't said it."

" You are a little fool, Beryl," said the blonde lady tolerantly.

" But she *was* altered," insisted the Baxter girl. " The old Madala would have laughed."

" Yes, she was altered," said Anita. " Her whole attitude to herself and her work changed that

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spring. How she horrified me one day. It was soon after *Ploughed Fields* came out, and we were talking about her new book, at least I was, pumping a little I confess, and suddenly she said—' Anita, I don't think I'll write any more. This stuff—' she had her hands on *Eden Walls*, ' it's harsh, it's ugly; and so's *Ploughed Fields*. Isn't it?' 'It's true to life,⁵ I said, ^c that's the triumph of it.' ' Is it ? ' she said. She looked at me in an uneasy sort of way. And then—' I'd like to write a kind book, a beautiful book.' I told her that she couldn't, that she was a realist. ' That's why,' she said, ' I don't think I'll write any more,' I laughed, of course. Anybody would have laughed. ' Oh,' she said, ' I mean it. I haven't an idea in my head. I'm tired and empty. I think I shall go away for a wander. There's always the country, anyhow.' ' Well, Madala,' I said, ^{fc} I think you're ungrateful. You're a made woman. You've got your name : you've got your line : you've got your own gift——' ' Oh, that!' she said, as if she were flicking off a fly. I was irritated. It was so arrogant. ' What more do you want ? ' I asked her. ' What more *can* you want? ' She said—' I don't know,' looking at me, you know, as if she expected me to tell her. I disliked that mood of hers. One did expect, with a woman of her capacity, to be entertained as it were, to have ideas presented, not to be asked to provide them. Then she began, a propos of nothing at all—' If I ever marry——' That startled me.

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We'd never touched on the subject before. 'Oh, my dear Madala," I said, 'you must never think of anything so—so unnecessary. For you, of all people, it would be fatal. It would waste your time, it would distract your thoughts, it would narrow your outlook, it would end by spoiling your work altogether. I've seen it happen so often. It's terrible to me even to think of a woman with a future like yours, throwing it away just for the——" She interrupted me. 'I wouldn't marry for the sake of getting married, if you mean that. Not even for children.' "

"You didn't mean that, did you, Anita?" said Miss Howe smiling a little.

"Certainly not. But I had always been afraid that she might be tempted to marry for the adventure's sake, for the mere experience, for the——"

"Copy," said Mr. Flood. "I always said so. Yes?"

" 'Oh well, Madala,' I said to her, 'you know what I think. I'm not one to quote Kipling, but—*He travels fastest who travels alone.*' She looked at me so strangely. 'Alone?' she said. 'Alone. It's the cruellest word in the language. There's drowning in it.' 'Well, without conceit, Madala,' I said, 'I can affirm that I have been alone, spiritually, all my life.' 'Ah, yes,' she said, 'but you're different.' And that," Anita broke off, "was what I liked in Madala. She did recognize differences. She could

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appreciate. She wasn't absorbed in herself. She said to me quite humbly—'I'm not strong, I suppose ; but I don't suffice myself. I can't bear myself sometimes. I can't bear the burden of myself. Can't you understand?' 'Frankly,' I said, 'I can't. I'm a modern woman, and the modern woman is a pioneer. She's the Columbus of her own individuality. She must be. It's her career. It's her destiny.' She answered me pettishly, like a naughty child—'I don't want to be a pioneer.' 'You're that,' I said, 'already, whether you want to be or not.' Then she said to me, with that dancing, impish look that her eyes and her lips and her white teeth rxsl to manage between them—'All right! If I've got to be, I will. But I'll be a pioneer in my own way. I swear I'll shock the lot of you.'

"Oho," said Mr. Flood with exaggerated unction.

"Exactly!" Anita gave his agreement such eager welcome. "That put me on the qui-vive. Knowing her as I did, it was a very strong hint. I awaited developments. Frankly, I was prepared for a scandal, a romance, anything you please in the way of extravagance. That's why the Carey marriage, that tamencss, upset me so. It was not what I was expecting. Really, I don't know which was more of a shock to me, *The Resting-place* or the marriage. Hardly had I recovered from the one when——"

"Oh, *The Resting-place* was the shock of my life

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too." He giggled. " I mourned, I assure you that I mourned over it. That opening, you know— ' There was once'—And the end again—' So they were married and had children and lived happily ever after.' Pastiche ! And then to be invited to wade through a conscientious account of how they achieved it! Too bad of Madala ! As if the poor but virtuous artist's-model weren't a drug on the market already ! And the impecunious artist himself—*stooping*, you know ! Oh, I sat in ashes."

Miss Howe clapped her hands.

" Jasper, I love you. I *do* love you. Did she pull your leg too ? Both legs ? She did ! She did ! Oh, there's only one Madala ! "

Mr. Flood's vanity was in his cheeks while she rattled on.

" Darling Jasper, I thought better of you ! Can't you see the whole thing's a skit? Giving the jam-pot public what they wanted ! Why, it's been out a year and they're sucking the spoon still. It's the resting-place ! Ask the libraries! Oh, can't you see? "

" If it is parody," said Mr. Flood slowly, "then, I admit, it's unique."

"What else? You'll not deny humour to her?"

"I do!" the blonde lady nodded her head.
" Once a woman is in love she's quite hopeless."

" I don't see how parody could be in question," Anita broke in. " Anybody reading the book care-

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fully must see that she's in earnest. That's the tragedy of it."

"The literary tragedy?"

"Not only literary. The psychological value is enormous. It's not art, it's record. It's photography. That happened. That happened, tragically, to Madala. Oh, not the trimmings, of course, not the happy-ever-after. But to me it's perfectly clear that that lapse into *Family Herald* romance has had its equivalent in Madala's own life. I've always felt a certain weakness in her character, you know—a certain sentimentality."

"In the author of *Eden Walls*?" said Miss Howe contemptuously.

"No, dear lady! But in the author of *The Resting-place*." Mr. Flood had recovered himself.

"Skit, I tell you, skit!" she insisted. And they continued to bicker in undertones while Anita summed up the situation.

"No, my theory is this—Madala Grey met some man——"

"Carey?" asked Mr. Flood, dividing his allegiance.

"No, Carey comes later. There was—an episode——"

"Episodes?" he amended.

"Possibly. But an episode anyhow, that I place myself at the end of the *Ploughed Fields* period. It may have been later, it may have been the following summer while she was working at *The Resting-*

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place. I'm open to conviction there. But an episode there must have been. In *The Resting-place* she wrote it down as it ought to have happened."

"Why ought?"

"Well, obviously it didn't happen or she wouldn't have become Mrs. Carey."

"The gentleman loved and rode away, you mean?"

"Something of the sort. Something went wrong."

"I see." Miss Howe was interested. "It's a theory, anyhow. And then in sheer savage irony at her own weakness——"

"Not a bit. In sheer weak longing——"

"I see. If your theory is correct—I don't know what you base it on——"

"Internal evidence," said Anita airily.

"Then I can imagine that *The Resting-place* was a relief to write. Poor Madala!"

"And then," concluded Anita triumphantly, "then appears Carey, and she's too worn out, too exhausted with her own frustrated emotions to care what happens. The book's in her head still, and she her own heroine. He appears to her—I admit that it's possible that even Carey might appear to her—as a refuge, a resting-place."

"Yes, but you don't like Mr. Carey," said the Baxter girl. "But if Madala did? Isn't it possible that in Madala's eyes——? Why shouldn't the hero be Mr. Carey himself?"

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Anita's eyes were bright with the cold anger that she always showed at the name.

" My good girl, you know nothing about John Carey, or you'd rule that out. Have you ever seen him? I thought not. And yet you *have* seen him. All day. Every day. When you talk of the man in the street, whom do you mean? What utterly common-place face is in your mind? Shall I tell you what is in mine? John Carey. Ordinary! Ordinary! The apotheosis of the uninspired I Oh, I haven't any words. Look for yourself." She rummaged furiously in the half-opened desk and (lung out a fading snapshot on a mount. " There he is! That's the thing she married 1 "

" What's he doing in your holy of holies? " Mr. Flood's eyes seemed to bore into her desk.

Anita, still thrusting down the overflowing papers, answered coldly—

" Madala sent it to Mother. She said that it wasn't good enough but that it would give her an idea."

" It certainly gives one an idea," said the blonde lady languorously.

" And then she put in a post-script that it didn't do him justice because the sun was in his eyes. Defiantly, as it were. Isn't that significant? She'd never own to a mistake. Pride! She had the devil's own pride. Look at the way she took her reviews! And in this case she would be bound to defend him. She'd defend anything she'd once taken under her wing."

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" Well, you know," drawled the blonde lady, her eyes on the photograph, "according to this he topped her by two inches. I don't somehow see him *under* Madala's wing." And then—" After all, there's something rather fascinating in bone and muscle."

" Yes, and I don't see," the Baxter girl hurried into defiance, " honestly I don't see, Miss Scrole, why she shouldn't have been in love with him. Of course, it's not a clever face, but it's good-tempered, and it's good-looking, and there's a twinkle. Madala loved a twinkle. And I don't see——"

Anita crushed her.

" We're discussing the standards of Madala Grey."

" That's not the point either, Anita." Mr. Flood would sometimes rouse himself to defend the Baxter girl. " You know something. You own to it. What do you know ? "

" Simply that she was in love with someone else. I've papers that prove it. Now it was either some man whom none of us know, whom for some reason she wouldn't let us know, or——" she hesitated. Then she began again—" Mind you, I don't commit myself, but—has the likeness never struck you? *Hugh Barrington* in *The Resting-place* and——?" Her eyes flickered towards Kent Rehan.

Mr. Flood whistled.

" Be careful, Anita."

" He ? " Miss Howe laughed, but kindly. " He's lost to the world. He'll be worse than ever now."

LEGEND

" There ! " Anita dropped upon the sentence like a hawk upon a heather bird. " You see ! You say that ! And yet you tell me there was nothing—nothing—between them ? Didn't she rave about him ? his talents ? his personality ? his charm ? And then she goes and writes the story of an artist's-model ! "

Miss Howe laughed again.

" When a thing's as obvious as that, it probably isn't so. Besides, the artist's-model marries the artist."

" Exactly. She leaves them, and us, cloyed with love in a cottage. I repeat, the artist's-model marries the artist because Madala Grey didn't. It's the merest shadow of a solution as yet, but—isn't that a living portrait in *The Resting-place* ? Oh, I know it by heart——

" Maybe it was his height that gave you the impression, less of weakness than of vagueness, as if his high forehead touched cloud-land, and were obscured by dreams; for his cold eyes guarded his mind from you, and his dark beard hid his mouth."

" You *do* know it by heart I " said Miss Howe.

" Of course I know it by heart. It was the first clue. Can anybody read those lines without recognizing him ?"

The Baxter girl persisted——

" But I don't see it. Oh, of course it is like him——but because she borrowed his face, the story needn't

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be about him. Why couldn't she just imagine the story? If she was a genius?"

"That remains the point," said Mr. Flood.

"She was," insisted Anita stubbornly.

Miss Howe smiled and said nothing.

He continued—

"The mere fact that she was a genius would prevent such a descent into milk and sugar, unless she were money-making or love-sick."

The blonde lady spoke—

"Just so! Love-sick—sick of love—savage with love—savaging her holy of holies. A parody. Lila's right."

But Miss Howe shook her head.

"No, no. I didn't mean that sort of parody. Madala may have had her emotions, but she'd always be good-tempered about them. She's laughing at herself in *The Resting-place* as well as at us."

"But why do you cavil at it so?" said the Baxter girl slowly.

•'Only at its plain meaning. Grant the parody and——"

"But why can't you just read it as it stands? Why do you say sentimental? I—I liked it."

Anita took the book from her hand.

"But, my dear child, *anybody* can write this sort of thing. Where's the passage the ladies' papers rave about, where they have a day on the river together?" She whipped over the pages while I said to the Baxter girl—

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"What is it? What's it about? What's the plot?"

"Oh, there isn't any. That's what they complain of. It's just a little artist's-model who sits to an elderly, broken-down dreamer, and thinks him a god. The duke and door-mat touch. It's just how two people fall in love and find it out. It's as simple as A.B.C. But people ate it when it came out."

"Trec.de, I tell you," insisted Mr. Flood.

Anita overheard him. .

"Exactly I Listen to this—

. . . and they landed at last in a meadow of brilliant, brook-fed grass.

She had no words in which to say a thousand times 'How beautiful!' Words? She had never known a country June. She had never seen whole hedges clotted with bloom, she had never in all her life breathed the perfume of the may or heard a lark's ecstasy. She had never—and to her simplicity there was no break in the chain of thought—she had never before been alone with him, unpaid, not his servant but his equal and companion. How should she have words?

She sat in the grass with the tall ox-eyes nodding at her elbow and looked at him from under her hat with a little eased sigh. This, after the dust of the journey, of the day, of her life, was bliss. She prepared herself for this bliss, deliberately, as she did everything. She was too poor and too hungry to be wasteful of her happiness: she must have every crumb. Therefore she had looked first at herself, critically, with her trained eye, fingering the frill of her blouse, flinging a scatter

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of skirt across her dusty city feet, lest her poverty should jar his thoughts of her

Then she looked at him. She saw him for a moment with imdazzled eyes, the blue sky enriched with clouds behind him. She was saying to herself—' I'm not a fool. I can see straight. I know what he is. He's just an ordinary man in a hot, black suit. He stoops, I suppose. He's worn out with work. He'll never be young again. And there's nothing particular about him. Then what makes me like him ? But I do. I do. He has only to turn and smile at me——'

Then he turned and smiled at her, and it seemed to her that the glamour of the gilded day passed over and into him as he smiled, glorifying him so that she caught her breath at his beauty. She knew her happiness. She knew herself and him. He was the sum of the blue sky and green, green grass, and the shining waters and the flowers with their sweet smell, and the singing birds and the hum of the little things of the air. All beauty was summed up in him : he was food to her and sunshine and music : he was her absolute good : and she thought that someone ought to see that his socks were mended properly, for there was a great ladder down one ankle, darned with wrong-coloured wool.

" Well ? " She shut the book.

" I like it," said the Baxter girl stubbornly.

Mr. Flood twisted uneasily in his seat.

" Oh, pretty, of course. Of course it's pleasant enough in a way. But Madala oughtn't to be pretty. Think of the stuff she *can* do."

" But can't you see," Miss Howe broke in. " how it parodies the slush and sugar school ? "

LEGEND

Anita shook her head.

" She used another manner when she was ironical. I wish you were right. Oh, you may be—I must consider—but I'm afraid that she is in earnest. That phrase now—' The green, green grass," (why double the adjective?)' the shining waters, the singing birds '—pitiful ! And that anti-climax—' He was her absolute good: and she thought that someone ought to see that his socks were mended properly.⁵ I ask you—is it art? "

" Not as serious work, of course," said Miss Howe, "but——"

" I wish I could think so," said Anita.

" Well, I wish I could do it," said the Baxter girl. " What do you say, Jenny? "

But it had brought back the country to me. It had brought back home. I hadn't anything to say to them.

" And she wouldn't discuss it, you know. She came in after supper that night, just as I was reading the last chapter. It had only been out a day. There she sat, where you are now, Lila, smiling, with her hands in her lap and her eyes fixed on her hands, waiting for me to finish."

" Oh——" Miss Howe gave a little gushing scream, " that reminds me—d'you know, Anita, somebody actually told me that nobody had seen *The Resting-place* before it was published, not even you. I was amused. I denied it, of course."

" Why?" said Anita coldly.

LEGEND

Miss Howe screamed again.

"Then you didn't? Oh, my dear? "

"Emancipation with a vengeance," said Mr. Flood.

"It had to come, Anita," said Miss Howe with deadly sympathy.

"It was not that. It was only—she was so extraordinarily sensitive about *The Resting-place*—unlike herself altogether. I think, I've always thought that she herself knew how unworthy it was of her. She—what's the use of disguising it?—she, at least, had a value for my judgment," her eyes, wandering past Miss Howe, brooded upon the Baxter girl, "and she knew what my judgment would be. She owned it. She anticipated it. I had shut the book, you know, quietly. She sat so still that I thought she was asleep. She had had one of those insane mornings——"

"Of course. She used to take a crowd of children into the country, didn't she? "

"Once a week. Slum children."

"I know. 'To eat buttercups,' she told me," said Miss Howe.

"It was ridiculous, you know. She couldn't afford it. Look at the way she lived! I always said to her, 'If you can afford mad extravagances of that sort, you can afford a decent flat in a decent neighbourhood'——"

"Oh, but I loved those rooms," said the Baxter girl, "with the Spanish leather screen round the wash-hand-stand."

LEGEND

Anita glanced behind her.

" Ah, you've noticed ? I happened to admire it one day and—you know what she is—' Would you like it? Why, of course, it would just suit the rest of your things. Oh, you must have it. I'd like you to. It's far too big for this room.' " " Oh,' I said, ' if you want it housed——' So that's how it comes to be here. One couldn't hurt her feelings. And you know, it was quite unsuitable to lodging-house furniture."

Miss Howe laughed.

"It disguised the wash-hand^Jstand. That was all Madala cared. Only then she a] ways took you round to show you how beautifully it did disguise it."

" Typical," said Mr. Flood. " Her reserves were topsy-turvy."

" But she had her reserves," said Miss Howe quickly.

" doubt that," he answered her.

" Oh, but she had." Anita recovered her place in the talk. " ⁴ Curious reserves. You know how she came to me over *Eden Walls* and *Ploughed Fields*. I saw every chapter. But as I was telling you, she wouldn't hear a criticism of *The Resting-place*. That evening she pounced on me. She was as quick as light. She said—' You don't like it! I knew you wouldn't! Never mind, Anita. Forget it! Put it in the fire ! You like me. What do the books matter ? ' She'd been watching me all the time,"

LEGEND

" She had eyes in the back of her head," said Miss Howe.

" Kind eyes," said the Baxter girl.

" And I assure you she wouldn't have said another word on the subject if I hadn't insisted. I told her not to be ridiculous. How could I help being disappointed? How could I separate her from her work? I was disappointed, bitterly. I made it clear. I said to her— Well, Madala, all I can say is that if your future output is to be on a level with this—this pot-boiler——"

" It's not a pot-boiler," said the Baxter girl loudly and quite rudely. " I don't know exactly what it is, but it's not a pot-boiler."

Anita stared her down.

" ' —pot-boiler,' I said, ' then—I wash my hands of you.' I wanted to rouse her. I couldn't understand her."

". Well? "said Miss Howe.

They all laughed.

" Oh, you can guess." Anita was petulant, but she, too, laughed a little. " You know her way. She just sat smiling and twisting a ring that she wore and looking like a scolded child."

" But what did she say? " said the Baxter girl.

" Nothing to the point. '.. Oh,' she said, ' but Anita, if I'd never written anything, wouldn't you be just as fond of me? ' Such a silly thing to say I She was distressing at times. She embarrassed me. Fond of her ! She knew my interests

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were intellectual. Fond of her I For a woman of her brains her standard of values was childish."

" But you were fond of her, you know," said Miss Howe.

" Oh, as for that—there was something about her—she had a certain way——After all, if it gave her pleasure to be demonstrative, it was easier to acquiesce. But she made a fetish of such things. I was only trying to explain to her, as I tell you, that it was quite impossible to separate creator and creatures, and that to me she was *Eden Walls* and *Ploughed Fields*, and if you believe me, she was upon me like a whirlwind, shaking me by the shoulders, and crying out—^{fc} No, no, stop I You're to stop ! It's me you like, not the books. I hate them. I hate all that. I shall get away from all that one day.' And I said—' I don't wonder you're ashamed of *The Resting-place*. I advise you to get to work at once on your new book. You'll find that if you pull yourself together——' And all she said was —' Nita 1 Nita ! *Don't*' And she looked at me in such a curious way——"

" How ? " somebody said.

" I don't know—laughing—despairing. She'd no right to look at me like that. It was I who was in despair."

"I'd like to have seen you two," said Miss Howe.

" I didn't know what had got into her. Of course I blame myself. I ought to have followed it out.

LEGEND

I might have prevented things. But I was annoyed and she saw it, and she——"

Miss Howe twinkled.

"She wouldn't let you be annoyed with her long. What did she do with you, Anita?"

"She? I don't know what you mean. We changed the subject. And as a matter of fact I was much occupied at the time with the *Anthology*." She paused. "She had excellent taste," said Anita regretfully. "Naturally I reserved to myself the final decision, but——"

"Just so," said Mr. Flood.

"Be quiet, Jasper." The blonde lady's draperies dusted his shoulder intimately.

"She'd brought me a delicious thing of Lady Nairn's, I remember, that I'd overlooked. And from talking of the *Anthology* we came, somehow, to talking about me. Yes——" Anita gave an embarrassed half laugh——"She began to talk to me, turning the tables as it were——about myself. She'd never, in all the years I'd known her, taken such a tone. Astonishing! As if—as if I were the younger." She stared at them, as one combating an unuttered criticism. "I—liked it," said Anita defiantly. "There was nothing impertinent. It was heartening. She made me feel that one person in the world, at least, knew me—knew my work. I realized, suddenly, that while I had been studying her, she must have been studying me, that she understood my capacities, my limitations, my

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possibilities, almost as well as I did myself. The relief of it—indescribable ! She was extraordinarily plain-spoken. As a rule, you know, I thought her manner——"

"Insincere?" said the Baxter girl. " Yes, I've heard people say that."

" It had that effect. It didn't seem possible that she could like everyone as much as she made them think she did. But with me, at least, she was always frankness itself. She believes, you know,—she believed, that is, that all my work so far, even the *Anthology* and the *Famous Women* series, not to mention the lighter work, is still preliminary : that my—" she hesitated—" my master-piece, she called it, was still to come. She said that, though she appreciated all my work, I hadn't ' found myself.' Yes ! from that child to me it was amusing. But right, you know. She said that my line, whether I dealt with a period or a person, would always be critical, but that I'd never had a big success because so far I'd been merely critical: that I'd never become identified with my subject: that I'd always remained aloof—inhuman. Yes, she said that. A curious theory—but it interested me. But she said that it was only the real theme I needed, the engrossing subject. She said that my chance would come : that ' she felt it in her bones.' I can hear her voice now—⁶ Don't you worry, Nita ! It'll come to *you* one day. A big thing. Biography, I shouldn't wonder. And I shall sit and say—1 told

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you so—I told you so ! ' Yes, she talked like that. Oh, it's nothing when I repeat it, but if you knew how it seemed to pour new life into me. It was the belief in her voice 1 "

" She always believed in you," said Miss Howe with a certain harshness. " Insincere ! You should have heard her talk of your *Famous Women* ! " Arid then—" Yes. She believed in you right enough."

" More than I did in her that night. I couldn't forget *The Resting-place*. It lay on the table, and every now and then, when I felt most comfort in her, my eyes would fall on it, and it would jar me. She felt it too. When I saw her off at last—it had grown very late—she stopped at the gate and turned and came running back. I thought that she had forgotten her handbag. She nearly always forgot her handbag. But no, it was *The Resting-place* that was on her mind. It was—' Nita ! try it again. Maybe you'd like it better.' And then—' Nita 1 I enjoyed writing it so.' ' That's something, at any rate,' I said, not wanting, you know, to be unkind. Then she said—' I wish you liked it. Because, you know, Nita—' and stopped as if she wanted to tell me something and couldn't make up her mind' 'Well, what?' I said. It was cold on the steps. She hesitated. She looked at me. For an instant I had an absurd impression that she was going to cry. Then she kissed me. She'd kissed me good-night once already, though, you know, we never did as a rule. And then, off she

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went without another word. I was quite bewildered by her. I nearly called her back; but it was one of those deep dark blue nights : it seemed to swallow her up at once. But I heard her footsteps for a long while after—dragging steps, as if she were tired. I wasn't. It was as if she had put something into me. I went back into the house and I worked till daylight. And all the next day I worked—worked well. I felt, I remember, so hopeful, so full of power. By the evening I had quite a mass of material to show her, if she came. I half expected her to come. But instead—" she fumbled among her papers—" I got this."

It was a sheet of note-paper, a sheet that looked as if it had been crushed into a ball and then smoothed out again for careful folding. Anita's fingers were still ironing out the crinkled edge while she read it aloud.

" I want to tell you something. I tried to tell ^YOU yesterday, but somehow I couldn't. It oughtn't to be difficult, yet all this afternoon I've been writing to you in an exercise book, and crossing out, and re-phrasing, and putting in again as carefully and dissatisfiedly as if it were Opus- 4. I wish it were, because then you'd be very much pleased with Madala Grey and forget the dreadful shock of Opus 3 I I was always afraid you wouldn't like it, and sorry, because I like it more than all my other work put together. Have you never even begun to guess why? But how should you, when I didn't know myself until after it was finished? Coming events, I suppose. It's quite true—one isn't overtaken

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by fate : one prepares one's own fate ; one carries it about inside one, like a child. I hear you say—' Can't you come to the point ? ' No, I can't. Partly because I'm afraid of what you'll say, because I'm afraid you'll be disappointed, and partly, selfishly, because there is a queer pleasure in beating about the bush that bears my flower. It's too beautiful to pick straight away in one rough snatch of a sentence. Am I selfish ? You've been so kind to me, I know you will be sorry and that troubles me. And yet—Anita, I am going to be married. You met him once in the churchyard at home, do you remember ? I've seen him now and then when I took the children down there in the summer. He——

There's something scratched out here," said Anita.

" I think we shall be happy. When you get accustomed to the idea I hope you will like him."

She paused.

" Now what do you make of that ? " said Anita.

" It explains the expeditions with the children," said Mr. Flood. " They were always too—philanthropic, to be quite—eh?"

" Oh, but she began those outings ages ago," said Miss Howe quickly.

" Besides," said Anita, " she didn't go every week that summer. That's the point. She told me herself that she was so busy that she had to get help—one of those mission women. Now why was she so busy?"

" Diversions in the country *and* attilictions in town? " said Mr. Flood. " It all takes time."

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Anita nodded.

"You think that? So do I. *And* attractions in town! Exactly! At any rate I shall make that the big chapter, the convincing chapter^ of the *Life*. I think I shall be able to prove that that summer was the climax of her affairs. I grant you that she met Carey that summer, but as she says herself, a few times only. We must look nearer home than Carey."

"Oh, but there's such a thing as love at first sight," protested the Baxter girl, and Anita dealt with her in swift parenthesis—

"I was there when they first met. Shouldn't I have realized——?" And then, continuing—"Well, reckon up my points. To begin with—the difference in her that we all noticed, the restlessness, the—unhappiness one might almost say, the aloofness—oh, don't you know what I mean? as if she didn't belong to us any more."

"As if she didn't belong to herself any more."

"Yes, yes, that's even more what I mean. Then comes the fact that we saw so little of her. What did she do with her time? Writing *The Resting-place*, was her explanation, but—is that gospel? Do you really believe that she sat at home writing and dreaming all those long summer days and nights, except when she was—eating buttercups—with Carey and her chaperons? And then comes *The Resting-place* with its appalling falling-off, and following on that, this letter, this sudden engage-

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ment. Now doesn't it look—I ask you, doesn't it look as if something had been going on behind all our backs and had at last come to a head ? "

" Oh, that she was in love is certain," said Mr. Flood. " Was there ever a woman of genius who wasn't ? "

" Exactly. It's a moral certainty. And this letter to me proves that, whoever it was, it wasn't Carey. 'I think we shall be happy.' 'I hope you will like him.' Is that the way a woman writes of her first love or her first lover? "

" Oh, but that sentence just before——" the Baxter girl stretched out her hand for the letter—— "' The bush that bears my flower——' " She spoke sympathetically; but it jarred me. I wondered now I should feel if I thought that the Baxter girl would ever read my letters aloud.

" Ah, that's the literary touch. Madala could never resist embroideries. Besides—she wants to confuse me. That means nothing. But here, you see——" she took the letter out of the Baxter girl's hand——" as soon as she comes to the point, the real point, the confession, the apologia—then the baldest sentences. Try to remember that Madala Grey has written one of the strongest love scenes of the decade, and all she can say of the man she is to marry is—' I hope you will like him.' "

" Hm ! It's curious ! " Miss Howe was frowning.

" Isn't it? And then you know, the whole manner of the engagement was so unlike her usual

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triumphant way. She always swept one along, didn't she? But in the matter of the marriage she seems, as far as I can make out, to have been perfectly passive. She left everything to the man—arrangements—furniture—I imagine she even bought her clothes to please him. And the wedding itself—no reception, no presents, no notice to anyone, so sudden, so private. Not a word even to her oldest friends——"

Great-aunt stirred in her corner.

"—there was something so furtive about it all: as if she were running away from something."

Miss Howe sat up.

"D'you mean?—what do you mean, Anita? Are you hinting——?"

Anita looked at her in a puzzled way that relieved me, I hardly knew why.

"Why, only that it carries out my theory—of Carey as a refuge."

"From what?"

"Life — frustration — what did you think I meant?"

"I don't know. Nothing. It was my evil mind, I suppose." She flushed.

"How she harps on the child!" the Baxter girl carried it on.

"That's a mere simile——" said Miss Howe swiftly.

⁴⁶ But a queer simile! "

"The marriage was sudden," laid Mr. Flood from

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the floor in his silky voice. " Anita's theory has its points."

" A seven months' child \ " It was the first word that the blonde lady had said for some time. There was something sluggishly cold, slimily cold, in her abstracted voice.

Anita started.

" I never suggested that," she said sharply. But there was a quiver in her voice that was more excitement than anger.

" My dear lady, nobody suggests anything. We are only remarking that the union of our Madala and her 'refuge'—the soubriquet is yours, by the way—was as surprising as it was—er—sudden. That was your idea? " He turned to the shadows and from them the blonde lady nodded, smiling.

At the time, you know, I didn't understand them. They were so quick and allusive. They said more in jerks and nods and pauses than in actual speech. But I saw the smile on that woman's face, and heard the way he said ⁶our Madala.' I felt myself growing angry and panic-stricken, and I was quite helpless. I just went across the room to that big man sitting dully in his corner, in his dream, and I caught his arm and cried to him under my breath—

" You must come. You must come and stop them. They're talking about her. Come quickly. They—they're saying beastly things."

He gave me one look. Then he got up and went swiftly from one room to the other. But swiftly

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as he moved and I followed, someone else was there before us to fight that battle.

It was Great-aunt Serle.

She was a heavy old woman and feeble. She never stirred as a rule without a helping arm; but somehow she had got herself out of her seat and across the floor to the table, and there she stood, her knitting gripped as if it were a weapon, the long thread of it stretched and taut from the ball that had rolled round the chair-leg, her free hand and her tremulous head jerking and snapping and poking at that amazed assembly as she rated them—

"I won't allow such talk. Anita, I won't have it. If I let you bring home friends—ought to know better! And you——" the blonde lady was spitted, as it were, on that unerring finger, "you're a wicked woman. That's what you are—a wicked, scandalous woman. And you, Anita, ought to be ashamed of yourself, to let her talk so of my girl. Such a woman! Paint and powder! Envy, hatred, malice! And in my house too! Tell her to wash her face!" She glowered at them.

There was a blank pause and then a sound somewhere, like the end of a spurting giggle. It must have been the Baxter girl. There was a most uncomfortable moment, before Anita cried out "Mother!" in a horrified voice, and Miss Howe said "Beryl!" in a voice not quite as horrified.

But the blonde lady sat through it all quite

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calmly, smiling and moistening her lips. At last she drawled out—

"Nita! Your dear mother's quite upset. So sorry, Nita!" Then, a very little lower, but we could all hear it—"Poor dear Nita! Quite a trial for poor dear Nita!"

But Anita had jumped up. She was very much flustered and annoyed. I think, too, that she was startled. I know that I was startled. Great-aunt didn't look like herself. She was like a witch in a picture-book, and her voice had been quite strong and commanding.

Anita tried to quiet her and get her away.

"Mother! You must be quiet! D'you hear me, Mother? You don't know what you're saying. You've been up too long. You're overdone. It's time you went to bed."

She took her firmly by the arm. But Great-aunt struggled with her.

"I won't. Leave me alone. It's your fault, Anita. You sat and listened. You let them talk that way about my girl."

"Now, Mother, what nonsense! Your girl! Madala's not your daughter." And then, in apology—"She's always confusing us. She gets these ideas."

"Not mine? Ah! That's all you know! 'Anita upstairs?' That's how she'd come running in to me. 'Are you busy, Mrs. Serle?' Always looked in to my room first. Brought me violets."

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Talked. Told me all her troubles. *You* never knew. Not mine, eh? Didn't I see her married, my pretty girl? 'Hole-and-corner business!' That's what you tell them? 'Nobody knew,' But I knew."

Anita's hand dropped from her mother's arm. She stared at her.

"You, Mother? You there?" And then, angrily, " Oh, I don't believe it."

" Don't believe it, eh? But it's true, for all I'm lumber in my own house. I'm to go to bed before the company comes, before she comes. Don't she want to see me then? Who pinned her veil for her and kissed her and blessed her, and took her to church, and gave her to him? Not you, my daughter. She didn't come to you for that." And then, with a slacking and a wail, " Eh, but we were never to tell I "

" Mother, you'd better come to bed. I——" there was the faintest suggestion of menace in her voice—" I'll talk to you tomorrow."

The old woman shrank away.

" I won't come. I know. You want me out of the way. You don't want me to see her. What are you going to say about me? You'll say things to her about me. I've heard you."

Quite obviously Anita restrained herself.

¹⁶ Now, Mother, you know you don't mean that."

" Hush!" Great-aunt pulled away her hand.

" Quiet, child, quiet I Wasn't that the cab? I've

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listened all the evening, all the long evening." Her old voice thinned and sharpened to a chirp. "Soft, soft, the wheels *go by*. The wheels never stop. Wait till the wheels stop. It's the fog that's keeping her. There's fog everywhere. Maybe she's lost in the fog." Then she chuckled to herself. "Naughty girl to be so late. But she's always late. Why should I go to bed? I've got to finish my knitting, Nita. Only two rows, Nita. The³" "I'll just last me till she comes." And then, "Anita, she will come?"

Anita turned to the others,

"Don't be alarmed. It's nothing. I'm afraid she hasn't realized——" She began again—"Now, Mother! It's bed-time, Mother dear."

"'Dear'—'dear'—why do you speak kindly? Madala's not here to listen." And then—"Nita, Nita child, let me stay till she comes."

Anita was quite patient with her, and quite unyielding.

"Now listen, Mother! It's no use waiting. Come upstairs with me. She won't——" her voice altered, "she can't come tonight."

Beside me Kent Rehan spoke—

"I can't stand it," he said. "I can't stand it. I can't stand it." He didn't seem to know that he was speaking.

But Great-aunt heard his voice if she didn't hear the words. She broke away from Anita and went shuffling over the floor towards him with blind

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movements. She would have fallen if he hadn't been beside her in an instant, holding her.

" Kent, d'you hear her ? You know my daughter. You know Madala too. You speak to her ! You tell her ! Madala always comes, doesn't she ? always comes. You tell her that ! I want to see Madala. Very good to me, Madala. Brought me a bunch of violets."

Anita followed.

" Kent, for goodness' sake, try to help me. She'll make herself ill. I shall have her in bed for days. Now, Mother——Now come, Mother ! "

Great-aunt clung to his arm.

"She's not kind. My daughter's very hard on me."

For the first time Anita showed signs of agitation. She was almost appealing.

" Kent ! You mustn't believe her. It's not fair. You see my position. One has to be firm. And you don't know how trying———What am I to do ? Shall I tell her ? She's as obstinate—I'll never get her to bed. Ought I to tell her ? She'll have to be told sooner or later. She'll have to realize——"

He said—

" I'll talk to her if you like."

Anita looked at him intently.

" It's good of you. She has always listened to you. Since you and I were children together. Do you remember, Kent ? Yes, you talk to her."

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"What's she saying?" demanded Great-aunt. Her old eyes were bright with suspicion. "Talking you over, eh? Talk anyone over, my daughter will—my clever daughter. So clever. Madala thinks so too. 'Dripping with brains.' That's what Madala said. Made me laugh. Quite true, though. Hasn't Madala come yet? "

"Now, look here, Mrs. Serle——" he put his arm round her bent shoulders, "it's very foggy, you know, and it's very late. Nobody could travel—nobody could come tonight. You'll believe us, won't you? "

"Wait! What's that?" She stood a moment, her finger raised, listening intently. Then she straightened her bowed body and looked up at him. One so seldom saw her face lifted, shone upon by any light, that that alone, I suppose, was enough to change her. For changed she was—her countenance so wise and beaming that I hardly knew her. "Now I know," she said, "she will come. Wait for her, Kent. She will come. I—I hear her coming. She's not so far from us. She's not so far away."

They stared at each other for a moment, the man and the old woman. Then her face dropped forward again, downward into its accustomed shadow, as he said to her—

"It's too late, Mrs. Serle. She won't come—now. Not now any more. And Anita thinks—truly you're very tired, aren't you? Now aren't you? "

"Very tired," she quavered.

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" I know you are. Won't you let me help you upstairs? "

"And stay a bit?" she said, clutching at him.
"Stay and talk to me?"

" Yes, yes," he humoured her.

" About Madala?"

He was very white.

" About Madala. Anita, take her other arm.
That's the way."

They helped her out of the room, and we heard their slow progress up the stairs.

It was the blonde lady who broke the silence with her tinkling laugh—

" Poor dear Nita ! "

" Kent's a good sort," said Miss Howe.

"What's Hecuba to him now?" Mr. Flood's smile glinted from one to another.

" A very old friend," said the blonde lady.
4^t "You heard what dear Nita said to him."

" 4 Children together !' I didn't know that." He was still smiling.

" And they always kept in touch," put in Miss Howe.

" Trust Nita for that," said the blonde lady.

Miss Howe nodded.

" She told me once that from the first she realized that he would do big things."

" So Nita kept in touch ! " Mr. Flood laughed outright.

" But it's only the last *fe'* years that she's

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been able to produce him at will, like a conjuror's rabbit"

" Since Madala's advent, you mean," said the blonde lady.

" ' Will you walk into my parlour,' said Anita to the fly. ' It's a literary parlour——' " murmured Mr. Flood. And then—" No. Kent's not likely to have walked in without a honey-pot in the parlour. Madala must have been useful."

" That's what Miss Serle will never forgive her,," think," said the Baxter girl.

"What?"

" That she was useful. Do *you* believe in the other man? "

" The unknown influence ? " His eyes narrowed. "Hm!"

" And yet of course there's been someone." The Baxter girl never quite deserted Anita, even in her absence.

The blonde lady nodded.

" Of course. Nita's always nearly right. The influence—the adventures—the *mariage de convert-ance*—she's got it all so pat—and the man too. She knows well enough; yet she fights against it. She won't have it. I wonder why. ' Very old friends ' I suppose." She laughed again. " But of course it was Kent. Can't you see that's why Nita hates her? What a *Life* it will be ! I just long for it to come out. Nita's a comedy."

" A tragedy."

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" Nita ? My dear Lila ! What do you mean ? "

" I'm only quoting," said Miss Howe. And then—" But when she isn't actually annoying me I think I agree."

" Who said it ? " said the Baxter girl inquisitively.

" Madala. It's the only thing I've ever heard her say of Anita. She never discussed Anita. Now of Kent she would talk by the hour. Which proves to me, you know, that the affair with him didn't go very deep. Nita quoted that description of Kent just now, but only so far as it served her. She carefully forgot how it goes on. Here, where is it ? Ah——

He brooded like a lover over his colour-box, and as she watched him her thoughts flew to her own small brothers at home. Geoff with his steam-engine, Jimmy sorting stamps—there, there was to be found the same ruthlessness of absorption, achieving dignity by its sheer intensity. She smiled over him and them.

" Koep your face still," he ordered.

She obeyed instantly, flushing; and as she did so she thought to herself—' I could be afraid of that man,' but a moment afterwards—' He *is* like a small boy.'

" Now that may be Kent—oh, it is Kent, of course—but it's not Madala's attitude to Kent. She was not in the least afraid of him."

" Ah, but that later passage, the country passage—that's pure Madala."

" Yes. Just where it ceases to be Kent—⁴ He stoops, I suppose. He's worn out with work. He's quite ordinary.' That's not Kent."

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"No, that's true. One doesn't know where to have her. She muddles her trail," said Mr. Flood.

"I call it weakness of touch not to let you know whom she drew from," said the Baxter girl.

"Ah, but she always insisted that she didn't draw portraits."

"Of course. They always do. If one believed *them* one would never get behind the scenes, and if one can't get behind the scenes one might as well be mere public and read for the story," said the Baxter girl indignantly.

"Well, you know," Miss Howe sat turning over the pages of *The Resting-place* with careful, almost with caressing lingers, "I don't believe she meant to draw portraits. She had queer, old-fashioned notions. I think she would have thought it—treacherous."

"The portraits are there though, if you look close enough," insisted the Baxter girl.

"Yes, but they happened in spite of her. Anyone she was fond of she took into her, in a sense : and when her gift descended upon her and demanded expression, then, all unconsciously, she expressed them too. But gilded ! We find ourselves in her books, and we never knew before how lovable we are. You're right, Blanche, *she Weed whatever she looked on*. And you're right too, Jasper, *Grande amoureuse*, she was that. That capacity for loving made her what she was. The technical facility was

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her talent and her luck; but it was her own personality that turned it into genius."

"Then after all you admit the genius," said the Baxter girl triumphantly.

"No. No. No. My judgment says no. When I read her books in cold blood—no. But we've been talking about her. It's as if she were with us, and when she's with us my judgment goes ! That's the secret of Madala Grey. She does what she likes with us. But the next generation, the people who don't know her, whether they'll find in her books what we do, is doubtful. Who wants a dried rose ? "

"Yes, but Miss Serle—in the *Life*? Won't she—preserve her?"

"Preserve—exactly ! But not revive. No, I'd sooner pin my faith to *The Spring Song*, although I haven't seen it. It ought to be a revelation. She eluded Nita, impishly. I've seen her do it. But there's no doubt that she gave Kent his chance."

"Every chance. She'd deny it, I suppose."

"Oh, she did." Miss Howe laughed. "Have you ever seen her in a temper? I have. I was a fool. I told her one day (you know how things come up) just something of the gossip about Kent and her. I thought it only kind. But you should have heard her. She was as healthily furious as a schoolgirl. That was so comfortable about Madala. She hadn't that terrible aloofness of really big people. She didn't withdraw into dignity. She just stormed." Miss Howe laughed again. "I

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can see her now, raging up and down the room—
'Do you mean to say that people——? I never heard of anything so monstrous! What has it got to do with them? Why can't they leave me alone? I've never done them any harm. I wouldn't have believed it, pretending they liked me, and letting me be friends with them, and then saying hateful things behind my back. I'll never speak to them again—never! That they should go about twisting things—Why can't they mind their own business? And dragging in Kent like that! Oh, it does make me so wild!' 'Oh, well, my dear,' I said to her, 'when two people see as much of each other as you and Kent do, there's bound to be talk.' At that she swung round on me. 'But he's my *friend*,' she said. 'Yes,' I said, 'that's just it.' 'But I'm not expected to marry everyone I'm fond of!' 'Are you fond of him, Madala?' I asked her. 'Yes,' she said directly, 'I am. I'm awfully fond of him. I'd do anything for him, bless his heart!' 'Well,' I said, 'you needn't be so upset. That's all that people mean. If you're fond of him and he—he's obviously in love with you——' But at that she caught me up in her quick way—'In love? Oh, you don't understand him. Nobody understands Kent. He doesn't understand himself. Dear old Kent!' Then she began walking up and down the room again, but more quietly, and talking, half to herself, as if she had forgotten I was there, justifying herself, justi-

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fying him. 'Dear old Kent! Poor old Kent I I'm awfully fond of Kent. So is he of me. But not in the right way. He's got, when he happens to think of it, a great romantic idea of the woman he wants, of the wife he wants; but the truth is, you know, that he doesn't want a wife. He wants a mother, and a sister, and a—a lover. A true lover. A patienter woman than I am. A woman who'll delight in him for his own sake, not for what he gives her. A woman who'll put him first and be content to come second with him. He'll always put his work first. He can't help it. He's an artist. Oh, not *content*. I didn't mean that. She must be too big for that—big enough to know what she misses. But a wise woman, such a loving, hungry woman. 'Half a loaf,' she'll say to herself. But she'll never have to let him hear. He's chivalrous. He'd be horrified at giving her half a loaf. He'd say—'All or nothing!' But he couldn't give her all. He couldn't spare it. So he'd give her nothing out of sheer respect for her. That's Kent. He's got his dear queer theories of life—oh, they're all right as theories—but he fits people to them, instead of them to people. Procrustes. He'd torture a woman from the kindest of motives. It's lack of imagination. Haven't you noticed?' 'Considering he's one of the great imaginative artists of the day, Madala,' I said to her, 'that's rather sweeping.'

⁴ But that's why,' she said. 'It's just because he's

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a genius. He lives on himself, in himself. Kent's an island.' I said—'No chance of a bridge, Madala?' She shook her head. 'Not my job.' I said I was sorry. I was, too. It would have been so ideal, that pair. I wanted to argue it with her; but she wouldn't listen. She said—'If I weren't an artist too, then maybe—maybe. I'm very fond of Kent. But no—I'd want too much. But, you know, there's a woman somewhere, rather like me—I hope he'll marry her. I'd love her. She'd never be jealous of me. She'd understand. She's me without the writing, without the outlet. She'll pour it all into loving him. I hope she's alive somewhere. He'd be awfully happy. And if he had children—that's what he needs. I can just see him with children. But not my children. If I married——' And then she flushed up to the eyes in that way she had, as if she were fifteen. ⁴ ±—'I'd like to be married for myself, for my faults, for the bits I don't tell anyone. Kent would hate my faults. I'd have to hide my real self.' She stood staring out of the window. Then she said, still in that rueful, childish voice—'I would like to be liked.' 'But, my dear girl,' said I, 'what nonsense you talk! If ever a woman had friends——' She flung round at me again—⁴ If I'd not written *Eden Walls* would Anita have looked at me—or any of you?' I said—'That's not a fair question. Your books are you, the quintessence, the very best of you.' 'But the rest of me?' she said, 'but the

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rest of me ?' I laughed at her. ⁴ Well, what about the rest of you ? ' Then she said, in a small voice—' It feels rather out of it sometimes, Lila."

" I say," Mr. Flood twinkled at her, " are you going to present all this to Anita? She'd be grateful."

" Not she," said Miss Howe sharply. " Too much fact would spoil her theory. Let her spin her own web."

" Agreed. There's room for more than one biography, eh?" They laughed together a little consciously.

" You know," the blonde lady recalled them, " she must have been quite a good actress. She always seemed perfectly contented."

" Imagine Madala Grey discontented," said the Baxter girl. " How could she be? "

" Oh, Kent was at the root of that," said Miss Howe, "for all her talk."

Mr. Flood nodded.

" Yes, the lady did protest too much, if your report's correct."

" It's the only explanation and, as you said, Blanche, in her heart Anita knows it. After all, he's a somebody. Madala wouldn't be the only one who's found him attractive, eh? " She cocked an eyebrow.

" Don't be scandalous, Lila," said the blonde lady virtuously, and Mr. Flood gave his little sniff of enjoyment.

LEGEND

"Oh, give me five minutes," said Miss Howe cosily. "She'll be down in five minutes. I've been good ail the evening. But I'm inclined to agree with her, you know, that Madala was attracted, just because Madala denied it so vehemently. Only Anita goes too far for me. She's right, of course, when she says of Kent—'Not a marrying man !' but not in the way she means it. There are dark and awful things in the history of every unmarried man, to Anita. She scents intrigue everywhere. I'm a spinster myself, but I'm not such a spidery spinster. She may be partly right. Some other man, some question-mark of a man, may have treated Madala badly. But Kent didn't. Kent isn't that sort. Intrigue would bore him. Still, he wasn't a marrying man in those days, and I think Madala was perfectly honest when she said—'Just friends.' But I think also, if you ask me, that they were far too good friends. It's not wvse to be friends with a man. You must be a woman first and let him know it. I don't believe in these platonic friendships. So I think that in time Madala found out where they were making the mistake. And he didn't, or wouldn't. Oh well!" she paused expressively, "he's finding it out now. He has been all the year. Didn't you see his face when he came in tonight? Madala shouldn't have hurried. Poor Madala ! Though I don't think it broke her heart, you know."

"No." The blonde lady nodded. "She was too

LEGEND

serene, too placid, for real passion. She could draw it well enough, but always from the outside."

"Oh, I don't think so," said the Baxter girl. "Think of the end of *Ploughed Fields*."

"Let's give her some credit for imagination, even if we don't say ⁴genius ' 1 I agree with Blanche. Oil, perhaps her heart did crack just a little——"

The blonde lady struck in——

"But then Carey's a doctor. So convenient ! "

"Yes," said Mr. Flood. "I always said he caught her on the rebound."

"And then, to mix metaphors, the fat was in the lire. Then, Kent woke up to her. Isn't it obvious? He was fond of Madala Grey, but it was Mrs. Carey that he fell in love with. Just like a man ! "

"Oh, I hate you," said Mr. Flood. "You destroy my illusions. I'm like Anita. 1 demand the tragic Madala."

"You can have her, I should think," said the Baxter girl thoughtfully. "Oh, of course your theory does seem probable as far as it goes, Miss Howe, but——"

"But what?" said Miss Howe.

⁴Well, she hardly ever came to town afterwards, did she? "

"Ah, Madala was always wise," said the blonde lady.

Mr. Flood rubbed his hands.

"Thank-you, Beryl. We're in sympathy. And

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it's quite a satisfying, tragical picture, isn't it? The two artists—he with his lay figure and she with her Hodge, and the long year between them. Can't you see them, cheated, desirous, stretching out to each other their impotent hands? One could make something out of that."

"You could, Mr. Flood," said the Baxter girl fervently.

"Out of what?" Anita was always noiseless. I jumped to hear her voice so close behind me.

Miss Howe looked up at her quizzingly.

"Madala and——Where is Kent?"

"With Mother still. He's managed her extraordinarily. She's getting sleepy, thank goodness. He'll be down in a minute." Then, with a change of tone—"Madala and Kent? I think not, Lila dear."

"But you said yourself——" the Baxter girl interposed.

"Oh no! I flung it out—a suggestion—a possibility. I haven't committed myself—yet. I wish I could be sure of Kent. He's upset my conception of him tonight. I should have said—selfish. Especially over Madala. But all men are selfish. Yet, tonight——" she hesitated, playing with the papers that lay half in, half out of the open desk. "But who was it, if it wasn't Kent? Because there was someone, you know——" And then, as if Miss Howe's smile annoyed her beyond prudence—"Do you think I'm inventing? Do you think

LEGEND

I've talked for amusement's sake? I tell you, she was on the verge of an elopement. *Without* benefit of clergy ! "

" Anita 1 " Miss Howe half rose from her chair.

"We're getting it at last." Mr, Flood addressed the room. " I knew she had something up her sleeve."

"I don't believe—I won't believe it," said Miss Howe.

Then Anita smiled.

" Didn't I say she was careless about her drafts ? I've a fragment here—no, I've left it in my writing-table——" and she rose as she spoke—" no name, but it's proof enough. It's an answer to some man's letter."

"But does she definitely consent——?" began the Baxter girl.

" Not in so many words. But it's obvious there was some cause or impediment, and he, whoever he is, has evidently had qualms of conscience about letting her call the world well lost for his sweet sake."

" That would rule out Kent, of course," said Miss Howe thoughtfully. " There was no reason why Kent shouldn't marry."

" We know of none," said Anita in her suggestive voice. " Isn't that as much as one can say of any man?"

" Ah ! " said the Baxter girl, illuminated. I don't know why—her round eyes. I suppose, and

LEGEND

her pursed mouth—but she reminded me of the woodcut of Minerva's owl in *Larousse*.

"So you see my prime difficulty. I've passed under review every man of her acquaintance, till I narrowed down the possible——"

"Affinities," said the blonde lady.

"—to Kent Rehan, John Carey, and this probable but unknown third. There I hang fire. Until I make up my mind on which of the three her love story hinges, I can't do more than trifle with the *Life*. And how shall I make up my mind?"

"Three?" said Mr. Flood. "Two. You can eliminate the husband. He's fifth act, not third."

"Yes, of course. But I never jump a step. Which leaves me the unknown—or Kent."

The blonde lady leant forward rather eagerly—

⁴⁶ Nita! Where's that letter?"

"I'll get it." She went across the room to her writing-table.

The Baxter girl twisted her head.

"I say! He's coming down the stairs."

"If she read aloud that draft——" the blonde lady's drawl had disappeared. She glittered like an excited schoolgirl—he might recognize——"

"You mean——?" Mr. Flood raised his eyebrows but Anita, fumbling with her keys, did not hear.

"It would be nice to besure," said the blonde lady.

"It's rather cruel, isn't it?" said Miss Howe uneasily.

LEGEND

"Why? It'll be printed in the *Life*. Besides, it may not have been written to him."

"That's why," said Miss Howe.

"It would be nice to be *quite* sure," said the blonde lady again. And as she spoke Kent Rehan came into the room.

At once I got up, with some blind, blundering idea, I believe, of stopping him, of frustrating them, but Anita was nearer to him than I.

"Is she asleep? Very good of you, Kent. Sit here, Kent. Jenny, is the window open in the passage? Very cold. I never knew such a draught."

I went out to see. I had to do as I was told. Besides, how could I have stopped them or him? Yet I was shaking with ansfer and disgust at them, and at myself for my hateful tongue-tied youth and insignificance. An older woman would have known what to do. Shaking with cold too—Anita was right—it was bitter cold in the passage. I could hardly see my way to the window for the fog. It was open an inch at the bottom, and at my touch it rattled down with a bang that echoed oddly. For an instant I thought it was a knock at the hall door. I stood a minute, quite startled, peering down into the black well of the hall. But there was no second knock, only the fog-laden draught of the passage came rushing up at me again, and again Anita called to me to come in and shut the door. I did so : and because it rattled, wedged

LEGEND

it with the screw of paper that lay near it on the floor, the crumpled telegram that Kent Rehan had dropped when he first came in. Then, still shivering a little, I sat down where I was. I didn't want to go nearer. I knew my face was tell-tale, I didn't want to have the Baxter girl looking at me, and maybe saying something. I could hear them in the other room well enough. Anita's voice seemed to cut through the thick air. There was a letter in her hand. She was twisting it about as if she couldn't find the first page.

"—obviously a draft." She held it away from her. Anita was long-sighted.

"Dear—dear——"

Then it breaks off and begins again. You see?" She display^{ed} it to them.

"Dearest——"

"Why, how clearly it's written!" The Baxter girl peered at it. "That's quite a beautiful hand. That's not Madala's scrawl."

The blonde lady looked at them through half shut lids.

"Ah! It's been written slowly——"

⁴¹As if she loved writing it!" The Baxter girl flushed. "Did *she* know about that sort of thing—that sentimental sort of thing? I should have thought her too—oh, too splendid, Vemoved—you know what I mean."

LEGEND

"I don't suppose she talked about it," said Anita coldly. "She was not of your generation." And then, to the others—"I assure you, this letter shook me. Even I never dreamed of this side of her. Listen." She read aloud in her measured voice—

"Dearest—

I wanted your letter so, I reckoned out the posts, and the distances, and your busyness. I thought that in two days you would probably write, and then I gave you another day's grace because you hate writing letters, and because I thought you couldn't dream how much I missed you—how much, how *soon*, I wanted to hear. And then to get your letter the very next day, before I could begin to look for it (but I did look!). Why, you must have written as soon as the train was out of the station! You missed me just as much then?

But it's a mad letter, you know. It makes me laugh and cry. It's so sensible—and so silly. 'Fame', 'career', 'reputation', 'position'—why do you fling these words at me? "I am making a sacrifice?" Darling, haven't you eyes? Don't you understand that you're my world? All these other things, since I've known you, they're shadows, they're toys, I don't want them. The reviews of my new book—I've never been so delighted at getting any—but why? D'you know why? To show them to you—to watch you shake with laughter as you read them. When a flattering letter turns up, I save it to show you as if it wore gold, because I think—"Perhaps it'll make him think more of me." Isn't it idiotic? But I do. And all the while I glory in the knowledge that all these things, all the fuss and fame,

LEGEND

don't mean a brass button to you—or to me, my dear, or to me.

And yet you write me a solemn letter about 'making a sacrifice,' 'abdicating a position.'

Don't be—humble And yet I like you in this mood. Because it won't last ! I won't *let* it. It's I who am not good enough. If you knew how I tip-toe sometimes. You're so much bigger than I am. I lie in bed at nights, and all the things I've done wrong in my life, all the twisty, tortuous, feminine things, all the lies and cowardices and conceits, come and sting me. I'm so bitterly ashamed of them. I feel I've got to tell you about them all, and yet that if I do you'll turn me out of your heart. If you did that—if you were disappointed—if you got tired of me—it turns me sick with fear.

I'm a fool to tear myself. I know I love me. And when you're with me I forget all that. I'm just happy. When you're there it's like being in the blazing sunshine. Can 'celebrity' give me that sunshine ? Can 'literature' fill my emptiness ? Are the books I write children to love me with your eyes ? Oh, you fool!

Oh, of course, I know you don't mean it. It's just that you think you ought to protest. But suppose I took you at your word ? Suppose I said that, on careful consideration, I felt that I wanted to lead my own life instead of yours ? that—how does the list run ?—my Work, my Circle of Friends, my Career, were too much to give up for—you ? What would you say—no, do ? for even I, (and the sun's in my eyes) even I can't call you eloquent ! But what would you do if I wouldn't come to you ?

Oh, my darling, my darling, you needn't be afraid. I'd rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God—

I'm changed^ What have you done to me ? Other

LEGEND

people notice **it**. My friends are grown critical of me. Only yesterday someone (no-one you know) sneered at me—' In love ? Oh well, you'll get over it. It's a phase.' You know, they don't understand. I'm not ' in love ', but I love you. There's the difference. I love you. I shall love you till I die. Till——? Aa if death could blot you out for me ! I u[^]ed to believe in death. I used to believe it ended everything. But now, since I've known you, I can never die You've poured into me an immortal spirit——"

" Go on," breathed the Baxter girl.

" It breaks oft there. It's riot signed. It was never sent."

" She had that much wisdom, then." The blonde lady's laughter came to us over Mr. Flood's shoulder. " That's not the letter to send to any man. Giving herself away—giving us all away——"

"To any man? To what man? There's the point. You see the importance. It's the heart of the secret. Who is it? For whom was she read[^] to give up, in her own words, name, friends, career——? "

" Well, practically she did that, didn't she, when she married Carey? She buried herself in the country. She didn't write a line. You said yourself that she put her career behind her. Why shouldn't it be written to Carey?"

" Oh, don't be absurd. It's Carey that makes it impossible. How could Carey have written a letter needing such an answer? Little he cared. What was her genius to him? Isn't it obvious,

LEGEND

isn't it plain as print, that Carey happened, Carey and all he stands for, *after* the writing of this letter, because of some hitch? Why wasn't the letter sent? What happened? What folly? What misunderstanding? What disillusionment? What realization of danger?—to send her, with that letter half written, into Carey's arms? Carey, that stick, that ordinary man 1 And on the top of it *The Resting-place* comes out, the *cri du cceur*—or, if you like, Lila, the satire—(for I'm beginning to believe you're right) the satire of *The Re^trng-pla^e*. I tell you, I smell tragedy."

"It's supposition, it's mere supposition," said Miss Howe impatiently.

"Isn't all detective work supposition to begin with? Wait till I've made my book. Wait till I've sifted my evidence, till I've ranged it, stick and brick, step by step, up, up, up, to the letter."

Suddenly from where he sat, half way between me and them, Kent spoke—

"Anita, you can't publish that letter."

Her face, all their faces, turned towards us. She stared.

"Why not?" And then—"Why do you sit out there? Come here. Come into the light."

He did not stir.

She frowned, puckering her eyes.

"Such a fog," she said fretfully. "I can't see you. Can't you keep that door shut, Jenny?" Then—"Well, Kent—why not? Why not?"

LEGEND

He said slowly—

"It's not decent."

She flared at once.

"Decent! Not decent! What on earth do you mean?"

He kept her waiting while he thought it out.

"I mean—it's not right, it's not fair. To whom-ever it was written, that's her business, not our business. And that letter——It's vile, anyway, publishing her letters."

She stared at him in a sort of angry bewilderment.

"But why? I shall write her life. One always does print letters."

"Not that sort of letter," he said.

^{4f}c But don't you see," she cried, "that *that* letter, Just *that* letter——"

He said—

⁴"That's why. How dare you read that letter here—aloud—tonight? It—its ghoulish."

"Kent! " There was outrage in her voice.

"But Kent——" Miss Howe intervened—"we knew her—we care—it's in all reverence——"

And Mr. Flood—

"My dear man, she's not a private character. The lives that will be written! Anita's may be the classic, but it won't be the only one. Letters are bound to be printed—every scrap she ever wrote. Nobody can stop it. It's only a question of time. The public has its rights."

"To what?" He turned savagely. "You've

LEGEND

had her books. She's given enough. Will you leave her nothing private, nothing sacred ? "

" But Kent, can't you see——" Anita had an air of pushing Miss Howe and Mr. Flood from her road——" aren't you artist enough to see——? A writer, a woman like Madala, she has no private life. She lives to write. She lives what she writes. She is what she write'. She gives her soul to the world, She leaves her riddle to be read. Don't you see? to be read. That's what I'm doing. That's what I'm going to do—read her—for the rest of you, for the public. Because—because they care, because we all care. It's done in all honour. It's a tribute. And for what I am going to do, such a letter is the key."

She spoke softly, sweetly, persuasively. She wooed him to agree with her. She was extraordinarily eager for his approval. And the approval of the others she did win. They were all murmuring agreement.

His eyes strayed over them, undecidedly, seeking—not help. I do not know what he sought, but his eyes found mine.

" You——" he said to me——" would you want your letter——?"

Anita's voice thrust in sharply. In the instant the pleading, the beauty, the woman, was gone from it. It was cold and shrill.

" Jenny's views can hardly concern us."

But he did not listen to her. He had drawn

LEGEND

sortie answer from me that satisfied him. He got up.

" Oh," I cried beneath my breath, and I think I touched his arm—"you won't let her?"

He shook his head. Then he went across to where Anita stood, her eyes on him, on me, while she listened to Miss Howe whispering at her shoulder.

" Look here, Anita ! " he began.

" I'm looking," she said.

He checked a moment, puzzled. Then he went on—

" That letter—you can't print it. You've no right. It's not your property."

She waved it aside.

" I shall be literary executor. She promised. It's mine if it's anyone's. It's no good, Kent, it goes into the book. Nothing can alter that. Nothing——"

Then she stopped dead. There was that same odd look in her eye as there had been when she watched us—that flicker of curiosity, and behind it the same gleam of inexplicable anger.

" Look here——" she said very deliberately—" look *you* here—what has it got to do with you?"

It was not the words, it was the tone. It was shameless. It was as if she had cried aloud her hateful questions—' Did you love her ? ' ' What was there between you ? ' ⁴1 want to know it all.

LEGEND

It tears me not to know.' But what she said to him, and before he could answer, was—

" If, of course—anyone—had any right—could prove any right——" She broke off, watching him closely. But he said nothing. " If," she said, and poked with her finger, " if that letter—if you recognized it—if that were the rough draft of a letter that had been sent——"

He stared down at her. His face was bleak.

" You'll get no copy from me, Anita ! "

" Oh ! " She caught her breath, fierce and wicked as a cat with a bird, yet shrinking as a cat does, supple, ears flat. " I only meant—I said *right*. If anyone—if you could satisfy me—if you have any right——"

He said—

" I have no right."

" Oh well, then ! " She shrugged her shoulders.

" But," he held stubbornly to his purpose, " whoever has a right to it—you can't print that letter."

She laughed at him.

" You'll see ! You'll see I "

" Yes," he said, " I'll see."

They held each other's eyes, angry, angry. I felt how Kent Rehan loathed her. And she—yes, she must have hated him. She was all bitterness and triumph and defiance. Yet all the time I was wanting to catch him by the arm and say—⁴ Be kind to her. Say something kind and she'll give

LEGEND

in.⁵ I knew it. He had only to say in that instant—^c Anita, I beg of you——' and she would have given him the letter, I knew it. I know it. I don't know how I knew it, but I was sure. But he was a man : of course he saw nothing. He was very angry. He looked big and fine. I wondered that she could stand outfacing him.

But she, for answer, picked up the letter, and affected to search through it.

"Had I finished? Where \vas I? Ah, yes—⁴ An immortal spirit——' "

His hand came down heavily and swept the light table aside.

" You can't do it. You shan't do it. By God youshan't."

How it happened I couldn't see. He was too quick. But at one moment she held the letter, and in the next he had it, and was kneeling at the grate, while she cried out—

"Kent!¹⁹ And then—" Lila ! Jasper! Stop him!"

Nobody could have stopped him. There was no flame, but the fire still burned, a caked red and black lump, smouldering on cinders. He picked it up—with his naked hands—thrust in the crumpled stiff paper, and smashed it down again, so that the Eump split, and still held it pressed down, with naked hands, till the sheet had charred and shrivelled Into nothing. I suppose it all happened in a few leconds, but it seemed like hours. I was in a train

LfiGEND

smash once : I wasn't hurt; but I remember that I came out of it with just the same sense of being battered and aged. This scene I had only watched : I had not shared in it: I was still in the little outer room. Yet I was shaken. I heard Mr. Flood call out—" Kent, you crazy fool I " I heard Anita—" Let me go, Lila!" And then the women were between me and him, and I could only see their backs, and there was a babel of voices, and I found myself sitting like a fool, clutching at the arms of my chair, and saying over and over again—" Oh, his hands, his hands, his poor hands! " The tears were running down my cheeks.

But nobody noticed me. They were all too busy. The group had shifted a little. The Baxter girl was edged out of it, and I watched her for a moment as she sat down again, her cheeks flaming, her eyes as bright as wet pebbles. She looked—it's the only word—consumptive with excitement. Every now and then she tried not to cough. I heard her saying—"It's the fog, it's the awful fog!" defensively. But nobody listened. They were all watching Anita.

Anita was dreadful. She was tremulous with anger. She was like a pendulum with the check taken away. Her whole body shook. She couldn't finish her sentences. She talked to everyone at once.

Miss Howe had her by the arm Miss Howe was trying to quiet her—

LEGEND

" My dear woman—steady now! You don't want a row, you know ! You've got the rest of the papers." But she might have talked to the wind.

He comes into my house—my property—in my own house——It's an outrage ! Kent, it's an outrage ! "

Kent Rehan rose to his feet. It was like a rock breaking through that froth of women. He stood a moment, nervously, brushing the black from his hands and wincing as he did so. Then he looked up. His eyes met hers. He flushed.

" Kent! Kent! " She flung off Miss Howe.

The intensity of reproach in her voice startled me, and I think it startled him. I found myself thinking—⁴ All this anger for what ? for a burnt paper ? It's impossible! But then—then what's the matter \with her?'

He said awkwardly—

" I'm sorry, Anita."

" *You !* " she cried panting—" *You*, to interfere I D'you know what you've done, what you've tried to do? Will you take everything, you and he? Haven't I my work too ? Oh, what you've had from her, what you've had from her ! And now you cheat me!"

He was bewildered. He said again—

" I'm sorry, Anita,"

She came close to him. Her little hands were clenched. There was a wail in her voice—

" You I Aren't you Mends with me? Didn't 1

LEGEND

share her with you ? Isn't she my work too ? What would you say if I came to your house and saw your work, your life work that she'd made possible, your pictures that are her, all her—and slashed them with a knife ? What would you do if I'd done that, if I'd cut it to ribbons, your *Spring Song* ? "

That moved him. I saw a sort of comprehension lighting his stubborn face. The artist in her touched the artist in him. Of what lay behind the artist he had no knowledge. But he said, quite humbly—

"Anita, I'm sorry ! "

Yet I knew that he was not sorry for what he had done.

" Sorry ! Sorry ! Much good your sorrow does ! " she shrilled, and I saw him stiffen again. She was strange. She valued him, that was so plain, and yet, it almost seemed in self-defence, she was always at her worst with him. " Sorry t It was the key of the book. You've spoilt my book."

" Nita ! Nita ! One letter ! " Miss Howe was almost comical in her dislike of the scene. "As if you couldn't pull it off without that." She pulled her aside, lowering her voice—" Nita, what's the use of a row ? Pull yourself together. Put yourself in his place. Besides—you can't afford—" She looked at Kent significantly. Anita's pale glance followed her and so their eyes met again. She was angry and sullen and irresolute. Another woman would have been near tears.

" Kent," she began. And then—" Kent—if we

LEGEND

quarrel——We're too old to quarrel——If you had a shadow of excuse——"

He waited.

She took fire again because he did not meet her half way.

"But if you think you've stopped me——" she cried. She broke off with a laugh and a new idea—"As if," she said slowly and scornfully, "as if Madala would have cared!"

He said distinctly—

"You didn't know her. You'd never understand——"

"Ah," she said, pressing forward to him, "why do you take that tone? What is it I don't understand? If you'd help me with what you know, it could be big stuff. I'd forgive you for the letter if you'd work with me," She hung on his answer.

But he only said, not looking at her, in the same tone—

"You'd never understand." And then, with an effort—"I'll go, Anita. I'm going. I'd better go."

Without waiting for her answer he went across the room to the little sofa near me where the hats and coats lay piled. I heard him fumbling for his things.

But Anita went back to the others. The watching group seemed to open to receive, to enclose her. Her head had touched the lamp as she passed under it, and set it swaying wildly, so that I could scarcely see their faces in that shift of light and shadow

LEGEND

through the thickened air. But I heard her angry laugh, and her voice overtopping the murmur—"Mad! He was always mad! If he weren't such an old friend——" And then the Baxter girl's voice—"Think of the sketches there must be!" And Miss Howe—"What I say is—you don't want to quarrel!" And hers again—"Did you hear him? I not understand Madala 1 Mad, I tell you! If I don't know Madala——"

It was at that moment that I looked up and saw a woman standing in the doorway.

"Anita!" I murmured warningly. But my voice did not reach her, and indeed, she and the little gesticulating group in the further room seemed suddenly far away. The air had been thickening for the last hour, and now, with the opening of the door, the fog itself came billowing in on either side of the newcomer as water streams past a ship. It flooded the room, soundlessly, almost, I remember thinking, purposefully, as if it would have islanded us, Kent and me. It affected me curiously. I felt muffled. I knew I ought to get up and call again to Anita or attend to the visitor myself, but the quiet seemed to dull my wits. I found myself placidly wondering who she was and why she did not come in; but I made no movement to welcome her. I just sat still and stared.

She was a tall girl—woman—for either word fitted her: she had brown hair. She was dressed in—I should have said, if you had asked me, that

LEGEND

I could remember every detail, and I can in my own mind; but when I try to write it down, it blurs. But I know that there was blue in her dress, and bright colours. It must have been some flowered stuff. She looked—it's a silly phrase—but she looked like a spring day. I wanted her to come into the room and drive away the fog that was making me blink and feel dizzy. There was a gold ring on her finger : yes, and her hands were beautiful—strong, white hands. In one she held the brass candle-stick that stood in the hall, and with the other she sheltered the weak flame from the draught. Yet not only with her hand. Her arm was crooked maternally, her shoulder thrust forward, her hip raised, in a gesture magnificently protecting, as though the new-lit tallow-end were fire from heaven. Her whole body seemed sacredly involved in an act of guardianship. But half the glory of her pose—and it was lovely enough to make me catch my breath—was its unconsciousness; for her attention was all ours. Her eyes, as she listened to the group by the hearth, were sparkling with amusement and that tolerant, deep affection that one keeps for certain dearest, foolish friends. It was evident that she knew them well.

" Can't you keep that door shut, Jenny ? The draught——"

Anita's back was towards me. Her voice, as she spoke over her shoulder, rang high, muffled, injurious, and—I laughed. In a flash the stranger's eyes were

LEGEND

on me, and I found myself thrilling where I sat, absurdly startled for the moment, because—she knew me too I She knew me quite well. She was smiling at me, not vaguely as who should say—' Oh, surely I've seen you somewhere ? ' but with intimate, disturbing knowledge. It was the glance that a doctor gives you, the swift, acquainted glance that, without offence, deciphers you. I was not offended either, only curious and—attracted. She looked so friendly. I half began to say—' But when ? but where ? ' but her bearing overruled me. Her mouth was pursed conspiratorially : if her hand had been free she would have put a finger to her lip. I smiled back at her, flattered to be partner in her uncomprehended secret. But I was curious—oh, I was curious 1 It was incredible to me that Anita and the rest should stand, subduing their voices to the soft, thick stillness that she and the fog between them had brought into the room, and yet remain unconscious of her vivid presence. I was longing to see their faces when they should at last turn and see her, and yet, if you understand, I was afraid lest they should turn too soon and break the pleasant numbness that was upon me. And upon them—the spell was upon them too. It was the look in her eyes, not glamorous, but kind. It healed. It passed like a drowse across the squabblers at the table : it stilled Anita's feverish monologue. Indeed the room had grown very still. There was no sound left in it but the slurring of the lamp. It rested

LEGEND

upon Kent as he stood in dumb misery, and I watched the strained lines of his body slacken and grow easier beneath it. At that—at that ease she gave him—suddenly I loved her.

And as if I had spoken, as if I had touched her with my hand, her eyes, that had grown heavy with his trouble, turned, brightening, upon me, as if I were the answer to a problem, the lifting of a care. But what the problem was I could not then tell; for, staring as she made me—as she made me—into her divining eyes, I saw in them not her thought but my own at last made clear to me—my dream, my hope, my will and my desire, new-born and naked, and, I swear it, bodiless to me before that night and that hour. It was too soon. I was not ready. It shamed me and I flinched, my glance wandering helplessly away like a dog's when you have forced it to look at you. And so noticed, idly, uncomprehending at first, and then with a stiffening of my whole body, that her hand did not show as other hands, blood-red against the light she screened, but coldly luminous, like the fingers of a cloud through which the moon is shining; and that her breast was motionless, unstirred, by any breath.

Then I was afraid.

I felt my skin rising. I felt my bones grow cold. I could not move. I could not breathe. I could not think.

A voice came out of the fog that had thickened to

LEGEND

a wall between the rooms—a voice, thin, remote, like a trunk call—

"*Can't* you keep that door shut, Jenny? The draught——" and was cut off again by the sudden crash of an overturned chair. There was a rush and a cry—a madman's voice, shouting, screaming, groaning—

"Madaia Grey! My God, Madala Grey!" and Kent's huge body, hurling against the door, pitched and fell heavily.

For the door was shut.

I ran to him. He was shaken and half stunned, but he struggled to his feet. It was dreadful to see him. He was like a frightened horse, shivering and sweating. His lips were loose and he muttered unevenly as if the words came without his will. I caught them as I helped him; the same words—always the same words.

I got him to the sofa while the rest of them crowded and clamoured, and then I found myself taking command. I made them keep off. I sent Anita for water and a towel and I bathed his forehead where he had cut it on the moulding of the door. Mr. Flood wanted to send for a doctor, but I wouldn't have it. I knew how he would hate it. Then someone—the Baxter girl, I think—giggled hysterically and said something about a black eye tomorrow, and then—"How did it happen?" "Did you see, Miss Summer?" And at that they all began to clamour again like an orchestra after a solo, repeating

LEGEND

in all their voices—"Yes, what happened? What on earth was it? Did you see him? Some sort of a seizure? I told you twice to shut that door. The draught——Are you better now, old man? Kent—what happened?"

They were crowding round him again. He pointed a shaking finger.

"She saw," he said. "She knows——"

"Jenny?" Anita turned on me sharply, an employer addressing a servant at fault. "Oh, of course—you were in here too. What happened then?"

I had a helpless moment.

"Well?" she demanded.

I stared at her. It was incredible, but there was actually jealousy in her voice. It said, pitifully plainly—'Again I have missed the centre of a situation!'

"Well?" she repeated. And then—"If you saw something——" She altered the phrase—"Tell us what you saw."

But I had not missed the quick fear that had shown, for a moment, in Kent's eyes—fear of betrayal even while his tongue was betraying him.

I laughed. I thought to myself as I answered, "Oh, I am doing this beautifully!*" And I was. My voice sounded perfectly natural, not a bit high. I had plenty of words. I said, most jauntily—

"Oh, Cousin Nita, I could hardly see my own nose. The fog had been simply pouring in— My fault—I

LEGEND

didn't latch the door properly, I suppose. And then you called, and Mr. Rehan went to shut it for me, and he slithered on the mat, and——"

"I see!"

"Of course! Parquet——" The Baxter girl took a step or two and pirouetted back to us. "Perfect! You ought to give a dance, Miss Serlc.*"

Anita made no answer, but taking the can and the towel she opened the door of dispute, and, stooping an instant on the threshold to lift some small object from the floor, went out of the room. We heard her set down her load on the landing, and the rattle of the sash as she threw up the window, paused, and shut it again. She came back. A fresh inflow of acrid vapour preceded her and set us coughing. It was the stooping, I suppose, that had reddened her checks, for she was flushed when she came back to us. It was the only time that I ever saw my cousin with a colour. She spoke to us, a little gaspingly, as if the fog had caught her too by the throat—

"Jenny's quite right. One can't see an inch in front of one. No—not a cab in hearing. You'll have to resign yourselves to staying on indefinitely. What? oh, what nonsense, Kent! As if I'd let you go in that state!*• Besides, there's Jasper's poem. Are you going away without hearing it?" The soft monologue continued as she shepherded them to the fire. "That's always the way—one talks—one gets no work done. Get under the light, Jasper! Beryl, help me to move the table. Oh yes, Jasper, I forgot

LEGEND

to tell you, I met Roy Huth the other day and he had just read——"

I heard a movement behind me. I turned. Kent had half risen. He spoke——

" Sit down. Sit down here." He touched the cushion beside him.

I shook my head.

" Not yet. My cousin——"

" Ah——"

We were silent.

I watched Anita. She stood a few moments in unsmiling superintendence, while the women settled themselves and Mr. Flood sorted his papers and cleared his throat. Then, as I had known she would do, she returned soft-footed to her purpose. At the same moment I left Kent Rohan's side. When she reached the archway between the two rooms, I was there.

" And now——" she confronted me——** what happened? "

" I told you."

She smiled.

"Did you? I have forgotten. Tell me again."

" Anita—he slipped. He fell. He was shutting the door."

"Did he replace this?" She opened her little hand. The wedge of paper that I had twisted lay on her palm. " It was shut in the door when I opened it just now." She waited a moment. Then, with a certain triumph——" Well? "

LEGEND

I said nothing. What was there to say?

She tossed it from her.

"Don't be silly, Jenny! What was it? *Who* was it?" Her eyes were horribly intelligent.

"He slipped. He fell. He was shutting the door." I felt I could go on saying that for ever and ever.

The red patches in her cheeks deepened. She spoke past me, rudely, furiously—

"I intend to know. I've a perfect right—— Kent, I intend to know."

I put out my arms carelessly, though my heart was thudding, and rested them against the door-posts.

"He's shaken—a heavy man like that. Better leave him alone."

"I intend to know," she insisted. And then—"Jenny! *Jenny!* Let me pass."

"No!" I said.

For a second we stood opposed, and in that second I realized literally for the first time (so dominating had her personality been) that she was shorter than I. She was dwindling before my eyes. I found myself looking down at her with almost brutal composure. That I had ever been afraid of her was the marvel! For I was young, and she was elderly. I was strong, and she was weak. Her bare arms were like sticks, but mine were round and supple, and I could feel the blood tingle in them as my grip tightened on the wood-work. She was only Anita Serle,

LEGEND

the well-known writer; but I was Jenny Summer, and Kent was needing me.

" Jenny—you will be sorry ! " Her eyes and her voice were one threat. Such eyes I Eyes whose pupils had dilated till the irids were mere threads that encircled jealousy itself—jealousy black and bitter—jealousy that had stolen upon us as the fog had done, obscuring, soiling, stifling friend and enemy alike—jealousy of a gift and a great name, of a dead woman and a living man and their year of happiness—jealousy beyond reason, beyond pity—jealousy insatiable, already seeking out fresh food, turning deliberately, vengefully, upon Kent and upon me.

I felt sick. I had never dreamed that there could be such feelings in the world. And now she was going to Kent, to probe and lacerate and poison—

" No 1 " I said.

Actually she believed that she could pass me !

I still held fast by the door-posts, and she did not use her hands. We were silent and decorous, but for an instant our bodies fought. She was pressed against me, panting—

"AW" I said.

Then she fell away, and without another word turned and went back into the other room.

I saw Miss Howe whisper some question. There was an instant's silence. Then her answer came—

** Much better leave him alone. Yes—rather shaken—a heavy man like that."

LEGEND

It was defeat. She was using my very words, because, for all her fluency, she had none with which to cover it.

I was sorry. I felt a brute. But what else could I have done? I stood a moment watching her recover herself. Then I went back to Kent.

He did not look up, but he moved a little to give me room. I sat down beside him. We were shut away between the wall and the window, in the shadow, out of sight of the others. It was very peaceful. Now and then I looked at Kent, but he was staring before him. He had forgotten all about me again, I knew. But I was content. It made me happy to be sitting by him. My thoughts hopped about like birds after crumbs. I remember wondering what I should do on the morrow—where I should go? That Anita would have me in the house another twenty-four hours was not likely. I had ten pounds. I did not care. I knew that I ought to be anxious, but I could not realize the need. I could not think of anything but him; yet I was afraid to speak to him. He sat so still. His face was set in schooled and heavy lines. There came a stir and a clash of voices from the other room, but he did not seem to hear it. It was only the end of a poem. In a little it had settled down again into the same monotonous hum, but for a moment I had thought that it was the break-up, and after that I had no peace. It had scared me. It made me realize that I had only a few minutes—half an hour at most—and that then he

LEGEND

would be going away—and when should I see him again,? Never—maybe never! He had his life all arranged. He didn't even know my name. I felt desperate. I couldn't let him go. I didn't know what to do. I only knew that—that I couldn't bear it if he went away from me.

It was then that he moved and straightened himself in his chair with a sigh, that heavy, long-drawn sigh that men give when they make an end. ⁴ Work or play, joy or grief, it's done with. And now——? * Such a sigh as you never hear from women. But then we are not wise at ending things.

I thought that he was getting up, that he was going then and there, and instinctively I hurried into speech, daring anything—everything—his own thought of me—rather than let him go.

" Yes—that's over ! " I translated softly.

He turned with such a stare that I could have smiled.

" I meant that. How did you know ? "

" Why shouldn't I know ? " I did smile then. It made him smile back at me, but doubtfully, unwillingly.

" Can you read thoughts—too ? " The last word seemed to come out in spite of himself;

" Not always. Yours I can." My face was burning. But I could have spared myself the shame that made it burn, for he did not understand. My voice said nothing to him. My face showed him nothing. He was thinking about himself. But he leant for-

LEGEND

ward in that way he has—a dear way—of liking to talk to you.

"Can you? I never can. Only when I paint. I can put them into paint, of course. But not words. *She* said——" and all through the subsequent talk he avoided the name——" she said it was laziness, a lazy mind. But I always told her that that was her fault. I—we—her people—were just wool: she knitted us into our patterns. She was a wonder. You know, she—she was good for one. She was like bread—bread and wine——" His voice strained and flagged.

I nodded.

" Yes. I felt that too."

He glanced sideways at me.

"Ah, then you knew her?" His voice (or I imagined it) had chilled. It began to say, that faint chill, that if I too were of * the set,' he could not be at ease. But I would not give him time to think awry.

" No, no ! Only tonight. But I do know her."

"Tonight?"

" Tonight," I said and looked at him.

" Then——" his hand tightened on the chair, " you saw ? I was right ? You *did* see ? "

" I saw—something," I admitted.

"Some-one?"

I nodded.

His face lighted up. He pulled in his chair to me.

" Her hands—did you notice her hands? I have

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a drawing of them somewhere. I'll show it to you——" He stopped short: Then——" What is your name ? " he asked me.

" Jenny. Jenny Summer."

He considered that fact for a moment and put it aside again.

" I'd like you to see it. Anita will want it for that damned scrap-book of hers. She'll be worrying at me—they all will."

" You won't let it go ? " I said quickly.

He shook his head.

^{4%} No. But they can't understand why. They can't understand anything. They thought I was mad just now. So I was, for that matter. To see her again, you know—to see her again——"

" I know," I said.

He laughed nervously.

" Hallucination, of course. Thought transference. What you please. They'd say so. Do you think so ? And I'd been thinking of my picture of her. Oh, I admit it. So we must look at the matter in the light of common-sense."

" But I saw her too."

His eyes softened, and his voice.

" Yes. You were there. That's comfort. You saw her too—standing there with her dear hands full of cowslips——"

" A torch," I said.

" Cowslips——" he checked on the word*
"What?"

LEGEND

"She was carrying a candle," I insisted. "It had just been lighted. She was holding it so carefully."

We stared at each other.

"You're sure?"

"Sure."

He fell back wearily in his chair.

"What's the good of talking? She's dead. That's the end of it. I was dreaming. Of course. But when you said that you saw, for a moment I believed——What does it matter? What does it matter anyway? But her hands were full of cowslips."

I turned to him eagerly. I knew what to say. It was as if the words were being whispered to me.

"That was your Madala Grey. But mine—how could she be the same? Oh, can't you see? We've never seen the real Madala Grey. She gave—she became—to each of us—what we wanted most. She wrote down our dreams. She *was* our dreams. Can't you see what she meant to my cousin? Anita toils and slaves for her little bit of greatness. But *she* was born royal. That's why Anita hates her so—hates her and worships her. Why, she's been a sort of star to you all—a symbol—a legend—

But the real Madala Gray—she wasn't like that. She was just a girl. She was hungry all the time. She was wanting her human life. And he, the man they laugh at, 'the thing she married,' he did love that real Madala Grey. Why, he didn't even know

LEGEND

of the legend. Don't you see that that was what she wanted? She could take from him as well as give. Life—the bread and wine—they shared it. Oh, and it's him I pity now, not you. Not you," I said again, while my heart ached over him. " You—can't you see what she showed you? Not herself——"

⁴¹ "What then?" he said harshly.

I made the supreme effort.

" But wha* -a woman—one day—would be to you."

I thought the silence would never break.

The strange courage that had been in me was suddenly gone. I felt weak and friendless. I wanted to cry. I waited and waited till I could bear it no longer. Then I lifted my eyes desperately, with little hope, to read in his face what the end should be.

I found him looking at me fixedly—at me, you understand, not through me to a subject that absorbed him, but at me myself. It was as if he were seeing me for the first time. No—as if he recognized me at last.

Then the doubts went, and the shame and the loneliness. It made me so utterly happy, that look on his face. I felt my heart beating fast.

He said then, slowly—I can remember the morels, the tone and pitch of his voice, the very shaping of his mouth as he said it—

"Do you know—it's strange—you remind me of

L E G E N D

her. You are very like her. You are very like Madala Grey."

The hunger in his voice hurt me. I wanted to put my arms round him and comfort him. I might have done it, for I knew I was still but half real to him. But I sat still—*only*, with such a sense in my heart of a trust laid upon me, of an inheritance, of a widening and golden future, I said to him—

" Yes. I know."

THE END

October 1917—April 1919

Will Shakespeare

A PLAY

*" There*8 a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will"*

SHAKESPEARE.

The Play was first acted at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, on November 17th, 1921, by the Reandean Company, with the following cast:—

WILL SHAKESPEARE.	MB. PHILIP MERIVALE
ANNE.	Miss MOYNA MACGILL
MRS. HATHAWAY.	Miss MARY RORKE
HENSLOWE.	MR. ARTHUR WHITBY
QUEEN ELIZABETH.	Miss HAIDEE WRIGHT
MARY FITTON.	Miss MARY CLARE
KIT MARLOWE.	MR. CLAUD RAINS
A Child Actor.	MASTER ERIC SPEAR
A Secretary.	MR. ARTHUR BAWTREE
A Stage Hand.	MR. GILBERT RITCHIE
A Boy.	MASTER SPEAR
A Landlord.	MR. IVOR BYUNARD
A Lady-in-Waiting	Miss JOAN MACLEAN

Shadows in Act I.

Ophelia.	Miss LENNIE PRIDE
Desdemona.	Miss GLADYS JESSEL
Othello.	MR. HERBERT YOUNG
Queen Margaret.	Miss FLORA ROBSON
Prince Arthur.	MR. ERIC CROSBIE
Rosalind.	Miss PHYLLIS FABIAN
Shy lock.	MR. GILBERT RITCHIE
Clown.	MR. IVOR BARNARD
Hamlet.	MR. NEIL CURTIS
Caesar.	MR. ARTHUR BAWTREE
Cleopatra.	Miss MAI ASHLEY
King Lear.	MR. FRED MORGAN

The Three Fates [Miss NORA ROBINSON
[Miss GLADYS GRAY
(Miss BEATRICE SMITH

*Strolling Players, Beefeaters, Stage Hands, Drinkers,
Court Attendants, etc.*

The Production by BASIL DEAN,
The Music by THOMAS WOOD.
Designs for the Scenery and Dresses by GEORGE HARRIS;

THE PEOPLE OF THE PLAY

As they appear

ANNE HATHAWAY.
WILL SHAKESPEARE
MRS. HATHAWAY.
HENSLOWE.
A CHILD.
PLAYERS.
QUEEN ELIZABETH.
MARY FITTON.
KIT MARLOWE.
STAGE HANDS.
A BOY.
A LANDLORD.
A MAN.
ANOTHER MAN.
A GIRL.
A STREET HAWKER.
A PAGE.
SOLDIERS, ATTENDANTS, ETC.

ACT I.—A COTTAGE IN STRATFORD.

ACT II.—TEN YEARS LATER—*Scene* 1. A ROOM IN THE PALACE. *Scene* 2. THREE MONTHS LATER—THE FIRST NIGHT OF "ROMEO AND JULIET."

ACT III.—*Scene* 1. A MONTH LATER—SHAKESPEARE'S LODGING. *Scene* 2. THE SAME NIGHT—A ROOM AT AN INN.

ACT IV.—THE NEXT DAY—A STATE ROOM IN THE PALACE

ACT I

The curtain rises on the living-room of a sixteenth-century cottage. The walls and ceiling are of black beams and white-washed plaster. On the left is a large open fireplace with logs burning. Beyond it is a door. At the back is another door and a mullioned window half open giving a glimpse of bare garden hedge and winter sky. On the right wall is a staircase running down from the ceiling into the room, a dresser and a light shelf holding a book or two. Under the shelf is a small table piled with papers, ink-stand, sand-box and so on. At it sits SHAKESPEARE, his elbows on his papers, his head in his hands, absorbed. He is a boy of twenty but looks older. He is dark and slight. His voice is low, but he speaks very clearly. Behind him ANNE HATHAWAY moves to and fro from dresser to the central table, laying a meal. She is a slender, pale woman with reddish hair. Her mo'cements are quick and furtive and she has a high sweet voice that shrills too easily.

ANNE [*hesitating, with little pauses between the sentences*].

Supper is ready, Will! Will, did you hear?

A farm-bird—Mother brought it. Won't you come?

She's crying in for the basket presently.
First primroses! Here, smell! Sweet, aren't
they? Bread?
Are the snow wreaths gone from the fields? Did
you go far?
Are you wet? Was it cold? There's black frost
in the air,
My mother says, and spring hangs dead on the
boughs—
Oh, you might answer when I speak to you!

SHAKESPEARE *gets up quickly.*

Where are you going?

SHAKESPEARE. Out!

ANNE. Where?

SHAKESPEARE. Anywhere——

ANNE. —away from me! Yes! Say it!

SHAKESPEARE [*under Ms breath*]. Patience! Patience!

ANNE. Come back! Come back! I'm sorry. Oh,
come back!

I talk too much, I crossed you. You must eat.
Oh! Oh! I meant no harm—I meant no
harm!—

You know?

SHAKESPEARE. I know.

ANNE. • Why then, come back and eat,
And talk to me. Aren't you a boy to lose
All day in the woods?

SHAKESPEARE. The town 1

ANNE. Ah ! In the town ?
Ah then, you've talked and eaten. Yes, you can
talk
In the town!

Ue goes 'back to his desk.

More writing? What's the dream
to-day?

He winces.

Oh, tell me, tell me !

SHAKESPEARE. No!

ANNE. I want your dreams.

SHAKESPEARE. A dream's a bubble, Anne, and yet a
world,
Unsailed, uncharted, mine. But stretch your hand
To touch it—gone! And you have wet your
fingers,
Whilst I, like Alexander, want my world—
And so I scold my wife.

APJJE. Oh, let me sail
Your world with you.

SHAKESPEARE. One day, when all is mapped
On paper——

ANNE, Now!

SHAKESPEARE. Not yet.

ANNE. Now, now!

SHAKESPEARE I cannot!

ANNE. Because you will not. Ever you shut me out.

SHAKESPEARE. How many are there in the listening room ?

ANNE. We two.

SHAKESPEARE. We three.

ANNE. Will!

SHAKESPEARE. Are there not three ? Yet swift,
Because it is too soon, you shrink from me,
Guarding your mystery still; so must I guard
My dreams from any touch till they are born.

ANNE. What! Do you make our bond our barrier now ?

SHAKESPEARE. See, you're a child that clamours—
" Let me taste ! "

But laugh and let it sip your wine, it cries—

" I like it not. It is not sweet! "—and blames
you.

See ! even when I give you cannot take.

ANNE. Try me!

SHAKESPEARE, Too late.

ANNE. I will not think I know
t^hat cruelty you mean. What is't you mean ?
Whatis't?

SHAKESPEARE. How long since we two married ?

ANNE. Why,
Four months.

SHAKESPEARE. And are you happy ?

ANNE. Will, aren't you,|

SHAKESPEARE. I asked my wife.

ANNE. I am ! I am ! I an !

Oh, how can I be happy when I read
Your eyes, and read—what is it that I read ?

SHAKESPEARE. God knows!

ANNE. Yes, God He knows, but He's so far away—
Tell Anne!

SHAKESPEARE. Touch not these cellar thoughts, half
worm, half weed :

Give them no light, no air : be warned in time :
Break not the seal nor roll away the stone,
Lest the blind evil writhe itself heart-high
And its breath stale us !

ANNE. Oh, what evil ?

SHAKESPEARE. Know you not ?
Why then I'll say " Thank God ! " and never tell
you—

And yet I think you know ?

ANNE. Am I your wife,
Wiser than your own mother in your ways
(For she was wise for many, I've but you),
AVays in my heart stored, and with them the
unborn

I feed, that he may grow a second you—
Am I your wife, so close to you all day,
So close to you all night, that oft I lie
Counting your heart-beats—do I watch you stir
And cry out suddenly and clench your hand
Till the bone shows white, and then you sigh and
turn,

And sometimes smile, but never ope your eyes,
Nor know me with a seeking touch of hands
That bids me share the dream—am I your wife,

Can I be woman and your very wife
And know not you are burdened ? You lock me
out,

Yet at the door I wait, wringing my hands
To help you.

SHAKESPEARE. You could help me; but—I know you !
You'd help me, in your way, to go—your way !

ANNE. The right way.

SHAKESPEARE. Said I not, sweetheart—your way I
So—leave it!

*He begins to write. ANNE goes to the window
and leans against it, looking out.*

ANNE [*softly*]. Give mo words ! God, give mo words !

SHAKESPEARE. Sweetheart, you stay the light.

ANNE, The pane is cool.

She moves to one side.

Can you see now ?

SHAKESPEARE. That's better.

The twang of a lute is heard.

ANNE. The road dances.

A VOICE [*singing*]. Come with me to London,

Folly, conic away!

I'll make your fortuae

On a fine day——

ANNE. A stranger with my mother at the gate !

*She opens the door to MRS. HATHAWAY, who
enters.*

THE VOICE [*nearer*].

Daisy leave and buttercup !
Pick your gold and silver up,
In London, in London,
Oh, London Town!

ANNE. What have you brought us, Mother, unawares ?

MRS. HATHAWAY. Why, I met the man in the lane and
he asked his way here. He wants Will.

ANNE. Does he, and does he ?

SHAKESPEARE [*at the window*].

One of the players. In the town I met him
And had some talk, and told him of my play.

ANNE. You told a stranger and a player ? But I—
I am not told !

THE VOICE [*close at hand*],
For sheep can feed
And robins breed
Without you, without you,
And the world get on without you—
Oh, London Town!

SHAKESPEARE *goes to the door.*

ANNE [*stopping him*]. What brings him here ?

SHAKESPEARE. I bring him 1
To my own house. [*He goes out.*]

MRS. HATHAWAY. Trouble ?

ANNE. Why no ! No trouble 1
I am not beaten, starved, nor put on the
street.

MRS. HATHAWAY. Be wise, be wise, for the child's sake,
bewiser!

ANNE. What shall I do? Out of your fifty years,
What shall I do to hold him?

MRS. HATHAWAY. A low voice
And a light heart is best—and not to judge.

ANNE. Light, Mother, light? Oh, Mother, Mother,
Mother!

I'm battling on the crumble-edge of loss
Against a seaward wind, that drives his ship
To fortunate isles, but carries me cliff over,
Clutching at flint and thistle-hold, to braise me
Upon the barren beaches he has left
For ever.

SHAKESPEARE *and the player*, HENSLOWE,
come in talking.

MRS. HATHAWAY [*at the inner door*].

Come, find my basket for me. Let them be 1

ANNE. Look at him, how his face lights up !

MRS. HATHAWAY. Come now,
And leave them to it!

ANNE. I dare not, Mother, I dare not.

MRS. HATHAWAY. It's not the way—a little trust——

ANNE. I dare not.

MRS. HATHAWAY *goes out at the door by the
fire.*

HENSLOWE [*in talk. He is a stout, good-humoured, elderly
man, with bright eyes and a dancing step. He wears ear-rings,*

is dressed shabby-handsome, and is splashed with mud. A lute is slung at his shoulder]. Played? It shall be played. That's why I'm here.

ANNE [*behind them*]. Will!

SHAKESPEARE [*turning*]. This is my wife.

ANNE [*curtseys. Then, half aside*]. Who is the man? Where from? What is his name?

HENSLOWE [*overhearing*]. Proteus, Madonna 1 A poor son of the god.

SHAKESPEARE *laughs*.

ANNE. A foreigner?

HENSLOWE. Why, yes and no! I'm from Spain at the moment—I have castles there; but my bed-sitting room (a green room, Madonna) is in Blackfriars. As to my means, for I see your eye on my travel stains, I have a bank account, also in Spain, a box-office, and the best of references. The world and his wife employ me, the Queen comes to see me, and all the men of genius run to be my servants. But as to who I am—O Madonna, who am I not? I've played every card in the pack, beginning as the least in the company, the mere unit, the innocent ace, running up my number with each change of hand to Jack, Queen, King, and so to myself again, the same mere One, but grown to my hopes. For Queen may blow kisses, King of Hearts command all hands at court, but Ace in his shirt-sleeves is manager and trumps them off the board at will. You may learn from this Ace; for I think, sir, you will end as he does, the master of your suit.

ANNE. A fortune-teller too !

HENSLOWE. Will you cross my palm with a sixpence, Madonna?

ANNE. With nothing.

HENSLOWE. Beware lest I tell you for nothing that you—fear your fortune!

SHAKESPEARE [*spreading his hand*]. Is mine worth fearing?

HENSLOWE. Here's an actor's hand, and a bad one. You'll lose your words, King o' Hearts. Your great scenes will break down,

SHAKESPEARE. Then I'll be 'prenticed direct to the Ace.

HENSLOWE. Too fast. You must come to cues like the rest of us, and play out your part, before you can be God Almighty in the wings—as God Himself found out when the world was youngish.

ANNE. We're plain people, sir, and my husband works his farm.

HENSLOWE. And sings songs? I've been trying out a new play in the provinces before we risk London and Gloriana——

ANNE. What! the Queen! the Queen?

HENSLOWE. Oh, she keeps her eye on poor players as well as on Burleigh and the fleet. *There's* God Almighty in the wings if you like! But as I say—

Whatever barn we storm, here in the west,
We're marching to the echo of new songs,
Jigged out in taverns, trolled along the street,

Loosed under sweetheart windows, whistled and
sighed

Wherever a farmer's boy in Lover's Lane
Shifts from the right foot to the left and waits—
" Where did you hear it? " say I, beating time:
And always comes the answer—" Stratford way ! "

4 green parish, Stratford !

SHAKESPEARE. Too flat, though I love it. Give me hills
to climb 1

HENSLOWE. Flat? You should see Norfolk, where I
was a boy. From sky to sky there's no break in the levels
but shock-head willows and reed tussocks where a singing
bird may nest. But in which ? Oh, for that you must sit
unstirring in your boat, between still water and still sky,
while the drips run off your blade until, a yard away,
uprises the song. Then, flash ! part the rushes—the nest
is bare and the bird your own ! Oh, I know the ways of the
water birds ! And so, hearing of a cygnet on the banks
of Avon——

ANNE. Ah!

HENSLOWE. You're right, Madonna, the poetical vein
runs dry. So I'll end with a plain question—" Is not
Thames broader than Avon ? "

SHAKESPEARE. Muddier——

HENSLOWE, But a magical water to hasten the moult, to
wash white a young swan's feathers.

SHAKESPEARE. Or black, Mephisto !

HENSLOWE. Black swans are rarest. I saw one when
I was last in London. London's a great city 1 Madonna,

you should send your husband to market in London, and in a twelvemonth he'll bring you home the world in his pocket as it might be a russet apple.

ANNE. What should we do with the world, sir, here in Stratford ?

HENSLOWE. Why, seed it and sow it, and plant it in your garden, and it'll grow into the tree of knowledge.

ANNE [*turning away*]. My garden is planted already.

HENSLOWE [*in a low voice*].

The black swan seeks a mate, black swan.

SHAKESPEARE.

A woman ?

ANNE [*turning sharply*]. What did he say to you ?

HENSLOWE. Why, that a woman can make her fortune in London as well as a man. There's one came lately to court, but sixteen and a mere knight's daughter, without a penny piece, and you should see her now ! The men at her feet——

ANNE. And the women——?

HENSLOWE. Under her heel.

ANNE. What does the Queen say ?

HENSLOWE.

Winks and lets her be,

A fashion out of fashion—gipsy-black

Among the ladies with their bracken hair,

(The Queen, you know, is red !)

SHAKESPEARE.

A vixen, eh ?

HENSLOWE. Treason, my son !

ANNE. God made us anyway and coloured us !

SHAKESPEARE. And is He less the artist if at will

He strings a black pearl, hangs between the campa

Of day and day the banner of His dark ?
Or that He leaves, when with His autumn breath
He fans the bonfire of the woods, a pine
Unkindledf,

HENSLOWE. True; and such a black is she
Among the golden women.

SHAKESPEARE. I see your pine,
Your branching solitude, your evening tree,
With high, untroubled head, that meets the eye
As lips meet unseen kisses in the night—
A perfumed dusk, a canopy of dreams
And chapel of ease, a harp for summer airs
To tremble in——

ANNE. Barren the ground beneath,
No flowers, no grass, the needles lying thick,
Spent arrows——

SHAKESPEARE, Yes, she knows—we know how women
Can prick a man to death with needle stabs.

ANNE. O God!

HENSLOWE. Your wife ! She's ill!

SHAKESPEARE. Anne ?

ANNE. Let me be f

SHAKESPEARE. Come to your mother—take my arm——

ANNE. I'll sit.

I have no strength.

SHAKESPEARE. I'll call her to you. [*He goes out.*]

ANNE. Quick!

Before he comes, what is her name ? her name ?
Her mood ? her mind ? In all the town of Stratford

Was there no door but this to pound at ? Quick !
 You know her ? Did you see his look ? O God !
 The last rope parts. He's like a boat that strains,
 Strains at her moorings. Why did you praise her
 so?

And talk of London ? What's it all to you ?
 Tall, is she ? Yes, like a tree—a block of wood—
 You said so ! (Is he coming ?) Tell me quick !
 I've never seen a London lady close.
 She's lovely ? So are many I How ?

HENSLOWE, She's new!
 She's gallant, like a tall ship setting sail,
 And boasts she fears no man. Say " woman " "
 though——

ANNE. What woman does this woman fear ?

HENSLOWE. The Queen.
 I've seen it in her eye.

ANNE. I should not fear.

HENSLOWE. You never saw the Queen of England smile
 And crook her finger, once—and the fate falls.

ANNE. I've seen her picture. She's eaten of a worm
 As I am eaten. I'd not fear the Queen.
 Her snake would know its fallow in my heart
 And pass me. But this woman—what's her name ?

HENSLOWE. Mary——

ANNE. That's " bitter." I shall find her so,
SHAKESPEARE comes in with MRS. HATHAWAY.

Look at him ! Fear the Queen ? Did not the
 Queen,

My sister, meet a Mary long ago
That bruised her in the heel ?

HENSLOWE. Man, your wife's mad !
She says the Queen's her sister.

ANNE. Mad, noble Festus ?
Not I! But tell him so—he'll kiss you for it.

HENSLOWE. I'll meet you, friend, some other time or
place——

SHAKESPEARE. What's this ? You're leaving us ?

HENSLOWE. Your wife's too ill——

SHAKESPEARE. Too ill to stand, yet not too ill to——
[Aside] Anne !

Why does he stare? What have you told my
friend ?

ANNE. Your friend!

SHAKESPEARE. My friend!

ANNE. This once-met Londoner !
What does he want of you, in spite of me ?
This bribing tramp, this palpable decoy——

SHAKESPEARE. Be silent in my house before my friends !
Be silent!

ANNE. This your friend !

SHAKESPEARE. Silent, I say!

ANNE. I *will* not! Blows ? Would you do that to me,
Husband?

SHAKESPEARE. I never touched you !

ANNE. What! No blow ?
Here, where I felt it—here ? Is there no wound,
No black mark ?

MRS. HATHAWAY. Oh, she's wild ! I'll take her. Come !
Come, Anne ! It's naught ! I know the signs.

[To SHAKESPEARE]

Stay you !

ANNE. O Mother, there befell me a strange pang
Here at my heart—*[The two go out together.]*

SHAKESPEARE. O women ! women ! women !
They slink about you, noiseless as a cat,
With ready smiles and ready silences.
These women are too humble and too wise
In pricking needle-ways : they drive you mad
With fibs and slips and kisses out of time :
And if you do not trip and feign as they
And cover all with kisses, do but wince
Once in your soul, (the soul they shall not touch,
Never, I tell you, never ! Sooner the smeared,
The old-time honey death from a thousand stings,
Than let their tongue prick patterns on your
soul!)

Then, then all's cat-like clamour and annoy !

HENSLOWE. Cry " Shoo ! " and clap your hands; for so
are all

Familiar women. These are but interludes
In the march of the play, and should be taken so,
Lightly, as food for laughter, not for rage.

SHAKESPEARE. My mother——

HENSLOWE *[shrugging]*. Ah, your mother!

SHAKESPEARE. She's not thus,
But selfless; and I've dreamed of others—tall,

Warm-flushed like pine-woods with their clear red
stems,

With massy hair and voices like the wind
Stirring the cool dark silence of the pines.

Know you such women 1—beckoning hill-top
women,

That sway to you with lovely gifts of shade
And slumber, and deep peace, and when at dawn
You go from them on pilgrimage again,
They follow not nor weep, but rooted stand
In their own pride for ever—demi-gods.
Are there such women ? Did you say you knew
Such women ? such a woman ?

HENSLOWE.

Come to London

And use your eyes !

SHAKESPEARE.

How can I come to London ?

You see me what I am, a man tied down.

My wife—you saw ! How can I come to London ?

Say to a sick man " Take your bed and walk ! "

Say to a prisoner " Release your chain ! "

Say to a tongue-slit blackbird " Pipe again

As in the free, the spring-time ! " You maybe

Have spells to help them, but for me no help.

London !

I think sometimes that I shall never see

This lady in whose lap the weed-hung ships

From ocean-end returning pour their gold,

Myrrh, frankincense. What colour's frank-
incense ?

And how will a man's eye move and how his hand,
Who sailed the flat world round and home again
To London, London of the mazy streets,
AWhere ever the shifting people flash and fade
Like my own thoughts ? You're smiling—why ?

HENSLOWE.

I live there.

SHAKESPEARE. Oh, to be you !

To read the faces and to write the dreams,
To hear the voices and record the songs,
To grave upon the metal of my mind
All great men, lordlier than they know themselves,
And fowler-like to fling my net o'er London,
And some let fly, and clip the wings of some
Fit for my notes; till one fine day I catch
The Governess of England as she goes
To solemn service with her gentlemen :
(What thoughts behind the mask, beneath the
crown?)

Queen ! The crowd's eyes are yours, but not my
eyes!

Queen ! To my piping you shall unawares
Strut on my stage for me ! You laugh ? I swear
I'll make that thrice-wrapped, politic, vain heart
My horn-book (as you all are) whence Til learn
How Julius frowned, and Elinor rode her way
Rough-shod, and Egypt met ill-news. I'll do it,
Though I hold horses in the streets for hire,
Once I am come to London.

HENSLOWE.

Come with UP

And there's no holding horses ! Part and pay
Are ready, and we start to-night.

SHAKESPEARE. I cannot.

I'm Whittington at cross-roads, but the bells
Ring " Turn again to Stratford ! " not to London.

HENSLOWE. Well—as you choose !

SHAKESPEARE. As I choose ? // I choose ?

I'm married to a woman near her time
That needs me ! Choose ? I am not twenty, sir !
What devil sped you here to bid me choose ?

I knew a boy went wandering in a wood,
Drunken with common dew and beauty-mad
And moonstruck. Then there came a nightshade
witch,

Locked hands with him, small hands, hot hands,
down drew him,

Sighing—: Love me, love me!" as a ring-dove
sighs,

(How white a woman is, under the moon !)

She was scarce human. Yet he took her home,
And now she's turned in the gross light of day
To a haggard scold, and he handfasted sits
Breaking his heart—and yet the spell constrains
him.

This is not I, not I, for I am bound
To a good wife and true, that loves me; but—
I tell you I could write of such a man,
And make you laugh and weep at such a man,
For your own manhood's sake, so bound, so bound.

HENSLOWE. Laugh? Weep? No, I'd be a friend to such a man ! Go to him now and tell him from me—or no! Go rather to this wife of his that loves him well, you say——?

SHAKESPEARE. Too well I

HENSLOWE. Why, man, it's common! Or too light, too low,

Not once in a golden age love's scale trims level

SHAKESPEARE. I read of lovers once in Italy——

HENSLOWE. You'll write of lovers too, not once nor twice.

SHAKESPEARE. Their scales were level ere they died of love,

In Italy——

HENSLOWE. But if instead they had lived—in Stratford—there'd have been such a see-saw in six months as——

SHAKESPEARE. As what?

HENSLOWE. As there has been, eh ?

" See-saw ! Margery Daw !

She sold her bed to lie upon straw."

And so—poor Margery ! Though she counts me an enemy—poor Margery I

SHAKESPEARE. What help for Margery—and her Jack ?

HENSLOWE. None, friend, in Stratford.

SHAKESPEARE. Do I not know it ?

HENSLOWE. Then—tell Margery!

SHAKESPEARE. Deaf, deaf!

HENSLOWE. Not if you tell her how all heels in London
(And the Queen dances !)

So trip to the Stratford tune that I hot-haste

Amsenttofetchthefiddler———

SHAKESPEARE.

Man, is it true ?

True that the Queen——?

HENSLOWE.

I say—tell Margery !

What! is she a woman, a wife, and will not further her man ? I say to you—tell Margery, as I tell you——

SHAKESPEARE. You do ?

HENSLOWE. I do. I do tell you that if you can come away with us now with your " Dream " in your pocket, and teach it to us and learn of us while you teach, and strike London in time for the Queen's birthday—I tell you and I tell her, Jack's a made man. See what Margery says to that, and give me the answer, stay or come, as I pass here to-night! And now let me go; for if I do not soon whip my company clear of apple-juice and apple-bloom, clear, that is to say, of Stratford wine and Stratford women, we shall *not* pass here to-night. [*He goes out.*]

SHAKESPEARE. To-night! [*Catting*] Anne! Anne! [*He walks up and down.*] Oh, to be one of them to-night on the silver road—to smell the steaming frost and listen to men's voices and the ring of iron on the London road ! [*Calling*] Anne!

ANNE [*entering*]. You called? He's gone? You're angry? Oh, not now,
No anger now; for, Will, to-night in the sky,
Our sky, a new star shines.

SHAKESPEARE.

What's that ? You know ?

ANNE. I know, and oh, my heart sings.

SHAKESPEARE.

Anne, dear Anne,

You know ? No frets ? You wish it ? Oh, dear
Anne,

How did you guess and know ?

ANNE. My mother told me.

SHAKESPEARE. She heard us? Did she hear—they've
read the play,

And the Queen's asked for me ! London, Anne !
London!

I'll send you London home, my lass, by the post—
Such frocks and fancies! London! London,
Anne !

And you, you know ? and speed me hence ? By
God,

That's my own wife at last, all gold to me
And goodness ! Anne, be better to me still
And help me hence to-night!

ANNE. It dips, it dies,
A night-light, Mother, and no star. I grope
Giddily in the dark.

SHAKESPEARE. What did she tell you ?

ANNE. No matter. Oh, it earns not that black look.
London ? the Queen ? I'll help you, oh, be sure !
Too glad to see you glad.

SHAKESPEARE. Anne, it's good-bye
To Stratford till the game's won.

ANNE, What care I
So you are satisfied ? The farm must go—
That's little——

SHAKESPEARE. Must it go ?

ANNE. Dreamer, how else
Shall we two live in London ?

SHAKESPEARE, We, do you say ?

They'd have me travel with them—a rough life—«

ANNE. I care not!

SHAKESPEARE. —and you're ailing.

ANNE. Better soon.

SHAKESPEARE. You'll miss your mother.

ANNE. Mothers everywhere
Will help a girl. I'm strong.

SHAKESPEARE. It will not do !

I have my world to learn, and learn alone.

I will not dangle at your apron-strings.

ANNE. I'll be no tie. I'll be your follower

And scarce your wife; but let me go with you !

SHAKESPEARE. If you could see but once, once, with my
eyes !

ANNE. Will! let me go with you !

SHAKESPEARE. I tell you—no !

Leave me to go my way and rule my life

After my fashion ! Til not lean on you

Because you're seven years wiser.

ANNE, That too, O God !

SHAKESPEARE. And if I hurt you—for I know I do,

I'm not so rapt—think of me, if you can,

As a man stifled that wildly throws his arms,

Raking the air for room—for room to breathe,

And so strikes unaware, unwillingly,

His lover 1

ANNE. I could sooner think of you
Asleep, and I beside you with the child,
And all this passion ended, as it must,
In quiet graves; for we have been such lovers
As there's no room for in the human air
And daylight side of the grass. What shall I do ?
And how live on ? Why did you marry me ?

SHAKESPEARE. You know the why of that.

ANNE. Too well we know it,
I and the child. You have well taught this fool
That thought a heart of dreams, a loving heart.
A soul, a self resigned, could better please
Than the blind flesh of a woman; for God knows
Your self drew me, the folded man in you,
Not, not the boy-husk.

SHAKESPEARE. Yet the same God knows
When folly was, you willed it first, not I.

ANNE. Old ! Old as Adam ! and untrue, untrue !
Why did you come to me at Shottery,
Out of your way, so often ? laugh with me
Apart, and answer for me as of right,
As if you knew me better (ah, it was sweet!)
Than my own brothers ? And on Sunday eves
You'd wait and walk with me the long way home
From church, with me alone, the foot-path way,
Across the fields where wild convolvulus
Strangles the corn——

SHAKESPEARE. Strangles the corn indeed !

ANNE, —and still delay me talking at the stile,

Long after curfew, under the risen moon.

Why did you come ? Why did you stay with me,
To make me love, to make me think you loved
me?

SHAKESPEARE. Oh, you were easy, cheap, you flattered
me.

ANNE [*crying out*]. I did not.

SHAKESPEARE. Why, did you not look at me
As I were God ? And for a while I liked it.
It fed some weed in me that since has withered ;
For now I like it not, nor like you for it !

ANNE. That is your fate, you change, you must ever be
changing,

You climb from a boy to a man, from a man to a
god,

And the god looks back on the man with a smile,
and the man on the boy with wonder ;

But I, I am woman for ever : I change not at all.
You hold out your hands to me — heaven : you
turn from me—hell ;

But neither the hell nor the heaven can change
me : I love you : I change not at all.

SHAKESPEARE. All this leads not to London, and for
London

I am resolved : if not to-night -

ANNE. To-night ?

SHAKESPEARE. As soon as maybe. When the child is
born—

When will the child be born ?

ANNE. Soon, soon——
SHAKESPEARE. How soon ?
ANNE. I think—I do not know——
SHAKESPEARE. In March ?
ANNE, Who knows ?
SHAKESPEARE. Did you not tell me March ?
ANNE. Easter——
SHAKESPEARE, That's May !
It should be March.
ANNE. It—should be—March——
SHAKESPEARE. Why, Anne ?
ANNE. Stay with me longer ! Wait till Whitsuntide,
Till June, till summer comes, and if, when you
see
Your own son, still you'll leave us, why, go then !
But sure, you will not go.
SHAKESPEARE. Summer ? Why summer ?
It should be spring, not summer——
ANNE. I'll not bear
These questions, like coarse fingers, prying out
My secrets.
SHAKESPEARE. Secrets ?"
ANNE. Secrets? I? I've none—
I never meant—I know not why the word
Came to me, " secret/" Yet you're all secret
thoughts
And plans you do not share. Why should not I
Be secret, if I choose ? But see, I'll tell you
All, all—some other time—were there indeed

A thing to tell——

SHAKESPEARE. When will the child be born ?

ANNE. If it were—June ? My mother said to-day

It might be June—July——This woman's talk
Is not for you——

SHAKESPEARE. July ?

ANNE. Oh, I must laugh

Because you look and look—don't look at me !

June! May! I swear it's May! I said the
spring,

And May is still the girlhood of the year.

SHAKESPEARE. July ! A round year since you came to
me!

Then—when you came to me, in haste, afraid,
All tears, and clung to me, and white-lipped swore
You had no friend but Avon if I failed you,
It was a lie ?

ANNE. Don't look at me !

SHAKESPEARE. No need?

You forced me with a lie ?

ANNE. Now there is—now !

SHAKESPEARE. You locked me in this prison with a lie ?

ANNE. I loved you.

SHAKESPEARE. And you lied to me——

ANNE. To hold you.

I couldn't lose you. I was mad with pain.

SHAKESPEARE. Are you so weak,

So candle-wavering, that a guac of pain
Could snuff out honour \

ANNE.

'Ware this hurricane

Of pain ! The deserts heed it not, nor rocks,
Nor the perpetual sea; but oh, the fields
Where barley grows and small beasts hide, they
fear—

And haggard woods that feel its violent hand
Entangled in their hair and wrestling, shriek
Crashing to ruin. What shall their pensioners
Do now, the rustling mice, the anemones,
The whisking squirrels, ivies, nightingales,
The hermit bee whose summer goods were stored
In a south bank ? How shall the small things stand
Against the tempest, against the cruel sun
That stares them, homeless, out of countenance,
Through the day's heats ?

SHAKESPEARE.

Coward ! They see the *tun*

Though they die seeing, and the wider view,
The vast horizons, the amazing skies
Undreamed before.

ANNE.

I cannot see so far.

I want my little loves, I want my home.
My life is rooted up, my prop is gone,
And like a vine I lie upon the ground,
Muddled and broken.

SHAKESPEARE.

I could be sorry for you

Under the heavy hand of God or man,
But your own hand has slain yourself and me.
Woman, the shame of it, to trap me thus,
Knowing I never loved you !

ANNE. Oh, for a month—
In the spring, in the long grass, under the apple-
trees——

SHAKESPEARE. I never loved you.

ANNE. Think, when I hurt my hand
With the wild rose, it was then you said " Dear
Anne ! "

SHAKESPEARE. I have forgotten.

ANNE. On Midsummer Eve—
There was a dream about a wood you told me,
Me—not another——

SHAKESPEARE, I was drunk with dreams
That night.

ANNE. That night, that night you loved me, Will.
Oh, never look at me and say—that night,
Under the holy moon, there was no love !

SHAKESPEARE, You knew it was not love,

ANNE. O God, I knew,
And would not know ! You never came again.
I hoped. I prayed. I hoped. I loved you so.
You never came.
And must I go to you ? I was ashamed.
Yet in the wood I waited, waited, Will,
Night after night I waited, waited, Will,
Till shame itself was swallowed up in pain,
In pain of waiting, and—I went to you.

SHAKESPEARE. That lie upon those loving lips ?

ANNE. That lie.

SHAKESPEARE. There was no child ?

ANNE.

But I, but I know you.

Have I not learned my god's face ? Have I not
seen

The great dreams cloud it, as the ships of the sky
Darken the river? Has not the wind struck
home,

The following chill wind that stirs all straws
Of omen ? You're to be great, God pity you !

Fm your poor village woman; but I know
What you must learn and learn, and shriek to God
To spare you learning, if you will be great,
Singing to men and women across fields

Of years, and hearing answer as they reap,
Afar, the centuried fields, " He knew, he knew ! "

How will they listen to you—voice that cries
" Right's right! Wrong's wrong ! For every sin
a stone!

Ye shall not plead to any god or man—

' I flinched because the pain was very great,¹

' I fell because the burden bore me down/

' Hungry, I stole/ " O boy, ungrown, at judgment,
How will they listen? What? I lied? Oh,
blind!

When I, your own, show you my heart of hearts,
A book for you to read all women by,

Blindly you turn my page with—" Here are lies ! "

SHAKESPEARE, Subtle enough—and glitter may be gold
In women's eyes—you say so—though to a man,
Boy rather (boy, you called me), lies are lies,

Base money, though you rub 'em till they shine,
III money to buy love with; but—I care not!
So be at ease ! My love's not confiscate,
For none was yours to forfeit. Faith indeed,
A weakling trust is gone, for though you irked
me

I thought you honest and so bore much from you—
Your jealous-glancing eye, officious hand
Meddling my papers, fool's opinion given
Unasked when strangers spoke with me, and
laughter
Suddenly checked as if you feared a blow
As a dog does—it made me mad !

ANNE. Go on!

SHAKESPEARE. For when did I use you ill ?

ANNE. Go on!

SHAKESPEARE, What need ?

All's in a word—your ever-presence here
As if you'd naught in life to do but watch me——

ANNE. Go on!

SHAKESPEARE. All this, I say, I bore, because at heart
I did believe you loved me. Well—it's gone !
And I go with it—free, a free man, free !
Anne ! for that word I could forgive you all
And go from you in peace.

ANNE [*catching at his arm*]. You shall not go !

SHAKESPEARE. Shall not? This burr—how impudent
it clings!

ANNE. You have not heard me——

SHAKESPEARE. Let me go, I say !

My purse, my papers——

ANNE. Will!

SHAKESPEARE. Talk to the walls,

For I hear nothing !

ANNE. Why, a murderess

Has respite in my case—and I—and I—

What have I done but love you, when all's said ?

You will not leave me now, now when that lie

Is certain truth at last, and in me sleeps

Like God's forgiveness ? For I felt it stir

When you were angry—I was angry too,

My fault, all mine—but I was sick and faint

And frightened, so I railed, because no word

Matched with the strong need in me suddenly

For gentlest looks and your beloved arms

About this body changed and shaking so;

But why I knew not. But my mother knew

And told me.

SHAKESPEARE. O wise mother !

ANNE. Will, it's true !

SHAKESPEARE. Practice makes perfect, as we wrote at school!

ANNE. I swear to you——

SHAKESPEARE. As then you swore to me.

Not twice, not twice, my girl!

ANNE. O God, God Son 1

Pitiful God ! If there be other lives,

As I have heard him say, as his books say,

In other bodies, for your Mother's sake
And all she knows (God, ask her what she knows !)
Let me not be a woman ! Let me be
Some twisting worm on a hook, or fish they catch
And fling again to catch another year,
Or otter trapped and broiled in the sun three
days,
Or lovely bird whose living wing men tear
From its live body, or of Italy
Some peasant's drudge-horse whipped upon its
eyes,
Or let me as a heart-burst, screaming hare
Be wrenched in two by slaving deaths for sport,
But let me not again be cursed a woman
Surrendered to the mercy of her man !

*She sinks doivn in a crouching heap by the
hearth. There ha& been a sound of many
voices drawing nearer, and as she ceases
speaking, the words of a song become clear.*

THE PLAYERS [*singing*].

Come with us to London,
Folly, come away!
We'll make your fortune
On a summer day.
Leave your sloes and mulberries
There are riper fruits than these,
In London, in London,
Oh, London Town!

For winds will blow
And barley grow
Without you, without you,
And the world get on without you—
Oh, London Town !

*The voices drop to a low hum. HENSLOWE
thrusts his head in at the window.*

HENSLOWE. The sun's down. The sky's as yellow as a
London fog. Well, what's it to be ?

SHAKESPEARE. London ! The future in a golden fog !

HENSLOWE. Come then !

SHAKESPEARE. I'll fetch my bundle. Wait for me !
What voices ?

HENSLOWE. The rest of us, the people of the plays.
We're all here waiting for you.

SHAKESPEARE. Come in, all ! all !

HENSLOWE. Does your wife say to us—" Come in ! " ?

SHAKESPEARE. What wife ?

He hurries up the stairs and disappears.

HENSLOWE [*opening the outer door*].

May we come in ?

ANNE. You heard him.

HENSLOWE. We ask you.

ANNE. It's his house.

HENSLOWE [*humming*]. While fortune waits
Within the gates
Of London, of London
He must be quick !

ANNE. Am I to tell him so ?

HENSLOWE. The new moon's up and reaping in a sky
Like corn—that's frost! A bitter travelling night
Before us——

ANNE [*going to the window*].

So it is.

HENSLOWE. Not through the glass!
You'll buy ill luck of the moon.

ANNE. I bought ill fortune
Long months ago under the shifty moon,
I saw her through the midnight glass of the air,
Milky with light, when trees my casement were
And little twigs the leads that held my pane.
I'm out of luck for ever.

HENSLOWE, Did I not tell you you feared your fortune ?
But there are some in the company can tell you a better, if
you'll let 'em in.

THREE PLAYERS IN MASKS [*tapping at the window*].

Let us in ! Let us in ! Let us in !

ANNE. I will not let you in. Wait for your fellow
On the high road! He'll come to you soon
enough.

*She turns from them and seats herself by
the fire.*

A PLAYER [*dressed as a king, over HENSLOWE'S shoulder*].
Are we never to come in ? It's as cold as charity since the
sun set.

ANNE. It's no warmer here.

A CHILD [*yoking his head under the PLAYER'S arm*]. I can't feel my fingers. [ANNE looks at him. Her face changes.]

ANNE. If the fire warms you, you may warm yourselves.

THE PLAYERS *stream in*.

It does not warm me. Look! It cannot warm me.

She thrusts her hand into the flame.

HENSLOWE. God's sake!

He pulls her back THE PLAYERS *stare and whisper together.*

ANNE. Eyes! Needle eyes! Why do you stare and point?

Like you I would have warmed myself. Vain, vain!

It's a strange hearth. You players are the first It ever warmed or welcomed. Charity?

Who said it—"Cold as charity"? That's love.

But there's no love here. Baby, stay away!

You'll freeze less out in churchyard night than here,

For here's not even charity.

THE CHILD [*warming his hands*]. I'm not a baby. I'm nearly eleven. I've played children's parts for years. I'm getting warmer. Are you?

ANNE. No.

CHILD. I like this house. I'd like to stay here. I suppose there are things in that cupboard?

THE KING *[overhearing]*. Now, now !

CHILD. That's my father. He's a king this week. He's only a duke as a rule. Are there apples in that cupboard ? Will you give me one ?

ANNE *goes to the cupboard and takes out an apple*.

ANNE. Will you give me a kiss ?

CHILD. For my apple ?

ANNE. No, for love.

CHILD. I don't love you.

ANNE. For luck, then.

CHILD. You told him you'd got no luck.

ANNE. Won't you give me a kiss ?

CHILD. If you like. Don't hold me so tight. Is it true you've no luck ? Shall I tell your fortune ?

ANNE. Can you ?

CHILD. O yes ! I've watched the Fates do it in the new play. It's Orpheus and—it's a long name. But she's his lost wife. Give me a handkerchief ! That's for a grey veil. *[Posing.]* Now say to me—" Who are you ? "

ANNE. Who are you ?

CHILD *[posing]*. Fate ! Now you must say—" Whose fate ? "

ANNE. Whose ?

CHILD. Oh, then I lift the veil and you scream. *[Stamping his foot.]* Scream !

ANNE. Why, baby ?

CHILD *[frowning]*. At my dreadful face. *[But he begins to laugh in spite of himself.]*

ANNE *[her face hidden]*. Oh, child ! Oh, child !

CHILD. That's right! That's the way she cries in the play. You see the man goes down to hell to find his wife, and the Fates show her what's going to happen while she's waiting for him. She's in hell already, waiting and waiting. It takes years to travel through hell. That's her talking to the old inan in rags and a crown.

ANNK. Who's he?

CHILD. Oh, he's a poor old king whose daughters beat him. He isn't in this play. Well, when Orpheus gets to hell—I lead him there, you know——

ANNE. A babe in hell—a babe in hell——

CHILD. I'm the little god of love. I wear a crown of roses and wings. They do tickle. Soon I'll be too big. So he and I go to the three Fates to get back his wife. She isn't pretty in that act. She's all white and dead round her eyes—like you.

ANNE. Does he find her?

CHILD. After he sings his beautiful song he does. Everybody has to listen when he sings. Even the big dog lies down. Your husband made us a nice catch about it yesterday. I like your husband. I'm glad he's coming with us. Are you coming with us?

ANNE. No.

CHILD. It's a pity. If you were a man you could act in the company. But women can't act. E^ven Orpheus' wife is a boy really. So are the three Fatefc. They're friends of mine. Wouldd you like to talk to them, the way we do in the play? Come on! I go first, you see, YOU must say just what I tell you.

He takes her hands and pulls her to her feet. She stares, bewildered, for the room has grown dim. The dying fire shines upon the shifting, shadowy figures of the PLAYERS. The crowd grows larger every moment and is thickest at the foot of the stairs. SHAKESPEARE is seen coming down them.

ANNE. The room's so full. I'm frightened. Who are all these people ?

CHILD. Hush! We're in hell. These are all the dead people. We bring 'em to life.

ANNE. Who? We?

CHILD. I and the singer. Look, there's your husband coming down the stairs! That's just the way Orpheus comes down into hell.

ANNE. Will! Will!

CHILD. Hush ! You mustn't talk.

ANNE. But it's all dreams—it's all dreams,

CHILD. It's the players.

SHAKESPEARE [*among the shadows*].

Let me pass!

THE SHADOWS. Pay toll!

SHAKESPEARE. How, pay it ?

A SHADOW. Tell my story ?

ANOTHER. And mine!

ANOTHER. And mints!

ANOTHER. And miife!

A ROMAN WOMAN.

Pluck back my dagger first and tell my story !

A DROWNED GIRL. Oh, listen, listen, listen, I've forgotten my own story. It's a very sad one. Remember for me!

SHAKESPEARE. I will remember. Let me pass!

A TROJAN WOMAN [*kissing him*]. Here's pay !

A VENETIAN. I died of love.

THE TROJAN WOMAN. Kiss me and tell my story !

A MOOR. Dead lips, dead lips !

A YOUNG MAN, This is how Judas kissed,

A QUEEN. My son was taken from me. Tell my story !

ANOTHER. And mine!

ANOTHER And mine!

A YOUNG MAN. That son am I!

Two CHILDREN, I—I——

A SOLDIER. I killed a king.

A CROWNED SHADOW. He killed me while I slept.

THE SHADOWS. You shall not pass until you tell our story!

A GIRL DRESSED AS A BOY.

I lived in a wood and laughed. Sing you my
laughter

When the sun shone !

SHAKESPEARE. I'll sing it. Singing I go,

What shall I find after the song is over ?

What shall I find after the way is clear j

AN OLD MAR, A Jw.

Gold and gold and gold——

A CLOWN. And a grave untended——

A MAN IN BLACK. Heartbreak——

TWO COUSINS.

A friend or two——

A ROMAN WITH LAURELS,

Oh, sing my story.

Before I had half-way climbed to the nearest star

My ladder broke.

SHAKESPEARE.

I'll tell all time that story.

THE ROMAN. The stars are dark, seen close.

SHAKESPEARE.

I'll say it.

THE ROMAN.

Pass!

AN EGYPTIAN [*holding a goblet*].

He shall not pass. Drink! There are pearls in
the cup.

A GIRL, A VERONESE [*taking it from her*].

No—sleep!

A MAN [*with a wand*]. Dreams!

THE KING IN RAGS.

Frenzy!

A NUN.

Sacrament!

A DRUNKARD.

A jest!

A ROMAN WIPE. Here's coals for bread.

THE EGYPTIAN [*a man in armour has flung his arm about
her neck*]. Eat, drink and pass again

To the lost sunshine and the passionate nights.

And tell the world our story !

SHAKESPEARE.

Let me go !

ALL THE SHADOWS.

Never, never, never 1 To the end of time we
follow,

Follow, follow, follow!

SEAKESPEARE,

Threads and floating wisps

Of being, how they fasten like a cloud

Of gnats upon me, not to be shaken on
Unsatisfied——

THE SHADOWS. Sing! Sing!

*There is a strain of music : the crowd hides
SHAKESPEARE : the three masked PLAYERS
have drifted free of the turmoil.*

CHILD [*delighted*]. He does it quite as well as Orpheus.

ANNE. Who are these dreams?

CHILD. The people of the plays. And there are the Fates at last! That's the end of my part. Now you must talk to them till your husband conies. He comes when you scream.

He picks up his bow and runs away.

ANNE. Come back ! Stay by me !

CHILD *[laughing]*. Play your part alone.

He is lost in the crowd. The MASKS have drawn near. The first is small and closely veiled and carries the distaff. The second is tall: part of her face shows white : her hands are empty. The third is lowed and crowned: she carries the shears.

ANNE. These are all dreams or I am mad. Who are you?

FIRST MASK. His fate. I hold the thread.

ANNE. I'll see you in

FIRST MASK. No 1

As she retreats the SECOND MASK takes the distaff from her.

SECOND MASK. I tangle it.

ANNE. Who are you ?

SECOND MASK. Fate ! his fate !

ANNE. Drop the bright mask and let me see !

The SECOND MASK drops her veil and shows the face of a dark lady.

It needs not 1
I knew, I knew ! Barren the ground beneath,
No flowers, no fruit, spent arrows——

The SECOND MASK makes way for the THIRD, who takes the tangle from her. The SECOND MASK glides aivay.

Not the shears!

THIRD MASK [*winding the thread*].

Not yet!

ANNE. Who are you ?

THIRD MASK. Fate ! his fate!

ANNE. A crown!

My snake should know its fellow—is it so ?

The mask is lifted and reveals the face of ELIZABETH.

I do not fear the Queen——

THIRD MASK. Take back the thread I

She gives the distaff to the FIRST MASK, who has reappeared beside her, and glides away.

ANNE. But you I fear, O shrinking fate ! what fate ?

What first and last fate ? Show me your face, I
say I

She tears off the mask. The face revealed is the face of ANNE. She screams.

Myself! I saw myself! Will 1 Will!

The CHILD kneeling at the hearth stirs the fire and a bright flame shoots up that lights the whole room. It is empty save for the few PLAYERS gathering together their bundles and SHAKESPEARE, who has hurried to ANNE, His hand, gripping her shoulder, steadies her as she sways.

SHAKESPEARE. Still railing?

CHILD [*to his father*]. She's a poor frightened lady and she cried. I like her.

ANNE. Gone! Gone! Where are they? Call them back! I saw——

SHAKESPEARE. What folly! These are players and my friends;

You could have given them food at least and served them.

ANNE. I saw—I saw——

HENSLOWE [*coming up to them*]. So, are you ready? The moon is high: we must be going.

SHAKESPEARE. I'll follow instantly.

The PLAYERS trail out by twos and threes. They pass the window and repass it on the further side of the hedge. They are a black, fantastic frieze upon the yellow, winter sky. HENSLOWE goes first: the king's crown is

*crooked, and the CHILD is riding on his back:
the masks come last.*

THE PLAYERS *[singing]*.

Come away to London,
Folly, come away !
You'll make your fortune
Thrice in a day.
Paddocks leave and winter byres,
London has a thousand spires,
A-chiming, a-rhyming,
Oh, London Town !
The snow will fall
And cover all
Without you, witliout you,
And the world get on 'without you—
Oh, London Town !

SHAKESPEARE *gw\$ hurriedly to the table and
picks up his books,*

ANNE. Will!

SHAKESPEARE, *fror your needs*

You have the farm. Farewell!

ANNE *[catching at his arm]*. For pity's sake !

I'm so beset with terrors not my own—

What have you loosed upon me ? I'll not be left
In this black house, this kennel of chained grief,
This ghost-run. Take me with you! No, stay
by me!

These are but dreams of evil. Shall we not wake

ACT WILL SHAKESPEARE

Drowsily in a minute? Oh, bless'd waking
To peace and sunshine and no evil done I
Count out the minute——

SHAKESPEARE. If ever I forget
The evil done me, I'll forget the spring,
And Avon, and the blue ways of the sky,
And my own mother's face.

ANNE. Do I say " forget " ?
I say " remember " ' When you've staked all, all,
Upon your one throw—when you've lost—
remember !
And done the vilest thing you would not do,
Self-forced to the vile wrong you would not do,
Me in that hour remember !

SHAKESPEARE. Let me go I

ANNE [*she is on the ground, clinging to him*].
Remember ! See, I do not pray " forgive " I
Forgive ? Forgiving is forgetting—no,
Remember me ! Remember, when your sun
Blazes the noon down, that my sun is set,
Extinct and cindered in a bitter sea,
And warm me with a thought. For we are bound
Closer than love or chains or marriage binds :
We went by night and each in other's heart
Sowed tares, sowed tears. Husband, when harvest
comes,
Of all your men and women I alone
Can give you comfort, for you'll reap my **pain**
As **I** your loss. What other knows our need ?

Dear hands, remember, when you hold her, **thus**,
Close, close——

SHAKESPEARE. Let go my hands 1

ANNE. —and when she turns
To stone, to a stone, to an **unvouchsafing** stone
Under your **clutch**——

SHAKESPEARE. You **rave** !

ANNE. —loved hands, remember
Me unloved then, and how my hands held you !
And when her **face**—for I am **prophecy**—
When her lost face, the woman I am not,
Stares from the page you toil upon, **thus**, **thus**,
In a glass of tears, remember then that **thus**,
No other way,
I see your face between my work and **me**,
Always 1

SHAKESPEARE. Make end and let me go !

ANNE [*she has **risen***]. Why, go !
But mock me not with any “ Let me go ” !
I do not hold you. Ah, but when you're old
(You will be old one day, as I am old
Already in my heart), too weary-old
For love, hate, pity, anything but peace,
When the long race, O straining **breast** ! is won,
And the bright victory drops to your outstretched
hand,
A windfall apple, not worth eating, then
Come back to **me**——

SHAKESPEARE [*at the **door***]. Farewell 1

ANNE. —when all your need
Is hands to serve you and a breast to die on,
Come back to me——

SHAKESPEARE. Never in any world !

*He goes out as the last figure passes the
window, and disappears.*

THE PLAYERS' VOICES [*dying away*].

For snow will fall
And cover all
Without you, without you——
The words are lost.

SHAKESPEARE [*joyfully*]. Ah ! London Town I

*He is seen an instant, a silhouette with
outstretched arms. Then he, too, disappears
and there is a long silence. A cold wind
blows in through the open door. The room
is quite dark and the fire has fallen to ashes.*

ANNE [*crying out suddenly*].

The years—the years before me I

MRS* HATHAWAY [*calling*]. Anne ! Where's Anne ?

She comes in at the side door.

Anne ! Anne ! Where are you ? Why, what do
you here,

In the cold, in the dark, and all alone ?

ANNE. I wait.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT II

SCENE I

A room at the Palace. ELIZABETH sits at a working table. She is upright, vigorous, with an ivory white skin and piercing eyes. Her hair is dark red and stiffly dressed. She is old, as an oak or a cliff or a cathedral is old—there is no frailty of age in her. Her gestures are measured, she moves very little, and frowns oftener than she smiles, but her smile, when it does come, is kindly. Her voice is strong, rather harsh, but clear. She speaks her words like a scholar, but her manner is that of a woman of the world, shrewd and easy. Her dress is a black-green brocade, stiff with gold and embroidered with coloured stones. Beside her stands HENSLOWE, ten years older, stouter and more prosperous. In the background MARY FITTON, a woman of twenty-six, sits at the virginals, fingering out a tune very faintly and lightly. She is taller than ELIZABETH, pale, with black hair, a smiling mouth and brilliant eyes. She is quick and graceful as a cat, and her voice is the voice of a singer, low and full. She wears a magnificent black-and-white dress with many pearls. A red rose is tucked behind her ear.

ELIZABETH. Monoy, money 1 Always more money *

Henslowe, you're a leech I And I'm a Gammer Gurton to let myself be bled. Let the public pay 1

HENSLOWE. Madam, they'll do that fast enough if we may call ourselves Your Majesty's Players.

ELIZABETH. No, no, you're not yet proven. What do you give me? Good plays enough, but what great play? What has England, what have I, to match against them when they talk to me of their Tasso, their Petrarch, their Rabelais—of Divine Comedies and the plays of Spain? Are we to climb no higher than the Germans with their "Ship of Fools"?

HENSLOWE. "The Faery Queen"?

ELIZABETH. Unfinished.

HENSLOWE. Green—Peele—Kyd—Webster——

ELIZABETH. Stout English names—not names for all the world. I will pay you no more good English pounds a year and fob to my treasurer to account for them. You head a deputation, do you? You would call yourselves the Queen's Players, and mount a crown on your curtains? Give me a great play then—a royal play—a play to set against France and Italy and Spain, and you can have your patent.

HENSLOWE. There's "Tamburlaine" 1

ELIZABETH. A boy's glory, not a man's.

HENSLOWE. "Faust" and "The Jew of Malta" I

ELIZABETH. I know them.

HENSLOWE. He'll do greater things yet.

ELIZABETH. Do you believe that, Henslowe!

HENSLOWE. No, Madam,

ELIZABETH. Then why do you lie to me \

HENSLOWE. Madam, I mark time, I have my man; but he is not yet ripe.

ELIZABETH. How long have you served me, Henslowe ?

HENSLOWE. Twelve years.

ELIZABETH. How often have you come to me in those twelve years ?

HENSLOWE. Four times, Madam

ELIZABETH. Have I helped or hindered ?

HENSLOWE. I confess it, Madam, I have lived on your wits.

ELIZABETH. Then who's your man ?

HENSLOWE. You'll not trust me. He has done little before the world.

ELIZABETH. Shakespeare ?

HENSLOWE. Madam, you know everything. Will you see him ? He and Marlowe are among our petitioners.

ELIZABETH. H'm t the Stratford boy^j I have not forgotten.

HENSLOWE. Who could have promised better? He came to town like a conqueror. He took us all with his laughter. You yourself, Madam——

ELIZABETH. Yes, make us laugh and you may pick all pockets ! He helped you to pick mine.

HENSLOWE. So far good. But he aims no higher. Yet what he could do if he would ! I have a sort of love of him, Madam. I found him : I taught him : I have daughters enough but no son. I have wrestled with him like Jacob at Peniel, but when I think to conquer he tickles my rib and

I laugh. That's his weapon, Madam ! With his laughter he locks the door of his heart against every man.

ELIZABETH. And every woman ?

HENSLOWE. They say—no, Madam !

ELIZABETH. Then we must find her.

HENSLOWE [*iviih a glance, at MARY FITTON*], They say she is found already. But a court lady—and a player ! It's folly, Madam ! Now Marlowe would shrug his shoulder and go elsewhere ; but Shakespeare—there is about him in little and great a certain dogged and damnable constancy that wrecks all. If he cannot have the moon for his supper, he will starve, Madam, whatever an old fool says to him.

ELIZABETH. Then, Henslowe, we must serve him up the moon. Mary !

MARY [*rising and coming down to them*]. Madam ?

ELIZABETH. Could you hear us ?

MARY. I was playing the new song that the Earl set for you.

ELIZABETH. For me ? But you heard ?

MARY. Something of the talk, Madam !

ELIZABETH. You go to all the plays, do you not ? Which is the coming man, Mary, Shakespeare or Marlowe ?

MARY. If you ask me, Madam, I'm all for the cobbler's son.

HENSLOWE. Mistress Fitton should give us a sound reason if she have it, but she has none.

MARY. Only that I don't know Mr. Marlowe, and I know my little Shakespeare by heart, I'm an Athenian—I'm always asking for new tunes.

ELIZABETH. Which is Shakespeare? The youngster like a smoking lamp, all aflame ?

MARY. No, Madam! That's Marlowe. Shakespeare's a lesser man.

HENSLOWE. A lesser man? Marlowe the lamp, say you?

He's conflagration, he's " Armada ! " flashed
From Kent to Cornwall! But this lesser man,
He's the far world the beacons can outflame
One little hour, but, when their flame dies down,
High o'er the embers in the deep of night
Behold the star !

ELIZABETH. I forget if ever I saw him.

HENSLOWE. Madam, if ever you saw him, you would not forget—

A small, a proud head, like an Arab Christ,
And noble, madman's fingers, never still—
The face still though, mouth bid, the nostril wide,
And eyes like voices calling shrill and sad,
Borne on hot winds from fairyland or hell;
Yet round the heavy lids a score of lines
All criss-cross crinkle like a score of laughs
That he has scribbled hastily down himself
With his quick fingers. No, not tall——

ELIZABETH. But a man !

MARY. Like other men.

ELIZABETH. Ah ?

MARY. It was easy,

ELIZABETH. Tell!

MARY. He came like a boy to apples. Marlowe now——

ELIZABETH. More than a man, less than a man, but not
As yet a man then? Well, 111 see your Shake-
speare :

Marlowe—some other time.

HENSLOWE.

I'll fetch him to you.

HENSLOWE *goes out.*

ELIZABETH. To you, Mary—to you!

MARY. O Madam, spare me ! It's a sti2 instrument and
once, I think, has been ill-tuned.

ELIZABETH. Tune it afresh 1

MARY. You wish that, Madam ?

ELIZABETH. I wish it. Marlowe can wait—and Pem-
broke.

MARY. Madam ?

ELIZABETH. I am blind, deaf, dumb, so long as you
practise your new tune. But the Earl of Pembroke goes
to Ireland.

MARY. He's an old glove, Madam.

ELIZABETH. Young or old, not for your wearing. Strip
your hand and finger your new tune !

MARY. Now, Madam ?

ELIZABETH. Why not ? Why do I dress you and keep
you at court ? Here's Spain in the ante-room and France
on the stairs—am I to keep them waiting while I humour a
parcel of players ?

MARY. Indeed, Madam, I wonder that you have spared
half an hour.

ELIZABETH. Wonder, Mary t Wonder 1 And when you
know why I do what I do you shall be Queen instead of me.-

In the meantime you may learn the trade, if you choose, I give you a kingdom to rule in the likeness of a poor player. Let me see how you do it! Yet mark this—though with fair cheeks and black hair you may come by a coronet (but the Earl goes to Ireland), yet if you rule your kingdom by the glance of your eyes, you will lose it as other Maries have done.

MARY. I must reign in my own way—forgive me, Madam !—not yours.

ELIZABETH, Girl, do you think you could ever rule in mine? Well, try your way! But—between queens, Mary—one kingdom at a time!

ELIZABETH *goes out.*

MARY [*she sits on the table edge > swinging Tier pretty foot*]. So Pembroke goes to Ireland! Ay, and comes back, old winter! I can wait. And while I wait—Shakespeare 1 Will Shakespeare! O charity—I wish it were Marlowe I What did the old woman say? A kingdom in the likeness of a player. I wonder. Well, we'll explore. Yet I wish it were Marlowe. [SHAKESPEARE *enters.*] Ah 1 here comes poor Mr. Shakespeare looking for the Queen and finding——

SHAKESPEARE. The Queen 1

MARY. Hush 1 Palace walls I Well, Mr. Shakespeare, what's the news?

SHAKESPEARE. Good, bad and indifferent*

MARY. Take the bad first.

SHAKESPEARE. The bad?—that I have not seen you some five weeks 1 The good—that I have now seen you

some five seconds ! The indifferent—that you do not care one pin whether I see you or not for the next five years !

MARY. Who told you that, Solomon ?

SHAKESPEARE. I have had no answer to——

MARY. Five letters, seven sonnets, two catches and roundelay !

SHAKESPEARE. Love's Labour Lost!

MARY. Ah, Mr. Shakespeare, you were not a Solomon then ! There was too much Rosaline and too little Queen in that labour.

SHAKESPEARE. You're right! Solomon would have drawn all Rosaline and no Queen at all. I'll write another play!

MARY. It might pay you better than your sonnets.

SHAKESPEARE. Do you read them—Rosaline ?

MARY. Most carefully, Mr. Shakespeare—on Saturday nights ! Then I make up my accounts and empty my purse, and wonder—must I pawn my jewels ? Then I cry. And then I read your latest sonnet and laugh again.

SHAKESPEARE. You should not laugh.

MARY. Why, is it not meant to move me ?

SHAKESPEARE. You should not laugh. I tell you such a thought,

Such fiery lava welling from a heart,
So crystallised in the wonder-working brain,
Mined by the soul and rough-cut into words
Fit for a poet's faceting and, last,
Strung on a string of gold by a golden tongue—
Why, such a thought is an immortal jewel

To gild you, living, in men's eyes, and after
To make you queen of all the unjewelled dead
Who bear not their least bracelet hence. For I,
Eternally I'd deck you, were you in your own,
Would you but wear my necklaces divine,
My rings of sorcery, my crowns of song.
What chains of emeralds—did you but know
My rubies, O my rubies—could you but see !
And this one gem of wonder, pearl of pearls,
Hid in my heart for you, could you but take,
Would you but take——

MARY. Open your heart!

SHAKESPEARE. Not so.

The god who made it hath forgot the key,
Or lost or lent it.

MARY. Heartless god ! Poor heart 1

Yet if this key—(is there indeed a key ?)

SHAKESPEARE. No lock without a key, nor heart, nor
heart.

MARY. —were found one day and strung with other keys
Upon my ring ?

SHAKESPEARE. With other——?

MARY. Keys of hearts!

What else ?

Tucked in the casket where my mortals lie—

Sick pearl, flawed emerald, brooch or coronet——

SHAKESPEARE. God!

MARY. Why, Jeweller ?

SHAKESPEARE. Then what they say——

MARY. They say ?
What do they say ? And what care I ? They say
Pembroke ?

SHAKESPEARE. They lie ! You shall not speak They lie !

MARY. So little doubt—and you a man ! It's new.
It's sweet. It will not last. We spoke of keys—
This heart-key, had I found it, would you buy ?
Come, tempt me with immortal necklaces !
Come, purchase me with ornaments divine !

SHAKESPEARE. I love you——

MARY. Well?

SHAKESPEARE. I love you——

MARY. Is that all ?

SHAKESPEARE. I love you so,

MARY. Why, that's a common cry,

i I hear it daily, like the London cries,

" Old chairs to mend 1 " or " Sweet, sweet
lavender ! "

Is this your string of pearls, sixteen a penny ?

SHAKESPEARE. D'you laugh at me ? I mean it.

MARY. So do they all.

Buy ! Buy my lavender ! Lady, it's cheap—
It's sweet—new cut—I starve—for Christ's sake,
buy !

They mean it, all the hoarse-throat, hungry men
That sell me lavender, that sell me love.

SHAKESPEARE. I put my wares away. I do not sell.

MARY. O pedlar ! I had half a mind to buy.

SHAKESPEARE. Too late.

MARY. Open your pack again 1 What haste !
What—not a trinket left me, not a pin
For a poor lady ? Does not the ofier hold ?

SHAKESPEARE. You did not close.

MARY, I will.

SHAKESPEARE. Withdrawn 1 Withdrawn !

MARY. Renew!

SHAKESPEARE. Too late.

MARY. You know your business best;
Yet—what care I?

SHAKESPEARE. Or I? Yet—never again
To buy and sell with you !

MARY. Never again.

Heigh-ho ! I sighed, sir.

SHAKESPEARE. Yes, I heard you sigh.

MARY. And smiled. At court, sir——

SHAKESPEARE. Yes, they buy and sell
At court. But I know better—give and take !

MARY *[evading him]*.

What will you give me if I let you take ?

SHAKESPEARE. If you will come with me into my mind—
How shall I say it? Still you'll laugh at me 1

MARY. Maybe!

SHAKESPEARE. My mind's not one room stored, but
many,
A house of windows that o'erlook far gardens,
The hanging gardens of more Babylons
Than there are bees in a linden tree in June,
I'm the king-prisoner in his capital,

Ruling strange peoples of a world unknown,
Yet there come envoys from the untravelled lands
That fill my corridors with miracles
As it were tribute, secretly, by night;
And I wake in the dawn like Solomon,
To stare at peacocks, apes and ivory,
And a closed door.
And all these stores I give you for your own,
You shall be mistress of my fairy-lands,
Til ride you round the world on the back of a
dream,
I'll give you all the stars that ever danced
In the sea o' nights,
If you will come into my mind with me,
If you will learn me—know me.

MARY.

I do know you.

You are the quizzical Mr. Shakespeare of the "Rose," who never means a word he says. I've heard of you. All trades hate you because you are not of their union, and yet know the tricks of each trade; but your own trade loves you, because you are content with a crook in the lower branches when you might be top of the tree. You write comedies, all wit and no wisdom, like a flower-bed raked but not dug; but the high stuff of the others, their tragedies and lamentable ends, these you will not essay. Why not, Mr. Shakespeare of the fairy-lands?

SHAKESPEARE. Queen Wasp, I do not know.

MARY. King Drone, then I will tell you. You are the little boy at Christmas who would not play snapdragon till

the flames died down, and so was left at the end with a cold raisin in an empty dish. That's you, that's you, with the careful fingers and no good word in your plays for any woman. Run home, run home, there's no more to you !

SHAKESPEARE. D'you think so?

MARY. I think that I think so.

SHAKESPEARE. I'll show you.

MARY. What will you show me, Will?

SHAKESPEARE. Fairyland, and you and me in it. Will you believe in me then ?

MARY, Not I, not I! I'm a woman of this world. Give me flesh and blood, not gossamer,

Honey and heart-ache, and a lovers' moon.

SHAKESPEARE. I read of lovers once in Italy—

She was like you, such eyes of night, such hair.

God took a week to make His world, but these

In four short days made heaven to bum on earth

Like a great torch; and when they died——

MARY. They died

SHAKESPEARE. Like torches quenched in water, suddenly,

Because they loved too well.

MARY. Oh, write it down !

Ah, could you, Will? I think you could not write it,

SHAKESPEARE. I can write Romeo. Teach me Juliet!

MARY. I could if I would. Was that her name—Juliet ?

SHAKESPEARE. Poor Juliet!

MARY. Not so poor if I know her. Oh, make that

plain—she was not poor I And tell them, Will, tell all men and women——

SHAKESPEARE. What, my heart ?

MARY. I will whisper it to you one day when I know you better. Oh, it'll be a play ! Will you do it for me, Will ? Will you write it for you and for me ? Where do they live ?

SHAKESPEARE. Verona. Italy.

MARY. Come to me daily ! Read it to me scene by scene, line by line ! How many acts ?

SHAKESPEARE. The old five-branched candlestick.

MARY. But a new flame ! Will it take long to write ?

It must not.

SHAKESPEARE. Shall not.

MARY. What shall we call it, Will ?

The Tragical Discourse ? The Famous End ?

The Lovers of Verona ?

SHAKESPEARE. No, no ! Plain.

Their two names married—Romeo and Juliet.

As they lean towards each other still talking

THE CURTAIN FALLS*

ACT II

SCENE II

The first performance of " Romeo and Juliet " : the end of the fourth act. The curtain rises on a small bare dusty office, littered with stage properties and dresses. When the door at the back of the stage is open there is a glimpse of passage and curtains, and moving figures, with now and then a glare of torchlight. There is a continuous far-away murmur of voices and, once in a while, applause. As the curtain goes up MARY FITTON is opening the door to go out. SHAKESPEARE holds her back.

MARY. Let go ! Let me go ! I must be in front at the end of that act. I must hear what the Queen will say to it.

SHAKESPEARE. But you'll come back ?

MARY. That depends on what the Queen says. I've promised you nothing if she damns it.

The applause breaks out again.

SHAKESPEARE. Listen ! Is it damned ?

MARY. Sugar-sweet, isn't it? But that's nothing. That's the mob. That's your friends. They'll clap you. But the Queen, if she claps, claps your play.

SHAKESPEARE. Your play!

MARY. Is it mine ? Earnest ?

SHAKESPEARE. My earnest, but your play.

MARY. Well, good luck to my play 1

SHAKESPEARE. Give me——

MARY. Oh, so it's not a free gift ?

SHAKESPEARE. Give me a finger-tip of thanks!

MARY. In advance ? Not I! But if the Queen likes it—I'm her obedient servant. If the Queen opens her hand I shan't shut mine. Where she claps once I'll clap twice. Where she gives you a hand to kiss, 111 give you—— There ! Curtain's down ! I must go.

SHAKESPEARE. Mary 1

MARY. Listen to it! Listen ! Listen ! This is better than any poor Mary.

She goes out. The door is left open. The applause breaks out again.

SHAKESPEARE. Is this the golden apple in my hand

At last ?

How tastes it, heart, and is it sweet, is it sweet ?

Sweeter than common apples ? So many years

Of days I watched it grow and propped and pruned,

Besought the sun and watered. O my tree

When the green broke 1 That was a morning hour.

Fool, so to long for fruit! Now the fruit's ripe.

The tree in spring was fairest, when it flowered,

And every petal held a drink of dew.

The bloom went long ago. Well, the fruit's here i Hark!

The applause breaks out again.

It goes well. Eat up your apple, man 1
This is the hour, the hour ! I'm the same man—
No better for it. When Marlowe praised me so
He meant it—meant it. I thought he laughed
at me

In his sleeve. Will Shakespeare! Romeo and
Juliet!

I made it—I! Indeed, indeed, at heart—
(I would not for the world they read my heart:
I'd scarce toll Mary) but indeed, at heart,
I know no song was ever sung before
Like this my lovely song. 7 made it—I!
It has not changed me. I'm the same small man,
And yet I made it! Strange ! [A knock.]

STAGE HAND [*putting in his head at the door*]. You'll not
Bee anyone, sir, will you?

SHAKESPEARE. I told you already I'll come to the
green-room when the show's over. I can see no stranger
before.

STAGE HAND. So I've told her, sir, many times. But
she says you will know her when you see her and she can't
wait.

SHAKESPEARE. A lady?

STAGE HAND. No, no, sir, just a woman. I'll tell her
to go away again.

SHAKESPEARE. Wait! Did she give no name?

STAGE HAND. Name of Hathaway, sir, from Stratford.

SHAKESPEARE. Anne! Bring her here! Bring her here
quickly, privately! You should have told me sooner.

Where does she wait? Did any see her? Did any speak with her? If anyone asks for me save Henslowe or Mr, Marlowe, I am gone, I am not in the theatre. What are you staring at? What are you waiting for? Bring her here!

STAGE HAND. Glad to be rid of her, sir! She has sat in the passage this hour to be tripped over, and nothing budes her. [*Calling*] Will you coine this way—this way! [*He disappears.*]

SHAKESPEARE. Anne? Anne in London? What does Anne in London?

STAGE HANI> [*returning*]. This way, this way! It's a dark passage. This way I

MRS. HATHAWAY *comes in.*

SHAKESPEARE. Not Anne!

MRS. HATHAWAY. Is Mr. Shakespeare——? Will! Is it Will? Oh, how you're changed!

SHAKESPEARE. Ten years change a young man.

MRS. HATHAWAY. But not an old woman. I'm Anne's mother still.

SHAKESPEARE. I'm not so changed that I forget it. What do you want of me, Mrs. Hathaway?

MRS. HATHAWAY. I bring you news,

SHAKESPEARE. Good news?

MRS. HATHAWAY. It's as you take it.

SHAKESPEARE. Dead?

MRS. HATHAWAY. Is that good news, my half son? She is not so blessed.

SHAKESPEARE, I did not say it so. Is she with you?

MRS. HATHAWAY. No.

SHAKESPEARE. Did she send you? Oh, so she has heard of this business! It's like her to send you now. She is to take her toll of it, is she?

MRS. HATHAWAY. You are bitter, you are bitter I You are the east wind of your own spring sunshine. She has heard nothing of this business or of that—dark lady.

SHAKESPEARE. Take care!

MRS. HATHAWAY. I saw her come from this room—off her guard. I know how a woman looks when a man has pleased her. Oh, please her if you must! I am old. I do not judge. And I think you will not always. But that's not my news.

SHAKESPEARE. I can't hear it now. I am pressed. This is not every night. I'll see you to-morrow, not now.

MRS. HATHAWAY. My news may be dead to-morrow.

SHAKESPEARE. So much the better. I needn't hear it,

MRS. HATHAWAY. Son, son, son! You don't know what you say.

SHAKESPEARE. That is not my name. And I know well what I say. You are my wife's mother and I'll not share anything of hers. But if she needs money, I'll send it. To-night makes me a rich man.

MRS. HATHAWAY. Richer than you think—and to-morrow poorer, if you do not listen to me.

There is a roar of applause.

SHAKESPEARE. Listen to you? Why should I listen to you? Can you give me anything to better that?

MRS. HATHAWAY. But if she can? Sixty years I Jiave

learned lessons in the world; but I never learned that a city was better than green fields, friends better than a house-mate, or the works of a man's hand more to him than the child of his own flesh.

SHAKESPEARE. And have I learned it, I? Do I not know

That when I left her I left all behind
That was my right? See how I live my life—
Married nor single, neither bond nor free,
My future mortgaged for a roofless home!
For though I love I must not say "I love you,
Come to my hearth!" A child? I have no
child:

I hear no voice crying to me o' nights
Out of the frost-bound dark. How can it cry
Or smile at me until I give it lips?
How can it clutch me till I give it hands?
How can it be, until I give it leave?
Small sparrow at the window-pane, a'cold,,
Begging your crumb of life from me, indeed
I cannot let you in. Small love, small sweet,
Look not so trustfully! You are not mine,
Not mine, not anyone's. Away, unborn!
Back to the womb of dreams, and never stir,
Never again! How meek the small ghost fades,
Reject and fatherless, that might have been
My son!

MRS. HATHAWAY. Is it possible? Anne knew you best.
She said you did not know. Dear son, too soon

By two last months, yet by these months too late
After you left her, Hamnet, the boy, was bom.

SHAKESPEARE. It is not true !

MRS. HATHAWAY, Ah, ah, she knew you best.

She said always, weeping she said always
You would not listen, though she sent you word;
But when the boy was grown she'd send the boy,
Then you would listen and come home, come
home.

But now that web is tattered in its turn
By a cold wind, an out-of-season wind,
Tearing the silver webs, blacking the leaves
And shaking the first blossoms down too soon,
Too soon, too soon. He shivered and lay down
Among pinched violets and the wrack of spring;
But when the sky drew breath and April came,
And summer with tanned fingers, beckoning up
New flowers from the ground, still our flower
drooped:

The sunlight hurt his eyes, his bed's too hot,
He drinks and will not eat: since Saturday
There's but one end.

SHAKESPEARE. What end ?

MRS. HATHAWAY. You're stubborn as she.

She will not bow to it. Yet she sent me hither
To bring you home.

SHAKESPEARE. New witch-work!

MRS. HATHAWAY. Will you not come ?

SHAKESPEARE. I will not.

MRS. HATHAWAY. Will you not come ? She bade me say
That the boy cries for you——

SHAKESPEARE. A lie! A gross lie I
He never called me father.

MRS, HATHAWAY. That he does !
You are his Merlin and his Arthur too,
And God-Almighty Sundays. Thus it goes—
" My Father says——" and " When my Fathel
comes——"

" I'll tell my Father ! " To his mother's hand
He clings and whispers in his fever now,
With bright eyes wide—your eyes, son, your
quick eyes—

That she shall fetch you (she ? she cannot speak)
To bring him wonders home like Whittington,
(And where's your cat?) and tell the tales you
know

Of Puck and witches, and the English kings,
To whistle down the birds as Orpheus did,
And for a silver penny pick the moon
From the sky's pocket, and buy him gingerbread—
And so he rambles on, breaking her heart
A second time, God help her !

SHAKESPEARE. I will come.

A MAN'S VOICE [*off the stage*].

Shakespeare! Will Shakespeare! Call Wirf
Shakespeare 1

SHAKESPEARE [*to MRS. HATHAWAY*]. Here!
When do we start ?

MRS.HATHAWAY. The horses wait at the inn.

VOICE. Will Shakespeare!

SHAKESPEARE. Give me an hour. The bridge is nearer.

On London Bridge at midnight! I'll be there !

MRS, HATHAWAY. Not later, I warn you, if you'd see the child alive.

SHAKESPEARE. Fear not, I'll be there. D'you think so ill of me ? I could have been a good father to my own son—if I had known. If I had known ! This is a woman's way of enduring a wrong, Oh, dumb beast! Could she not send for me—send to me ? Am I a monster that she could not come to me? " Buy him gingerbread!" To send me no word till he's dying! Would any she-devil in hell do so to a man ? Dying ? I tell you he shall live and not die. There was a man once fought death for a friend and held him. Can I not fight death for my own son ? Can I not beat death off for an hour, for a little hour, till I have kissed my only son ?

MARLOWE'S VOICE. Shakespeare! The Queen—the Queen has asked for you,

And sent her woman twice. Will Shakespeare!
Will!

SHAKESPEARE. At midnight then.

MRS. HATHAWAY *goes out.*

VOICE. Will Shakespeare!

SHAKESPEARE. Coming! Coming !

MABY [*in the doorway, followed by MARLOWE*],

Is Shakespeare——?

SHAKESPEARE.

Oh, not now, not now, not now!

MARY. Are you mad to keep her waiting? She has favours up her sleeve. You are to write her a play for the summer revels. Quick now, ere the last act begins ! Off with you! [SHAKESPEARE *goes out.*] Look how he drags away ! What's come to the man to fling aside his luck ?

MARLOWE. He has left it behind him.

MARY. Here's a proxy silver-tongue! Are you Mr. Marlowe?

MARLOWE. Are you Mistress Fitton ?

MARY. So we've heard of each other.

MARLOWE. What have you heard of me ?

MARY. That you were somebody's brother-in-art! What have you heard of me ?

MARLOWE. That you were his sister-in-art.

MARY. A man's sister ! I'd as soon be a cold pudding ! What did he say of his sister, brother ?

MARLOWE. That you brought him luck.

MARY. That he leaves behind him !

MARLOWE. Like the blind man's lucky sixpence that the Jew stole when he put a penny in his plate.

MARY. A Jew of Malta ?

MARLOWE. What, do *you* read me ? You ?

A STAGE HAND [*in the passage*]. Last act, please ! Last act! Last act!

MARY. I must go watch it.

MARLOWE. Don't you know it ?

MARY. Oh, by heart ! Yet I must sisterly watch it.

MARLOWE. Stay a little.

MARY. Till he coines ? Then I shall miss all, for he'll keep me.

MARLOWE. Against your will ?

MARY. No, with my Will.

MARLOWE. Is it he or his plays ?

MARY. Not sure.

MARLOWE. If I were he I'd make you sure.

MARY. I wonder if you could! I wonder—how' (

MARLOWE. Too long to tell you here, and—curtain's up !

MARY. Come to my house one lazy day and tell me !

MARLOWE. Hark ! That's more noise than curtain !

HENSLOWE'S VOICE. Shakespeare! Shakespeare!
[*Entering.*] Here's a calamity! Where's Shakespeare ?
He should be in the green-room ! Why does he tuck away
in this rat-hole when he's wanted ? And what's to be done ?
Where in God's name is Shakespeare ?

MARY. With the Queen.

MARLOWE. The curtain's up; he'll be here in a minute.

MARY. What's wrong ?

HENSLOWE. Everything! Juliet! The clumsy beasts 1
They let him fall from the bier : they let him fall on his arm 1
Now he's moaning and wincing and swears he can't go on,
though he has but to speak his death scene. I've bid them
cut the afterwards.

MARLOWE, Broken ?

HENSLOWE. I fear so.

MARY. Let it be broken ! Say he must go o.n!

What ? Spoil the play ? These baby-men 1

HENSLOWE,

He will not.

MARLOWE. The understudy ?

HENSLOWE. Playing Paris. Where's Shakespeare?
What's to be done ? The play's spoiled,

MARLOWE. He'll break his heart.

MARY. He shall not break his heart!

This is our play ! Back to your Juliet-boy,

Strip off his wear and never heed his arm!

Bid them play on and bring me Juliet's robes I

I'll put them on and put on Juliet too.

Quick, Henslowe!

HENSLOWE. What! a woman play on the stage ?

MARY. Ay, when the men fail I Quick! I say Pli do
it!

SHAKESPEARE [*entering*].

Here still ? You've heard ?

MARY [*on the threshold*]. And heeded. Never stop me I

You shall have Juliet. You shall have your play.

She and HENSLOWE hurry out.

MARLOWE. There goes a man's master! But does she
know the part ?

SHAKESPEARE. She knows each line, she knows each
word, she breathed them

Into my heart long ere I wrote them down.

MARLOWE. But to act 1 Can you trust her ?

SHAKESPEARE. She ? Go and watch ! I need not.

MARLOWE. But is it in her ? She's Julia not Juliet, not
your young Juliet, not your June morning—or is she ?

SHAKESPEARE. You talk! You talk! You talk)
What do you know of her t

MARLOWE. Or you, old Will ?

SHAKESPEARE. I dream her.

MARLOWE. Well, pleasant dreams 1

SHAKESPEARE. No more. *I'm black awake.*

MARLOWE. What's wrong ? Ill news ?

SHAKESPEARE. From Stratford. Yes, yes, yes, Kit I
And it must come now, just now, after ten dumb years !

MARLOWE. Stratford ? Whew ! I'd forgotten your
nettle-bed. What does she want of you ?

SHAKESPEARE. Hark ! Mary's on.

MARLOWE. It's a voice like the drip of a honey-comb.

SHAKESPEARE. Can she play Juliet, man ? Can she play
Juliet ?

I think she can. Kit ?

MARLOWE. Ay ?

SHAKESPEARE. Oh, is there peace
Anywhere, Kit, in any, any world ?

MARLOWE. What is it, peace ?

SHAKESPEARE. It passeth understanding.
They round the sermon off on Sunday with it,
Laugh in their sleeves and send us parching home,
This is a dew that dries ere Monday comes,
And oh, the heat of the seven days !

MARLOWE. I like it 1
The smell of dust, the shouting, and the glare
Of crowded noon in cities, and such nights
As this night, crowning labour. What is—peace ?

STAGE HAND [*entering*]. Sir, sir, sir, will you come down,
sir, says Mr. Henslowe. The end's near and the house half

mad. We've not seen a night like this since—since *your* night, sir ! Your first night, sir, your roaring Tamburlaine night ! Never anything like it and I've seen many. Will you come, sirs ?

SHAKESPEARE. You go, Marlowe !

STAGE HAND. There's nothing to fear, sir ! It runs like clockwork. The lady died well, sir ! Lord, who'd think she was a woman ! There, there, it breaks out. Listen to 'em ! Come, sir, come, come !

MARLOWE. We'll come ! We'll come

The man goes out.

SHAKESPEARE. Not I ! Oh, if you love me, Marlowe, swear I'm ill, gone away, dead, what you please, but keep them away ! I can stand no more.

MARLOWE. It's as she said—mad—mad—to fling your luck away.

SHAKESPEARE. A frost has touched me, Marlowe, my fruit's black. Help me now ' Go, go ! Say I'm gone, as I shall be when I've seen Mary——

MARLOWE. A back stairs ? Now I understand.

SHAKESPEARE. Oh, stop your laughter' I'm to leave London in half an hour.

MARLOWE. Earnest ? For long ?

SHAKESPEARE. Little or long, what matter ? I've missed the moment. Who has his moment twice ?

MARLOWE. Shall you tell her why you go ?

SHAKESPEARE. Mary ? God forbid !

VOICES. Shakespeare ! Call Shakespeare !

SHAKESPEARE. D'you hear them? Help me! Say I am gone! Oh, go, go!

MARLOWE. Well, if you wish it!

He goes out leaving the door ajar. As SHAKESPEARE goes on speaking the murmurs and claps die away and the noises of the stage are heard, the shouts of the scene-shifters, directions being given, and so on. Finally there is silence,

SHAKESPEARE. Wish it? I wish it? Have you no more for me

Of comfort, Marlowe?

Oh, what a dumb and measureless gulf divides
Star from twin star, and friend from closest friend!
Women, they say, can bridge it when they will:
As seamen rope a ship with grappling irons
These spinners of strong cords invisible
Make fast and draw the drifting glory home
In the name of love. I know not. Better go!
I am not for this harbour——

There is a sound of hasty footsteps and MARY FITTON enters in Juliet's robes. She stands in the doorway, panting, exalted, with arms outstretched. The door swings to behind her, shutting out all sound.

MARY.

Oh, I faced

The peacock of the world, the arch of eyes
That watched me love a god, the eyes, eyes, eyes,
That watched me die of love. Wake me again,

O soul that did inhabit me, O husband
Whose mind I uttered, to whose will I swayed,
Whose self of love I was ! Wake me again
To die of love in earnest 1

SHAKESPEARE. Mary! Mary 1

MARY. I cannot ride this hurricane. I spin
Like a leaf in the air. Die down and let me lie
Close to the earth I am ! O stir me not
With rosy breathings from the south, the south
Of sun and wine and peaks that flame to God
Suddenly in the dark ! O wind, let be
And drive me not; for speech lies on my lips
Like a strange finger hushing back my soul
With words not mine, and thoughts not mine arise
Like marsh-flame dancing ! As a leaf to a tree
Upblown, O wind that whirls me, I return.
Master and quickener, give me love indeed !

SHAKESPEARE. These are the hands I never held till now:
These are the lips I never felt on mine :
This is the hour I dreamed of, many an hour :
This is the spirit awake. God in your sky,
Did your heart beat so on the seventh dawn ?

MARY. 'Ware thunder!

SHAKESPEARE. Sweet, He envies and is dumb,
Dumb as His dark. He was our audience.
Now to His blinding centrum home He hies,
Omnipotent drudge, to wind the clocks of Time
And tend His 'plaining universes all—
To us, to us, His empty theatre of night

Abandoning. But we too steal away;
For the play's done,
Lights out—all over—and here we stand alone,
Holding each other in a little room,
Like two souls in one grave. We are such lovers——

ANNE'S VOICE. As there's no room for in the human air
And green side of the grass——

SHAKESPEARE. A voice ! A voice !

MARY. No voice here !

SHAKESPEARE. In my heart I heard it cry
Like a sick child waked suddenly at night.

[Crying out]

A child—a sick child! Unlink your arms that hold
me 1

MARY. Never till I choose!

SHAKESPEARE. Put back your hair ! I am lost
Unless I lose all gain. O moonless night,
In your hot darkness I have lost my way !
But kiss me, summer, once ! On London Bridge
At midnight—111 be there 1 Has the clock
struck ?

MARY. Midnight long since.

SHAKESPEARE. Oh, I am damned and lost
In hell for ever !

MARY. Fool, dear fool, what harm I
If this be hell indeed, is not hell kind ?
Is not hell lovely, if this love be hell ?
Is not damnation sweet ?

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT III

SCENE I

SHAKESPEARE'S *lodging. It is the plain but well-arranged room of a man of fair means and fine taste. The walls are panelled: on them hang a couple of unframed engravings, a painting, tapestry, and a map of the known world. There is a four-post bed with a coverlet and hangings of needlework, and on the window-sill a pot of early summer flowers. There is a chair or two of oak and a table littered with papers. SHAKESPEARE is sitting at it, a manuscript in his hand. On the arm of the chair lolls MARLOWE, one arm flung round SHAKESPEARE'S neck, reading over his shoulder.*

SHAKESPEARE. Man, how you've worked! A whole act to my ten lines ! You dice all day and dance all night and yet—how do you do it ?

MARLOWE. Like it ?

SHAKESPEARE. Like it? What a word for a word-master ! Consider, Kit! When the sun rises like a "battle-bong over the sea : when the wind's feet visibly race along the tree-tops of a ten-mile wood : when they shout" Ainen!" in the Abbey, praying for the Queen on Armada Day : when the sky is a brass gong and the rain steel rods, and across all

suddenly arch the seven colours of the promise—do I *like* these wonders when I stammer and weep, and know that God lives? Like, Marlowe!

MARLOWE. Yes, yes, old Will! But do you like the new act?

SHAKESPEARE. I like it, Kit! [*They look at each other and laugh.*]

MARLOWE. And now for your scene, ere I go,

SHAKESPEARE. My scene! I give you what I've done. Finish it alone, Kit, and take what it brings! I'm sucked dry.

MARLOWE. I've heard that before.

SHAKESPEARE. I wish I had never come to London

MARLOWE. Henslowe's back. Seen him?

SHAKESPEARE. I've seen no one. Did the tour go well?

MARLOWE. He says so. He left them at Stratford. Well, I must go.

SHAKESPEARE. Where? To Mary?

MARLOWE. Why should I go to your Mary?

SHAKESPEARE. Because I've asked you to, often enough. Why else? You've grown to be friends. You could help me if you would.

MARLOWE. Never step between a man and a woman!

SHAKESPEARE. But you're our friend! And they say you know women.

MARLOWE. They say many things. They say we're rivals, Will—that I shall end by having you hissed.

SHAKESPEARE. Let them say! But have you seen Mary? When did you last see Mary?

MARLOWE. I forget. Saturday.

SHAKESPEARE. Did you speak of me, Kit? Kit, does she speak of me?

MARLOWE. If you must have it—seldom. New songs, new books, new music—of plays and players and the Queen's tantrums—not of you.

SHAKESPEARE. I have not seen her three days.

MARLOWE. Why, go then and see her!

SHAKESPEARE. She has company. She is waiting on the Queen. She gives me a smile and a white cool finger-tip, and—"Farewell, Mr. Shakespeare!" Yet a month ago, ay and less than a month—1 Did you give her my message? What did she say?

MARLOWE. She laughed and says you dream. She never liked you better.

SHAKESPEARE. Did she say that?

MARLOWE. She says you cool to her, not she to you.

SHAKESPEARE. Did she say that?

MARLOWE. Swore it, with tears in her eyes.

SHAKESPEARE. Is it so? I wish it were so. Well, you're my good friend, Marlowe 1

MARLOWE. Oh, leave that 1

SHAKESPEARE. Kit, do you blame me so much?

MARLOWE. Why should I blame you?

SHAKESPEARE. That I'm here and not in Warwickshire.

MARLOWE, I throw no stones. Why? Have you heard aught?

SHAKESPEARE. No, nor dared ask—nor dared ask,

Marlowe. The boy's dead. I know it. But I will not hear it. Marlowe, Marlowe, Marlowe, do you judge me ?

MARLOWE. Ay, that putting your hand to the plough you¹ look back. Would I comb out my conscience daily as a woman combs out her hair ? I do what I choose, though it damn me ! Blame you ? The round world has not such another Mary—or so, had I your eyes, I should hold. For this prize, if I loved her, I would pay away all I had.

SHAKESPEARE. Honour, Kit ?

MARLOWE. Honour, Will!

SHAKESPEARE. Faith and conscience and an only son ?

MARLOWE. It's my own life. What are children to me ?

SHAKESPEARE. Well, I have paid.

MARLOWE. But you grudge—you grudge! Look at you ! If you go to her with those eyes it's little wonder that she tires of you.

SHAKESPEARE. Tires ? Who says that she tires ? Who says it ?

MARLOWE. Not I, old Will! Not I! Why, Shakespeare ?

SHAKESPEARE [*shaken*]. I can't sleep, Kit! I can't frite. What has come to me? I think I go mad. [*He starts.*] Was that the boy on the stairs ? I sent him to her. I wrote. I have waited her will long enough. She shall see me to-night. I'll know what it means. She plays with me, Kit. Are you going ?

MARLOWE. I shall scarce reach Deptford ere dark.

SHAKESPEARE. How long do you lodge in Deptford ?

MARLOWE. All summer.

HENSLOWE [*pounding at the door*]. Who's at home?
Who's at home?

MARLOWE. That's Henslowe.

SHAKESPEARE. Why does the boy stay so long?

HENSLOWE [*in the doorway*]. Gentlemen, the traveller returns ! For the last time, I tell you ! My bones grow too old for barn-storming. Do you go as I come, Kit ? Thank you for nothing!

MARLOWE. Be civil, Henslowe ! " The Curtain " 's on its knees to me for my next play.

HENSLOWE. Pooh ! This man can serve my turn.

MARLOWE. You see, they'll make rivals 'of us, Will, Before they've done. I'll see you soon again. [*He goes out.*]

HENSLOWE. Well, what's the news ?

SHAKESPEARE. I sit at home. You roam England, ifou can do the talking. How did the tour go ?

HENSLOWE. You're thin, man! What's the matter ? Success doesn't suit you ?

SHAKESPEARE. How did the tour go ?

HENSLOWE. By way of Oxford, Warwick, Kenil-
(vorth——

SHAKESPEARE. I said " how " not " where."

HENSLOWE. —and Leamington and Stratford, We played " Romeo " every other night—and to full houses, my son ! I've a pocketful of money for you. They liked you everywhere. As for your townsfolk, they went mad. You can safely go home, boy 1 You'll find Sir Thomas in the front row, splitting his gloves. He'll ask you to dinner.

SHAKESPEARE. Were you there long ?

HENSLOWE. Two nights.

SHAKESPEARE. Did you see—anyone ?

HENSLOWE. Why not say——

SHAKESPEARE. I say, did you pass my house ?

HENSLOWE. I had forgot the way.

SHAKESPEARE. As I have, Henslowe !

HENSLOWE. Should I have sought her ?

SHAKESPEARE. No.

HENSLOWE. Yet I did see her.

Making for London, not a week ago,
Alone on horseback, sudden the long grey road
Grew friendly, like a stranger in a dream
Nodding " I know you ! " and behold, a love
Long dead, that smiles and says, " I never died ! "
Then in the turn of the lane I saw your thatch.
Summer not winter, else was all unchanged.
Still in the dream I left my horse to graze,
And let ten years slip from me at your gate.

SHAKESPEARE. Is it ten years ?

HENSLOWE. The little garden lay
Enchanted in the Sunday sloth of noon :
In th' aspen tree the wind hung, fast asleep,
Yet the air danced a foot above the flowers
And gnats danced in it. I saw a poppy-head
Spilling great petals, noiseless, one by one:
I heard the honeysuckle breathe—sweet, sweet:
The briar was sweeter—a long hedge, pink-
starred——

SHAKESPEARE. I know.

And flung it crashing back: ran out, wide-armed,
Calling your name : then—saw me, and stood still.
So still you'd think she died there, standing up,
As a sapling will in frost, so desolate
She stood, with summer round her, staring——

SHAKESPEARE.

Well ?

HENSLOWE. I asked her, did she know me? Yes, she
said,

And would I rest and eat ? So much she said
To the lawn behind me—oh, to the hollyhock
Stiff at my elbow—to a something—nothing—
But not to me. I could not eat her food.
I told her so. She nodded. Oh, she knows
How thoughts run in a man. No fool, no fool I
I spoke of you. She listened.

SHAKESPEARE.

Questioned you ?

HENSLOWE. Never a question.

SHAKESPEARE.

She said nothing ?

HENSLOWE.

Nothing.

SHAKESPEARE. Not like her.

HENSLOWE.

But her eyes spoke, as I came

By way of London, Juliet, " The Rose,"

And the Queen's great favour (" And why not ? "
they said)

Again to silence; so, as I turned to go

I asked her—" Any greeting ? " Then she said,

Lifting her chin as if she sped her words

Far, far, like pigeons flung upon the air,

And soft her voice as bird-wings—then she said,

¹¹ Tell him the woods are green at Shottery.

Fuller of flowers than any wood in the world."

"What else?" said I. She said—"The wind still blows

Fresh between park and river. Tell him that! "

Said I—"No message, letter?" Then she said,

Twisting her hands—"Tell him the days are long.

Tell him——" and suddenly ceased. Then, with good-bye

Pleasantly spoken, and another look

At some wraith standing by me, not at me,

Went back into the house and shut the door.

SHAKESPEARE. Ay, shut the door, Henslowe; for had she been this she

Ten years ago and I this other I——

Well, I have friends to love 1 Heard Marlowe's news?

He's three-part through Leander! Oh, this Marlowe!

I mine for coal but he digs diamonds.

HENSLOWE. Yet fill your scuttle lest the world grow chill! Is the new play done?

SHAKESPEARE. No.

HENSLOWE. Much written?

SHAKESPEARE. Not a line.

HENSLOWE. Are you mad? We're contracted. What shall I say to the Queen?

SHAKESPEARE. What you please.

HENSLOWE. Are you well?

SHAKESPEARE. Well enough.

HENSLOWE. Ill enough, I think I

SHAKESPEARE. Write your own plays—bid Marlowe, any man

That writes as nettles grow or rain comes down !

I am not born to it. I write not so.

Romeo and Juliet—I am dead of them!

The pay's too small, good clappers I These ghosts
need blood

To make 'em plump and lively and they know it,

And seek their altar. Threads and floating wisps

Of being, how they fasten like a cloud

Of gnats upon me, not to be shoo'd off

Unsatisfied—and they drink deep, drink deep;

For like a pelican these motes I feed,

And with old griefs' remembrance and old joys'

Sharper remembrance daily scourge myself,

And still they crowd to suck in scars and live.

HENSLOWE. Now, now, now—do I ask another " Juliet "
of you ? God forbid I A fine play, your " Juliet," but——

SHAKESPEARE. Now come the " but's."

HENSLOWE. Man, we must live ! Can we fill the theatre
on love and longing, and high words ? Ay, when Marlowe
does it to the sound of trumpets. But you—you're not
Marlowe. You know too much. Your gods are too much
men and women. Who'll pay sixpence for a heart-ache ?
and in advance too ! Give us but two more " Romeo and
Juliet " 's and you may be a great poet, but we close down.
Another tragedy ? No, no, no, we don't ask that of you !
We want light stuff, easy stuff. Oh, who knows as well as
you what's wanted ? It's a court play, my man/ The
French Embassy's to be there and the two Counts from

Italy, and always Essex and his gang, and you know *their* fancy. Get down to it now, there's a good lad ! Oh, you can do it in your sleep ! Lovers and lasses, and quarrels and kisses, like the two halves of a sandwich ! But court lovers, you know, that talk verse—and between them a green cress of country folk and country song, daffodils and valentines, and brown bowls of ale—season all with a pepper of wit—and there's your sandwich, there's your play, as the Queen likes it, as we all like it!

SHAKESPEARE. Ay, as you like it! There's your title pat!

But I'll not serve you. I'm to live, not write.

Tell that to the Queen !

A boy enters icJd^tlwg and stops as he sees
SHAKESPEARE.

Well, Hugh, what answer ?

BOY.

None, sir!

SHAKESPEARE. What? No answer?

HENSLOWE. See here, Will! If you do not write me this play you have thrice promised, I'll to the Queen—sick or mad I'll to the Queen this very day for your physic—and so I warn you.

SHAKESPEARE [*to the boy*]. Did you see——!

BOY. The maid, sir !

HENSLOWE. I'll not see " The Rose " in ruins for a mad——

SHAKESPEARE [*to the boy*]. But what did I bid you ?

BOY. Wait on the doorstep till Mistress Fitton came out, though I waited all night. But indeed, sir, she's gone; for I saw her, though she did not see me.

HENSLOWE. Oh, the Fitton I Now I see light through the wood!

SHAKESPEARE. What's that you say?

HENSLOWE. I say that the Queen shall know where the blame lies.

SHAKESPEARE. You lie. I heard you. I saw you twist your lips round a white name.

HENSLOWE. Will! Will! Will!

SHAKESPEARE. Did you not?

HENSLOWE. Why, Will, you have friends, though you fray 'em to the parting of endurance.

SHAKESPEARE. What's this?

HENSLOWE. I say you have friends that see what they see, and are sorry.

SHAKESPEARE. Yes, I am blessed in one man and woman who do not use me as a beast to be milked dry. I have Marlowe and——

HENSLOWE. Marlowe? And I said, God forgive me, that you knew men and women! Marlowe!

SHAKESPEARE. You speak of my friend.

HENSLOWE. Ay, Jonathan—of David, the singer, of him that took Bathsheba, all men know how. [SHAKESPEARE makes a threatening movement.] No, no, Will! I am too old a man to give and take with you—too old a man and too old a friend.

SHAKESPEARE. So you're to lie and I'm to listen because you're an old man!

HENSLOWE. Lie? Ask any in the town. I'm but a day returned and already I've heard the talk. Why, man, they make songs of it in the street!

SHAKESPEARE. It? It? It?

HENSLOWE. Boy ?

BOY. Here, sir ?

HENSLOWE. What was that song you whistled as you came up the stairs ?

BOY. "Weathercock," sir?

HENSLOWE. That's it!

BOY. Lord, sir, I know but the one verse I heard a dray man sing.

HENSLOWE. How does it go ?

BOY. It goes— [*singing.*]

Two birds settle on a weathercock—

How's the wind to-day—0 ?

One shall nest and one shall knock—

How's the wind to-day—0 ?

Turn about and turn about,

Kit pops in as Will pops out!

Winds that whistle round the weathercock,

Who's her love to-day—0 ?

It's a good tune, sir !

HENSLOWE. Eh, Will ? A good tune ! A rousing tune!

SHAKESPEARE [*softly*], " For this prize, if I loved her, I jvoud pay all I had ! I do what I choose though it damn me!"

BOY. May I go, sir ?

SHAKESPEARE. Go, go!

BOY. And my pay, sir ? Indeed I'd have stopped the ady if I could. But she made as if she were not herself, ind rode out of the yard. But I knew her, for all her riding-fcat and breeches.

HENSLOWB. What's all this ?

SHAKESPEARE [*to the boy*]. You're dreaming——

BOY. No, sir, there was your ring on her finger——

SHAKESPEARE. Be still! Take this and forget your dreams ! [*He gives him money.*] Henslowe, farewell! If you've lied to me I'll pay you for it, and if you've spoken truth to me I'll pay you for it no less.

HENSLOWE. Pay? I want no pay. I want the play that the Queen ordered, and will have in the end, mark that! You have not yet served the Queen.

SHAKESPEARE. Boy! Hugh 1

BOY. Sir?

SHAKESPEARE. Which way did she ride ?

BOY. Am I asleep or awake, sir ?

SHAKESPEARE. Which way did she ride ?

BOY. Across the bridge, sir, as I dreamt it, along the Deptford road.

SHAKESPEARE. Marlowe! The Deptford road! The Deptford road ! [*He rushes out.*]

BOY [*showing his money*]. Dreaming pays, sir! It's gold.

HENSLOWE. Boy, boy! Never trust a man! Never kiss a woman ! Work all day and sleep all night! Love yourself and never ask God for the moon 1 So you may live to be old. This business grows beyond me. I'll to the Queen.

He trots out, shaking his head. The boy skips after him, whistling his tune.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT Til

SCENE II

A private room at an inn late at night. Through the door in the right wall is seen the outer public room, with men sitting drinking. There is a window at the back, set so low in the wall that, above the window-sill, the heads of summer flowers glisten in the moonlight. On the left wall is the hearth and between it and the window a low bed. In the centre is a table with candle, glasses and mugs, and two or three men sitting round it drinking. MARLOWE stands with his back to the window, one foot on a chair, shouting out a song as the curtain rises.

MAKLOWE [*singing*].

If Luck and I should meet

I'll catch her to me crying,

" To trip with you were sweet,

Have done with your denying ! "

Hey, lass ! Hoj lass !

Heel and toe, lass !

WLo'll have a dance with me ?

ALL TOGETHER. Hey, Luck ! Ho, Luck !

Ne'er say no, Luck !

Til have a dance with thee!

A MAN [*hammering the table*]. Again ! Again !

LANDLORD [*at the door*]. Sir, sir, there's without a young gentleman hot with riding——

MARLOWE. Does the hot young gentleman give no name ?

LANDLORD. Why yes, sir, Archer, Francis Archer ! He aaid you would know him.

MARLOWE. I knew an Archer, but he died in Flanders.

LANDLORD. He may well come from Flanders, sir, for he's jauddy.

MARLOWE. Are Flanders' graves so shallow ? Tell him if he's alive I don't know him, and if he's dead I won't know him, and so either way let him go where be belongs.

The LANDLORD goes out.

THE MAN. What, Kit ! send him to hell with a dry throat ?

MARLOWE. And all impostors with him !

THE MAN. But what if it were a true ghost ? Have a heart ! You'll be one yourself some day, and watch old friends run away from yw Then you come to haunt them in pure good fellowship

LANDLORD [*at the door*], tfor, he says indeed he knows you. His business is private.

MARLOWE. Well, let Kim come in. No, friends, sit still ! If he's the death he pretends we'll face him together as the song teaches,

[*Singing.*] When Death at last arrives,

I'll greet him with a chuckle,

I'll ask him how he thrives

And press his bony knuckle,
 With—Ho, boy ! Hey, boy 1
 Come this way, boy !
 Who'll have a drink with me ?

MARY'S VOICE *[on the stairs]*.

Hey, Sir! Ho, Sir!
 No, no, no, Sir !

Why should he drink with thee ?

ALL TOGETHER. Hey, Death ! Ho, Death !

Let me go, Death !

I'll never drink with thee !

MARLOWE. What voice is that ?

MARY *stands in the doorway. She is dressed as a boy, with cloak, riding boots, and slouch cap.*

MARY *[singing]*. If Love should pass me by,
 I'll follow till I find him,
 And when I hear him sigh,
 I'll tear the veils that blind him.
 Up, man ! Dance, man !
 Take your chance, man !
 Who'll get a kiss from me ?

ALL TOGETHER. Hey, Love ! Ho, Love !
 None shall know, Love !

Keep but a kiss for me ! *[They clap.]*

THE MAN *[to MARLOWE]*. Ghost of a nightingale ! D'you know him ?

MARLOWE. I think I do. *[To MARY, aside]* What April freak is this ?

THE MAN [*with a glass*]. Spirits to spirit, young sir!
Have a drink!

MARY. I should choke, sir! We drink nectar in my country.

THE MAN. Where's that, ghost?

MARY. Oh, somewhere on the soft side of heaven where the poppies grow.

THE MAN. He swore you were dead and buried,

MARY. And so I was. But there's a witch in London so sighs for him and so cries for him, that in the end she whistled me out of my gravity and sent me here to fetch him home to her.

THE MAN. Her name, transparency, her name?

MARY. Why, sir, I rode in such haste that my memory could not keep up with me. It'll not be here this half-hour.

MARLOWE. Landlord, pour ale for a dozen, and these friends will drink to her, name or no name—in the next room.

THE MAN. Kit, you're a man of tact. I'm a man of tact.
We're all men of tact!

Ho, boys! Hey, boys!

Come this way, boys!

Who'll have a drink with me?

The door closes on them.

MARY. Well, did you ever see a better boy? My hair was the only trouble.

MARLOWE. Madcap! What does this mean?

MARY. What I said! [*singing*].

Moth, where are you flown ?

To burn in a flame I

Moth, I lie alone——

You've not been near me these four days.

MARLOWE. Uneasy days—I could not.

MARY. Are you burned, moth? Are the poor wings
a-frizzle ?

MARLOWE. Not mine, dear candle, but a king of moths,
But a great hawk-moth, velvet as the night
He beats with twilight wings, he, he is singed,
Fallen to earth and pitiful

MARY. Oh. Shakespeare!

My dear, I've run away because I hate
The smell of burning.

He was to come to me to-night to tell me his tragedies and
his comedies and—oh, I yawn ! And I played her so well
too at the first——

MARLOVTS. Who ?

MARY. The cool nymph under Tiber stairs—what's her
name ?—Egeria. Am I your Egeria, Marlowe ?

MARLOWE. Something less slippery.

MARY. Oh, she was fun to play—jirst to please the Queen
and then to please myself. For I was caught, you know.
It's something to be hung among the stars, something to
say—" I was his Juliet! "

MARLOWE. What, you—you Comedy-Kate ?

MARY. Why, I'm a woman ! that is—fifty women!

While he played Borneo to my Juliet

I could be anything he chose. O Kit!

I sucked his great soul out. You never lit the
blaze

I was for half an hour : then—out I went 1

MAKLOWE. He stoops o'er the embers yet.

MARY. But ashes fanned
Fly from their centre, lighter than a kiss,
And settle—where they please ! *[She kisses him,]*

D'you love ine ?

MARLOWE. More than I wish.

MARY. Would you be cured ?

MARLOWE. Not possible.

MARY *[singing]*. Go to church, sweetheart,
A flower in your coat!
Your wedding bells shall prove
The death of love I The death of love 1
Ding-dong! Ding-dong 1
The death of love I

Or so Will says.

MARLOWE. He should know.

MARY. What's that ?

MARLOWE. Nothing.

MARY. He's married ?

MARLOWE. I do not tell you so.

MARY. Married! He shall pay me. Married! I
guessed it—but he shall pay me. A country girl ?

MARLOWE. If you must know! He has not seen her
these ten years. She sent for him the night of " Juliet."

MARY. Why now all's plain.

So she's the canker that hath drooped our rose I

If I had loved him—I do not love him, Marlowe—
This would have fanned a flame. Well, we're all
cheats!

But now I cheat with better conscience. Married !
Lord, I could laugh 1 He must not know I know
it.

MARLOWE. I shan't boast I told you. O Mary, when I
first came to you, it was he sent me. He came like a child
and asked me to see you, to say what good of him I could,
Because I was his friend. And now, sec, see,
How I have friended him !

MARY. I love you for it.
He shall not know. Why talk of him? Forget
him 1

MARLOWE. Can you ?

MARY. Why, that I cannot makes me mad——

MARLOWE. Forget him ?
As soon forget myself! I am his courage,
His worldly wisdom—Mary, I think I am
The youth he lost in Stratford. Yet we're one age,
And now we write one play. If I died of a sudden,
It seems he'd breathe me as I left my body,
And I should live in him as sunshine lies
Forgotten in a forest, and be found
In slants and pools and patterns, golden still
In all he writes.

MARY. O dull Kit 1 have I adventured here to hear you
falk of dying ?

MARLOWE. You borrowed Archer's name.

MARY. I wanted one that would startle you out to me, and you told me the tale of him once, how young he died.

MARLOWE. And how unwilling! You've set him running in my head like a spider in a skull,
Spinning across the hollows of mine eyes
A web of dusty thought. Sweet, brush him off
Death's a vile dreg in this intoxicant,
This liquor of the gods, this seven-hued life.
Sometimes I pinch myself, say—" Can you die ?
Is it possible ? Will you be winter-nipped
One day like other flies ? " Fm glad you came.
Stay with me, stay, till the last minute of life !
Let the court go, the world go, stay with me !

MARY [*her arms round him*].

So—quiet till the dawn comes, quiet! Hark !
Who called ? Did you hear it ?

MARLOWE. Birds in the ivy.

MARY. No.

Twice in the road I stopped and turned about
Because I heard my name called. There was
nothing;

Yet I had heard it—Mary—Mary—Mary !

MARLOWE. You heard your own heart pound from riding.

MARY. Again!

Open the window! [*MARLOWE rises and goes to the window.*]

Do you see anything ?

MARLOWE. All's sinister. The moon fled out of the sky
Long since, and the black trees of midnight quake.

MARY. And the wind ! What a wind ! It tugs at the
window-frame

Like jealousy, mad to break in and part us.

Could you be jealous ?

MARLOWE. If I were a fool

I'd let you guess it.

MARY. Wise, you're wise, but—jealous ?

Too many men in the world ! I'd lift no finger

To beckon back the fool that tired of me,

Would you ? But, he, he glooms and says no word,

But follows with his eyes whene'er I stir.

I hate those asking eyes. Look thus at me

But once and—ended, Marlowe ! I'll not give

But when I choose. [*He sits beside her.*]

MARLOWE. But when / choose.

Behind them the blur of the window is darkened.

MARY [*in his arms*]. Why yes !

Had he your key-word—! Sometimes I like him
yet,

When anger comes in a white lightning flash,

Then he's the man of men still, then with shut eyes

I think him you and shiver and I like him,

Held roughly in his arms, thinking of you.

Thrf Warwick burr is like an afterwards

Of thunder when he's angry, in his speech.

MARLOWE. What does he say ?

MARY. He says he is not jealous I
He would not wrong me so, nor wrong himself.
Then the sky lightens and we kiss—or kiss not 1
Who cares ?
Then in come you. It's well he thinks you his
In friendship——

MARLOWE. So I was,

SHAKESPEARE *swings himself noiselessly over
the sill.*

MARY. And so you are,
And have all things in common as friends should.
Eh, friend?
Oh, stir not! Frowning ? If you were a fool—
(How did it run ?) you'd let me guess you—jealous 1
But you're no fool.

MARLOWE. Let's have no more 1 You know
I loved—I love the man.

MARY. Why, so do I.

MARLOWE. You shall not 1

MARY. Then I will not. Not to-night.

SHAKESPEARE [*standing by the window*].

Why not to-night, my lover and my friend ?

He comes down into the room as they start up.

Will you not give me wine and welcome me ?
Sit down, sit down—we three have much to say.
But tell me first, what does that hand of yours
Upon her neck, as there were custom in it ?
Part! Part, I say ! Part 1 lest I couple you
Once and for all 1

MARY. He's (armed!

MARLOWE. He shall not touch you.

SHAKESPEARE. You, Marlowe! You!

MARLOWE. Stand out of her way!

SHAKESPEARE. You! You 1

MARLOWE. Why then——

MARLOWE darts at SHAKESPEARE and is thrown off. He staggers against the table, knocking over the candle. As he strikes the second time his arm is knocked up, striking his own forehead. He falls across the bed. There is an instant's pause, then SHAKESPEARE rushes to him, slipping an arm under his shoulder.

MARY. Dead? Is he dead 1 Oh, what an end 1

I never saw a dead man. Will—to me I

SHAKESPEARE. Get help!

MARY. I dare not.

MARLOWE. Oh!

SHAKESPEARE. What is it?

MARLOWE. Oh 1

My life, my lovely life, and cast away

Untasted, wasted——

Death, let me go ! *[He dies.]*

MARY. What now? Rouse up! Delay

Is dangerous. Wake! Wake! What shall we
do?

SHAKESPEARE, O trumpet of the angels lent to a boy,

Could I not spare you for the golden blast,
For the great sound's sake ? What have I done ?

ANNE'S VOICE. Ah ! Done

The thing you would not do——

MARY. Rouse ! Rouse yourself I

What now ?

ANNE'S VOICE. Remember——

SHAKESPEARE. Hark ! A sigh !

MARY. The wind

Keening the night——

SHAKESPEARE. A sound of weeping——

MARY. Rain.

Is this a time for visions ? White-cheeked day
Stares through the pane. Each minute is an eye
Opening upon us. What shall we do now ?

SHAKESPEARE. Weep, clamorous harlot ! We have
given him death,

And shall we dock his rights of death, his peace
Upon his bed, his sun of hair smoothed, hands
Crossed decently by me, his friend ? Close you
His eyes with kisses, lest I kill you too !

Give him his due, I say ! his woman's tears !

You were his woman—oh, deny it not !

You were his woman. Pay him what you owe !

MARY. What ? Do you glove my clean hand with your
stain,

Red fingers ? Soft ! This is your kill, not mine '
My free soul is not sticky with your sins,

You pinch your lips ? You singe me with your
tongue ?

Your country lilac that you left for me.
 Taught you strange names for a woman. Harlot ?
 I?

Sjveep your own stable, trickster, married man;
 Lie, cheat, break faith, until you end a man
 That bettered you as roses better weeds——

SHAKESPEARE. That is well known.

MARY, —and now you'll stare and weep
 Until the watch comes and the Queen hears all.
 Then——ends all!

And I caught with you ! She's a devil of ice
 Since Leicester died. No man or woman stirs her;
 But she must have her toys ! London's her doll's
 house,

Its marts, its theatres. This death was half her
 pride,

And you the other. Was I not set to mould you ?
 What will she do to me now her doll's broken,
 Broken in my hand ? I fear her, oh, I fear her,
 The green eyes of her justice and her smile.

Will, if you love me—you who have had my lips,
 And more, and more, and shall have all again,
 All that you choose, and gladly given—awake !
 Fly while there's time to save yourself and me !
 Look not on him—he's blind—he cannot speak,
 Nor stretch a hand to stay you—he's cold nothing !
 But we, we live ' Here on my throat, here, here,
 (Give me your fingers !) feel the hot pulse live I
 Yet I'll die sooner than be pent. You know
 me I

Must I lie still for ever at his side
Because you will not rouse yourself ?

SHAKESPEARE. Who speaks ?
O vanished dew, O summer sweetness gone,
O perfume staled in a night, that yesterday
Was fresh as morning roses—do you live ?
Are you still Mary ? O my shining lamp
Of love put out, how dark the world has grown,
Did you want him so? Did it come on you
suddenly,
And shake you from your north——

MARY, The dawn 1 the dawn!

SHAKESPEARE. Or did you never love me—where do you
point ?

MARY. To save ourselves comes first 1

SHAKESPEARE. To answer me I

MARY. Fool! Fool! Will you hang? Let go, fool!

SHAKESPEARE. Answer me t

MARY. Will, for the love of living——

SHAKESPEARE. Answer me I

MARY. I never loved you. Are you answered ?

ANNE'S VOICE. Oh—

For a month—in the spring——

SHAKESPEARE. Is it a month ago ?

The trees are not yet metall'd with the dust

Of summer, that were greening when we two——

MARY. Oh, peace 1

SHAKESPEARE, —in a night of spring——

MARY. Ah, was it love I

SHAKESPEARE. Remember, Beauty, when you came to me,

As came the beggar to Cophetua,
As queens came conquered to the Macedon,
As Cressid came by night to Diomed,
As night comes queenly to the bed of day
Enmantled in her hair, so you to me,
Juliet, and all your night of hair was mine
To curtain me and you——

MARY. Forgiven, forgiven——

SHAKESPEARE. That night you loved me——

MARY. I was drunk with dreams
That night.

SHAKESPEARE. That night of victory you loved me 1
I have my witnesses. O watching stars——

MARY. The eyes, the eyes, the arch of eyes !

SHAKESPEARE. —speak for me I
Once was a taper that outshone you all,
It burned so bright. Oh, how you winked and
pried!

I saw you through the tatters of the dark
And mocked you in my hour. Yet speak for me,
Eternal lights, for now my candle's blown
Past envy 1 But she loved me then!

MARY. I know not.

SHAKESPEARE. Though god and devil deny—you loved
me then!

MARY. But was it love ?

I could have loved if you had taught me loving.

Something I sought and found not; so I turned
 From searching. I have clean forgotten now
 That ever I sought—and so live merrily—
 And so will live ! Why wreck myself for you ?

SHAKESPEARE. O heart's desire, and eyes', desire of
 hands,

Self of myself, have pity !

MARY. What had you ?

If I had borne you children (but I was wise,
 Knowing my man, as men have taught me men)
 What name had you to give them, to give me ?
 No, no, I wrong you, for you christened me
 But now, first having slain him who had struck
 The rankness from your mouth.

SHAKESPEARE. What have I done——

MARY. Lied, lied to me!

SHAKESPEARE. —and if I did——

ANNE'S VOICE. To hold you t
 I couldn't lose you. I was mad with pain.

MARY. Tricked me——

SHAKESPEARE. To hold—listen to me—to hold you t
 Lest I should lose you, I was mad with pain.

MARY. Are you so womanish that a breath of pain——

SHAKESPEARE. A breath! God, listen! A breath, a
 summer breath!

MARY, —could blow away your honour ?

SHAKESPEARE. Once it was mine.

I laid it up with you. Where is it now ?

I'm stripped of honour like an oak in June

Whose leaves a curse of caterpillars eat,
That stands a mockery to flowers and men,
With naked arms praying the lightning down.

ANNE'S VOICE. At Shottery the woods are gjeen——

SHAKESPEARE.

My God 1

ANNE'S VOICE. And full of flowers——

SHAKESPEARE.

Let be, let be ! My honour ?

I bought it with a woman—not like you,
A faithless-faithful woman—not like you;
But weak as I'm weak, loving as I love,
God help her ! not like you—no black-eyed Spain
Whose cheeks hang out their red to match the red
When bull meets man—no luxury that wears
A lover like new clothes, and all the while
Eyes other women's fashions; but a woman
That should have loved me less, poor fool, and
less——

MARY. You should have loved me less, my fool, and less 1

SHAKESPEARE. Yet from this folly all the music springs

That is in the world, and all my hopes that ranged
Lark-high in heaven ! Yet murder comes of it.

Look where he lies ! He was true friend to me,
And I to him, until you came, you came.

MARY. I came and I can go.

SHAKESPEARE. Mary ! *[There is a clatter of hoofs.]*

MARY. D'you hear ?

Horses! What do they seek? You, Marlowe,
me?

SHAKESPEARE, This they call conscience.

MARY. Take your hand away !
Til slip through yet; nor shall you follow me;
You had your chance. Listen! A boy was here;
Qjie Francis Archer. Say it after me—
No woman, but a boy, a stranger to you 1
SHAKESPEARE. Strange to me, Mary.

There is a sound of voices in the yard.

MARY. If you hold me now
I'll scream and swear you stabbed him as he slept.
They're drinking still. [*She opens the door.*]
VOICES [*in the outer room*].

Hey, boy ! Ho, boy 1
Heel and toe, boy !
Who'll have a drink with me ?

MARY. If you should get away.
Send me no message, come not near me ! Now!
She slips into the room. SHAKESPEARE
stands at the half open door watching.

A MAN. Sing another verse !

ANOTHER. There's the boy back. Make him sing it 1

MARY. I'm to fetch more wine first.

THE MAN. Sing another verse !

ANOTHER. If Love and I should meet,
I'll catch her to me—

ANOTHER. Luck, you fool, not love !

ANOTHER. Where's the difference? If you're in love
you're in luck,

ANOTHER. Here, stop the boy 1

MARY. Let me pass, gentlemen 1

THE MAN. Sing another verse!

ANOTHER. If Love and I——

ANOTHER. Shut up now and let the kid sing it!

MARY. Why yes, if you'll let me pass afterwards, sir,
like love in the song.

THE MAN. Sing another verse! Sing twenty other
verses 1

MARY [*singing*]. If Love should pass me by,
I'll follow till I find him,
And when I hear him cry,
I'll tear the veils that blind him I

THE MAN. Now then, chorus '

ALL TOGETHER. Hey, Love ! Ho, Love!
None shall know, Love!
Keep but a kiss for me 1

MARY *disappears in the crowd. The door
swings to as SHAKESPEARE turns back into the
room.*

SHAKESPEARE. Marlowe! Marlowe!

She is gone, Marlowe, that was a fume of wine
Between us. Marlowe, Marlowe, speak to me !
Never a sound. We have seen many a dawn
Creep like a house-wife on the drunken night,
And tumble him from heaven with work-day hand
And bird-shrill railing; but such a waking up
As this we never knew. Sorry and cold
I look on you. Kit, Kit, this mark of the knife

Is the first blot I ever saw in you,
The first ill-writing. Kit, for your own sake,
You should have wronged a stranger, not your
friend;

For like a looking-glass my heart still served you
To see yourself, and when you struck at me,
You struck yourself, and broke this mirror too.

A knock.

Mary? Is it Mary? Lie you quiet, Marlowe 1
We will not let her in.

HENSLOWE. Within, who's within there?

SHAKESPEARE,

Two dead men.

HENSLOWE.

Is it Marlowe?

Is Shakespeare there?

SHAKESPEARE.

Come in, come in, come in!

*HENSLOWE comes in hurriedly. He leaves
the door half open behind him.*

VOICES [*singing*]. Ho, boy! Hey, boy!

Come this way, boy!

Who'll have a drink with me?

HENSLOWE. Why, here's a bird of wisdom sitting in the dark! Shut your eyes, man, and use candles or you'll scorch out your own sockets! What's wrong now? But tell me that as we ride; for the Queen wants you in a hurry, and, what's more, an angry Queen. I'd not be you! Here I've hunted London for you from tavern to lady's lodging till I ferreted out that Marlowe was here, and so I followed him for news.

SHAKESPEARE. Here's news enough. Henslowe, look here!

HENSLOWE. Who did it ?

SHAKESPEARE. We—he and I. There was another in it.

HENSLOWE. Was it the youngster passed me in the yard,
Caught at his horse and rode like fear away ?

SHAKESPEARE. Was't a pale horse ?

HENSLOWE. I saw not. In the dark
A voice cried " Hurry ! "

SHAKESPEARE. That was she.

HENSLOWE. Who ? Who ?

SHAKESPEARE. Death. She has fled and left her catch
behind.

Can you do anything ?

HENSLOWE. For the living scarce——

You must be got away. Are you known here ?

SHAKESPEARE, As men know Cain. All, all is finished,
Henslowe!

LANDLORD [*putting his head in at the door*]. Is anything
wrong, sir ?

HENSLOWE. Wrong ? What should be wrong ? But
we're in haste. Call the ostler ! We want a second horse.

*He slips his arm through SHAKESPEARE'S and
tries to lead him to the door.*

LANDLORD. Is the gentleman ill, sir ? He sways.

HENSLOWE. Your good wine, host.

A MAN [*over the LANDLORD'S shoulder*]. The best on the
Surrey side!

HENSLOWE. He'll tell the Queen so in an hour if you'll make way.

MEN [*crowding into the doorway*]. The Queen I Did you hear ?

He's been sent by the Queen !

HENSLOWE. Keep your people back, landlord!

THE MAN [*staggering into the room*]. I say, three cheers for the Queen !

ANOTHER. The Queen ! The Queen ! Three cheers for Bess!

[*Singing*]. Hey, Bess ! Ho, Bess !
Heel and toe, Bess !

Ladies and gentlemen, here's a man on the bed.

HENSLOWE. Ay! My friend! Let him be !

THE MAN. Is he drunk too ?

THE OTHER. If I were a judge I'd say " Very drunk I " He's spilled his wine on his clothes. What I say is " Waste not, want not! "

LANDLORD. Come now, come away! You hear what the gentleman says.

THE MAN [*throwing him off*].

Hey, Death ! Ho, Death!
Let me go, Death !

Shall I wake him?

SHAKESPEARE [*turning in the doorway*]. Ay, wake him, wake him, old trump of judgment! Wake him if you can,

And if you cannot let him sleep his sleep
And envy him that he can sleep so sound!

THE MAN. Ay, sir, he shall sleep till he wakes. But we, sir, well sing you ofE the premises, for the love of Bess.

Hey, Bess 1 Ho, Bess 1

ANOTHER [*hammering the table*]* Death, not Bess!
Death ! Death ! Death ! Come along, chorus I

Two OR THREE [*as they lurch out of the room*].

Ho, boy! Hey, boy 1

Come this way, boy!

Who'll have a drink with me ?

ALL [*following*]* Hey, Death! Ho, Death 1

Out you go, Death !

We'll never drink with thee I

*The door swings to and quiet settles on the
lightening room. The first ray of sunlight
touches the bed. Outside the birds are beginning
to sing.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

IV

A room in the palace, hung with tapestries. On the right wall is a heavy, studded door : on the left, a great raised seat on a low platform. On the back wall is a small curtained door and a large window. A girl in a primrose-coloured gown stands at it holding back its curtain. Set slantwise in front of it, nearer the centre of the stage, is a writing-table with scattered papers. At it sits ELIZABETH, a secretary beside her. The Queen's dress is of dull grey brocade with transparent lawn and jewels of aquamarine ; but as the evening deepens its colour becomes one with the dusk and only her white face and hands are clearly seen.

A HAWKER [*chanting in the street far away*].

Cress ! Buy cress !

Who'll buy my cress-es ?

ELIZABETH *lays down her pen.*

ELIZABETH. These three are signed. Take them to Burleigh. This I'll not grant. Tell him so ! [*The man goes out.*]

HAWKER [*nearer*]. Cress ! Buy cress !

ELIZABETH. There ! Put the papers by !

The girl at the window comes down to the table and begins to sort them.

ANOTHER HAWKER. Strawberries ! Ripe strawberries
THE GIRL. I wonder, Madam, that you choose this room
Here on the noisy street.

ELIZABETH. Child, when you marry
Who'll rule your nursery, you or your maids ?

GIRL. Why, that I will!

ELIZABETH. Then you must Bit in it daily. Where's
Mary Fitton?

GIRL. In waiting, Madam, and half asleep. She was up
early to-day. I saw her from my window by the little
garden door and called to her. She had been out to pick
roses, as you bade her, ere the dew dried on them.

ELIZABETH. As I bade her ?

GIRL. Yes, Madam, she said so.

HAWKER [*close at hand*]. Cress ! Buy cress!
Fit for Queen Bess!

ELIZABETH. Open the window ! [*The girl opens it.*]

HAWKER. Cress ! Buy cress !
Who'll buy my cress-es ?

ELIZABETH. Fetch me my purse !

*The girl goes out by the little door. As she
does 50, ELIZABETH takes her purse from a
drawer and going to the window, throws out
a coin.*

HAWKER. Cress 1 Buy cress!
Are you there, lady ? [ELIZABETH *throws out another coin.*]
I plucked my riches
From Deptford ditches,

I came by a Deptford Inn;
Where a young man lies,
With pennies on his eyes——
Murdered, lady, and none saw who did it!
Cress ! Buy cress !

ELIZABETH *flings out another coin.*
There was a boy that ran away, and Henslowe the Queen's
man, and a third——

Cress ! Buy cress !
A supper for Queen Bess I

ELIZABETH *lays down the purse on the table
as the girl comes back.*

GIRL [*distressed*]. Madam——

ELIZABETH. It was here. That cress seller has a sweet
voice. Fling her a coin and ask her where she lives!

GIRL [*going to the window*]. Hey, beggar 1

HAWKER. Bless you, lady!

GIRL. Where do you come from with your green stuff 1

HAWKER. Marlow, lady, Marlow 1

Down by the river where the cresses grow,
And buttercups like guineas.

Cress ! Buy cress 1

Who'll buy my cress-es t

Her voice dies away in the distance.

GIRL. She has come a long way.

Marlow's across the river, far from us.

ELIZABETH. Marlowe's across the river, far from us.
If any ask to speak with me, let me know it!

GIRL. Why, Madam, Henslowe, the old player, has been waiting since noon, and Mr. Shakespeare with him.

ELIZABETH. The name's not written here. Whose duty?

GIRL. Mary Fitton's.

ELIZABETH. Send Henslowe! And when I ring let Mary Fitton answer!

GIRL. Ill tell her, Madam.

She goes out. ELIZABETH rises and goes slowly across the room to the dais and seats herself. There is a pause. Then a page throws open the big door facing the dais and HENSLOWE enters.

ELIZABETH. Henslowe, you're not welcome
For the news you bring.

HENSLOWE. Madam, that Marlowe's dead
I know because I found him—I am new come
from Deptford—
But how you know I know not.

ELIZABETH. Why, not a keel
Grounds on the Cornish pebbles, but the jar
Thrills through all English earth home to my feet.
No riderless horse snuffs blood and gallops home
To a girl widowed, but I the sparking hoofs
Hear pound as her heart pounds, waiting; for
niy spies
Are everywhere. Do not my English swifts
"Report to me at dusk, eavesdropping low,
The number of my English primroses

In English woods all spring? The gulls on
Thames

Scream past the Tower " Storm in Channel 1
Storm! "

And if I hear not, a sudden my drinking glass
Rings out" Send help, lest English sailors drown ! "
The lantern moon swings o'er unvisited towns
Signalling " Peace ! " or a star shoots out 'of the
west

Across my window, flashing " Danger here! "

And is it Ireland rising, or a child

On chalk-pit roof after the blackberries,

I'm warned, and bid my human servants haste.

The flat-worn stones, the echoes of the streets

At night when drunkards tumble, citizens

In the half silence and half light trot home,

Reveal the well, the ill in my own land.

I am its eyes, its pulse, its finder-tips,

The wakeful partner of its married soul.

I know what darkness does, what dawn discovers

In all the English country. I am the Queen.

You have done my errand? Shakespeare the player is
with you?

HENSLOWE. He waits without.

ELIZABETH. Then he too was at Deptford last night.

HENSLOWE. None knows it.

ELIZABETH. That's well I But was it he, Henslowe—
he?

HENSLOWE. No, no, no ! I'll swear it.

ELIZABETH. But will he swear it ?

HENSLOWE. He's dazed, he will say anything—yes—
no—

Just as you prompt him, as if one blow had struck
His soul and Marlowe's body. Madam, he's not
his witness!

Yet, if tVere true, if he has lost us Marlowe,
Must we lose him? Then has the English stage
Lost both her hands and cannot feed herself,
Starves, Madam!

ELIZABETH. You're honest, Henslowe ! Your son's SOD
one day

May help a king to thread a needle's eye.

But do you think he did it ?

HENSLOWE, No, though he says it,
For he loved him.

ELIZABETH. Loved him, but a woman better.

HENSLOWE. There was no woman with them.

ELIZABETH. So I hear; but a boy 1

HENSLOWE. Unknown.

ELIZABETH. Did you see him ?

HENSLOWE. Not his face. He was past me in a flash,
crying " Hurry ! "

ELIZABETH. Well, I'll see Shakespeare.

HENSLOWE. Madam——

ELIZABETH. I thread my own needles, Henslowe, being
a woman. [MARY FITTON enters.] Send Mr. Shakespeare
to me ! [Then, as MARY turns to go—] Mary 1

MARY. Madam ?

ELIZABETH. Bid him hurry! [MARY *turns to the door.*]
Mary!

MARY. Madam?

ELIZABETH. What did I tell you but now?

MARY. Madam, to bid him hurry.

HENSLOWE [*recognising the voice*]. "Hurry!"

ELIZABETH. Wait. Daylight, Henslowe? Girl, you're slow. You go heavily. Have you not slept? Let Henslowe do your errand! [To HENSLOWE] Let him wait at hand!

MARY. Madam, I can well go.

ELIZABETH. No hurry now. [HENSLOWE *goes out*]
D'you guess why I send for your teller of tales?

MARY. No, Madam.

ELIZABETH. He has told a tale, it seems, that I'd hear told again.

MARY. Told?

ELIZABETH. Why are you not in black, Mary?

MARY. I, Madam?

ELIZABETH. Marlowe is dead.

MARY. I grieve to hear it.

ELIZABETH. When did you hear?

MARY. Why, Madam, now—you tell me!

ELIZABETH. Then I tell you wrong. He is alive and has told all.

MARY. Alive? They lie to you, Madam! What has he told? Who says it?

ELIZABETH. You, Mary Fitton! For by your dark-ringed eyes

Your dreaming service and those blind hands ot
yours

Seeking a hold, I think you saw him die,
Ere you passed Henslowe in the dark, crying
" Hurry 1 "

MARY. Madam, it was your errand. For this Shake-
speare,

This quill you thrust on me to sharpen up,
Jealous of Marlowe, though he had no cause
(What! must I live his nun, his stay-at-home ?
Your servant and a lady of the court!),
Sent me a letter——

ELIZABETH. Let me read !

MARY. I tore it!
——so inked in threat that I post-haste for Dept-
ford——

ELIZABETH. Ill judged 1

MARY. I know! I followed my first fear.
——rode to warn Marlowe. Shakespeare following,
Spying upon us, spying upon us, Madam !
Found us in counsel. Then, with a hail of words
That Marlowe would not bear, with " stale " and
" harlot,"

He beat me down, till Marlowe flung¹em back;
Then like two dogs they struggled. Marlowe fell.

ELIZABETH. Struck down?

MARY. Struck down, but blindly, not to kill—
I will not think to kill—and as he fell
His own knife caught him, here.

ELIZABETH. What did you then?

MARY. I, Madam?

ELIZABETH. You, Madam? Did you fold your hands

And watch this business as you'd watch a play,
And clap them on? Or, as a short month since
You played a part I think, did you strike in
And play a part? Why did you call for help?

MARY. I did not, Madam!

ELIZABETH. Why did not Mary Fitton
Cry help against—which lover?

MARY. Lover, Madam?

ELIZABETH. There's tinker, tailor, soldier—the old
rhyme—

There's Pembroke, Marlowe, Shakespeare——

MARY. Madam! Madam I
I'll not bear this!

ELIZABETH. Ay, you have fierce black eyes—
What will you do then if you will not bear it?
You have leave to show.

MARY. I say I did cry out
To both that they should cease.

ELIZABETH. So you cried out 1
Bring up your witnesses that heard you cry!

MARY. I did not stand and watch. I ran upon them.
I was flung off and bruised.

ELIZABETH. Show me the bruise!

MARY. High on my arm——

ELIZABETH. Rip up your sleeve and show me!

You stand, you stare, you're white. I think you
shake.

MARY. Anger not fear, though you were ten times Queen
Of twenty Englands 1

ELIZABETH. Quiet, and quiet, my girl t
This ill-spent night has left you feverish.
You are too free for court,
Too bruised and touzled for my gentlemen.
You shall go home, I think, to heal this bruise,
To cleanse your body and soul in country air
And banished quiet till I send for you.

MARY. Upon what count?

ELIZABETH. On none. But I've no time,
No room for butter-fingers. Here's a man slain
Upon your lap that England needed. Go !
Go, blunted tool! [*She touches a bell.*]

MARY. Madam ! Madam ! You wrong me !

ELIZABETH. I've wronged your betters, Mary, Mary
Fitton,
As tide wrongs pebble, or as wind wrongs chaff
At threshing time.

A page driers at the great door on the right.

Send Mr. Shakespeare to me 1

MARY. This is the justice of the Queen of England I

ELIZABETH. My justice.

MARY, Have I not served you ?

ELIZAPETH. All things serve me.

It hey choose their path. I use them in their path.

MARY. As once you used, they say——

ELIZABETH. Do not dare ! Do not dare !

MARY. Dare, Madam ? May I not wonder, like another,
Why you have used me thus ?

ELIZABETH. I used you, dirt,
To show a man how foul the dirt can be;
But now I brush you from *him*.

*The main door opens and HENSLOWE enters
followed by SHAKESPEARE. She beckons to
HENSLOWE.*

Herislowe 1

HENSLOWE. Madam ?

*They speak privately for a moment, then
HENSLOWE goes out by the small door.*

MARY [*to SHAKESPEARE*].

You come to cue !

SHAKESPEARE. What has fallen?

MARY. Sent away

Because of you, because my name is Mary I

SHAKESPEARE. Go to my lodging ! Wait for me 1 I'll
follow,

For where you go I go.

MARY. Ay, bring your wife 1

This is over ! There are other men 1

She goes out.

SHAKESPEARE. Mary ! Love, life, the breath I breathe,
come back!

Mary, you have not heard me 1 Mary 1 Mary 1
Come back! [*The door shuts with a clang.*]

ANNE'S VOICE. Come back !

ELIZABETH. Never in any world!

Fasten the door there !

SHAKESPEARE [*struggling to open it*]. Open ! Open, I say!

ELIZABETH. Beat, beat your heart out! Let me watch you beat

Those servants of your soul until they bleed,

Mash, agonise, against a senseless door !

Beat, beat your weaker hands than that dead tree,

Tear, tear your nails upon its nails in vain.

Beat, beat your heart out—you'll not pass the door!

Can you not come at her ? She goes—beat, beat!

The distance widens, like a ship she goes

Utterly from you. Follow ! Beat your hands !

What? Are you held, you who bow men with words

Windily down like corn-fields ? Is she gone ?

Call up the clouds to carry you who walk

Sky-high, star-level, eyeing the naked sun.

Where are your wings? Beat, beat your heart out I Beat !

Where is your strength ? Will not the wood be moved?

Cannot your love-call reach her, you who know

The heart of the lark and how the warm throat thrills

At mating-time ? Is there a living thing

You do not dwell in, cannot stir, and yet
You cannot move this door ?

SHAKESPEARE. I am not so bound——

ELIZABETH. Why, yes, there's the window! You may cast down and be done with it all—done with it all! I'll not stop you. Who am I to keep a man from his sweet rest? And yet—what of me, my son, before you do it? What of me and this England that I am ?

SHAKESPEARE. Madam, I have not slept these five nights. I do not know what you say.

ELIZABETH. Or care ?

SHAKESPEARE. Or care, Madam, forgive me! God's pity, Madam, open the door !

ELIZABETH. It shall not serve you.

SHAKESPEARE. I know it.

ELIZABETH. She has sold you, man.

SHAKESPEARE. I know it. Open the door!

ELIZABETH. Come here, my son! Why do I hold you here, think you ?

SHAKESPEARE. Marlowe——

ELIZABETH. Tell me nothing! I'll know nothing! Mr. Shakespeare, where is the work I should have from you? Where is the new play? You sold and I bought. Give me my goods ! Then go !

SHAKESPEARE. A play? You are Queen, Madam, you do not live our lives; so I call you not pure devilish to keep me here for so little a thing.

ELIZABETH. Yet I will have it from you! There's paper, pen——

111 have your roughed-out scene ere Hcnslowe
leaves

To-night. And ere the ended month this play,
This English laughter, ringing all her bells,
Before the pick of Europe at my court
Performed, shall link our hands with Italy,
With old immortal Athens. This youll dc.
For this you can.

SHAKESPEARE [*crying out*]. I am to live, not write,
To love, not write of love, to live my life
As others do, to live a summer life
As all the others do !

ELIZABETH. I thought so too
When I was young. Then, 'mid my state affairs
And droning voices of my ministers
The people's acclamation and the hiss
Of treacheries to England and to me,
Ever I heard the momentary clock
Ticking away my girlhood as I reigned;
While she—while she—
Mary of Scotland, Mary of delight,
(I know her sweetheart names) Maybird, Mav
flower,
The three times married honeysuckle queen,
She had her youth. Think you I'd not have
changed,
Sat out her twenty years a prisoner,
Bidden her road from France to Fotheringay,
To have her story ? Am I less woman, I,

That I'd not change with her ? For the high way
Is flowerless, and thin the mountain air
And rends the lungs that breathe it; and the light
Spreading from hill to everlasting hill,
Welling across the sky as from a wound,
A heart of blood between the breasts of the world,
Is not much nearer, no, nor half as warm
As the kissing sun of the valleys: and we climb
(You'll climb as I do) not because we will,
Because we must. There is no virtue in it;
But some pride. Fate can force but not befool me
I am not drunken with religious dream
Like the poor blissful fools of kingdom come:
I know the flesh is sweetest, when all's said,
And summer's heyday and the love of men :
I know well what I lose. I'm head of the Church
And stoop my neck on Sunday—to what Christ ?
The God of little children ? I have none.
The God of love ? What love has come to me ?
The God upon His ass ? I am not meek,
Nor is he meek, the stallion that I ride,
The great white horse of England. I'll not bow
To the gentle Jesus of the women, I—
But to the man who hung 'twixt earth and heaven
Six mortal hours, and knew the end (as strength
And custom was) three days away, yet ruled
His soul and body so, that when the sponge
Blessed His cracked lips with promise of relief
And quick oblivion, He would not drink:

He turned His head away and would not drink :
Spat out the anodyne and would not drink.
This was a god for kings and queens of pride,
And Him I follow.

SHAKESPEARE. Whither ?

ELIZABETH. The alley's blind.

For the cross rules us or we rule the cross,
Yet the cross wins in the end.
For night is older than the daylight is :
The slack string will not quiver for the hand
Of cunningest musician.
Does the cross care, a chafer on a pin,
Whether Barabbas writhe, or very God ?
All's one to the dead wood! Dead wood,
 dead wood,
It coffins us in the end. God, you and me
And everyone—the dead wood baffles all.
And why I care I know not, but I know
That I'll die fighting—and the fight goes on.
Yet not uncaptured shall the assault go on
Against dead wood fencing the hearts of men.
For this I chose you.
I am a barren woman. Mary's child
Reigns after me in England. Yet, to-night,
I crown my heir. I, England, crown my son.

SHAKESPEARE. There was a better man but yesterday—
 To him the crown ! King was he of all song.

ELIZABETH. He's king now of the silence after song;
 When the last bell-note hovers, like a high

And starry rocket that dissolves in stars,
Lost ere they reach us. He is lord of that
For ever.

SHAKESPEARE. He—he had the luck; but I,
But England was not lucky.

ELIZABETH. Be assured
Had England chosen Marlowe, here to-night
England had crowned him, and you in Surrey ditch
Had lain where he lies, dead, my dead son, dead.
Take you the kingship on you !

SHAKESPEARE. A player-king—

ELIZABETH. As I a player-queen ! I play my part
Not ill, not ill. Judge me, my English peer,
And witness for me, that I play not ill
My part ! And if by night, unseen, I weep,
Scourging my spirit down the track of the years,
Hating the name of Mary, as she said;
Yet comes and goes my hour, and comes again,
My hour, when I bear England in my breast
As God Almighty bears His universe,
England moves in me, I for England speak,
As I speak now. It is not the shut door.
But I, but England, holds you prisoner.

SHAKESPEARE. But to what service, England, and what
end?

ELIZABETH. I send my ships where never ships have
sailed,
To break the barriers and make wide the ways
For the after world.

Send you your ships to the hidden lands of the soul,
To break the barriers and make plain the ways
Between man and man. Why else were we two
born?

SHAKESPEARE. What's the worth of a play?

ELIZABETH. My ships are not so great
And ride not like firm islands of dry land
As Philip's do; yet these my cockle-boats
Have used the vast world as a village pound,
And fished for treasure above the planets' bed
In the drowned palaces where, water-bleached,
Atlantis gleams as gleams the skull-white moon,
Rolled in the overwhelming tides of time
Hither and down the beaches of the sky.
Send out your thoughts as I send out my men,
To earn a world for England !—paying first
The toll of the pioneer. I do not cheat.
Here is the bill—reckon it ere you pay !

SHAKESPEARE. Have I not paid?

ELIZABETH. Nay, hourly, till you die.
I tell you, you shall toss upon your bed
Crying " Let me sleep ! " as men cry " Let me
live! "
And sleeping you shall still cry " Mary ! Mary I "
This will not pass. Think not the sun that wakes
The birds in England and the daisy-lawns,
Draws up the meadow fog like prayer to heaven,
And curls the smoke in cottage chimney stacks,
Shall once forget to wake you with a warm

And kissing breath ! The four walls shall repeat
The name upon your lips, and in your heart
The name, the one name, like a knife shall turn.
These are your dawns. 7 tell you, I who know,
Nor shall day spare you. All your prospering
years,

The tasteless honours for yourself—not her—
The envy in men's voices, (if they knew
The beggar that they envied!) all this shall stab,
Stab, stab, and stab again. And little things
Shall hurt you so : stray words in books you read,
And jests of strangers never meant to hurt
you:

The lovers in the shadow of your fence,
Their faces hid, shall thrust a spare hand out,
The other held, to stab you as you pass :
And oh, the cry of children when they play!
You shall put grief in irons and lock it up,
And at the door set laughter for a guard,
Yet dance through life on knives and never rest,
While England knows you for a lucky man.
These are your days. I tell you, I, a queen,
Ruling myself and half a world. I know
What fate is laid upon you. Carry it!
Or, if you choose, flinch, weaken, and fall down,
Lie flat and howl, and let the ones that love you
(Not burdened less) half carry it and you!

Will you do that ? Proud man, will you do that ?

SHAKESPEARE. Because you are all woman——

ELIZABETH. Have you seen it ?

None other sees.

SHAKESPEARE. —and not as you're the Queen,
I'll let you be the tongue to my own soul,
Yet not for long I'll bear it.

ELIZABETH. To each his angel

For good or ill.

Women to a man, the man to a woman ever
Mated or fated. I am this fate to you,
As to me once a fallen star you knew not.
It's long ago. You should have known the man,
He was the glory of the English night,
Its red star in decline. For see what came—
His fires were earthy and he choked himself
In his own ash. Not good but goodly was he,
A natural prince of the world: and he had been
one

Had he been other, or I blind, or—Mary.

Lucifer ! Lucifer ! He loved me not,

But would have used me. Well—he used me not.
He died. I loved him. This between us two.

Bury it deep!

SHAKESPEARE. Deap as my sorrow lies.

But, Queen, what comath after ?

ELIZABETH. Work.

SHAKESPEARE. And after ?

ELIZABETH. Sleep comes for me.

SHAKESPEARE. And after ?

ELIZABETH. Sleep for you.

SHAKESPEARE, And after ?

ELIZABETH. Nothing. Only the blessed sleep

SHAKESPEARE. And so ends all ?

ELIZABETH. And so all ends.

SHAKESPEARE. Love ends ?

ELIZABETH. And so love ends.

SHAKESPEARE. I have a word to say.

Give me this crown and reach the sceptre here 1

The end's not yet, but yet the end is mine;

For I know what I am and what I do

At last! Give me my pen, ere the spark dies

That lights me ! And now leave me !

He turns to the table and his work.

ELIZABETH [*loudly*]. Open the door I

SHAKESPEARE. Sesame, sesame! A word to say——

*The door is flung open and the long passage
is seen.*

O darkness, did she pass between your walls,

And left no picture on the empty air,

No echo of her step that waits for mine

To wake it in a message ? What do I here ?

" A word to say " ! There's nothing left but
words.

*ELIZABETH has descended from her throne
and crossing the room, pauses a moment beside
him.*

ELIZABETH. Is the harness heavy—heavy?

SHAKESPEARE. Heavy as lead.

Heavy as a heart.

ELIZABETH. It will not lighten.

SHAKESPEARE. Go! [*She goes out.*]

I had a word to say.

Oh, spark that burned but now——!

ANNE'S VOICE. It dips, it dies——

SHAKESPEARE. A night-light, fool, and not a star. I
grobe

Giddily in the dark. I shall grow old.

What is my sum? I have made seven plays,

Two poems and some sonnets. I have friends

So long as I write poems, sonnets, plays.

Earn then your loves, and as you like it—write!

Come, what's your will?

Three sets of lovers and a duke or two,

Courtiers and fool—We'll set it in a wood,

Half park, half orchard, like the woods at home.

See the house rustle, pit gape, boxes thrill,

As through the trees, boyishly, hand on hip,

Knee-deep in grass, zone-deep in margarets,

Comes to us—Mary!

ANNE'S VOICE. Under the apple-trees,

In the spring, in the long grass—Will!

SHAKESPEARE. Still the old shame

Hangs round my neck with withered arms and
chokes

Endeavour.

ANNE'S VOICE. Will 1

SHAKESPEARE. Is come 1

Sown, sprouted, scythed and garnered——

ANNE'S VOICE, I alone

Can give you comfort, for you reap my pain,

As I your loss—loss—loss——

SHAKESPEARE. Anne, was it thus ?

ANNE'S VOICE. No other way——

SHAKESPEARE. Such pain ?

ANNE'S VOICE. Such pain, such pain !

SHAKESPEARE. I did not know. O tortured thing,
remember,

I did not know—I did not know ! Forgive——

ANNE'S VOICE. Forgiving is forgetting—no, come back!

I love you. Oh, come back to me, come back !

SHAKESPEARE. I cannot.

ANNE'S VOICE. Oh, come back ! I love you so.

SHAKESPEARE. Be still, poor voice, be still!

ANNE'S VOICE. I love you so.

SHAKESPEARE. What is this love ?

What is this awful spirit and unknown,

That mates the suns and gives a bird his tune ?

What is this stirring at the roots of the world ?

What is this secret child that leaps in the womb

Of life ? What is this wind, whence does it blow,

And why ? And falls upon us like the flame

Of Pentecost, haphazard. What is this dire

And holy ghost that will not let us two

For no prayers' sake nor good deeds' sake nor
pain

Nor pity, have peace, and live at ease, and die
As the leaves die ?

ANNE'S VOICE. I know not. All I know
Is that I love you,

SHAKESPEARE. But I know, having learned—
This I believe because I know, I know,
Being in hell, paying the price, alone,
Licked in the flame unspeakable and torn
By devils, as in the old tales that are true—
All true, the fires, the red-hot branding irons,
The thirst, the laughter, and the filth of shame,
All true, O fellow men ! all true, all true—
Down through the circles, like a mangled rat
A hawk lets fall from the far towers of the sky,
Down through the wakeful aeons of the night,
Into the Pit of misery they call
Bottomless, falling—I believe and know
That the Pit's bottom is the lap of God,
And God is love.

ANNE'S VOICE. Is love, is love——

SHAKESPEARE. I know.
And knowing I will live my dark days out
And wait for His own evening to give light.
And though I may not fill the mouth I love,
Yet will I sow and reap and bind my sheaves,
Glean, garner, mill my corn, and bake, and cast
My bread upon the waters of the age.
This will I do for love's sake, lest God's eyes,
That are the Judgment, ask her man of her

One day, and she be shamed—as I am shamed
Ever, in my heart, by a voice witnessing
Against me that I knew not love.

PAGE [*entering with lights*]. The Queen, sir,
Has sent you candles, now the sun is down,
That you may see to work.

SHAKESPEARE. I thank the Queen.
Tell her the work goes well!

He sits down at the tdbk.

one, scene one,

Oliver's house. It *shall* go well. I have
A strength that comes I know not whence. It *shall*
Go well. And then 111 give the Roman tale
I heard at school—a tale of men, not women:
That easies all. But Antony goes on
To Egypt and a gipsy : leaves his pale wife
At home to scald her eyes out. Mary—Mary—
Will you not let me be ? It *shall* go well.
And after Antony some Twelfth Night trick
To please our gods and give my pregnancy
Its needed peace. How many months for Den-
mark?

And then? A whole man laughs, and so will I.
Oh, Smile behind the thunder, teach me laughter
And save my soul!—

The knock-about fat man, try him again 1
He'll take a month or less—candles are cheap,
Cheaper than sleep these dreaming nights. That
done.

I'll sink another shaft in Holinshed—
 Marlowe, your diamonds ! your diamonds I
 The king and his three daughters—he's been
 shaped

Already. Truel But rough-cut only. Wait I
 Give me that giant cluster in my hand
 To cut anew, in its own midnight set,
 It shall outshine Orion ! Afterwards,
 A fairy tale maybe, and after that—
 And after that—and after—after ? God 1

The years before me ! And no Mary ! Mary——

ANNE'S VOICE. When her lost face——

SHAKESPEARE. It shall, it shall go well.

ANNE'S VOICE. —stares from the page you toil upon,
 thus, thus,

In a glass of tears——

SHAKESPEARE. They scald, they blind my view,
 No comfort anywhere.

ANNE'S VOICE. I love you so.

SHAKESPEARE. The work, the work remains.

ANNE'S VOICE. But when you're old
 For work too old, or pity, love or hate,
 For anything but peace, and in your hand
 Lies the crowned life victorious at last——

SHAKESPEARE. Like the crowned Indian fruit, the
 voyage home

Rots while it gilds, not worth the tasting——

ANNE'S VOICE. Then,
 Remember me 1 Then, then, when all your need

Is hands to serve you and a breast to die on.
Come back to me !

SHAKESPEARE. God knows—some day ?

ANNE'S VOICE. I wait.

As he stoops over his work again

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

January, 1920—April, 1921

*The "Dearly beloved
of Benjamin cobb*

A TALE

IT was a shock to see a clerical figure turning, with the air of an owner, into my old home. I rounded on the house-agent's clerk, a friendly enough creature, but new since my day.

"Does he live there? Why doesn't he live in the Rectory?"

"This is the Rectory—oh, you mean the old Rectory. Nobody lives there now—too near the churchyard."

"Do for me? I only want a place for week-ends."

"See it if you like, of course!" He turned resignedly up the road. "Not my place to crab it; but nobody's lived there these twenty years. Old Cobb was the last."

"Cobb? Little Mr. Cobb?"

"Ah, you lived here once, of course! Know him?"

"A little. I was only a boy. I was never inside the house."

"Nor anyone else by all accounts. Charer, the reverend was, eh?"

I nodded, but half hearing; for we had struck across the churchyard and I was puzzling over the altered look of the place. Yet the square of sky was still set like a turquoise in the belfry, the yew tree still held out propped arms, and the daisied hay of summer was undulating over the graves. But the oaks? now I had it! The oaks still stood in a row, but a row without purpose; for the hedge they had sentinelled was gone and behind them extended a raw track of white crosses and dying wreaths.

"Of course!" I decided aloud. "It's the field! They've taken in the Rectory field!"

"They'll take in the Rectory soon." He flung open the door in the high stone wall like a jailer unlocking a prison, and laughed. "Do for you, eh? It's empty."

"Swept and garnished/" said I, and stared.

There it stood, just as it stood in my memory, the one unfriendly house in that friendly land. With its sickly stucco, with its two sockets of blackness where the glass of the upper windows had been broken or removed, with its pinched and thrust-out porch like a fretful mouth, it still had its remembered appearance of a wicked human face. A piece of cloud skimming the blue overhead was reflected for the instant of its passing in a jag of pane, and it was as if an eyeball had rolled suspiciously in our direction. The grimy laurels still hedged its basements, the lean fir tree, always dying yet never dead, still scrabbled with spindly fingers on the creeperless north wall. The stringy rose-bush still bunted against the dining-room window, but its flowers were rotting under their caps of discoloured outer petals and its leaves without gloss were so wrinkled and sapless that you'd think the very blights must starve. The surrounding garden was a mere rubbish heap. It had been neat enough once: little Mr. Cobb was his own gardener, and there had been a bed or two and, every spring, bean-poles and taut string and a spatter of hopeful green; but I could see now that, even had the pence been less pitifully sparse, nothing could have fruited in such a place. "Cut down the trees!" faintly across the years I could hear my mother's indignant voice; but the wife of little Mr. Cobb would not have even a dead twig broken from its branch. She had vouchsafed, in the early days of her marriage, with a snap of her fine eyes and a toss of her

handsome head, that "she liked her privacy, thank you! *She* wasn't public property whatever her husband might be!" and with that snap and toss had shut yet another door upon herself for the rest of her life. The 'eighties were not tolerant of bad manners in one they considered an inferior, and all the world knew that little Mr. Cobb had married beneath him. And so the weeded path* grew velvety with damp and the flowers were choked by the rank droppings from the all-encircling limes, and the Rectory remained fenced in from air and sunlight and the neighbours' eyes till it was as quiet there and hopeless as hell on Hallow-e'en.

I said:

"It's a marvel they stood it so long. Where are they living now, d'you know?"

"Living? They're dead," said the house-agent. "Dead years ago. Their grave's just over the wall." He swished a way for himself through the nettles to the lo* rampart that overlooked the churchyard, saying as he did so, with a nod at the house behind us, "They're pulling it down in the spring. Good thing too. D'you know you couldn't get a man or woman or child to come through this gate after dark? Queer couple! They say she beat him."

"They say—they say!" I cried impatiently.

"Oh, well, some say it was him, of course—that he kept her locked up. They say if you'd come here, in the dark you know, that you'd see enough through those windows——"

"They sleep quiet, I should think," I said, leaning over to read the plain headstone lying almost under my feet. It ran:

"Sacred to the memory of
BENJAMIN COBB,
for 25 years shepherd of this parish.
He entered into rest
on February zyth, 1903.
Also of
EILEEN,
his dearly beloved wife,
who died a week later.*

And then in small letters half hidden by the daisies:

"Judge not!"

"Who had the sense to put that up?" I asked curiously.

"Sense? I don't know about sense. Old Miss Sheperley paid for it."

"The schoolmistress? Is she alive still?"

"Alive and kicking. Retired, of course. Lets lodgings. Now she might put you up for the time being. There's a place I'd like to show you to-morrow—that is, if you'll go to the hundred."

"A hundred's my limit. So she put it up, did she?"

"She did. Her own expense too. Would do it. 'Penance' was the word she used, they tell me."

"Penance? She was always good friends with the Rector?"

"Ah, but who wasn't, so far as I make out? They say when the end came——"

But at that I broke in with a promise to look over the house at a hundred the next day, and so got rid of him. I didn't want to hear of little Mr. Cobb's end from that hearsay stranger.

Long forgotten, gallant little Mr. Cobb! All through the flowery walk he danced ahead of me, a black-frocked shadow with arms and legs and coat-tails all at work to hurry him. He was always in a hurry, was little Mr. Cobb, always so eager to get his day's work done, always so joyous in his return to his uncertain welcome; yet always (looking back, that fact stood out very clearly) so determined that not a jot of that work should be ill done, unfitted for it as he must have known himself to be. A successful clergyman must, I suppose, have something of the man or in him and something of the woman, and little Mr. Cobb was pure masculine, stubborn, truthful, precise; yet if he were no Whitcfield, at least his parish was properly patrolled and his church as well kept as his surplice. The village vowed that he had but one and that he washed it himself. "The more credit to him!" said my mother hotly when this reached her; for it was always spotless. When he trotted about the altar in it, zealous and unsmiling, he always reminded me of good dog Toby in a Punch-and-Judy show enduring his ruff and standing soberly on his head. Sometimes indeed we wished that he were a little less thorough: from "When the wicked man" to "Remain with you always" he spared us nothing: we progressed every Sunday through prayers, psalms, Litany, Communion, and three full-length hymns, though characteristically he took them at the briskest of paces and his sermons were short and pithy. Only two or three times a year was the programme varied. When little Mr. Cobb sailed up the nave, his ceremonial bearing not even marred by those pouncing glances that detected whisperers or empty seats, when the reverend gallopade of the service slowed to a wedding march tempo and, final proof, the Te Deum gave place to

the interminable Benedicite, we children would nod at each other and, daring nurse, turn in our seats to stare; for "O all ye works of the Lord!" was a certain sign that the legendary Mrs. Cobb was in the Rectory pew. Why the Benedicite should appeal to him on such occasions we did not guess: I suppose its triumphant echoes have little meaning to childish ears; but to me it is plain enough now. Little Mr. Cobb was spreading his feathers in the eyes of his mate, eagerly proving that he could hold his congregation, that he could be master in his own church. Little Mr. Cobb was showing off to his dearly beloved.

"The dearly beloved!" Ever since I can remember it was the parish's nickname for the Rector's wife. Provoked by some ill-considered loyalty of his, born between a sneer and a smile at some tea-table gathering, it was kept alive, long after the irritation had been forgotten, by his own habit of never referring to her without some tender qualification:

"My dear wife is inclined to think——"

"As my beloved wife always feels——"

and once, on that dreadful night when he had come to us with head held very straight and a painful flush on his leathery cheek, to beg a sofa to sleep on, it had been:

"My dear wife, as you know, suffers greatly in health. At such times, Eileen—my wife, that is—my dearly beloved wife—is not herself. At such times——" and so broke off with a twitching lip. What between the little man's shame and pride, and chattering teeth, for, he was drenched to the skin, it took my father ten minutes to realize that the woman had locked him out of the house to spend the bitter March night as he could. He had not the keys of the church, he explained, or he would not have

troubled them—no, he would not go to bed—if he might sit by the fire till morning—he must be gone early, his wife would be wanting him then. And at that, confidentially, over a glass of port, sipped with judgment—"Nerves, my dear sir! It's her nerves! They exhaust her. They make her wretched."

He was so obviously distressed at the idea that anyone should sit up with him that my people in the end went off to bed, leaving him with his feet on the hob and an eiderdown tucked round him; and when, in the morning, my mother stole down before the servants were awake to make him a cup of tea, he looked so surprised and, decorous good man, so shocked, that she did not know whether to laugh or cry at him and was forced to call down my father. And then between them they sent him off with a good breakfast inside him to what he called his home.

Gallant little Mr. Cobb! Turning for a last look at the Rectory, I almost thought I saw him standing once more in the gaping door-hole, and with him my small self of long ago caught in the very of unlawful entry. I could almost hear his voice, quick and harsh, as if he, not I, were the startled one:

"Shouldn't play here, you know! No place for children. Where's your mother?"

I pointed dumbly to a corner of the bloomy hedge where mother and my cousins were sitting stringing cowslips, and then and there he marched me off to them, his hand still on my shoulder. My mother must have guessed that something was wrong, for she got up, scattering flowers and children, and came through the long grass to meet us.

"Why, Hughie——" she began quickly, but her eyes

were on little Mr. Cobb, and it was then that I first realized that grown-up people have a language of glances.

He gave me a friendly push towards her.

"Fve had a visitor. But I'm telling him, Mrs. James, my garden's no place to play in. Too damp, eh?" And then as I jogged off to join the others I heard a hurried undertone—"Mustn't let him come, my dear! Not a place for children! No, no, no! Not a place for children!"

Not a place for children indeed, I thought, as I recalled my one other glimpse of that forbidden ground. I must have been older, for I was sent, I think, to leave a note, and I remember the more sophisticated thrill with which I started out, my curiosity so whetted by the recollection of all the fragments of evil gossip I had heard that my sister's "I dare you to go in; I dare you to wait for an answer; I dare you to!" was scarcely needed. Indeed I reached the laurels by the bow window before my courage failed me and, at a movement within, I dived into the bushes to watch and get my breath before attempting the final venture of the doorstep and the knocker.

They were both at home. He was sitting at his desk, writing his sermon I imagine, for it was a Saturday, and she was trimming a hat with the invariable pink roses. I remember that particularly because I thought to myself, What did she want a hat for when she never went out? And when she had finished she put it down and said something. I saw her lips shaping the words that I could not hear. He turned to her and smiled. He must have said that it was pretty, for she smiled back at him and put it on her head and began twisting the bows about as if she were pleased. At that, with such a brightening eye,

he said something again, quickly, jerking his head towards the church. But she frowned and shook her head, and as he went on talking with pleasant urgent gestures, flung *off* the hat so roughly that it tumbled from the sofa to the floor, and then, as he stooped for it, laughed at him, a hateful loud laugh that I could hear through the shut window. I watched him straighten himself, put down the hat so carefully and look at her with a shutting *off* of the brightness of his face that touched me. It was like the shutting off of sunlight on a gleamy day of spring. I knew the look so well, and with a stricken conscience, for it was just the way my own mother looked at me when I wouldn't be good. I felt horribly ashamed for her. He spoke a word: it must have been her name; but she merely looked him over insolently and, turning, flounced out of the room. She left the door wide behind her, and I was so busy peering down the passage, so busy storing impressions to tell the others, that I forgot little Mr. Cobb. He must have sat himself down to his writing at once, for he was hard at work when his wife returned, still with that leaden look on her face and in her hands a tray of dinner-things. She swept the tablecloth into a corner and flung on another, carelessly, so that one end dipped to the floor. Even through the closed window I could hear the maddening clatter with which she dumped the tray upon the side-board and tossed the crockery and utei sils into place. She was like an ill-broken mare we had once possessed and sold again after it had nearly killed my father. I watched her eye glint at her husband after each provocation just as Lady's used to do, and her mouth take an uglier line because he would not heed. For he wrote on-drawing aside his chair to give her passage when she

pushed rudely by him, and catching at his papers without a word when a swing of her hips in passing would have whirled them to the floor. His expression did not change: he still worried patiently and funnily at his pen like a terrier worrying at a stick; but something in the stoop of his shoulders made me feel indignant. She had the meal ready at last, and told him so with one movement of the lips; and so slouched to her place and sat down, digging her chin into her fist and letting her other hand and arm sprawl out across the table so that a glass tipped and the ugly bone spoon was flicked out of the cellar in a spray of salt.

For a moment the room was perfectly still, with the two souls in it sitting like statues, she at the table and he at his shabby desk. Then she flung at him, over her shoulder, "Am I to wait all day?"—one read the words on her pressed lips, her flattened eyelids, her nostrils twitching like a cat's tail. He rose at that, rubbing his hands, with a touch of apology in his cheerful smile, a touch too much of sprightliness in his step, and sat down at the end of the table with his back to me. He bowed his head for grace, picked up the carving knife and fork and set them down again: then ensued once more one of their odd pauses, and I saw his hand slip out and close over hers. But at that she started up like a mad creature, caught up the heavy cover in front of her and flung it straight at him. It missed him by an inch and crashed through the window into the bushes at my feet. I was too frightened to move. I could hear now as well as see, and the torrent of words that poured from her lips dazed me—words that had no meaning, words that stuck in one's mind like one's first sight of blood, or beastliness, or death.

He let her talk, with no more in the pauses of her

passion than a low "Eileen! Eileen!" and suddenly it was over, as a thunderstorm is over, and she dropped limp and exhausted in her chair. Then to my amazement he went swiftly to her (I wondered awesomely what he was going to do to her), and she caught at him with both her hands, as if she were dragging herself out of a pit and, with a little gasping cry, down went her head on his shoulder and her eyes closed. In an instant he had his arms round her and half lifted, half dragged her to the horsehair sofa. I thought, I remember, that he looked very funny dragging that big woman about. I heard her say:

"Don't go!" And then—"Benjy, I didn't mean——"

He shook up a pillow and pulled a rug over her, a bright patchwork thing that distred my attention for a moment; for our nurse used to make patchwork quilts, and it was the fashion among us children to collect scraps of silk for her. When I had time for those strange ors in my play, little Mr. Cobb was busy with a sandwich and a plate and was urging her to eat and drink. But she wouldn't touch it. She said—I could hear her clearly enough now:

"Leave me alone! Oh, can't you leave me alone!" and in the same breath: "Don't go!"

He was murmuring in a distressed voice something about an appointment in the village and:

"You know, my dear, that's why we had lunch so early."

She gave him a gleaming look and said again:

"Don't go!"

But he only said with mild finality:

"My dear, you know I must!" and hunted forth his shovel hat from a cupboard in the wall. I can see now, as

my childish eyes could not see, how like his little speech was to his little self. I don't suppose that ever in his life it had occurred to him that it was possible to omit a duty even for her sake: maybe that f was at the root of their misery.

She flounced back on to the sofa with:

"You never do anything to please me!" And at his cheerful:

"Why, it's only to the schools, my dear! I'll be back before you know I'm gone!" she would give him no answering smile. She said:

"I don't care if you never come back!" and as he hesitated in the doorway fumbling with his Prayer-books, looking at her kindly, as if he hoped even then for another sort of speeding, she cried:

"Oh, do *go* if you're going!"

At that he went. I waited till he should have left the garden to make my escape. He came out by the front door and stood a moment on the ill-kept broken steps that betrayed his poverty, and I heard him say to himself very softly, "My poor girl! My poor girl!" and sigh. Then he jammed the shovel hat firmly down upon his head and jaunted off brisk as ever. I thought to myself that it was queer to call a lady older than mother a girl.

Miss Shepperley still lived opposite her schools, but the road there seemed much shorter than once it had been, and so I arrived as, it amused me to realize, I had always done, punctually at tea-time. Miss Shepperley didn't know me at first; but when she did we were very glad to see each other. In ten minutes I was in the same horsehair armchair that I used to sit in, the same service with the turquoise band round the edges was set out on

the table between us, and the same tea-cosy with the hand-painted eschscholtzias that had been my sister's handiwork was covering the same brown teapot with the chipped knob; while from over the road the shrill voices of the afternoon singing class uplifted in "John Peel" and "Early one morning" still floated in at the open window as they used to do. Indeed there was only Miss Shepperley's front hair, very grey against the dark brown coils at the back (but it had been all brown when I knew her) to remind me that I was a young man of affairs and not an eight-year-old come to tea with Miss Shepperley for a treat.

We talked: I told her all that I had been doing, and she told me all that she had been doing in the last fifteen years; and I thought how far and fast I had run and how stock-still Miss Shepperley had been sitting. And yet I thought that stagnation suited her, for she had grown out of the masterless fifties into a kind old witch with all the beauty of an old woman and all the energy of a young one. I began to think the world of her again, just as I used to do; and she knew it and twinkled. Within an hour she had heard all about my novel and my editor and my engagement and the rest of my hopes and fears. And then we fell to inquiries after one old friend and another till at last:

"So little Mr. Cobb is dead," I said. "I'm sorry."

"For him?" she said quickly. "You needn't be!"

"I suppose not. But I liked him. And the woman died also, I hear—see rather."

"Ah, you've been in the churchyard," she said. And then, flushing, "I put that up."

"So I'm told. Why, Miss Shepperley?"

She smiled at me indulgently:

"What do you want to know for? The editor? Oh, my dear, you can tell the story if you like. Nobody would believe it, so it's quite safe. Besides, there isn't one."

"There must have been. What was it, Miss Shepperley? Drink? Drugs? What was the matter with her?"

She blinked at me; and suddenly I realized that in Miss Shepperley's eyes I was not much older than the small boy who used to take tea with her, in spite of my editor and my engagement. She said:

"Drink—drugs—we don't run to that sort of thing here. You have your cinemas in London. But in a village, you know, the passions themselves are enough of a stimulant."

I blurted out, suddenly seeing her with new eyes:

"You didn't live here always?"

She smiled at me.

"No, my dear!"

And that is as much as I ever heard of Miss Shepperley's life story. We sat silent. I didn't know, nor do I yet, whether I had been snubbed or confided in. Presently I said uncertainly:

"The passions?"

"Love, hate, jealousy, grief. And pity, my dear. Pity can be a passion. Yes, you had 'em all in full flower up at the Rectory—passion-flowers—the only flowers that garden ever fruited."

"What fruit?"

"Dust and ashes, They died, my dear. They point a moral and adorn a tale. D'you want to tell it?"

"Hear it, anyway."

She said thoughtfully:

"You could call it *The Lovers⁹ Tale*, if it weren't used already."

I looked at her to see if she was joking. But she was quite grave. I said:

"Lovers? Miss Shepperley, she made his life a hell. Even I know that from the scraps I can remember."

"But she loved him."

"I've seen them together."

"She loved him."

"I'll never believe it."

"I wouldn't once. And so it's on my conscience that I helped to kill her. And yet not much on my conscience, for you may be sure that wherever she is now, heaven or hell, he'll be looking after her."

"I'll admit that he loved her, though even that's hardly believable——"

"She was young once, you know!" said Miss Shepperley.

"Well, of course!" I said uncertainly.

"Ah, but I mean *young*. She had the gifts of youth. A fretful mouth even then, and coarse hands, but—she would have charms, I think, for a little man like him. At twenty-five you'd have called her—a fruitful goddess: that is if she hadn't pinched herself so insanely. But she was as vain as a peacock: that began the trouble. She arrived here, you know—they were a honeymoon couple—feathered and bustled, all silk and cheap lace, and he with a hundred and fifty a year! It put people's backs up, knowing what they knew." And then, answering the lift of my eyebrows—"Oh, she had caught him in his college days—one of the townspeople. He was a catch, you know—double first and so on. But for his marriage he might have done anything. All sorts of shining lights used to come down to see him—at first—till she drove them away."

"But why? Why?"

"My dear, she was jealous of the stones he walked on, of the weeds he pulled out of the garden. D'you know, I think it pleased him. He had thrown over all his prospects to marry her, and so that attitude of hers rewarded him, I suppose, at the start. The novelty, do you think? He was a learned schoolboy and she went to his head, I imagine, like bad champagne. He was such a prig, you know, when they first came here."

"Little Mr. Cobb?"

"You wouldn't think so, would you? Kind little man. But he was! Heavens, how intellectual his sermons were! A real treat if you had the taste—but what's the use of brilliance in a village? What with his priggishness and her vulgarity you can understand that they weren't liked. He weathered it: he was a quick learner; but she—never! She offended people right and left—made silly mistakes and wouldn't let herself be told. Always reminding one that she was a lady too, poor creature! We'd have put up with her, of course, if it had been only that she was underbred, but on the top of it all she had the temper of a fishwife, and when she lost it she didn't care what she said or did. In fact I don't believe she knew. I remember a scene once at a ladies' meeting, a penny reading committee, when every woman in the room got up and walked out of the house except me. I was official in a sense, or I'd have gone too. But believe me, when they were gone she turned round to me (remember she'd been impossible, simply impossible) and said in a rueful, helpless way that disarmed me, in spite of myself:

" 'Aren't they beasts? Oh, aren't they? You can't say a thing to please them!'

"(One didn't say beast in those days, you know! It was

a dreadful word.) And then:

" 'Oh, and I took such pains with the tea!'

"So she had, my dear! It was the sort of tea that would have been ostentatious at the Big House, and they with that pittance and what he earned from his learned societies! My eyes ran over the sugared cakes and the satin doilies, and I suppose she saw what I thought, for she came up to me and planted herself in that dreadful attitude of hers, hands on hips like a principal boy—oh, I can see her now, and the way it showed off her figure—and said:

" 'Well, what's wrong with *that*? And then—'You can get out too if you look at me like that.'

"But her lip was trembling and I was sorry for her. She was just like an ignorant, ill-bred child."

"I keep my sympathy for him all the same!" said I.

"Why, yes—if it comes to that. D'you know, there was even at one time talk of pressure being brought on him to resign. It came to nothing in the end, I fancy, because the vestry were such cowards. No one, face to face with him, had the heart to give him the reason. But he was learning—oh, he was learning! I tell you he grew into what you knew in the first two years—and after that final flare-up he managed somehow to keep her under control. Indeed it grew easy, what with her declaring that she wouldn't receive so-and-so and the whole neighbourhood avoiding her. For a time she came to the official gatherings, concerts and mission work and so on, and then a child was born and died, and after that she might have been dead herself for all we saw of her. But tales still went the rounds. They had a servant at first, but they never kept one a month. The girls all said the same thing—a good mistress till she was crossed, and

then—a devil! They stuck to it that she was kind to them, that they'd like to stay, but they were afraid for their lives when she was in one of her fits/

"And of him? What did they say of him?"

"He chilled them, you know. He never could be hail-fellow. But they all spoke well of him. But of her it was always, 'Ah, the pore dear! She's a fair terror, the pore dear!' as if they half admired her."

"But they didn't stay?"

"No. And between you and me, my dear, that's what I put his death down to. She took over the work of the house after a fashion; but she was a slap-dash useless creature: I've always said he was under-nourished. She fed him on boiled eggs and cheap sweets, I fancy, and so of course when the influenza came—no stamina! God forgive me for saying so, my dear, for he's capable of rising from his grave to contradict it. *He* never complained."

"Why on earth he ever married her——" I began.

"You'd never be such a fool, would you?" said Miss Shepperley. And then—"Oh, my dear, why do people marry? Body and soul—but the body has first say when one's young. Isn't it so? You're a young man and I'm a woman and an old one—but isn't it so?" And then, as I made her no answer—"No, no! It's what she saw in him that occupies me."

"It's pretty obvious, isn't it? You said yourself——"

"Yes, I said she was out to catch her man, and he was not the first by all accounts——"

"Oh, that sort!"

"I've never been sure. His friends were very loyal. There was never a hint, never the flicker of an eyelid. Too loyal—that was what made one suspicious. But if

she were—what we've thought her sometimes and whispered and said and shouted from the thatch (you know what a village is), does it say she didn't love him? Body and soul—but the soul might have had first say perhaps with her, for a change. Suppose now that he hadn't married her? He saved her from something: d'you think she didn't know it? But / say, didn't she save him too? Better to break your heart than shrivel it, my dear! I'm old-fashioned: I believe marriages are made in Heaven, even this one. At least he died with her hand in his. Dr. Davis told me that. What do you think his last words were?"

I said:

"It should have been, 'Dearly beloved!' "

"'Doctor, make her rest!' Davis said that finished him, and he's accustomed to queer scenes. They had been on their feet for pretty well a fortnight, you know, with half the village paralyzed by the influenza scare, and they'd no sooner got it under than the Rector dropped where he stood. They sent for her—the first time she'd been in a neighbour's house for years—but she shocked everyone. She didn't seem to consider how ill he was: to move him—to get him back to the Rectory—that was her whole concern. He was her husband and it was her place to decide, and there was a conspiracy against her, and so on—oh, dreadful! Davis was pretty rough with her at last, they tell me, but he couldn't forbid her the room because the Rector was asking for her. And so she sat there all through the night while he sank, quarrelling with Davis under her breath. But at dawn little Mr. Cobb began to pull at her hand, Davis said, and craned from his pillow till his lips touched it, and then, as I tell you, while Davis straightened him, 'Doctor,' he says,

'make her rest!' and with that drowzes and, after a while, dies. He was only fifty."

"Well?" I said at last softly.

"Well?" she returned. And then I saw that her mouth was unsteady and wished I had held my tongue. But she had herself well in hand, all but her mouth.

"It's not much to you, my dear," she said steadily, "but we—we were fond of him."

I said:

"So was I, I think, or he wouldn't have stuck in my mind so all these years. But that's only half the tombstone, Miss Shepperley?"

"Ah, poor soul, yes!" she said. "I'd forgoten her. We all forgot her. Such a funeral! All the village came. We were fond of him. And everyone saying it in whispers, you know, in a wondering way, as if it were a surprise to us. It was only afterwards that we thought of Mrs. Cobb. She hadn't come—that wasn't anything: women didn't till lately—but it got round that she'd been quite unpardonable to Mr. Davis and the Squire. She as good as told Doctor Davis that his treatment was responsible for the Rector's death, and then began to bargain with the Squire about moving and the fittings of the house—yes, before her husband was so much as buried—and there was a row royal with the undertaker's people. They said that the only thing she seemed to care about was her mourning. Lady Sarah, who had called with the Squire, offered to lend her clothes, knowing, of course, that there was no money; and I'm sure she offered it nicely; but no! She was all for ordering crapes and alpacas from the draper's, till old Brown went up to see her himself and told her bluntly that he would help her, and so would the rest of the vestry, for the Rector's sake, but that he

wouldn't give credit for fallals. He came back quite shaken, d'you know, and said that she'd screamed him out of the house. And after that nobody went near her for two or three days, and I can't say that I blame them. But on Saturday, a week from the day he died, I was in at Brown's, at the grocery counter, and while he was serving me he told me something that made me uncomfortable. He said that he'd had no orders from the Rectory since the day he went up, and that his boy had told him that morning that the milk-jugs hadn't been touched for two days. The boy had left them at the gate, and when Brown told him to go up to the front door, he said he was afraid to, because the garden was all over scarecrows. Brown said, quite rightly, that something ought to be done, but that he himself wouldn't go near her for a sovereign nor let his wife. He said, and I'm sure he believed, that she was possessed of a devil. It is a devil too, a temper like hers."

"So you went!" I told her.

She flushed.

"How did you know?"

"Old times," said I, smiling at her; but she only answered with her familiar, anxious frown:

"Oh, I know I meddle."

"Is that what you call it?" said I.

She put out her hand and touched mine.

"Nice boy!" said Miss Shepperley. And then—"But this bit of meddling wasn't so easy. It was years since I'd spoken to her. She'd taken a dislike to me because of the concerts. Mr. Cobb used to depend on me, you know, to run them, and she was unpleasant about it. I don't mind telling you. I'm too old to mind. But going up to the Rectory I thought to myself that it was rather good of

me to trouble. But there, it was for his sake I was meddling, not for hers. The boy was quite right: there were two jugs of milk by the steps, blue and thickened, with dust on the cream, and when I opened the door in the wall you never saw such a sight! The whole garden was strewn with black garments, spread on bushes, hung from twigs, flapping and bellying in the wind till the place looked like a picture I once saw of vultures on a battlefield. I thought she must have run mad, till I noticed the pools and trails of black water on the gravel and up the steps. Then I understood. It was her mourning, my dear. She had been dyeing all her clothes. Queer, isn't it, how trouble takes people! I could see her as I came up the path, sitting at the table in the dining-room, driving her machine till I thought she'd break it; but though the dining-room window was two yards from the porch and though I know she saw me, there was no answer when I knocked. But I wasn't going to be stopped when I'd got so far—dear knows I truly hoped to help her!—so I went straight in, down the passage and into the room—and found myself face to face with her as she sat between the table and the wall. I said:

" 'Forgive me—may I come in?'

"She didn't get up. She barely lifted her head, and I began to think that she wasn't going to speak at all and to wonder what I should do next. But after a minute she said:

" 'What do you want here—now?'

"I said:

" 'I thought I might be of some use to you, Mrs. Cobb/

" 'She went on turning the handle and guiding the stuff past the needle as she said, without a look at me:

" 'A pity you didn't come sooner!*

"I said, holding on to my temper:

" 'One is diffident about intruding.'

" 'Yes,' she said, 'you've been diffident about intruding for twenty years, the lot of you! But you think you can come and go as you please, I suppose, now my husband has left me in the lurch.' Yes, she said that. Imagine it! I was so shocked that I could only get out a:

" 'Mrs. Cobb!'

" 'Well!' she said, stooping her face to the cloth and biting off a thread, 'hasn't he left me in the lurch?' And then—'What call had he to go grubbing round in those muck-heaps they call cottages?'

"I said, trying to be gentle, trying my hardest, my dear:

" 'Mrs. Cobb, don't you realize——?'

"She flung up her head.

" 'I realize that he thought more of his tin-pot parish than of his wife. D'you think he'd listen to me when I begged him to stay at home—begged him and prayed him? Not he! It's as if he'd died to spite me.'

"Well, at that, my dear, I lost my temper completely, utterly, as I've never in my life done before or since. I said:

" 'To please you, I should think!'

"At that she dropped her work and got to her feet with a:

" 'What the hell d'you mean?' speaking in a raucous street voice, the way drunken women speak: her face was flaming. But I didn't care. I said:

" 'You know the hell I mean——' and with that I launched out. I told her what we thought of her and him. I told her how we'd watched them all these years

and how we'd grown to like and pity him, and in the end been glad to hear that he was dead and free of his bitter troubles. I told her in so many words that if ever a woman had ruined a man's life then she had ruined his, with her selfishness and her cruelty and her crazy rages. And that if the epidemic had been his way of release, before God and in the sight of the congregation he was none the less a murdered man and that she had killed him.

"Then I stopped; and for a minute we stared at each other without a word. I was panting, and so was she, and her face had gone a queer mottled colour, patches of red on dead white, and her mouth was half open. She said at last quite quietly, like a lady, not like a fishwife (it was a side of her I'd never dreamed of):

" 'You must be mad!'

"I said:

" 'Must I, Mrs. Cobb? Then we're all mad in this village, for I'm saying what we all think.'

"She looked down at her work thoughtfully as if it were something that she'd never seen before, and then back again at me with just the same look, and then she said, stammering a little:

" 'But—but I loved him!'

"I laughed: not maliciously, but because I couldn't help it. I suppose I was rather near hysteria. It had shaken me to say what I'd said. But she went on quite gently:

" 'Why do you laugh? I loved him/ And then, with a sort of hastening of her speech in the quiet room, like a storm blowing up on a leaden day, 'I loved him. It's not true what you say. I tell you I loved him—I loved him/ And then—'Benjy, you *know!* Benjy, tell her! Benjy!'

She waited, as if for an answer, moving her hands to and fro as though she were feeling for a support; and when no answer came—I had no words, my dear—she suddenly fell back into her chair, bowed her head in her hands and began to cry. No, and it wasn't hysterics either: it was grief finding outlet—grief: such grief as I had never dreamed of, and yet I've had my share, I dare say. It wasn't like a woman crying: it was like the crying of a lost soul on judgment day—after sentence. I didn't seem to see her, if you understand: it was like watching a storm of nature. I thought—don't laugh at me—I kept on thinking of the Flood when the rain came down, pulping and battering and beating the world flat, drowning it. It went through my head over and over again, in his voice, you know, little Mr. Cobb's dry Sunday voice, reading the lesson in church, 'The fountains of the great deep were broken up and the windows of heaven were opened.' I tell you it was the most terrifying and inhuman thing I've ever dreamed of, that bitter, wicked creature sitting there, crying, crying, crying, like a drowning world.

"I suppose I sat there an hour watching her, not daring to speak.

"She'd cry herself quiet, you know, after a time, and sit there twisting her hands. Then she'd lift her head at last with a listening air and her poor drowned eyes would wander weakly round the room and fix their gaze on something, the leather chair by the fire it was once, and another time the dyed breadths of stuff in front of her, and then her lip would begin to quiver and her eyes fill and the muscles of her throat strain, and you'd see her fighting and struggling with herself, her face all twisted up like a comic mask, and then—down would go her

head again, and the rain, the rain renew. I tell you, you could see it and hear it, with the forests snapping like matchwood, the cities swept away, the ridges of the world crumbling into mud beneath that downpour: and still the storms sweeping on in gusts of wind and lightning and water, wiping away all things human, blotting out the face of the world.

"Only it was not the world: it was a woman crying.

"And then she began to beat her head against the wall.

"You can imagine that I talked to her, put my arm round her, tried to bring her to some sort of reason. Oh, *my* anger was gone, gone in the first five minutes, overwhelmed, swept away. I tell you it seemed a pretty trivial thing, my anger. I was not even sorry: how can you be sorry for a grief like that? But I wanted her to restrain herself. Such grief wasn't decent, it wasn't livable with, it had got to be covered up. I said what I could that was comforting, but it was like trying to uphold a ruined cliff that is sliding into the sea. I didn't know what to do or what to say. And when she began to beat her forehead against the wall, yes, and when I went to her, threw me off as if I were a fly to be brushed away—she was a big strong woman—then I went for help. I thought she'd kill herself."

"Was she trying to, d'you suppose?"

"I don't think so. I think she was just easing her pain. She was always a violent creature, and so when she suffered, it was violently. But you can imagine that I couldn't let it go on. I had to have help. I went out, late as it was, running all the way, to find the district nurse, but she was away looking after a patient, and when I went on to the sexton's wife, she was out too. It must have been an hour before I found anyone, and when we

did get back to the Rectory Mrs. Cobb was gone. She was not in the room, not in the house.

"That was a night, I tell you. We went first to the doctor, and he knocked up Wills, the constable—you remember Wills? By that time half the village was up and out with lights and lanterns. Somebody, I don't know who, put the word about, and in a moment they were all whispering and then shouting, 'The ponds! Try the ponds!' You know the two ponds at the side of the road, opposite Oulson's down at Drake's Bottom."

"I know," I said. "They're deep/'

"And used, my dear, and used these hundred years! I could tell you tales! Well, we all set off helter-skelter the mile and a half down Drake's Hill, and a time we had when we got there! We knocked up Oulson's to get a drag, but he had nothing; and at last the men got out the netting he used for his cherry trees and made shift with that. It all took time, and what with the darkness and the wet—oh, we were a set of fools, and after an hour we knew it! Kettles and pots and pans we found, but we didn't find Mrs. Cobb. It was grey daylight when we got to the top of Drake's Hill again and back to the Rectory. It was just as we left it, and we were beginning to break up—for what were we to do?—we were soaked and tired out!—when one of a parcel of boys going off home across the churchyard let out a whoop and yell, and then they all came running back, crying out that they'd found her. Fools that we were—we'd never thought of the churchyard! As I said to Mary Wills, 'Call ourselves women! We might have known!'

"She was lying on her face on his grave, with the earth scattered all round her as if she'd been digging. Her poor hands were torn and her arms clayed up to the

elbow, and she was dead—dead and peaceful/

"Poor thing!" said I. And after a moment, "What was it—heart?"

"Exposure. Exhaustion too, I daresay, after all that crying; but they brought it in 'exposure.' She must have lain there all the time we were searching. There was frost on her dress and hair. Oh, you know, that cut me to the heart, to think how he must have grieved to hear her above him in the darkness, calling to him and getting no answer, getting no help, when he'd cherished her so. I suppose that was *his* punishment. 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols!' I heard him preach on that once—one of his sound sermons, all Greek derivations and the Athanasian Creed."

"Poor things!" I said again. And then—"At least, poor him! I can't get up much sympathy for her, can you?"

But Miss Shepperley did not answer, and lifting my eyes I saw that she was listening, not to me, but to the voices of the children, very loud and nasal all of a sudden in the hot little silent room:

"Ye gentlemen of England,
That live at home at ease,
How little do you think upon
The dangers of the seas!
Give ear unto the mariners——"

She turned with a gesture sharp as a cry. I never knew before that old eyes could hold such passion:

" 'The dangers of the seas,' my dear! That's it! 'The dangers of the seas!' Have we ever sailed to the gates of hell and heaven, and seen the face of Love? Oh, it may

come to you still. You're young. But I? What right have I to judge? Have I been where they've been? Grant that they wrecked themselves; but—think of the stars they steered by! To bury the bodies when they come ashore and commend the souls to the wind of God that drove 'em—that's our business. But not to judge them, my dear, never to judge them; for we've not been on their journey, and we don't understand."

October[^] 1922.

Adams Opera

A PLAY WITH MUSIC BY RICHARD ADDINSELL

The Play was first produced at the Old Vic Theatre, London, on December 3rd, 1928, by Andrew Leigh, for Lilian Baylis, with the following cast:—

ADAM	JOHN LAURIE
TOM FIDDLER	ERIC SPEAR
TOM TIDDLER	WILFRED BABBAGE
THE SLEEPING BEAUTY	ADELE DIXON
MOTHER EARTH	MARIE LOHR
A STOUT PARTY	CECILIA NONO
A THIN PARTY	AUDRIE HAYNES
A YOUNG PARTY	RITA DANIEL
DUMMY	ERIC ADENEY
SPEAKER	TORIN THATCHER
BIG BEN	MICHAEL WATTS
SOLOMON GRUNDY	HORACE SEQUEIRA
MRS. GRUNDY	ESME CHURCH
SIX COURT LADIES	IRIS BAKER, ROSAMUND BURNE, NORA DESMOND, BERYL EDE, MARY HULL, MABEL MITCHELL
NOBODY	ANDREW LEIGH
CENSOR	REYNER BARTON
PRESS	PETER TAYLOR-SMITH
WIRELESS	SIDNEY KNIGHT
RUMOUR	DAVID FERGUSON
THE MAN IN THE STREET	PERCY WALSH

THEY THE CASTLE SERVANTS

The Foreman	GODFREY KENTON
A Tinker	PERCY HARRIS
A Tailor	PHILIP FOTHERGILL
A Soldier	FRANK LEPLA
A Sailor	POWELL LLOYD
An Apothecary	RAPE THOMPSON
A Ploughboy	CHARLES SMYRK
A Gentleman	ERIC PHILLIPS
A Thief	H. STANLEY BEERS
A Lift-Boy	LESLIE YOUNG
A Flower Girl	LILIAN CLIFFORD
Two Housemaids	IVY RICHARD, GRACE BROCKETT

GINETTE SPANIER, EDITH COATES, MABEL ROBERTS, VERA GORING-THOMAS, MONICA BRETT, PEGGY HUNTER, MARY LAMB, ARABELLA TURTLE

The Music under the direction of LAWRENCE A. COLLINGWOOD

Designs for Scenery and Dresses by OWEN P. SMYTH

Dances arranged by NINETTE DE VALOIS

Stage Manager, MICHAEL WATTS

Assistant Stage Manager, ERIC SPEAR

THE PEOPLE OF THE PLAY

ADAM

TOM FIDDLER, <i>An amateur of the arts</i>	}	Twin brothers, Adam's travelling companions
TOM TIDDLER, <i>A man of business</i>		

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY *A Princess*

A STOUT PARTY

A THIN P A R T Y

A YOUNG PARTY

DUMMY

SPEAKER

BIG BEN

SOLOMON GRUNDY

MRS. GRUNDY

Six COURT LADIES

NOBODY

MOTHER EARTH

CENSOR

PRESS

W I R E L E S S

R R U N N E R S

DESIRE

THE MAN IN THE STREET

A LIFT-BOY

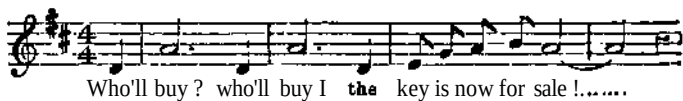
HAPPY FAMILIES

S H E E P T H

WOLVES

The SCENE throughout is the Great Hall of the Castle in the Briar Wood.

The TIME is Today. In a few years you will have to re-imagine some of the costumes: THEY and THE PARTIES and ADAM and his travelling companions will need new clothes: and TOM FIDDLER will certainly have designed a fresh interior. But the TIME will always be TODAY.



P R E F A C E

When the script of OPERA was submitted to those personal and professional friends whose approval I first seek, some liked it and some disliked it. Some objected that music and laughter were out of place in a tragedy: one trusted but disapproving critic, when I asked him—"Didn't you like even the funny bits?" replied austere—"What funny bits?" while some, and perhaps the greatest number, told me that a preliminary statement was necessary to their enjoyment or even to their satisfaction or y condemnation of the play itself. In the following pages, then, I have tried to comply with their wishes by giving as briefly as I can an account of how the play came to be written.

ADAM'S OPERA is an attempt to translate into terms of the theatre an impression of the period which directly succeeded that awakening which we call 'the war.' It is one thing to live through five years of crockery-smashing, followed by five years devoted to picking up the pieces: it is another thing to attempt to define the general impression made by those years upon the minds that endured them. If you could stand outside the world and watch the things that happened on it as you watch things happening on a stage, what sort of an would those ten years present? The mind shrinks back before the effort required even to attempt to decipher the pattern which must underlie that past apparent confusion of national wills and purposes. Yet it is necessary, for the sake of present sanity and future peace, that each one of us should

attempt to define the impression received, and, for individual profit, interpret the picture which memory presents. We have watched a tragedy: what is the moral that we have survived to comprehend?

The impression that the period made on the principals in the play—the political leaders, the international financiers, the army and navy chiefs, on, in a word, the initiated men and women, will obviously be a very different impression from that made upon the general public. Yet the impression produced upon such members of the general public as are articulate or semi-articulate, is nevertheless the impression which seems to me most worth studying; for, in the long run, it is the impression which will survive: it is the impression from which the later generations will in turn form their impression of our tragedy.

Now what is that impression? Words bubble up in the mind—nightmare, Babel, black fog, the *Bojg*. That is to say, we feel that the cheerful despair of the average man when he contemplates his own national present and future in relation to his past, is based on the fact that his mind harbours simultaneously contradictory notions concerning all three. He is in a muddle. Peace, he says to himself, is the pearl of great price. Let us strive for peace! and adds ruefully that in many ways he was better off when the war was on. He has discovered during the war that men and women, his brothers and his sisters, can be as gods walking: with shining eyes he points to Edith Cavell and the Unknown Soldier. Five minutes later he will tell you, without any sense of incongruity, that he has lived long enough in the world to know that all men and women have their price. According to his class and creed he believes that Imperialism or Communism, Free

Trade or Protection, is the panacea for human ills, while agreeing with you that there is no such thing as a panacea. He is quick to point out that love of money was at the root of the disasters that he deplotes, and turns his whole energies, when the peace bells ring, to renewing his material prosperity. He shouts "Progress!" he adjures his fellows to "Educate! Educate!" all the while privately discussing the probability that his nation's day is over. These various contradictions he justifies by referring to the picture remaining in his mind of existence during the last ten years: and he generally finishes by vowing, on the wounds of his dead, that the lesson has been learned and that the blind terror shall never again be allowed to wreck civilisation, adding as a rider that while human nature is human nature you cannot stop war, and that for his part he does not expect the present peace to last more than ten years.

How is such a mass-mind and its contradictory impressions to be put upon the stage? Only by isolating a typical and recurrent phase of its development, and dramatising that phase in terms of individual figures.

Now a phase which constantly recurs in the history of civilisation is the one epitomised in the Bible story—*'An angel went down at certain seasons into the pool and troubled the water.'* If there be such a thing as progress, that progress is achieved by the appearance at irregular intervals of human beings who, for the purposes of the argument, may be called 'saviours/ These human beings are born, as the phrase has it, 'ahead of their times/ They own thoughts, they conceive projects, they pursue ideals, they worship gods, incomprehensible to the society in which they live. Society is generally enchanted by the new ideas presented, and attempts to adopt them

with modifications that entirely change their nature. The experiment then fails and the saviour founders in a storm of hatred and ridicule; yet the idea, temporarily eclipsed, invariably survives and becomes the core of the succeeding civilisation. It is easy to trace the family history of such saviours throughout the centuries. Every nation has its own spiritual dynasty. But turning to our own day when ideas are quicker travellers and nationalism has declined, when a universal war has concentrated the world's intelligences on the same problem, it is more difficult to identify the typical figure of the crisis through which we have lately passed. Yet in order to find a centre to the impression I have been trying to dramatise it was necessary to use such a figure. I invented one and called it—ADAM.

The figure of ADAM first came alive in my mind when I was reading a volume of speeches by the late American ex-President Woodrow Wilson; though it is needless to add that there is not the faintest attempt in the following pages to draw a portrait or suggest an explanation of an enigmatic career. It is once again merely a matter of impression. I know no more than the average man or woman knows of politics and policies, of statecraft and finance. My opinion, like the opinion of most busy men and women concerned in their own affairs, is valueless because it is uninstructed. But an impression can be of value where an opinion is worthless, and my impression of the figure and effect of the late President has this value, that it is probably identical with that of many hundred thousand English newspaper readers.

Here was a man who in the beginning, to our eyes, was a negligible creature; for he made fine speeches that did not lead to action. He would not join us in a just war.

He was the man who had used a phrase which, shorn of all relation to its context, we remembered, the phrase—"Too proud to fight!" Here was a man who suddenly, phrase or no phrase, turned into an angel of light; for under him America did at last fight. Thereafter the impressions came ever quicker and faster. Speeches—speeches—uplift—American accents at Victoria Station—battles—victory—an arrival in London—an ecstatic press—a glittering smile—an open carriage—Paris—rumours—gossip—a peace treaty—fourteen points—the League of Nations—a curiously quiet, unheralded return to a far country where people lived who were like us and yet unlike us—an incomprehensible and dramatic change of situation—a figure repudiated by its own people—a flinging to the wolves of a great reputation—a retirement—an illness—death.

How does the average mind think to-day of Wilson? What is left in it beyond a vague impression of a saviour in a silk hat, who—up to a point—saved; but who, in the end, wasn't so much of a saviour after all? The phrase 'League of Nations' is added to that earlier phrase 'too proud to fight,' and the two phrases remain in the mind as the epitaph, whether admiring or depreciatory the average man hardly knows, of that vague figure which men called President Wilson, and once thought of as a very prince of peace.

This, at any rate, was my own impression until it was considerably altered by an encounter with a volume of President Wilson's speeches. Once again, the encounter did not begin to clarify impressions received as to the rights and wrongs of the drama in which Wilson played for a moment the star part. But it was impossible to read the speeches themselves without a human quickening of

the pulse; for here, policies or no policies, was pure tragedy. The tragedy lay in the fact that five years had elapsed since the words were spoken, and that within that short time almost every prophecy that the speaker had made had been falsified, every aspiration nullified, every item of his confession of faith contradicted by the object of his service and his worship. His country had, in every particular, gone counter to the assertions made on her behalf: whether with justification or not is beside the point. The impression remains that, genius or fool, saviour or charlatan, Wilson did offer to the world in which for a brief moment he was a principal figure, what he believed was a remedy for all its ills: and that his own country took, examined, hesitated, smiled, shook its head, and flung back his remedy in his face. Again I repeat that I am not attempting to discuss the rights and wrongs of the case. It is the situation that interests me: and the fact that the figure, towering for a moment above the fog of the last ten years, and after a moment reabsorbed into the fog, is a typical one. The figure, saviour or Aunt Sally according to your point of view, is, from the dramatist's point of view at any rate, the gathering point of the fog. The figure of Wilson does play for our own age and civilisation the central part in the world's oldest drama, the part of the rescuer who cannot rescue, the saviour who, if he saves, never lives to know it, but is swamped through the weaknesses of his own character and the incomplete comprehension of those whom he has set out to rescue.

With that identification of the centre in the impression I was striving to define, the ideal figure of the late President vanishes from this record. With gratitude and deep respect I turn from that figure and its tragedy to my

own imagined fairy-tale figure of ADAM, a prince.

For the play is nothing but a fairy-tale: an attempt to answer the question which every child asks—"What happens when the Sleeping Beauty wakes up?" and again—"What happens to the man who wakes her?"

I don't pretend, of course, that the play began life as the mere nursery piece that it has become. To begin with, it seemed that here was a theme requiring very different treatment. Here was an opportunity of tracing once more, and in terms of our own day, the recurring history of the divine half-caste, wrecked by the fact that he is a god when he should be a man, and a man when he most needs to be a god. Prometheus wedded to Pandora, the saint dreaming of Sophia, Orpheus, dumb, rent by the female mob—this was the theme. Yet Pandora must be dressed by Lucile, and the chosen friends of Prometheus be members of the Stock Exchange and the Day-after-Tomorrow Club. Finally the tale must be told in the grand manner, or at least in as grand a manner as I could manage.

Need I add that I couldn't manage it?

I have never before had to deal with a story which so obstinately took the bit between its teeth. The more necessary it seemed that the principals should roll out noble sentiments about the pursuit of the ideal and the future of the race, the more persistently the minor characters interrupted with flippancies. Even ADAM constantly substituted for the purple patches so carefully planned, absurd snatches of doggerel that, I recognised with dismay, were not even original, were mere echoes and misquotations of the operas of the nursery. I had planned that the play, which begins with the finding and waking of the Sleeping Beauty and the establishment upon

earth of the kingdom of heaven, that continues with the disillusionment and rebellion of ADAM'S friends and subjects who very naturally expect the kingdom to pay a good deal better than Wembley, should end in a trial scene. ADAM should have a good deal to say—ten pages or so—should say it nobly, eloquently; and his enemies, with an equal loftiness of bearing, an equal command of blank verse and a much greater display of common sense, should retort upon and overwhelm him. But when I began to work at the trial scene, the beauty and the dignity and the pathos of that tremendous event—the judging of a saviour by his saved—immediately and nightmarishly dwindled down into a thing ridiculous, into a mob of rowdy gutter children playing a counting-out game. So persistent was this resolution of the story, either to work itself out in terms of the nursery or not to allow itself to be written at all, that, after struggling with it for nearly two years, I gave in and let the thing go its own crazy way. I realised, in fact, that the impression I had so long been trying to translate, this impression of modern life as a gigantic mob with single figures raised for a moment on the shoulders of the mob, only to tumble back into the mob and be trampled bloodily into the earth beneath the feet of the mob, was essentially not a tragic but a comedic impression. All the suffering and the heroism, the beauty and the filth, the songs and the ravings of the last ten years were, if you could get far enough away from the whole thing, not so very different from one's impression of a nursery of children when nurse is having an afternoon out and the half-grown son-and-heir tries to quell the riot.

Once all this was clear in my mind the play worked itself out quickly enough, with vast loss of dignity, but

with all sorts of amusing technical compensations. The fairy tale of the Sleeping Beauty gave me the plot, and the nursery gods, alive with the beliefs of the centuries, obligingly presented themselves as *dramatis persona*, speaking modern cockney and Oxford English; so that I had but to flatten and burlesque such verse as it was necessary to retain, invent fresh doggerel when Mother Goose failed me and—call in the composer! His music, and his collaboration in the final modelling of the play solved the remaining problems, while the difficulty of putting on the stage political parties, bourgeoisie and unemployed, vanished on discovering that we had both been devotees of Beggar-my-Neighbour and Happy Families. Custom, Order and News now settled down happily as the GRUNDYS and their circle, and the rest followed suit. As for NOBODY, he is really a Cruikshank drawing that used to make me laugh. He turned up disconcertingly one morning when I least wanted ADAM and BEAUTY interrupted in their love scenes, and has since lurked in the shadow of a courtier's coat-tails or the folds of BEAUTY'S gown. He is a little wizened, mournful creature, half monkey, half cherub, in jester's clothes. You are meant to like him; though he is a far cry from his parents and originals, Chaos and Old Night. But all these creatures of the play have degenerated. Sophia, daughter of God, has turned into La Belle au Bois Dormant, a beautiful doll who only occasionally and momentarily nods her head and smiles: and ADAM'S travelling companions, the Black and the White Guardians, have become TOM FIDDLER, amateur of the arts, and TOM TIDDLER, the business man.

Only ADAM has been saved. He is, in spirit at least, as I have always seen him.

CLEMENCE DANE,

ADAM'S OPERA

I

The great chamber of the Sleeping Beauty's house is a saloon of the Louis XIV period. Large windows alternate with full length mirrors on the walls: handsome console tables and buhl bureaux stand beneath the gilded looking-glasses, and curtains obscure the stained glass windows. On the left of the room is a card table: on the right such a throne as the Sun-King himself would have approved had he ever deigned to exchange courtesies with the castle's owner. And this he may have done: he was known as a lover of beauty in his day: he and the mistress of the castle can well have been acquainted. Did he ever come unscathed through the briar-wood and stately up the castle steps into this very chamber? If he did, how shocked he would be to see its state when the curtain rises on it to-day. The paint is peeling off the great lift-like portals at either side of the stage, and a huge spider's web has swung itself across the folding doors that rule off the inner half of the room which is raised two steps above the ore-stage. The windows are observed with dirt., and the gilt of The mirrors and furniture is brown with age. The brilliant brocades^ stamped with the royal roses and lilies, have faded to a dim medley of sad pink^ old gold\ violet and brown, like a heap of last year's pot-pourri in a china bowl. On the walls hang familiar pictures—the Botticelli Venus^ Cosimo's Death of Procris^ Velasque^ Infanta, and half a dozen others which have inexplicably strayed here from their various museums. But there is no time to examine more closely the really astonishing

ADAM'S OPERA

collection of lovely things in the room, nor even to stare at the startling effect of the briar roses that have pushed in hungry rootlets through a cracked pane and gone rioting up a bell-rope in a flurry of pink and green; for', so soon as the eye gets accustomed to the fantastic, parti-coloured light, it will be realised that there are people in the room: and people are always more interesting than things.

A. lady and gentleman, the GRUNDYS no less, are seated on a low couch near the untenanted throne. GRUNDY is a pleasant purplish creature nor unlike the portraits of Samuel Pepys. He wears a full-bottomed coat, lace ruffles and knee-breeches. He has sagged in his chair and his silk-stockinged legs are crossed. A bandana handkerchief covers his bald head and his plump hands are folded upon the discarded periwig in his lap. His mouth is open and he is fast asleep. MRS. GRUNDY is a little too sour of countenance to make him an ideal wife. She is dressed Spanish fashion in the blacks of a duenna of the period, and her bearing is as starched as her cuffs and her wide-spreading collar. She, too, sleeps, genteelly, with occasional noddings and dignified recoveries of the head.

At the card table on the other side of the room sit three ladies and a lord, very slowly and sleepily playing cards. The eldest is A STOUT PARTY in crinoline and corkscrew curls: she wears a bunch of primroses. Her partner, A THIN PARTY, wears a bustle and severe bodice. The third, THE YOUNG PARTY, is an earnest young woman with spectacles, short hair, and an odd red cap on her head. She is stretching out a hand to DUMMY'S spread of cards. DUMMY himself is a well-preserved gentleman in coronet and robes: like his fellow players his eyes are closed. Behind his chair stands SPEAKER, a drowsy butler. CENSOR, a middle-aged schoolmaster in cap and gown, with a butterfly net and killing bottle in his hand, lies asleep on the steps

of the throne, with NOBODY, a small creature dressed as a jester crouched asleep beside him. By the lift-like closed doors on the left stands a LIFT-BOY, upright and snoring.

A strip of carpet runs from the footlights up the centre of the stage to the two steps and disappears under the folding doors. Huddled upon these steps lie the six COURT LADIES, asleep. They are the prettiest young creatures you can find in a month of Sundays. Their silken skirts billow out in hollyhock effects of primrose', blue, green, pink, lavender and orange, that delight the eye as much as their fashion—they are Watteau shepherdesses, every one of them—shocks our sense of fitness. Louis XIV furniture, Watteau shepherdesses, bustles and liberty caps—the Sleeping Beauty seems to have no sense of period whatever! We wonder what costume she herself has chosen to repose in. But there is no sign of her: and so our eyes return once more to the intriguing strip of disappearing carpet.

Silence reigns. There is a snore now and then, an occasional sigh as a sleeper shifts and settles, or the card party shuffle and cut: then silence once more: a silence of years, a silence so profound that, with a sense of relief, we hear very faintly, as one does sometimes in a threat re, the muffled voices from without of the everyday life of the streets. The voices grow louder. We recognise the intonations of a cockney NEWS-BOY up lifted in—

Noon edition! Noon edition! Startling developments! Noon edition!

Then it occurs to you that news-boys are no longer allowed to cry the news in London streets, and that therefore—Listen!

THE NEWS-BOY'S VOICE Noon edition! Safe arrival of the Prince! Terrific struggle with the bri—arsl Prince emerges in t! Safe arrival of the Prince! Noon edition!

There is a sound of distant knocking, and the great bell that hangs like a chandelier from the roof begins to sway.

THE VOICE [*nearer*] The Prince accompanied by suite swims moat! Swims moat! Suite in difficulties! Gallant rescue by Prince! 12.1 edition!

The bell begins to boom: the sleepers stir fretfully but do not wake: there is a sound of tramping steps that draws nearer.

THE VOICE [*close at hand, shrill and clear*] Prince arrives at Sleeping Beauty's castle! Prince rings bell! 12.2 edition! Prince effects entry!

A SECOND VOICE 12.3 edition! Prince mounts staircase! Interview with suite! 12.3 edition!

THE FIRST VOICE 12.4 edition! Prince knocks at door! Able assistance of suite! 12.4 edition! 12——

But by this time the bell has swelled to such intolerable clamour that the only other sound to be heard is the violent hammering upon the door to the right. It shakes under the blows till the whole room seems to quiver. Finally a lower pane splinters and falls forward and in the hole the head and shoulders of the news-boy, RUMOUR, appear, He wriggles himself and his bundle of papers into the room, shrieking as he does so—

RUMOUR 12.5 edition! 12.5 ! The Prince has battered down the door!

He dashes across the stage to the lift and shakes the LIFT-BOY impatiently by the shoulder, as WIRELESS, the second news-boy, emerges through the hole and bolts after him, crying—

WIRELESS Startling developments! Discovery of key by Prince! Key to the Castle of the Sleeping Beauty, discovered in Prince's pocket! Startling develop——

He trips heavily over the recumbent figure of THE CENSOR, just as the key is heard to turn heavily in the lock, and the door is flung open with a crash.

WIRELESS [*deliriously, as he picks himself up*] Prince arrives! Prince arrives! Safe arrival of Prince and party! 12.6 edition! Safe arrival of Prince in the Castle of the Sleeping Beauty! Safe arrival!

*He shoots in to the lift and disappears with RUMOUR and the LIFT-BOY as ADAM, followed by TOM FIDDLER and TOM TIDDLER, enters the chamber and stares about him. ADAM is a young t?2an not yet grown to his age,, which is twenty. His eyes are still lustrous as a child's: his nose is hooked and thin with wide nostrils: his lips are too small and close pressed for absolute beauty. It is a face that expresses strength of mind and will and purpose', but it has not yet the strength of experience. At the moment it is alive with excitement, with infectious laughing eagerness that shows itself in incessant gesture, in glances that ask childishly for companioning eagerness and excitement. This is a human creature born to adventures, and born, too, to embroil and entangle and entice all he meets into sharing his adventures. How he manages it his disciples can only explain by describing him as something quite different from what he is. Indeed the two bosom friends who accompany him are standing examples of his curious capacity for **attring** his own opposites. ADAM is*

dressed for the quest comfortably in country tweeds that show no trace of his recent adventures; but the briar wood and the moat have damped and draggled the travelling companions, each of whom is a dandy in his way. TOM FIDDLER, the younger twin, who is not unlike ADAM to look at, is studiously dressed. He wears the same sort of clothes as ADAM does, but he has thought about them more, much more. TOM TIDDLER, on the other hand, wears the clothes his city tailor chooses for him, and his tailor is fond of cheerful noises. He stands beside his poised and languid brother, jingling the money in the pockets of his grey trousers, while he considers the situation: and his coarse clever face shows a certain shame-faced amusement. He doesn't quite know what he is doing here, miles away from his office. It is the talk of treasure that has drawn him of course, he reminds himself apologetically, and there may be something after all in the story of a hidden castle and a Sleeping Beauty—look at Tut-an-khamen! If so, he is quite prepared to back ADAM, of whom, once more shame-facedly, he is fond. He will see that the whole thing is put on a sound business footing. A. company would be the thing, with himself as chairman. But what with his wet trouser-legs and torn coat, he has an uneasy conviction that ADAM, aided and abetted by TOM FIDDLER, has, and not for the first time either, led him hot foot into a mare's nest. However, he will wait and see: especially as his first glance round the great chamber convinces him that at any rate there will be pickings. He moistens a finger, thoughtfully, and rubs up the inlay of the piece of furniture nearest to him, as ADAM bursts into speech.

ADAM'S OPERA

ADAM At last! The castle in the heart of the briars! I dreamed it and it's true! A child's dream, a boy's dream, a ten year dream come true!

[Singing]

Oh, once upon a time,
Under the towered loose-strife as I lay
On summer's heart, I heard a willow wren
Calling a hidden mate—"Who'll come? I come!"
A gold bee scuffled in the meadowsweet,
While larks descending from the deep of noon
Sang of the Sleeping Beauty hidden away:
'Somewhere—somewhere!' the voices thronged
the air:
'Come soon!' 'I come!' Beauty is hidden away.

DESIRE *[a voice singing behind the scenes]* Hidden away!

ADAM 'Twas then I found the key!

TOM FIDDLER *[who has the Oxford manner]* Definitely I congratulate you, my dear! To find the Sleeping Beauty's castle here, in a faint little wood that we've passed every week-end for the last ten years, it's *too* atmospheric!

TOM TIDDLER *[his accent is of the city]* No-one else would have dreamed of there being a Tom Tiddler's ground hidden away here—I'll say that for you, Adam, old man!

ADAM *[speakin\$]* No-one? Every child in the land knew it.

The Sleeping Beauty pricked her finger-tip
And lies asleep now somewhere in the world,
Till one shall part the briars and break the spell,
And set her free with kisses—

TOM FIDDLER And what then?

ADAM What then? What then? We'll set the wrong
world right.

Together, she and I. Beauty and I!

TOM TIDDLER You go too fast, dear boy! All you've
found's a castle. That doesn't say there's a
Sleeping Beauty in it.

TOM FIDDLER [*superior*] You denied the castle originally.

TOM TIDDLER [*reasonably*] I did and I was wrong.
Haven't I admitted it like a man? But that
doesn't——

ADAM [*catching sight of the sleepers*] Look!

TOM TIDDLER Bless my soul!

TOM FIDDLER [*with raised eyebrows*] Your soul! Pooh!

ADAM [*breathless*] Asleep!

TOM TIDDLER Every damn one of them!

ADAM Look at the dust—thick as sleep.

TOM FIDDLER [*backing a little*] Adam, are they dead?

ADAM Asleep.

*He bends over one of the COURT LADIES and touches her
dress gently.*

TOM TIDDLER Drunk, more like. Tell me that anybody sober could sleep through the racket we made? Here! You!

He shakes GRUNDY by the shoulder.

GRUNDY *[thickly]* The answer is in the negative. *[He re/apses]*

TOM FIDDLER *[dropping into the throne]* Yes, I've had about enough. *[He yawns]*

ADAM *[calling aloud as he paces the room]* Beauty, where are you? Where shall I find you, Beauty?

DESIRE *[a voice, speaking\]* Find—beauty—

RUMOUR'S VOICE *[in the distance]* Two o'clock edition! News of Prince's arrival spreads like wildfire! Excitement of the populace! Two o'clock edition! *[He runs out]*

THE LIFT-BOY'S VOICE Going up!

TOM FIDDLER I say, who's that?

During the last speeches the lift-like doors on the left of the stage burst open, and THEY, the castle servants, pour into the hall like people squeezing out of a Tube exit. THEY are composed of SHEEP and WOLVES and HAPPY FAMILIES. The FAMILIES have stepped out of the card game: the SHEEP and WOLVES wear skins over shabby modern clothes all cut from the same dull material. Each carries the distinguishing article of his trade. Their eyes are shut and they move like sleep-walkers. First come two HOUSEMAIDS, sweeping as they go.

THEY Hush! Hush! Hush!

TOM TIDDLER Someone awake at last!

THEY Hush! Hush! Hush!

ADAM [*stopping the HOUSEMAID*] Where is she—the Princess?

THE HOUSEMAID [*sweeping*]

The cellars, the cellars:
We sweep out the cellars.

TOM TIDDLER [*to the second HOUSEMAID*] Where have you sprung from, eh?

THE SECOND HOUSEMAID

The cellars, the cellars:
We sleep in the cellars.

ADAM [*to THEM*] Who are you?

THEY We're families of Families.
We're happy, happy Families.

TOM FIDDLER Did you ever—

THEY We're Rich Man and Poor Man
And Beggarman bold:
We walk in our sleep
And we do as we're told:
We do as we are told.

We're always together,
We're Wolves and we're Sheep:
And we do as we're told
As we walk in our sleep:
As we walk in our sleep.

ADAM'S OPERA

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We're Tinkers and Tailors
With solder and thread:
We're Soldiers and Sailors,
We chop off a head
As soon as we're told:
We do as we're told.

We're Ploughboy and Master,
We sow and we reap,
Or sell you a plaister,
And all in our sleep:
For we work in our sleep.

We struggle and strive
For butter and bre^d:
We're hardly alive,
And we're very soon dead:
We're very soon dead.

They sell us and buy:
We do as we're told:
We never know why
We do as we're told.
But we come very cheap,
For we do as we're told:
We're nothing but sheep,
We do as we're told:
We cry in our sleep,
But we do as we're told:
We do as we're told.

TOM FIDDLER [*backing once more*] Adam, I don't like
them. They disturb.

ADAM They're under a spell.

THEY Yes, we're under a spell!
 We sleep fairly well,
 And we try to do right;
 But we're not very bright,
 For we're under a spell!

TOM FIDDLER Why are they all so grey?

THEY We lie where we're told,
 And the cellars are cold:
 We snore and we stifle,
 But health is a trifle:
 We do as we're told!

TOM TIDDLER They look half asleep.

TOM FIDDLER They look half dead.

ADAM Starved.

WOLVES *[breaking the ranks]*

 Give us the dole! Bow!
 Give us the dole! Wow!

SHEEP *[huddling\]*

 Ba—ba! You Black Sheep,
 Keep out of the fold!
 Ba—ba! We're White Sheep!
 We do as we're told:
 We do as we're told!

GRUNDY *[drowsily]* Now then, no crowding! Pass along
 there, please!

MRS. GRUNDY Sweep away the dirt!

GRUNDY Sweep it into the cellars!

MRS. GRUNDY The lift will take it down.

THE LIFT-BOY That will break the lift.

THE FAMILIES [*breaking ranks*]

If the lift breaks down we shall smother in the cellars,
We shall die twice, thrice: we shall never see the sun!

MRS. GRUNDY Sweep away the dirt!

THE HOUSEMAIDS [*sweeping to the lift*]

Sweep away!

Sleep away!

Sweep, sweep, sweep away!

THE FAMILIES

But you mustn't break the lift or we shan't get to
[town!

What shall we do if the lift breaks down?

A FLOWER GIRL

Roses for the Princess!

Posies for the Princess!

She scatters them.

THE FAMILIES

We must hurry to the office, to the office, to the
[office!

How shall we live if the lift breaks down?

ADAM [*stopping the FLOWER-GIRL*] Where is she,
sweetheart?

THE HOUSEMAIDS Let us sweep, sweep, sweep!

THE FLOWER-GIRL I've roses to scatter to her!

THEY She's asleep, sleep, sleep!
What does it matter to her?

They shuffle on.

TOM TIDDLER [*outraged*] Are they lunatics?

ADAM [*absorbed*] Can't you see? They're the castle servants. They're walking in their sleep.

TOM TIDDLER [*relieved*] Oh, is that all?

ADAM [*passionately*] All! isn't it enough? Isn't it horrible?

THEY Horrible! Hush!
 Horrible! Hold—
 What does it matter?
 We do as we're told!

ADAM [*to the brothers*] Can't we wake them? If Beauty sees them like this she'll break her heart.

TOM TIDDLER As long as they do their job I don't see that it matters.

THEY What does it matter?
 We do as we're told!

TOM TIDDLER [*referring it to TOM FIDDLER*] Do you see that it matters? [*He drops on to a chair*] Lord, I'm fagged.

TOM FIDDLER So'm I.

He lifts up Mrs. Grundy and dumps her on her husband's knee.

MRS. GRUNDY Not quite nice.

TOM FIDDLER [*settling himself in her seat*] That's better!
 [*He lights a cigarette*]

TOM TIDDLER [*stretching out his legs*] Where's Adam got to? No repose! No balance! [*He strangles a yawn*] Close in here.

ADAM'S OPERA

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ADAM [*he has picked his way between the sleeping ladies up the steps to the folding doors*] Tom! She's here!

TOM TIDDLER [*half asleep*] Wha's a' matter?

ADAM [*exalted*] Here! Behind these doors! I feel it! I know it!

WIRELESS [*running in*] Three o'clock edition! Prince ascends the steps!

RUMOUR [*following*] 3.1 edition! The Princess turns on her pillow! [*He runs out*]

WIRELESS 3.2 edition! Prince's suite overcome by well-known spell! Will the Prince survive? [*He runs out*]

ADAM [*turning sharply*] What's that? Tom Tiddler? [*A snore answers him. Pie comes down the steps*] Tom Fiddler! [*ToM FIDDLER yawns again*] There's something wrong here—no air!

TOM FIDDLER Oh, chuck it, Adam! I'm sleepy. [*He settles himself more comfortably*]

ADAM [*to TOM FIDDLER*] We must open the window. Help me, old friend!

TOM FIDDLER [*pricilly asleep*] Window's not meant to open.

THEY [*agitated*] The windows will break,
We're bound to catch cold:
We don't want to wake,
We do as we're told:
We do as we're told!

ADAM [*picking up a stool*] Then stand out of the way!

Atishoo! Atishoo!
To let in fresh air?
We're bound to catch cold;
Oh is it quite fair?

TOM TIDDLER [*the reproachful elder*] You've done it
again! They're all catching cold.

TOM FIDDLER [*interested*] They're all waking up.

ADAM Waking up? Then the Princess must be stirring
somewhere, somewhere very near. [*He turns to
the closed door*]

THEY [*stirred, then confusedly*]

She is near, she is here!
She is sure to catch cold.
Atishoo! Atishoo!
We've all caught a cold:
She is sure to catch cold!

*The sneering and laughter and crying continue as ADAM
mounts the steps once more.*

TOM TIDDLER [*hastily intercepting him*] Oh no, you
don't! My turn now!

ADAM [*turning halfround*] What?

TOM TIDDLER [*a man in the right*] You've lost your
turn.

TOM FIDDLER [*backing him*] You turned back to open
the window.

ADAM [*bewildered*] But it was to save you! You were
falling into the sleep.

TOM TIDDLER Never mind that! You've lost your turn.
Hand over that key!

ADAM My key? My own key?

TOM FIDDLER [*interposing between his brother and ADAM*]
Oh no, you don't! I was his first follower. I'm
to come next to him in everything.

TOM TIDDLER [*roused, blustering*] Who put up the money
for this expedition? Answer me that!

TOM FIDDLER [*roused, but exquisitely calm*] Who put you
up to putting up the money? Answer me that!
You! You'd never have known the dark horse
he was if I hadn't told you.

TOM TIDDLER [*furious*] You! Why, knowing you and
your crowd were in it nearly put me off again.

TOM FIDDLER [*with a graceful gesture*] Adam, I appeal!

TOM TIDDLER [*elbowing him aside*] Whose turn is it?
Come now!

ADAM [*clenching his hand*] By God, I will not——

RUMOUR [*in the background*] Unlocked for development!
Prince loses self-control!

NOBODY [*rising from his stool at the feet of MRS. GRUNDY
and plucking ADAM by the sleeve*] Hush! Let 'em
try! What harm?

ADAM Eh? What's that? Who are you?

NOBODY [*shrugging*] Nobody! Nobody see straight
when it's a question of beauty. You let 'em try
the key. [*He nods reassuringly*]

TOM TIDDLER [*impatiently*] Now, Adam! Play fair!
Whose turn?

ADAM'S OPERA

i

ADAM [*fiercely*]

Let Beauty answer! She should know her own!

NOBODY [*soothingly*]

Let Beauty answer! She will know her own!

ADAM [*on the steps*]

If you are common, Beauty, to the crowd,
And if to wake you needs no kiss withheld
From any woman's mouth until this hour,
No soul and body lonely for your sake
Nor heart reserved an altar till you come:
Then answer, answer, phantom of the briars!
Then open, false delight, to all who come!

TOM TIDDLER [*annoyed*] I don't call that a fair way to
put it.

NOBODY [*raising a deprecating hand*]

Let Beauty answer!

TOM FIDDLER Hark!

ADAM [*triumphant*] There is no sound!

TOM TIDDLER Well, after remarks like that, what do
you expect?

ADAM Expect? [*He stares at them: then—*]

Faith from my followers, friendship from my friends,
And Beauty holy as the love of God.
There is no sound, I say. Now take your turn!

TOM TIDDLER [*with importance*]

0 mistress of the increase of the town,
 Here stands a master of the hiving town!
 By gold and silver as a fountain poured,
 By streets of narrow-fronted palaces,
 By jewels and the lesser merchandise
 Of booths and markets and the midnight streets,
 1 bid you open, Fortune of the briars!
 Arise, Imperial! Let in the town!

But the key will not turn.

ADAM [*quietly*] No sound!

TOM TIDDLER [*swelling*] No word, no answer?

ADAM [*to TOM FIDDLER*] Take your turn!

TOM FIDDLER [*eagerly*]

0 mother of the muses, hear me now!
 For I have rhymed you in a thousand songs,
 And told your story to a thousand ears,
 Set up your image in the market-place,
 And sold your likeness to the happy few
 To make you famous in the world of men . . .
 1 heard a sound!

ADAM A sigh!

TOM TIDDLER Or was it laughter?

They watch TOM FIDDLER, but the key will not turn for him.

ADAM [*triumphant*]

A sleeper's laughter and a dreamer's sigh,
A wainscot mouse that stirred. There is no sound.

TOM FIDDLER [*plaintive*] I do call it mean. I threw a
sonnet to her only last week.

TOM TIDDLER [*thoughtful*] The money I've spent on this
outfit!

ADAM [*smiling*] What now, old friend?

TOM TIDDLER Oh, have it your own way! I'm sick of
this high falutin'.

TOM FIDDLER [*wearily*] Women are so crude!

TOM TIDDLER [*annoyed*] Crude? Born fools! All right,
Adam! Get on with it!

ADAM [*as he turns the key*]
Princess!

THEY [*confused, softly*]
Princess! Hush! Hark again! Princess!

ADAM

O Beauty, I am Adam, Adam the Prince,
Come from afar to worship, from afar.
Asking no leave, lord of your citadel,
Master in your house, king of your treasury,
I turn the key and enter.

*The doors swing apart. The Sleeping Beauty lies upon a
couch in the inner room. She is dressed like any great lady
of the Sun-Kings day.*

THEY [*on their knees*] Master of his own,
He enters.

ADAM [*calling softly*]
Beauty!

THEY Beauty!

THE PRINCESS [*drowsily*] What of the briars?

ADAM
Thornless, beloved!

THE PRINCESS In remembered speech
Who calls forgotten Beauty? Let me sleep
Pillowed in legend, curtained, canopied,
A by-gone tale, a dreamer and a dream!

ADAM
O gate of dreams, be opened! Let us in!

THE PRINCESS
They wounded me. I slept.

ADAM
And with you slumbered
All heavenly waking to delightful day:
The skies are stone: the dull sea-waves unnumbered,
Level our fields, abandoned to decay:
The woodbine chokes the wheat: the harvest fail;
While cityward the idle peasants throng
Where strangers jostle strangers all day long:
Their homeless longing swells the general wail;
For men in cities never drink the air,
Nor feel the crisp grass yielding to their tread,
But like the caged small mice that climb a stair
In a blind hurry hasten to be dead.

THEY
We are your dead, O Beauty! Raise us now!

ADAM'S OPERA

i

THE PRINCESS

Who called? Who dreams me? Oh, I've slept and
I have seen suns in travail and great moons [slept!
Ending in cinders, I have slept so long!
I have seen planets dancing before God,
Like summer gnats at eve when all winds die
Down in the world I loved once! Weary me!
Is there a summer still? Is there a world?

ADAM

There's need of you, O dreamer, in that world!
There's need of you, O dream, to wake that world!
Return, forgotten Beauty, to my world,
A dreamer wakened and a dream come true!

He kisses her.

THE COURT LADIES [waking]

Draw now the curtains of your sight
And bring a day to birth!
O sleepy eyes, reflect the blue
Of heaven, till heaven, regarding you,
On earth describes
A younger heaven.
Let Beauty wake, let Beauty rise,
To be the light
Of heaven on earth!

THE PRINCESS *rises*: THE COURT *wakes, yawning^ and instantly becomes emotional and talkative,*

RUMOUR \thrilled\ The Princess stirs! The Princess
wakes! Late edition! Galvanised by kiss the
Princess rises!

WIRELESS Court follows suit! Extra special! Court
recovers consciousness!

MRS. GRUNDY [*fully awake*] Kissing in public! Tut-tut!

RUMOUR [*darting to her side*] Interview with Mistress of
the Robes! Views of Mrs. Grundy on the
situation!

RUMOUR [*following*] Scandal in high life! Stop press!
Comments of the Prince's suite! Populace
remain calm!

*And indeed, THEY, hidden in the shadows, are still on
their knees, breathless, adoring. But TOM FIDDLER and
TOM TIDDLER, in excited conversation, are fair game for
WIRELESS and RUMOUR who, deserting MRS. GRUNDY,
prowl up, a hand to each ear.*

TOM TIDDLER [*scratching his head*] Is that all? Why,
she's just like any other woman.

TOM FIDDLER [*the despairing lover*] Thomas, it's not fair!
I made her. She's my picture, my music, my
tales and my songs. All my dreams have come
true, and for Adam, not for me! Why wasn't I
Adam? Why couldn't I believe?

TOM TIDDLER [*doubtfully*] Do you believe now?

TOM FIDDLER [*devout*] I believe, I believe! Down on
your knees!

TOM TIDDLER [*awkwardly*] Well, if everyone's doing it!
[*He kneels: then, cheering up, he continues con-
fidentially*] Do you notice this pavement?
That'd sell for a pretty penny. It's old mosaic.
It's glass and gold.

THEY *\among themselves*

Glass? Gold?
Bought? Sold?
Beauty's pavement?
Beauty's stair?
Bought? Sold?
Who'd dare?
Break, pattern,
Crack, mould,
When Beauty's stair
Is bought, sold.

TOM FIDDLER Glass and gold? What else should the
pavement of the holy city be?

THEY *\among themselves*

Holy city,
Holy stair!
Old, old,
Old as pity,
Old as fair!
Glass, gold!
Holy, holy!
Who would dare
Buy her pavement,
Tread her stair?
Holy, holy!

TOM TIDDLER Oh, all right! I'm not arguing, I only
say Adam's done well for himself.

THEY [*among themselves*]

Well for himself?
Well for herself?
How can she tell,
Tell for herself?
Does she guess,
Saying yes,
That all's well for herself?
Well for him?
Well for us?
Well for herself?

TOM FIDDLER [*hushing his brother*] Watch him! Listent
They've forgotten us.

THE PRINCESS [*to ADAM*]

Who are you? God or man, what mother bore you?

ADAM

I'm a lost child: I know not whence I come.

THE PRINCESS

Thus spake the princes that were here before you.

ADAM

I seek a kingdom: I desire a home;
For all know I was stolen at my birth.
There was a woman, old and grey as earth,
Who held me in her arms—

THE PRINCESS

Her name?

ADAM'S OPERA

r.

ADAM

God knows!

But still I hear her singing of green grass,
And of the mighty queen my mother was,
And that my father—ah, Princess, it goes
Like any dream—he was a nobleman,
His kingdom mine: and ends as it began,
In cradle quiet and a face half seen,
And rocking winds that whisper, 'Grass is green!'~

THE PRINCESS

And man is grass! *[She laughs]*

THEY

She mocks him, mocks him, mocks him.

NOBODY

This beauty mocks him. Grass is withered soon.

ADAM *[puzgled]* Do you mock me, my beauty?

THE PRINCESS Not I! But I laughed as I thought of an
old lover of mine. Nobody here remembers
him. One Nebuchadnezzar, a king.

NOBODY I remember him. Shall I sing you the mad
king's song, Adam, prince, soon to be king?

THE PRINCESS Sing to Adam! *[She seats herself on the
throne]*

THEY *[urgently]* Listen, Adam!

ADAM *[still worshipping]* I hear nothing but the song of
Beauty, the song of her breath, her words, her
walk, the rustle of her dress.

NOBODY [*sharply*] All beauty's lovers must be sung this
song whether they listen or no.

WIRELESS *and* RUMOUR Listen in! Listen in! Nobody's
singing a song!

NOBODY \singing\

The Chaldee king lost his appetite:

The Chaldee king lay awake at night:

The moon shone in where the king lay sick,

And Nebuchadnezzar went lunatic.

By night, by day, he sighed, he said:

'Give me grass, green grass! I am sick of bread!'

THEY

Grass! Give him grass! He is sick of bread!

NOBODY

The courtiers knew not what to do,

So they boiled the brewers in their own brew,

They hung up the butchers on sharp meat hooks:

They served up the heads of the pastry-cooks;

But Nebuchadnezzar sighed again:

'Give me grass, green grass! I am sick of men!'

THEY

Grass! Give him grass! He is sick of men!

NOBODY

The king went out to the fields in tears,

He lived with the beasts for three green years:

Then he picked up his sceptre and home went he

To judge his people in far Chaldee,

Singing, 'Grass for supper and grass for bed,

The fields have raised a king from the dead!'

ADAM'S OPERA

i

THEY

He lost his wits in the world of men,
But earth, mother earth, gave them back again.

THE PRINCESS [*sighing*] Yes, he went to earth like the
rest of them.

ADAM [*with a start*] Who did?

THE PRINCESS The mad king.

ADAM [*vaguely*] What king?

THE PRINCESS [*laughing*] Why, you heard Nobody's
song.

ADAM* I heard the rustle of your skirt: I heard you
catch your breath and sigh. This was my song.

THE PRINCESS [*earnestly*] Was I your song? Are you he
indeed?

ADAM Who is he?

THE PRINCESS The prince who shall come. *They* know
the prophecy!

THEY [*singing*]
And Beauty Lhat lieth sleeping,
He shall raise by the hand:
With a kiss and a kiss he shall wake her,
And they shall deliver the land.

ADAM I am he; for I waked you with a kiss.

THE PRINCESS Too soon, too soon! You should have
let me sleep out my sleep.

ADAM We needed you so.

THE PRINCESS Still, you ought not to have waked me.
There's another year to run. *[To NOBODY]*
Isn't there?

NOBODY *[shrugging]* Ask the cherry stones!

THE PRINCESS Ah! Which year did they say I should be
happy in?

ADAM *[eagerly]* Why, this year.

NOBODY Next year?

THEY Some time!

THE PRINCESS When plum flowers late!

NOBODY *[harshly]* That's never!

ADAM Never? What do you mean?

THE PRINCESS Ask the cherry stones!

THEY *\singing*
This year, next year, sometime, never,
Count your cherry stones, cherries on your plate:
Cherry year is merry year, plum year is dumb year,
Marry in a cherry year when plum flowers late.

ADAM'S OPERA

i

PRINCESS When shall I marry me?

THEY Ask the dierry-stones 1

LADIES This year's early, next year's late.

Rich man, poor man, young man, bag-o'-bones?

Count your cherry stones, cherries on your plate

Silk, satin, cotton, rags, who will marry her?

PRINCESS This year, next year, shall I make him wait?

LADIES Coach, carriage, barrow, cart, whither will he
[carry her?

THEY Ask the cherry stones, cherries on her plate!

PRINCESS Which year?

THEY Any year! Youth's a fever.

PRINCESS When shall I marry me? What shall be my fate?

THEY Some time's plum time, plum time's never.

LADIES Cherry tree's a merry tree when plum flowers
[late.

ADAM [*slowly*] D'you mean that someone has tried to
wake you before? -

THE PRINCESS [*lightly*] Tried? They're always doing it.
1 haven't had a proper rest—oh, not for
hundreds of years.

ADAM But——

THE PRINCESS It's quite easy to wake me. I'm senti-
mental: I always was. A kiss and——Oh, it's
easy to wake me. The trouble is to keep me
awake.

ADAM I'll care for that.

THE PRINCESS That's what they all said, poor fellows!

ADAM [*pulled*] Why do you call them 'poor fellows'?
They were princes, weren't they?

THE PRINCESS Princes and tailors and candlestick
makers. But they all went the same way, poor
souls!

ADAM Which way?

THE PRINCESS Oh, don't let's talk about it!

ADAM Which way?

THE PRINCESS Oh, don't let's think about it!

ADAM Which way?

THE PRINCESS If I don't put these things out of my
mind I get bad dreams.

ADAM Which way?

THE PRINCESS [*petulantly*] Oh, well then! [*She moves
lazily to the central window and pulls the cord of the
curtain, which rolls back leaving bare the blue and
green distant view*] Look!

ADAM What a land it is!

THE PRINCESS [*passionately*] Our land! No land in the
world like it! [*With a complete change of tone*]
You see that little hill?

ADAM The green hill?

THE PRINCESS Outside the city wall.

ADAM'S OPERA

i

ADAM What of it?

THE PRINCESS Ah! What of it!

ADAM A bare tree crowns it: or—is it a tree?

THE PRINCESS Is it a tree?

ADAM It looks like a cross.

THE PRINCESS [*harshly*] We've the right of pit and gallows, of course.

ADAM [*startled*] Pit and—? [*then he laughs*] Poohl
That's all over hundreds of years ago.

THE PRINCESS I *am* hundreds of years ago.

ADAM You're twenty, my rose, you're twenty!

THE PRINCESS A hundred and twenty: a thousand an
twenty!

DESIRE Twenty! Twenty!

ADAM You're as young as spring.

THE PRINCESS I'm as old as the pit and gallows. My pit,
my gallows, so take care!

ADAM The pit—the gallows—the cross. Was that the
end of them—the princes and the saviours?

THE PRINCESS The end of the princes and the saviours.

ADAM All of them?

THE PRINCESS All.

ADAM [*wonderingly*] How did they sin?

THE PRINCESS They couldn't keep me awake.

ADAM [*the conqueror*] Keep you awake? What, have I dreamed of you, lived for you, fought for you, sought the one way to you, cut down the briars—

THE PRINCESS Is that how you've begun your reign? Cut down my briars, have you, and broken my window, my immemorial window? Why did you break my window, Adam?

ADAM We'll put in another.

THE PRINCESS Not the same. The blood of five hundred years has stained my window.

ADAM This shall be a new proper window: clear glass to let in the daylight.

THE PRINCESS It was all the colours of the rainbow,

ADAM But, dearest heart, you couldn't see through it!

THE PRINCESS See through it! Heigh-ho! It's wonderful how little men change in a hundred years. Who are those with you? Are they of your mind? Who are they?

ADAM Travelling companions: friends and lovers! My friends, your lovers! [*To TOM TIDDLER and TOM FIDDLER*] Come! [*They draw near*]

THE PRINCESS [*turning from them*] My prince, have no friend but me! No friends, no lovers, love me! So shall I keep you the longer.

ADAM'S OPERA

I

ADAM All my life long!

THE PRINCESS Why, yes, all your little long life. What are their names?

ADAM Tom Tiddler and Tom Fiddler.

THE PRINCESS But which is which?

TOM TIDDLER *[singing]*

I call myself a man of sense,
My brother is the high-brow.

TOM FIDDLER Tom Tiddler sweats for paltry pence;

TOM TIDDLER But Fiddler keeps a dry brow.

TOM FIDDLER At private views and cocktail teas
Tom Tiddler wears a shy brow;

TOM TIDDLER Yet could he pay the bill for these
Without the aid of my brow?

TOM FIDDLER My twin is merely Stock Exchange

TOM TIDDLER True, Fiddler has the show brow.
His hair descends, his speech is strange,
He is, in f, a 'pro' brow.
His views on everything alive
Intimidate the low-brow,

TOM FIDDLER A creature which appears to thrive
On prically no brow.

When Thomas talks to me of art
I listen with a clawed brow,

TOM TIDDLER And yet the lad is good at heart,
He cannot help his bored brow.

TOM FIDDLER [*aside, swooning*] Cockney rhymes! Thomas,
how can you?

BOTH O brother! were the brains but thine
Which coil within my stored brow,
Then Art and Business would combine
To show the perfect broad-brow.

ADAM Welcome them, Princess! But give first to Tom
Fiddler your hand: he has served you all his
life.

TOM FIDDLER [*the adoring artist*] Wrote of you, painted
you, sang of you, starved in an attic and
dreamed of you.

THE PRINCESS [*keenly*] And—did not seek me!

ADAM Not fair, my rose! He struggled through every
briar-bush in Chelsea to get at you and your
roses.

TOM FIDDLER [*put out of his stride*] Oh, please, my dear,
not Chelsea! Where is Chelsea?

THE PRINCESS [*innocently*] What is Chelsea?

TOM FIDDLER [*earnestly*] It isn't. But Bloomsbury—ah
Beauty, you'd feel at home in Bloomsbury. I
live there.

[Singing]

I am a man of Bloomsbury,
I am so wondrous wise,
I sought you in a briar-bush
And scratched out both my eyes.
But when they said my eyes were out
I exercised my brain,
And jumped into another bush,
To scratch them in again.
I am a man of Bloomsbury,
I am so wondrous wise.

ADAM *[effecting the introduction]* Now Tom Tiddler here,
he's made in another mould.

TOM TIDDLER *[jingling his money in his embarrassment]*
Roses—pooh! *[He bursts into song]*

Marigold is the flower I seek
Marry gold will I.
What care I for a rosy cheek
Marry gold will I.

Golden thistle won't prick me!
Goldenrod though my lady be,
Marigold! Marigold!
Marry gold will I!

Venus' purse is treasure trove,
I shall marry gold.
Golden locks has my lady love
Though her lips are cold.

ADAM'S OPERA

Roses grow upon any tree,
Marigold is the flower for me.
Marigold! Marigold!
Marry gold will I!

ADAM [*swiling*] You see! But Tom Tiddler's the brains of the expedition all the same. And yet—don't be angry—I thought I'd never get him to come.

THE PRINCESS [*coolly*] How did you persuade him to believe in me?

ADAM I showed him your statue. It's in the British——

TOM FIDDLER My dear, she wouldn't know what that means. [To THE PRINCESS, *affably*] It's in Bloomsbury.

ADAM I said I'd show him the original if he came.

I knew that somewhere you were hidden away,
'Somewhere, somewhere, in earth or sea or air,'
Loud sang the lark, 'Beauty is hidden away!'

THE PRINCESS
What said the business man?

ADAM Looked long and long,
From ivory to gold, from gold again
To ivory——

THE PRINCESS Then said the business man?

TOM TIDDLER
I'm on! There's money in it!

ADAM'S OPERA

i

THE GRUNDYS

Money in it! Money in it.

TOM TIDDLER *[singing]*

Some where, some where, the voices thronged the air,
Crying, 'Money in it! Money in it! Money is hidden
away!'

Beauty's garden is Tiddler's Ground! Money in it!
Money in it!

Come with me to Tom Tiddler's Ground, Tiddler's
ground, Tiddler's ground!

Off we go to Tom Tiddler's ground, where money
is hidden away!

*He runs out arm in arm with the GRUNDYS, PRESS and
CENSOR following, but TOM TIDDLER watches the coming
scene from the doorway.*

THE PRINCESS *[unswiling]*

For this you waked me! Am I profitable?

By love, you'd sell me when you tire of me?

You shake your head? You smile? Forgive me, Adam!

I have had many lovers, little love.

[lamenting^]

Awake am I in a new century,

And men wear masks. How shall I read these men?

How will you deal with wakened Beauty, Adam?

Now the spell's broken and the story's told.

Beauty the housewife, Adam the good-man,

Shall we praise love, and love, and talk of love,

Till we grow old and yawn?

THEY *[urgentlj]*

Adam, beware!

THE PRINCESS [*as he sits beside her*]

My coverlet has lain in lavender:
My couch is stuffed with rose leaves: ah, bend down,
After long journey rest a little while,
And I'll play prince and wake you with a kiss
All in good time. But conquerors must rest
Like other folk, and honey-sweet is sleep.
To pause and lie at peace, to work no more—
This is the laurel crown and this the goal.

ADAM'S *head sinks upon her breast.*

COURT LADIES [*singing*]

For the end of it all is a lullaby,

Hushaby!

The end of it all is a lullaby!

THE PRINCESS [*singing*]

My home is not hid from the saviours of men:
They trample my tall briar roses; but then,
Though they wake me and win me, I slumber again,
For the end of the quest is a lullaby,

Hushaby!

COURT LADIES The end is a rest and a lullaby.

THE PRINCESS

When soldiers and sailors my kingdom have torn,
Come tinkers and tailors to mend and adorn:
And each has his crowning of roses and thorn;
But the end of the reign is a lullaby,

Hushaby!

COURT LADIES The end of them all is a lullaby.

ADAM'S OPERA

i

THE PRINCESS

I remember a chemist who kissed me awake,
I remember a ploughboy who sang for my sake,
And gentlemen chanting my name at the stake:
Once a thief fell asleep to my lullaby,

Hushabyt

COURT LADIES A thief fell asleep to her lullaby.

THE PRINCESS

Who were these that cried "Beauty, my queen and
my bride!"
Never ask if a name or a title abide!
They are written on sand in the path of the tide,
With waves that erase them for lullaby,

Hushaby!

COURT LADIES The rise of the tide for a lullaby.

THE PRINCESS

Though I wake when they call me I sigh in my sleeve,
For no-one has broken the spell that I weave:
Then I sleep again, dreaming, and dream that I grieve
That the end of them all is a lullaby,

Hushaby!

COURT LADIES The end of them all is a lullaby.

In a dream Beauty answers, in dream is aware
Of a voice in her garden, a step on her stair:
And turns on her pillow, too weary to care
That the end of it all is a lullaby,

Hushaby!

The end of it all is a lullaby.

THEY [*returning one by one*]

Does he sleep? If he sleeps we shall stifle in the cellars,
We shall die twice, thrice, we shall never see the sun!

ADAM [*lifting his head*]

Who called? Princess, you called?

THE PRINCESS

Not I! Lie still!

THEY [*frantic*]

Adam! Adam! Save us!
Save us while you can!
The Spell is upon you, Adam!
Hell is upon you, Adam!
Adam! Adam! Save us!
Save us, son of man!

ADAM [*starting up*] Who calls me by my name and the
title of my house? Do I know my parentage at
last? Did I dream it on your breast? Did I see
my fathers hidden there?

THE PRINCESS Be still! Dream on!

THEY [*desperate*]

The Spell is upon us!
Hell is upon us!
Save us, son of man!

ADAM Who calls upon the son of the princess and the
saviours? What need to call? Am I not here
already to serve you as my fathers served;
though you treat me as you treated my fathers?

THEY \pailing\

Never again!
Never again!

ADAM'S OPERA

i

ADAM When Beauty slept was there peace in the land?
There was silence, there was heaviness, there
was no peace. Her people hid in the cellars,
fearing the light, and shivered. Did you not
hide? Did you not sleep?

THEY We did! We hid!
We wept! We slept!
We do as we're bid!

ADAM My father's fathers came and brought you into
the sunshine. What did you with my fathers, O
my people?

THEY [*softly*] We stoned them with stones:
We burned them with fire*
We scattered their bone⁰.

ADAM Why, my own people?

THEY [*drearily*] We had no desire
To crucify, crucify!
Now, as of old,
We do as we're told.

ADAM What will you do to me, my own people?

THEY [*hopefully*] We'll do as we're told!
We'll do as we're told!

ADAM [*with energy*] I will fill up the cellars: I will
cleanse the ways of the house: I will break
down the hedges: I will burn the briars at the
root. There shall be no end and no barrier to
Beauty's kingdom.

THE PRINCESS [*beginning to laugh*] O Adam, how like you
are to the rest of them! What else will you do
with my kingdom?

ADAM [*the lover*] You give me leave, Princess?

THE PRINCESS I give you leave to do—what They let
you do. They are our masters.

ADAM They? Fear not Them! O you, my own people,
my own folk, have I your leave?

THEY [*joyously*] Cut down the hedges, yes!
Adam the king is strong!
Break all the barriers, yes, yes, yes!
For the king can do no wrong!

THE PRINCESS They have chosen you king, Adam! Do
I sit beside you, and for how long?

THEY Long, long!
Right and wrong!
We have got a new master!
He shall reign
But a year and a day,
Because he can't work any faster!

TOM FIDDLER [*fussing*] Hail to the king and queen!
Strew roses!

A FLOWER GIRL Hush, hush!
Briary bush!
Beauty shall have her new posies,
Of lavender blue,
With livelong and rue,
Because he has cut down her roses!

ADAM'S OPERA

I

ADAM [*sturdily*] And why not? Sweet lavender is your flower, not sweet briar.

THE PRINCESS Who told you so?

ADAM My heart.

THE PRINCESS [*singing*]

Lavender's blue, dilly-dilly,
Lavender's green!

ADAM When I am king, dilly-dilly,
You shall be queen!

THE PRINCESS Who told you so, dilly-dilly,
Who told you so?

ADAM 'Twas my own heart, dilly-dilly,
That told me so.

THEY 'Twas his own heart, dilly-dilly,
That told him so!

ADAM When we are wed, dilly-dilly,
When we are one,
There shall be peace, dilly-dilly,
Under the sun!

THE PRINCESS Ere that be so, dilly-dilly,
It shall be found
Lavender's blue, dilly-dilly,
All the year round!

THEY Lavender's blue, dilly-dilly,
All the year round!

ADAM When you are queen, dilly-dilly,
When I am king,
Let the bells ring, dilly-dilly,
All the bells ring!
Earth shall be heaven, dilly-dilly,

THE PRINCESS How do you know?
ADAM 'Tis my own heart, dilly-dilly,
 That tells me so!
THEY 'Tis his own heart, dilly-dilly,
 That tells him so!

THE COURT *and the GRUNDYS return., headed by*
TOM TIDDLER.

WIRELESS Stop press! Adam announces the millenium!

RUMOUR Tom Tiddler discovers gold and silver in the
garden!

THE COURT, *headed by TOM TIDDLER, re-enter*
excitedly.

CENSOR Pass along there, please!

MRS. GRUNDY No respect! No consideration!

CENSOR Let the lady pass, can't you?

GRUNDY Now then! No idling! No standing about!
There's some picking up to be done.

TOM TIDDLER Gold and silver!

MRS. GRUNDY In the garden!

GRUNDY We're re-christening it Tom Tiddler's Ground.

MRS. GRUNDY Little attention!

TOM TIDDLER Most gratifying!

MRS. GRUNDY *[to GRUNDY]* Time they got to work!
Satan finds——

ADAM'S OPERA

i

GRUNDY Ah! Now then, all of you, bustle along now!
This way! Time we got on with our work!
The daily round——

MRS. GRUNDY The common task——

GRUNDY This is earth, you know, not Utopia!

THEY But earth's to be heaven, dilly-dilly!

GRUNDY How do you know?

THEY 'Twas his own heart, dilly-dilly,
That told us so.

CENSOR Hush! Shoo! [*He hustles them off*]

GRUNDY [*to MRS. GRUNDY, dismayed*] Earth to be—Did
you hear that, my dear?

MRS. GRUNDY I did!

GRUNDY [*to MRS. GRUNDY*] If earth's to be heaven,
dilly-dilly——

MRS. GRUNDY Silly-dilly, I call it! I'm quite contented
with the world as it is.

GRUNDY I only said—if earth's to be heaven in the
future——

MRS. GRUNDY Fudge!

GRUNDY —we'd better be seeing about our arrange-
ments before we move.

MRS. GRUNDY I shan't stop being Mrs. Grundy—in
earth or heaven. I refuse to move for anyone.

GRUNDY At any rate, my dear, we shall need wings and
things.

MRS. GRUNDY Fiddle-de-dee!

GRUNDY White robes, anyway.

THE CENSOR High collared, long-sleeved, not more than six inches from the ground.

MRS. GRUNDY I'll attend to that. I'm the mistress of the wardrobe. *[To GRUNDY]* But you'd better see about getting us good seats.

TOM FIDDLER What for, dear lady?

MRS. GRUNDY The coronation, of course!

ADAM Coronation?

GRUNDY You can't be king, sir, until you're crowned and robed. And until you're king the Princess can't marry you. Ask the guardians!

ADAM I am the Princess's guardian, and when I am absent my two friends shall guard her. Know all that I appoint Tom Tiddler here to be Beauty's treasurer, and Fiddler his brother the keeper of her house. She needs no other protectors. Tell them so, sweetheart!

THE PRINCESS The question is, do I need them?

NOBODY *[singing]*

Hector Protector was smothered in green,
Hector Protector was sent to the queen.
The queen did not like him—

THE CENSOR Hush! Change the subject!

ADAM'S OPERA

r

GRUNDY We refuse to change the subject. We submit that the Princess is hereditarily protected against fresh air or change of residence. We refuse to sanction the appointment of new guardians: the old ones are most satisfactory.

ADAM Show me these guardians!

MRS. GRUNDY *curtseys.*

ADAM You?

MRS. GRUNDY I am Mrs. Grundy, the Mistress of the Princess's Robes. Allow me to introduce my husband and his friends.

GRUNDY I control the Princess's court.

THE CENSOR I tell her what plays are proper.

THE PRESS I report such of her remarks as Mr. and Mrs. Grundy consider it desirable to repeat.

WIRELESS *and* RUMOUR We broadcast the rest of them.

ADAM Who appointed you?

MRS. GRUNDY The Princess's uncle and her aunts.

ADAM Where are they?

GRUNDY [*gesturing towards the absorbed card-players*] At their game—oh no, sir, you mustn't disturb them!

DUMMY [*to THE STOUT PARTY*] Your deal!

THE YOUNG PARTY No, it's mine!

THE THIN PARTY No, it's not!

THE YOUNG PARTY It's not yours anyway!

THE STOUT PARTY It is mine, isn't it, Speaker?

SPEAKER That is so, m'lady!

THE YOUNG PARTY Hurry up then!

THE CENSOR Hush!

They play.

ADAM [*curiously*] What are they playing?

SPEAKER Westminster Bridge.

ADAM [*swiling*] You seem to know all about them?

GRUNDY [*behind his hand*] Speaker—the butler—with them for years—more a friend than a servant.

TOM TIDDLER Which is which?

SPEAKER Well, sir, the stout party, as you might call her, and the thin party on her right, they're twin sisters, but they don't agree as such. The stout party's a conservative old lady: she generally partners with his lordship, him that's dummy at the moment. Now her twin, she's what you might call liberal-minded, for all she looks so pinched. She's too easy with their youngest sister, sir, to please the old lady. But the youngest party 'ates the lot of them: and as for 'is lordship, she sees red whenever he addresses of her.

TOM TIDDLER You haven't too easy a job, then, eh?

ADAM'S OPERA

i

SPEAKER [*grateful for sympathy*] I give you my word, sir,
what with one party and then another revoking,
and the youngest party wanting a re-count
after every deal, and me never knowing when
the clock won't strike, every minute's full.

ADAM But a clock ought to strike.

SPEAKER Not our clock, sir! When our clock strikes it
stops the clocks all over the castle, let alone its
own works: and Nobody knows what happens
then.

NOBODY [*solemnly*] The parties can't get on with their
game.

SPEAKER You may say so indeed. A strike fair dazes
'em.

BIG BEN [*after preliminary whirrings, sings*]
Wise men and fools,
Do as you like!
Lay down your tools,
I'm going to strike.
One——

There is a commotion at the card-table.

SPEAKER [*agitated*] Did you hear that? That means
there's a mouse in the works again.

NOBODY [*singing*] Hickory, dickory, dock!
A mouse ran up the clock,
The clock struck one,
The game went on,
Hickory, dickory, dock!

I

ADAM'S OPERA

THE STOUT PARTY Hickory, dickory, dock!
 THE THIN PARTY I haven't heard the clock!
 THE STOUT PARTY It's nearly two,
 THE THIN PARTY The lead's with you!
 BOTH TOGETHER Hickory, dickory, dock!

THE YOUNG PARTY Hickory, dickory, dock!
 The mouse has stopped the clock!
 The hour has struck,
 The hands have stuck,
 Hickory, dickory, dock!

NOBODY Hickory, dickory, dock!
 The aunts have had a shock!
 THE PARTIES To think a mouse
 Could scare a house!
 And who will mend the clock?

BIG BEN Wise men and fools,
 Pray do not shirk!
 Pick up your tools!
 I'm going to work.

NOBODY Hickory, dickory, dock!
 The mouse ran down the clock!
 SPEAKER The clock's repaired,
 THE PARTIES Now who declared?
 NOBODY Hickory, dickory, dock!

'THE STOUT PARTY [*hastily*] My deal! [*They play*]

ADAM'S OPERA

i

ADAM I don't understand these parties. Don't they realise that the Princess is awake at last? How long is this game of theirs going on?

SPEAKER [*confidentially*] If I may take the liberty, I shouldn't wait for them to finish their game, sir! I should get on with the ceremonies just as if they wasn't there. They won't care what becomes of her Highness so long as they're let play their game.

GRUNDY [*hurt*] Speaker! This from you!

SPEAKER I'm awake, sir! The clock 'as struck and times 'as changed. I was always one to 'old the scales impartial. [*To NOBODY*] Here, you! Nip along and fetch the robes and crown!

THEY [*returning*]

Hush! Hush!

Briary bush!

The kingdom shall have a new master.

He shall wear

A briary crown,

Because he can't work any faster.

Up, down,

Fetch him his crown!

Beauty shall have a new owner.

Garlands fade

As soon as made,

And so let us crown him the sooner.

ADAM [*off-hand*] Crown? I don't want your crown. I don't care a button for your crown. Crowns are for the Princess.

GRUNDY [*much worried*] Highness, Highness, you must wear a crown! When you go out into the Wide World to tell them about us, how else are they to know you for what you are?

THE PRINCESS [*moved*] How are they to know him? When the windows are flung wide and the sunshine streams in, let them say—Adam, who sought Beauty, passed this way! When they plough the old battle-fields with the new ploughshares that once were swords, when the axes of the woodmen ring merrily as they abolish the briars, say—Adam, who waked Beauty, ordered it! When the Wide World that lies so beautiful beyond the briar-wood is visited by him, when he bids men come to me welcome and unchecked, let them say—This is Adam's work: Adam, who kissed Beauty! This is Adam's kingdom: Adam, who loved Beauty! This is the rule of Adam, who sits at Beauty's side! Weave him a crown, of the briars that he trampled under his feet! Give him for a sceptre the lilies of peace! He needs no other sceptre, he shall wear no other crown.
[*She goes to him and takes his hand*]

GRUNDY Well, it's very irregular, your Highness, but——

THE CENSOR Hush! Will your Highness be seated upon your throne?

ADAM'S OPERA

i

ADAM [*gaily*] Let Beauty sit upon the gold and ivory
Her heart is my throne.

GRUNDY [*tried very high*] But if you won't be throned in
state, what is the court to do?

THE COURT [*to each other*] E x l y ! Precisely! What is
the court to do?

SPEAKER [*confidentially*] If you'll forgive the liberty, sir,
what they mean is—if you won't sit and be
comfortable, it ceases to be an of respect for
the court to stand and be uncomfortable.

ADAM [*looking around upon the scene*] I need no court.

GRUNDY No court? Then what's to become of us?

THE COURT *is agitated and huddles together.*

THE PRINCESS All my lovers are his courtiers.

THEY [*To THE COURT*] Aha! D'you hear that? We've
as much right here as you have, haven't we,
Adam? Oh, at last, at last, we've as much right
here as you have! Beauty, kind Beauty, we love
you! We are your courtiers too, and wish you
joy.

BIG BEN *strikes.* THE PARTIES *rise in agitation.*

THEY [*singing*]
Now you are married we wish you joy,
First a girl and then a boy,
A mansion house and a garden shady,
And now, good master, kiss your lady!

Now you are married we wish you wealth,
Not a sneeze to mar your health,
Better for worse and richer for poorer,
And now, sweet lady, kiss your lover!

Now you are married we wish you peace,
Golden wedding and heart at ease:
Take one another and love one another,
And so, good people, kiss each other!

Now you are married we wish you joy!

GRUNDY Tut-tut! It's not to be borne!

TOM TIDDLER [*to THE PARTIES and THE COURT*] If you
don't like it you can get out, see?

THEY Out! Out! Kick 'em out!

SERVANTS *return with the royal mantle, and THE
FLOWER GIRL presents the briar roses 'which she
has hastily woven into a crown.*

MRS. GRUNDY [*bursting into tears*] Oh, oh, oh! I never
heard of such a thing! I'm the Mistress of the
Wardrobe and they've got out the robes with-
out consulting me! Look at the crown they're
using!

GRUNDY [*aside*] My dear, consider your dignity!

MRS. GRUNDY I am considering my dignity.

GRUNDY You should never let the common people see
you cry.

ADAM'S OPERA

i

MRS. GRUNDY I'm not crying: it's only a cold!
Atishoo! Opening windows at this time of
day! Atishoo! But did you ever hear of such
a thing?

GRUNDY Tut-tut!

THE PRINCESS *offers ADAM the briar crown, and the
six COURT LADIES scatter roses from THE FLOWER
GIRL'S basket at their feet, while THE COURT
sings—*

THE COURT T#/-tut! Did you ever hear of such a thing?
THE LADIES Ring a ring o' roses,

A pocket full o' posies!

He doesn't care a button if he never wears a crown!

THE COURT T#/-tut! Did you ever hear of such a king?
A-tishoo! A-tishoo!
We all fall down!

THEY 7~#/-tut! Did you ever dream of such a king?

A slice of bread and honey,

A pocket full of money!

And you shall do the dirty work and I shall wear the crown!

IV-tut! Did you ever hear of such a thing?

A-tishoo! A-tishoo!

You'll all fall down!

THE COURT (*in increasing agitation*)

Tut-tuti Did you ever hear of such a thing?

GRUNDYS We've not a leg to stand on!
 Whatever shall we land on?

 It's simply revolution! We shall come upon the town!
ALL T#/-tut! Did you ever dream of such a king?
 A-tishoo! A-tishoo!
 We'll all fall down!

*And so THE COURT does., overwhelmed by the joyous
avalanche of THEM as they dance round the man and
woman who kiss amid the rain of roses.*

The Curtain falls.

II

*It is a year later. The scene is still the great hall ,/BEAUTY'S house; but except for its proportions you wouldn't recognise it. It has been completely re-decorated: line and pattern have given way to blobs and blotches of crude colour, such as you find in the German picture-book Struwel-Peter: to mustard bottle-green, ILeckitfs blue, magenta and cherry. The colours scream at each other like driven pigs, or so, at least, it seems to an eye accustomed to the mellow arrangements of the first ; but TOM FIDDLER loves it all. When the curtain goes up he is himself standing at his easel, palette and brushes in hand, putting the finishing touches to his new picture of THE PRINCESS but keeping an eye at the same time on such of THEM as are hanging up the new pictures—two Picasso*s, an El Greco, four Van Goghs, and a Gauguin—while others stagger away under the weight of the discarded Botticelli Venus. At the back of the stage others again are setting in position a cast of 'EpsteinV ,ima.*

The inner room is as much changed as the fore-stage, where the PARTIES, unchanged, are playing cards as before. The couch is pushed to one side and a cradle stands in its place. MOTHER EARTH the nurse, an old woman robed in brown, rocks it, while MRS. GRUNDY sits on a settee in the fore-ground, knitting. She is handsomely dressed in the clothes of today: so are the six COURT LADIES, who float in as the curtain rises and flutter about the cradle, singing—

LADIES Beauty's child is full of grace:
MOTHER EARTH Adam's child has Beauty's face:

LADIES Beauty's child is loving and giving:
 MOTHER EARTH Adam's child must work for its living:
 Adam's child is full of woe:
 LADIES Beauty's child has far to go:
 MOTHER EARTH Gold and grey the thread is spun,
 For Beauty's child is Adam's son.

MRS. GRUNDY Bless its little heart!

THE PRINCESS'S VOICE

How many days has my baby to play?
 THE LADIES Friday, Saturday, Sunday!
 Monday morning *off* he goes,
 To school with Mrs. Grundy!

THE PRINCESS'S VOICE Only three days? Then bring
 him to me, Nurse! Bring him into my garden
 quickly!

MOTHER EARTH [*as she carries out the baby*]

Hush-a-bye, baby, the garden is green,
 Your father's a noble, your mother's a queen:
 You shall have kingdoms, silver and gold——

Her voice dies away.

THE LADIES [*talking*]

Bless its little heart!
 Queer name to give a child—Eros!

A LADY [*singing*]

ANOTHER [*singing*]

Means love, you know!
 Then why not say so?

ADAM'S OPERA

ir

A LADY [*fa/king*] Pity it wasn't born on a Sunday.

MRS. GRUNDY Sunday is the official birthday.

A LADY It was born on Friday really.

ANOTHER [*swgwg*] Friday's child is full of woe,
Saturday's child has far to go.

MRS. GRUNDY Its official birthday is the Sabbath.

ALL [*sitiging*] Gold and grey the thread is spun,
For Beauty's child is Adam's son!

MRS. GRUNDY And I must say I *do* think that man
ought to come back!

A LADY Yes! He's been away more than six months.

ANOTHER Just think, Adam hasn't seen his own Son-
and-Heir!

ALL [*singing*]

Tut-tut! Did you ever hear of such a thing?

Baby, baby, bunting!

Adam's gone a-hunting!

He stuck a feather in his cap and wouldn't wear his

Tut-tut! Did you ever hear of such a king— [crown

TOM FIDDLER [*standing back from his ease*] That's enough
for today! Like to come and look?

THE LADIES Oh, it's wonderful! Who is it?

TOM FIDDLER The Sleeping Beauty, of course!

A LADY Oh, of course!

ANOTHER I see! Asleep!

ANOTHER It's e x l y like her!

ANOTHER Not quite so tall perhaps?

ANOTHER Taller, isn't she?

ANOTHER She's different, somehow!

MRS. GRUNDY Tut-tut! The man's mad. He's given her
short hair!

A LADY Short hair!

ANOTHER That's new!

THE LADY I like it!

ANOTHER Don't you?

ALL Let's call upon the barber, the barber, the barber,
Let's call upon the barber and see what he can do.

THE LADIES Barber, barber, shave and shear,
Shave and shear, shave and shear!
How many curls ought I to wear,
All in the morning early?

TOM FIDDLER Wear them smooth or wear them rough,
Wear them rough, wear them rough!
Four and twenty is enough,
Out in the garden early!

THE LADIES Barber, barber, cut my hair,
Cut my hair, cut my hair!
Barber, barber, shave and shear,
All in the morning early!

TOM FIDDLER Lady love! Let down your hair,
Down your hair, down your hair!
That I may climb without a stair,
All in the morning early!

ADAM'S OPERA

n

THE LADIES Never again shall I loose my hair,
 Net my hair, knot my hair!
 Never again let down my hair,
 Out of my window early!

[They float- out.]

TOM FIDDLER *[gloomily]* Women are so crude.

TOM TIDDLER *[entering with GRUNDY and CENSOR]* Crude?
 Born fools!

MRS. GRUNDY Tut-tut!

TOM TIDDLER *[eyeing TOM FIDDLER]* What's the matter?

TOM FIDDLER *[needing comfort]* Don't you *feel* it's like
 her?

TOM TIDDLER Near enough! Well, have you finished?

TOM FIDDLER What? Her portrait! I shall never finish
 her portrait.

TOM TIDDLER I meant the decorations.

TOM FIDDLER *[proudly]* Don't they satisfy?

TOM TIDDLER *[gloomily]* They ought to. They've cost a
 pot of money.

GRUNDY But worth it, if I may say so. The tourists will
 believe it's the Sleeping Beauty's castle now.
 But if they'd seen it in its original state, I doubt
 if they'd have looked at it. How much are you
 charging?

TOM TIDDLER Five shillings entrance, including tour of
 the grounds and inspection of the state apart-
 ments. Refreshments provided! Postcards, sou-

venirs: roses, shilling a bloom: with thorns removed, one and sixpence! Signed photographs of Beauty asleep and awake! All to be bought on Tom Tiddler's ground near the kitchen gardens.

TOM FIDDLER [*pulled*] I thought Beauty refused to sign?

MRS. GRUNDY I am her secretary. I signed for her.

TOM FIDDLER What will Beauty say to that?

TOM TIDDLER She's too busy with the son-and-heir to make enquiries.

TOM FIDDLER But what'll Adam say?

TOM TIDDLER What should he say? It's big money.

TOM FIDDLER I don't think he'll like it.

TOM TIDDLER He'll like it all right when he begins to pick up the gold and silver.

TOM FIDDLER [*slowly*] I'm not sure that I like it either.

TOM TIDDLER Why, it was your own idea!

TOM FIDDLER Decorations, yes. But to charge admittance!

TOM TIDDLER Oh, get off your horse! You've got to live, haven't you, even if you are a genius?

TOM FIDDLER Thomas, I love you—but—Adam won't like it.

ADAM'S OPERA

n

TOM TIDDLER Then what's he been away six months for? Hasn't he been doing a lecture tour round the Wide World, telling them all about the Sleeping Beauty and the castle? If he doesn't make money out of it, what does he do it for? Fun?

TOM FIDDLER There's a thing called art for art's sake.

MRS. GRUNDY Fiddle-de-dee!

TOM TIDDLER You got out of bed the wrong side this morning, my son. You go back and sleep it off!

MR. and MRS. GRUNDY *[singing]*

Go to bed, Tom!

Go to bed, Tom!

Drunk or sober,

Go to bed, Tom!

TOM FIDDLER *[furious]* I shall go to the Princess this moment.

WIRELESS *[entering with RUMOUR]* Dissension between the Lord Treasurer and the Minister of Fine Arts!

RUMOUR Tom Fiddler favours the return of the Prince!

THEY *[entering by twos and threes]* Oh, oh, oh! Is Adam coming back? Hurray! Hurray! The Prince is coming back!

They cross the stage and go out again whispering.

MRS. GRUNDY Tut-tut!

TOM TIDDLER Come, brother! Easy now! You're stirring up the people just when Fd got them settled down to work. What's got into you?

TOM FIDDLER [*feverishly*] Beauty! Beauty! Beauty! She was a dream before the child came, but now she's grown so real to me that——

TOM TIDDLER That what?

TOM FIDDLER Well, to put it in language that you'd understand—I don't like selling her a pup.

TOM TIDDLER But we're not! We're selling it to Adam. Now look here, brother, you've been seeing too much of Beauty, that's what's the matter with you! Painting her picture all the morning, and playing the fiddle to her all the afternoon—what sort of a partner do you think you are? You'll have to stop it——[*Singing*]

So——

Thomas, come give me your fiddle, my boy,
If ever you mean to thrive—o!

TOM FIDDLER

Nay,—I'll not give my fiddle, my toy,
To any man alive—o!
If I should give you my fiddle, my dear,
Be sure I should go mad—a!
Too many a joyful hour, my dear,
My fiddle and I have had—a!

TOM TIDDLER Why——

Thomas, then yield me your palette, my boy,.
Your paper and little ink-pot—o!
I'll take you into my office, my boy,
And teach you what is what—o!

ADAM'S OPERA

TOM FIDDLER

If I should yield you my palette, my dear,
Or cease to write and read—a!
To loaf and dream and talk, my dear,
I'd be a fool indeed—a!

TOM TIDDLER Then,—

Thomas, come sell me your spirit, my boy,
From nine of the clock till five—o!
And you shall handle more money, my boy,
Than any man alive—o!

TOM FIDDLER

If I should sell you my spirit, my dear,
Be sure my 'soul would die—a!
And what would it profit Thomas, my dear,
To gain the world thereby—a!

DESIRE [*jawing the tune*]

By—a!
Hushaby—a!
For the end of the world is a lullaby,
Hushaby!
The end of it all is a lullaby!

MRS. GRUNDY Very well then! I must forbid the
Princess to see Mr. Fiddler except in my
presence—

Chaperon, Tom!
Chaperon, Tom!
Drunk or sober,
Chaperon, Tom!

TOM FIDDLER O God! Why doesn't Adam come back?

DESIRE Adam, come back!

TOM TIDDLER What's the hurry, brother? Hasn't everything gone well?

TOM FIDDLER Too well!

TOM TIDDLER Haven't I run the show properly?

GRUNDY Hasn't he conciliated the court?

TOM FIDDLER That's it! What will he say when he finds you all back again in your old jobs? Even Dummy and the Aunts!

TOM TIDDLER Come, come! What's wrong with them? Dummy's reformed himself, hasn't he? And even the Aunts don't play bridge any longer. They've gone back to-the good old game, the finest game in the world and the oldest—although that Young Party thinks she invented it herself.

TOM FIDDLER What game?

THE YOUNG PARTY *and* THE STOUT PARTY {*simultaneously*}
Grab!

THE YOUNG PARTY It's mine, I tell you! Isn't it, Speaker?

SPEAKER The remarks were simultaneous, ladies! It had better go into the pool.

THE YOUNG PARTY [*ominously*] Oh well, as I mean to have the pool in the end—Grab! (*She secures a card*)

THE STOUT PARTY *and* THE THIN PARTY [*together*] Grab!

THE YOUNG PARTY [*shouting them down*] Gr—gr—gr—grab!

ADAM'S OPERA

II

TOM FIDDLER Why, it's Animal Grab!

SPEAKER It's a variant of Beggar-My-Neighbour, sir!

THE YOUNG PARTY I beggar him for his own good,
Speaker!

SPEAKER That must be put in the form of a question,
Miss!

THE THIN PARTY [*softly*] Grab, grab, grab, grab, grab!

THE STOUT PARTY Sister, those votes are mine. [*She
secures them*]

THE THIN PARTY Grab! [*She secures a card*]

THE STOUT PARTY Grab, grab, grab! [*She secures them*]

THE YOUNG PARTY [*rising and snatching at the kitty*] Grab
and pool!

THE STOUT PARTY *and* THE THIN PARTY It's not fair.
Appeal to Dummy! Appeal to Speaker!

THE YOUNG PARTY You can appeal to whom you like.
I've beggared you. [*She sings*]

The field that once was barren ground

My neighbour has reclaimed;

But as for me I cannot dig,

To beg I am ashamed:

So he must share his land with me,

And plough and plant for two;

For I—

Beggar my neighbour, my neighbour!

THEY [*to each other*] That's you!

GRUNDY \singing]

I love to go my own sweet way,
But if ray neighbour goes
A way that he prefers to mine,
I tread upon his toes:
I never could leave well alone,
I can't let people be:

Sol-

Worry my neighbour, my neighbour!

THEY [to each other] That's me!

CENSOR \singing\

My neighbour may be fifty odd,
That's no affair of mine!
I will not let him go to plays
At which I draw the line.
He is not old enough to know
When he is shocked or bored:

Sol-

Censor my neighbour, my neighbour!

THEY [to each other] O Lord!

MRS. GRUNDY \singtng\

I do not bet, I cannot smoke,
I never live in sin,
Or take a cup and drink it up
To let good temper in.
So I have time to criticise,
A right to make a fuss:
And I—

Bully my neighbour, my neighbour!

THEY [to each other} That's us!

TOM FIDDLER All the same, I tell you this! Adam will put a stop to your beggaring and your bullying when he comes.

TOM FIDDLER When he comes!

GRUNDY If he comes!

TOM FIDDLER What do you mean? He's expected any day, any hour. It's a whole month since Beauty wrote to him to come back.

TOM TIDDLER Oh yes, she wrote right enough.

MRS. GRUNDY Yes indeed, she wrote.

GRUNDY But——

TOM TIDDLER But——

TOM FIDDLER But what?

ALL THREE Aha!

THE PRINCESS [*entering, with her LADIES*]

I sent a letter to my love,
And on the way I dropped it:
One of you has picked it up,
And put it in his pocket!

I wrote a letter to my love,
'Twas all my own inditing:
I said I hoped it found him well,
As it left me at writing.

II

ADAM'S OPERA

I said we'd had the painters in,
That rain was needed badly:
And every one was very kind,
But oh! I missed him sadly.

COURT LADIES For every one was very kind,
But yet she missed him sadly.

THE PRINCESS I told him to trot home again
As fast as he could caper:
I wrote it with a golden pen
Upon a silver paper.

I took it to the post myself,
(I thought it would be better)
I paid three ha'pence for a stamp,
And then—I lost my letter!

COURT LADIES She took it to the post herself,
(She thought it would be better!)
She paid three ha'pence for a stamp,
And then—she lost her letter!

THE PRINCESS I sent a letter to my love,
And on the way I dropped it,
One of you has picked it up,
And put it in his pocket!

[To TOM FIDDLER]
It wasn't you?

TOM FIDDLER No such luck, your Loveliness!

THE PRINCESS [*to GRUNDY*] It wasn't you?

GRUNDY Your Queenliness knows that I am incapable——

THE PRINCESS [*to MRS. GRUNDY*] It wasn't you?

MRS. GRUNDY That's as may be.

PRESS To whom was the letter addressed, your Highness?

THE PRINCESS To my love.

MRS. GRUNDY Which love, Ma'am?

THE PRINCESS Do you dare?

TOM FIDDLER We're all your lovers, Loveliness!

THE PRINCESS O Tom Fiddler, what has she done with my letter?

MRS. GRUNDY That's my business, Ma'am!

PRESS Looks like theft to me.

MRS. GRUNDY Monstrous!

CENSOR [*alert*] Now then, what's all this about?

THE LADIES She sent a letter to her love,
And on the way she dropped it:
Somebody has picked it up,
And put it in her pocket!

CENSOR [*to MRS. GRUNDY*] Turn out your pocket!

MRS. GRUNDY Tut-tut!

THE LADIES We don't wear pockets nowadays,
It's not the mode in our days.

MRS. GRUNDY I am the keeper of Beauty's conscience:
naturally I picked up the letter. Unheard of, at
this time of day, writing love letters to her own
husband!

THE PRINCESS Then it was——

MRS. GRUNDY It is my duty to see that Beauty's love
letters go by the proper channels.

THE PRINCESS So it was——

MRS. GRUNDY I gave it to Solomon.

THE PRINCESS Then it was——

GRUNDY It was written in gold on silver paper. Its
proper place was the Treasury. Tom Tiddler is
in charge of Adam's keys and correspondence.

THE PRINCESS Then it was——

TOM TIDDLER It was of no interest to me. I handed it
to the Press.

THE PRINCESS So it was——

PRESS I consulted the Censor.

CENSOR I suppressed it. Change the subject!

THE PRINCESS (*stamping her foot*) You suppressed my
letter? You'll be suppressing me next!

THEY [*entering by twos and threes*] Beauty's angry, angry,
angry!

THE PRINCESS Angry I am. Tell me this, Tom Fiddler,
Adam's friend! What right have they to pick
up my letter? Oh, Tom Fiddler, Tom Fiddler,
do you think they have pocketed my lover's
letters too?

ADAM'S OPERA

n

CENSOR They weren't at all nice reading, Highness!

GRUNDY Indeed, no!

MRS. GRUNDY The things he's been saying!

GRUNDY The things he's been doing!

MRS. GRUNDY No balance!

GRUNDY No proportion!

MRS. GRUNDY Letting people in!

GRUNDY Letting people out!

THEY What's it all about?
 What's the matter now?
 What has Adam done?
 Why and where and how?
 He's letting people out!
 He's letting people in!
 There's bound to be some fun!
 There's going to be a row!
 But what's it all about?
 And when will it begin?
 Shall we hide or shall we run?
 He's letting people out!
 He's letting people in!
 There's going to be a row!
 But what's it all about?

CENSOR The truth is, he's been giving all sorts of wrong impressions.

PRESS He's usually been inviting people into the garden.

MRS. GRUNDY So unnecessary.

GRUNDY Literally compelling them to come in!

TOM TIDDLER And *our* garden, mark you!

THE PRINCESS Your garden? My garden—Adam's garden—all the world's garden! Oh, Tom Tiddler, why doesn't my gardener come home? He promised, but he doesn't come. [*She sings*]

Oh! Out of sight is out of mind—

[Come home to me, my lover!]

And man's a thistle on the wind—•

[Home again, my lover!]

The north in wrath begins to blow,

My heart's a garden full of snow

And frost without my lover!

Naught will quicken, naught will grow,

My roses droop, my lilies die,

And as they sicken so must I,

Lost without my lover!

I feel it, the forgotten smart,

The needle stab against my heart—

[Oh, come in time, my lover!]

For when my heart begins to bleed,

Unless my lover come with speed,

I'm dead and dead and dead indeed—

[And who shall save my lover?]

MRS. GRUNDY [*in the pause*] Atishoo!

THE PRINCESS What was that?

TOM FIDDLER I think somebody sneezed.

MRS. GRUNDY Atishoo!

GRUNDY My dear! What's the matter? Atishoo!

MRS. GRUNDY Some fool's opened a window. Atishoo!

TOM TIDDLER She's right. There is a draught. Atishoo!

PRESS A distinct draught. Atishoo!

MRS. GRUNDY Atishoo! I haven't had such a cold since
that dreadful day when we all woke up.
Atishoo! Atishoo!

THEY Atishoo! Atishoo!
Who's let in fresh air?
If Adam were here
To let in fresh air,
I'd say he—[Atishoo!]
Had let in fresh air.
He's bound to be near,
With all this fresh air!

DESIRE Bound to be near!

THEY He is here, he is near!
We know him of old.
Atishoo! Atishoo!
He's let in fresh air,
We are bound to catch cold!

THE MAN IN THE STREET [*putting his head in at the window*]
Excuse me all—but I've a notion I've just
passed his Highness. All alone he was, and
hurrying along like any common man in the
street.

TOM TIDDLER Are you sure? Atishoo!

THE MAN IN THE STREET I'm the man in the street, I
am. I'm never sure about anything. But I seen
him at his wedding and——

WIRELESS [*in the street without*] Prince arrives! Prince
arrives! Rumoured mysterious return of the
Prince Consort!

THE COURT LADIES [*singing excitedly*]

Sneeze on Monday, sneeze for danger!

TIDDLER Adam has returned alone—Shoo-a-tishoo!

LADIES Sneeze on Tuesday, kiss a stranger!

GRUNDY Not while I'm a chaperon—Shoo-a-tishoo!

LADIES Sneeze on Wednesday, sneeze for a letter!

PRINCESS Oh, a letter from my love—Shoo-a-tishoo!

LADIES Sneeze on Thursday, something better!

PRINCESS What is better than my love—Shoo-a-tishoo!

LADIES Sneeze on Friday, sneeze for sorrow!

FIDDLER Naught's ahead but grief and pain—Shoo-a-
tishoo!

LADIES Sneeze on Saturday, see your love tomorrow!

PRINCESS Adam is come home again—Shoo-a-tishoo!

THEY Lift up your hands, and your eyes to him lift,
Seeker and Finder, he comes with a gift.
As cloud to the river, returning in rain,
So love to the lover returneth again.

THE PRINCESS My love and my lover,

TOM FIDDLER Her love and her lover,

THEY Our love and our lover returneth again!

ADAM Returneth again!

*For ADAM has entered—not the ADAM of the first > but
a man so haggard and stooping, with face so drawn and hair*

so grey, that twentyyears mist have passed over his head instead of one. Perhaps they have, for the clocks of Beauty's castle are not set to the time of the Wide World. He comes in wearily, the royal mantle dragging after him; but his eyes are still eager, and he is smiling.

ADAM I have come back to you at last, O Beauty's people! And I have done your errands. The Wide World makes peace with you and sends you its love. See, here is the Treaty signed! All the kings of the Wide World have signed it. They will cut down the briars as we have done.

TOM TIDDLER [*interposing irritably*] Yes, but——

ADAM [*disregarding him*] Here is an end to barriers and frontiers, to drawn swords guarding them, to customs and tolls. You are free at last, O my own people, to walk in the Wide World, and the World is free to wander in Beauty's garden. Have I done well?

THEY [*aside*] He's done very well,
 We're pleased as can be.
 Let's all shake his hand,
 Let's ask him to tea!
 Do you quite understand
 What he's done very well?
 It's to do with the land,
 It's a Treaty, you see!
 He's broken a spell,
 So we all shake his hand,
 And we ask him to tea.

THEY *line up, while* THE PRINCESS, *with* TOM FIDDLER,
watches unnoticed.

At this point PRESS *ushers forward* MR. and MRS.
 GRUNDY, *who have difficulty in elbowing a path through*
the crowd.

PRESS Hush! Hi!
 Make way there, if you please.

THEY Now why?

MRS. GRUNDY Intolerable squeeze!

PRESS Enter the deputation!

MRS. GRUNDY We represent the nation!

GRUNDY [*with an obeisance to ADAM*]

Ahem! Ahem! Ahem! I will confess—

MRS. GRUNDY We're in a mess!

GRUNDY For we had no conception, I may say—

MRS. GRUNDY Until to-day—

GRUNDY Of the profound extent to which you're
 seized—*

MRS. GRUNDY Who sneezed?

GRUNDY Upon the popular imagination.

So we're forming a Committee to adjust—

MRS. GRUNDY Or so we trust—

GRUNDY The situation.

And are giving an At Home—

MRS. GRUNDY Kindly come!

GRUNDY To which, as guest of honour, you're
 invited.

We shall be pleased

To welcome you to tea—

MRS. GRUNDY R.S.V.P.

ADAM'S OPERA

n

PRESS Hush! Hi!
 Silence for his reply!

ADAM I——

PRESS———Allow me!

Adam accepts with pleasure! He's delighted
To come to tea.

ADAM No——

PRESS———Allow me!

Adam appears to have no time for tea.

THEY *[sweeping the deputation aside and forming into line]*
But he must come to tea.
We are A, B and C.
We're dying to meet him,
He must come to tea.

WOLVES Make way, do you hear!

THE FAMILIES *[shaking hands, one by one, they file past*
ADAM]

Hullo! Howdy do?
You remember D., don't you?
I knew you at school.
So come to tea, won't you?

SHEEP My turn now, my dear.

THE FAMILIES Hullo! this is E.
I'm terribly thrilled.
My uncle once knew you,
[The one who was killed.]

WOLVES Don't push, do you mind!

THE FAMILIES Hullo! Howdy do?
Delighted to greet you.
I've twenty-four aunts,
And they *all* want to meet you.

SHEEP It's the people behind.

THE FAMILIES Hullo! Howdy do?
Not forgotten old G.?
And the row with the bobby?
Then come and have tea.

WOLVES That's my place, you know.

THE FAMILIES I'm H. de J.K.
I think you know mother!
You lent her a fiver,
Do lend me another!

SHEEP You trod on my toe.

THE FAMILIES Howdy do? Mrs. L.—
L. met you in France.
How perfect to meet you,
Do come to my dance!

WOLVES The sheep are the worst.

THE FAMILIES I'm M. who took N.
You remember me, surely?
I jilted your cousin,
So came to tea early!

SHEEP But we were there first!

ADAM'S OPERA

n

THE FAMILIES I'm a son of the O's,
I'm related to P.
I know all your people,
So do come to tea!

WOLVES Never saw such a crowd.

THE FAMILIES We are Q.R.S.T.
U and V. Would it trouble you—
Sign this for me
And another for W.

SHEEP Don't speak quite so loud!

THE FAMILIES Hullo! Howdy do?
Meet X.Y. and Z.
What? Wanting to leave us?
He's got a swelled head!

SHEEP *and* WOLVES They make such a fuss.

THE FAMILIES But you must come to tea.
He shall come to tea, dear.
I'm not going to vote
If he won't come to tea, dear.

SHEEP *and* WOLVES Let's take the next bus
To the next A.B.C.!
He's no time for us,
And I *do* want my tea.

DESIRE Oh, go and have tea!

The hand-shaking continues in dumb show as they file out>
PRESS *and* CENSOR rounding up the queue.

THE PRINCESS [*aside, to TOM FIDDLER*] This is not young Adam. This is an old man- who does certain duties wearily. His smile is not for me, and his eyes have not sought mine. What has the Wide World done to him?

TOM FIDDLER He is crowned king. He must please the people and put their concerns first.

THE PRINCESS I am before the people and after the people. Once I was his sole pleasure and his sole concern.

TOM FIDDLER He will come to you when he has settled the affairs of the state.

THE PRINCESS [*wailing*] Yes, he will come to me and he shall not find me. If I am not first with Adam, I and Love my son, first in thought, first in look, first in speech, then is the story ended, then is the song sung. Let Adam go his way and I will go mine. He shall not find me ever any more.

She sings—

Lavender's blue, dilly-dilly,
Lavender's grey—
Whither shall I wander,
Wander away?

Lavender's dead, dilly-dally,
Lavender's dry—
Buy my sweet lavender,
Wanderer, buy!

ADAM'S OPERA

II

Whitherwander, whitherwander,
Upstairs or down?
Whither wander? To my chamber,
Lavender's blown!

Sixteen branches a penny—•
Who'll buy? Not any!
Whither shall I wander,
Wander alone?

She goes out weeping, unseen of them all.

TOM TIDDLER [*brushing aside the last of the crowd*] Look
here, Adam, we've got to have a talk—

ADAM It must wait. I have not yet kissed my wife, nor
looked upon the face of Love, my son.

TOM TIDDLER They can wait another five minutes.
You've got to listen. You don't realise how
important—

ADAM I have travelled round the Wide World. I am
so weary that I cannot stand. Will you not give
me an hour's peace?

GRUNDY But, Highness, the Lord Treasurer is entirely
in the right. The Treaty that you have made
won't do.

MRS. GRUNDY That's it! It won't do!

TOM TIDDLER You see, it won't do!

THEY [*going out*] Oh, oh, oh, won't it do?

ADAM Tom Fiddler, are they mad? I have given them Beauty and the Wide World, yet they say—
[*He sways suddenly*] Help me! I am weak. I have not slept nor eaten for haste to be here again. Your shoulder—[Ton FIDDLER *goes to him and supports him*] Now, sirs, while Beauty waits and Love waits, what has Adam done that will not do?

TOM TIDDLER [*unrolling the Treaty*] We are satisfied with the first clause. It is quite right that we should be free to walk into the Wide World. But we don't see why the Wide World should be free to walk in Beauty's garden. If the Wide World wants to come in and out, it's got to pay for it. Let 'em buy the key!

Singing—

For I'll sell you all the key of Beauty's garden!
Who'll buy? Who'll buy?

FIDDLER It lies on Beauty's heart:

TIDDLER And a string that ties the key of Beauty's garden,
Who'll buy? Who'll buy?

FIDDLER It's fast in Adam's hand.

GRUNDYS Let me tell you there's a rat in Beauty's garden,
Who'll sigh? Who'll sigh?

FIDDLER It gnaws the string apart.

ADAM Oh, kill me then the rat in Beauty's garden!
Who'll try? Who'll try?

GRUNDYS He doesn't understand.

TIDDLER You must never kill the rat in Beauty's garden!

GRUNDYS Not I! Not I!

We rely upon the rat.

TIDDLER For he steals me back the key of Beauty's garden,

GRUNDYS So spry! So spry!

We have never known him fail.

TIDDLER And the man who caught the rat in Beauty's

GRUNDYS Oh, fie! Oh, fie! [garden,

If he should manage that,

TIDDLER He'd be master of the world and Beauty's

Who'll buy? Who'll buy? [garden.

The key is now for sale!

ADAM [*convulsed with anger*] A rat? A rat? Tom Fiddler, you, you were my first follower, and after sweet and blessed Beauty, you are closest to me—who is this rat? Who would desert me? Who would betray Beauty? Who would sell his right in her for gold? Could any man? Could you, Tom Fiddler? [*Pointing to TOM TIDDLER*] Could he? Is my mind fallen sick that it dreams even for a fever's instant, that any man could? This is the work of the rat, the invisible rat. I feel him, here, Tom Fiddler! He gnaws my heart-strings, he has gnawed away my wisdom. I do not know friends from foes, Tom Fiddler! Woe's me, I had no foes a year ago. Is this the rat's work also? Has he gnawed away my faith? Who of you are my friends? Who are my foes? Are you one, old friend? Will you too sell

Beauty for gold? I am faint: I am weary: God forgive me that I doubt my own friends* hearts! This is a dream, an evil dream, a spell to be broken! There, I break it! [*He straightens himself, smiling*] Is that you, Tom Tiddler, holding the Treaty in your hand? Why do you frown at me? What is wrong with this Treaty?

TOM TIDDLER We don't make anything out of it. Now my plan is to charge admittance—

ADAM [*bewildered*] Charge? Money?

TOM TIDDLER [*briskly*] Five shillings a head!

MRS. GRUNDY Children half price!

TOM TIDDLER We should have to re-erect the barriers, of course, and let the briars grow. Not too high——

MRS. GRUNDY And keeping them clipped would afford occupation for the unemployed.

ADAM Build up the barriers? Are you mad?

TOM TIDDLER Are you deaf? I tell you there's money in it!

ADAM I have promised the Wide World that it should be free to come and go—free as we are free to come and go.

TOM TIDDLER [*firmly*] We must repudiate the agreement, that's all!

ADAM'S OPERA

II

GRUNDY [*suave*] After all, your Highness, if I may say so, the arrangement was your idea, not ours.

MRS. GRUNDY The Parties didn't authorise it: they only authorised you to—

THE THIN PARTY [*once more absorbed in the game*] Grab!

THE STOUT PARTY Grab, grab, grab!

THE YOUNG PARTY Grab, grab, grab, grab!

THE THREE PARTIES Grab!

They continue to play.

ADAM The Parties? Beauty gave me leave, and They gave me leave. I need no other leave.

TOM TIDDLER Now look here, Adam, old man, be reasonable!

ADAM [*disregarding him*] Freedom, peace and friendship between Beauty's kingdom and the Wide World: this is my reason and Beauty's law. From her own lips you shall hear it. Where are you, Beauty?

DESIRE Ah—Beauty!

ADAM Tom Fiddler, it comes upon me that they have so bedevilled me between them that I have not yet sought Beauty, nor seen Beauty, here in her own place. Where is she?

TOM FIDDLER She was here a moment ago.

ADAM [*Starting*] She was here?

TOM FIDDLER She watched you and held out her arms;
but They beset you and you did not see her.

ADAM [*daZed*] I did not see her!

TOM FIDDLER She went away weeping.

ADAM [*crying out*] What has come to me among you?
Beauty!

DESIRE Beauty!

ADAM Beauty, where are you? Where shall I find you,
Beauty?

DESIRE [*as ADAM rushes out*] Find—beauty!

TOM FIDDLER [*to TOM TIDDLER*] You have grown,
brother! You have bewildered Adam at your
pleasure. You have shaken him to his roots.
You must be a greater brother than ever I took
you for.

MRS. GRUNDY I always said, Mr. Fiddler, that you
never did your brother justice. Didn't I,
Solomon?

GRUNDY You did. I agreed with you.

Singing—

If all the quests were one quest,

TOM TIDDLER And it were led by me:

GRUNDY If all the tests were one test,

TOM TIDDLER And it were passed by me:

If Beauty nodding in her bower

Should blow a kiss to me,

And Adam's luck were my luck,

What a great man I should be!

ADAM'S OPERA

n

MRS. GRUNDY [*jocosely*] And, which is much more important, what a rich man, Mr. Tiddler!

TOM TIDDLER Exl y!

Singing—

If all the keys were one key,
THE GRUNDYS And Tom could turn that key:

TOM TIDDLER If all the fees were one fee,
THE GRUNDYS And Tom were paid that fee:

If no-one ventured in or out,
TOM TIDDLER Unless approved by me,
THE GRUNDYS And Beauty's house were Tom's ground,
What a rich man he would be!

NOBODY [*entering from the inner room*] Mrs. Grundy, the ladies are asking for a chaperon. The Prince is knocking at all the doors in the castle, and they want you to tell him that they are not at home.

MRS. GRUNDY Tut-tut! I'll come at once. Solomon, you'd better come and protect us weak women! The man may be violent.

Al.R. and MRS. GRUNDY hurry out through the doors to the inner room. NOBODY closes the door behind them and sits down cross-legged on the steps.

TOM FIDDLER Adam violent? I wish he would be! Oh, for the hurricane Adam I used to know! Eh? Did you ever see anyone so changed, so pitifully changed?

TOM TIDDLER It's we who have changed, brother! And
for the better! *\Hummin'j*

If Adam's luck were my luck,
What a great man I should be!
We believed in his star, brother, and he built
his fortune on our belief—young fools that we
were to let him! But now—*[whistling]*

Who'll buy? Who'll buy?
I tell you, Tom, we made him, and now we're
going to break him. There's no more money
in the Adam proposition.

TOM FIDDLER *[in a rush of enthusiasm]* We made him?
Who told us the tale of the Princess sleeping in
the wood's heart? Who led us to the very
castle of the Sleeping Beauty?

TOM TIDDLER *[coolly]* Are you quite sure that she was
the Sleeping Beauty?

TOM FIDDLER *[brought up short]* Are you mad?

TOM TIDDLER Are you quite sure that there ever was or
could be a Sleeping Beauty? Do you believe,
deep down in your heart, that this—Beauty, as
you call her, could lie hidden and asleep year
after year and century after century, and wake
now to live and move among us, and bear a
child? Pooh! It's against all human experience!

TOM FIDDLER But the legend—

TOM TIDDLER Legend, e x l y !

TOM FIDDLER But we saw with our own eyes!

ADAM'S OPERA

ir

TOM TIDDLER [*offhand*] Speak for yourself!

TOM FIDDLER [*agitated*] Brother, brother, weren't we both there? Didn't we see him turn the key that we couldn't turn?

TOM TIDDLER [*slyly*] I have my suspicions of that key.

TOM FIDDLER Didn't we see her stir in her sleep as he bent over her? Didn't we see her open her eyes as he waked her from her age-old sleep?

TOM TIDDLER You saw a fine woman sit up in bed and yawn.

TOM FIDDLER [*recoiling*] You blaspheme Beauty.

TOM TIDDLER [*conciliatory*] Well, leave that! There may be a sleeping beauty somewhere for all I know, but how do you know that this was she?

TOM FIDDLER [*thunderstruck*] How do I know?

TOM TIDDLER Yes, how do you know? Come! How do you know that she hadn't been smuggled in half an hour before?

TOM FIDDLER What?

TOM TIDDLER You can't prove that she wasn't.

TOM FIDDLER Or you prove that she was.

TOM TIDDLER That's where common-sense steps in.

TOM FIDDLER Blasphemy!

TOM TIDDLER Common-sense.

TOM FIDDLER [*distraught*] O God! O devill

TOM TIDDLER [*lightly*] Neither God nor devil! Just common-sense! A woman who sleeps for a hundred years is outside my experience. Then how can it be true?

TOM FIDDLER Has he ever lied to us?

TOM TIDDLER I'd sooner believe he could, than believe something I can't understand.

TOM FIDDLER [*anguished*] Is my leader a cheat? Is my heart's desire a trollop?

TOM TIDDLER [*tolerant*] Well, well! No need to label everyone!

TOM FIDDLER But I saw him wake her.

TOM TIDDLER You were asleep a moment before. Can you trust your memory?

TOM FIDDLER [*in the toils*] God pity me! I don't know.

TOM TIDDLER [*briskly*] I do. A sleeping beauty is against all reason.

TOM FIDDLER [*maddened*] Then your reason is my devil, and the devil rules the world.

TOM TIDDLER [*gently*] Not at all! You and I will rule it.

TOM FIDDLER What's this?

TOM TIDDLER This dreaming fool, this self-deceiving cheat—his time's up, I tell you! No-one believes in him any more.

TOM FIDDLER The people believe.

ADAM'S OPERA

n

TOM TIDDLER [*quickly*] In her, not in him. He asks too much of them. They'll soon get rid of him. But she—

TOM FIDDLER You'll destroy her too?

TOM TIDDLER [*roughly*] You fool, no! She's our trump card. One of us shall marry her. You, if you like! Give me the power and you can have the kingdom and the glory. Back me and you shall have her! Don't you love her, you dreaming, dazzle-eyed fool?

TOM FIDDLER [*stammering*] Do I love Beauty? Do I dare—?

TOM TIDDLER Put that clap-trap out of your head!

TOM FIDDLER [*in his dream*] She's never looked at me. How could she look at me?

TOM TIDDLER [*finally*] Well, it's the beauty's own lookout if she doesn't. She shall marry one of us or be exposed for what she is, with her painted cheeks and dyed hair.

TOM FIDDLER Blasphemy! Blasphemy!

TOM TIDDLER The woman of a charlatan!

TOM FIDDLER I'll kill you for that!

He flings himself on TOM TIDDLER.

TOM TIDDLER [*mastering him*] You're not strong enough. You don't believe any more.

TOM FIDDLER stares at him for a moment and then, as TOM TIDDLER lets him go, turns and falls into a chair, his head buried in his arms. He breaks into passionate sobbing.

TOM TIDDLER [*contemptuously*] What are you crying about? *He* wouldn't do that. I give him his due: he's never whined. When he's exposed—kicked out—a laughing-stock—as he will be before the day's over, still he won't do that.

TOM FIDDLER [*hysterically*] 'And the devils also believe and tremble!'

TOM TIDDLER [*bored*] Oh, stow it! I know a man when I see one, even when he gets in my way.

TOM FIDDLER [*bitterly*] A man? I thought him a god. What's the good of a man to me?

TOM TIDDLER [*jovially*] Or a god to me? [*Then, as TOM FIDDLER turns as if to go*] Where are you off to?

TOM FIDDLER Away—anywhere! Honour is a hobby-horse and beauty a harlot's cheek! Youth's a fever and hope a dream! Gold is God and the world the devil's dunghill for ever and ever!

TOM TIDDLER Amen! I'll do better without you. Paint your pictures and play your fiddle and sing your sawny songs! Write your novels, dance and make music, whilst I do the work of the world.

TOM FIDDLER Make music? How can I? I've grown old. I don't believe in anything. I'm out of touch with life. I'll die and be damned.

TOM TIDDLER [*robustly*] Not you! You'll stay alive and do the damning.

ADAM'S OPERA

II

TOM FIDDLER \struck\ So I can! So I will! \Much
cheered\ Bless you for that word, brother!

He goes out to the right.

TOM TIDDLER [singing]

If all the geese were one goose,
And it were stuffed by me,
I'd turn the bird to some use,
I'd make it lay for me!
A golden egg, an orb, a crown,
A sovereignty for me!
When Adam's goose is my goose,
What a gander I shall be!

He goes out to the left.

NOBODY [alone on the stage] Adam! Adam! You've lost
the friends of your youth! Now I know that
the end is near.

THE MAN IN THE STREET [putting his head in at the window]
Hey! Who's there?

NOBODY Nobody!

THE MAN IN THE STREET Where's the Prince?

NOBODY Nobody's seen him.

THE MAN IN THE STREET The Princess then?

NOBODY Nobody knows.

THE MAN IN THE STREET Nobody listens to a rough
chap like me. Won't nobody take one of 'em
a message?

NOBODY Why don't you come inside? He'd be as
pleased as Punch to see you.

THE MAN IN THE STREET I'm the man in the street, I am. I never get inside of anything. But the Prince, he's a sportsman! Look 'ere, there's a row on. Won't nobody tell him?

NOBODY Nobody will.

THE MAN IN THE STREET Look 'ere! These two pals of mine, they know more about it than I do. [*He hoists up RUMOUR and WIRELESS*] I'll drop 'em in if nobody minds. [*They drop lightly into the room*] Cut along now and tip him the wink, there's good boys! Cheerio!

He shambles off. WIRELESS and RUMOUR are left in the centre of the stage with NOBODY sitting cross-legged between them.

RUMOUR [*excitedly*] There's something wrong!

WIRELESS There's something wrong!

BOTH For everybody's talking, there must be something

RUMOUR I shan't be long! [in it!]

WIRELESS I shan't be long!

BOTH There's nothing like a key-hole, I'll tell you in a [minute!]

They run up the steps and catching each a handle of the folding doors they pull them open and stand, still holding them, each with a free hand to his ear, at either corner of the stage. The opening of the doors has revealed once more the inner room which has changed to a fashionable beauty Parlour. MRS. GRUNDY is manageress: THEY are manicurists, hair-dressers, etc. THE LADIES are scattered about the room: one is having her hair dressed:

ADAM'S OPERA

n

one is in evening dress: another is trying on a hat: Mannequins promenade. A gramophone is playing.

THE LADIES *[singing]*

What do you suppose the news is now?
 There's going, there's going to be a row, row, row!
 They say, they say that Beauty's run away,
 Or is it Fiddler? Or is it Tiddler?
 Or is it Adam, young Adam, Prince Adam who's gone?
 None knows
 Who goes;
 But they'll depose
 Some-one!
 For here, there, everywhere, they say, say, say
 That Adam's lost Beauty, Beauty, Beauty!
 Adam's come to stay again,
 Late, too late!
 Beauty's hid away again.
 Fate! It's fate!
 He ruled us all, did the king, king, king;
 But he'll have a great fall and we'll sing, sing, sing,
 'All Adam's horses and all Adam's men
 Will never find Beauty, Beauty, Beauty,
 Never bring Beauty back again.'

RUMOUR I told you so!

WIRELESS I told you so!

BOTH Another time believe me! I said so from the start.

RUMOUR But does he know?

WIRELESS He may not know—

BOTH *Ooh!* Cut along and tell him and watch him break
[his heart!]

They run off.

II ADAM'S OPERA

ADAM [*entering* Beauty, where are you? Why do you hide from me, Beauty? [*seeing NOBODY*] Where's the Princess?

NOBODY Nobody knows.

ADAM [*rapping at the folding-doors*] Beauty, I need you. Call her—and quickly! I'm not in the mood for laughter.

MRS. GRUNDY We shouldn't dream of laughing at your Highness.

ADAM Why shouldn't you, if it comes to that?

MRS. GRUNDY [*reverently, her eyes on his mantle*] We know what real ermine costs.

A LADY Yes, indeed! Why, even coney nowadays—

MRS. GRUNDY And the next thing, your Highness?

ADAM I am waiting for my wife.

MRS. GRUNDY Sir, she's here. What more can we do?

THE LADIES [*from all parts of the room*]

Here!

Here!

Here!

A LADY A looking-glass, a hare's-foot, crimson lips—
What else is Beauty, Adam?

ANOTHER [*crossing the room*] Slender hips
Are all the rage: and with one's hair—you see?

ADAM'S OPERA

n

ADAM Beauty, where are you?

A LADY [*at the toilet-table*] Is he calling me?

ANOTHER [*n'ith bare arms and long train*]
Or me?

ANOTHER [*muffled to the throat, trying on a hat*]
Or me?

ADAM Where have you hidden her?

ANOTHER Here!

MRS. GRUNDY [*opening a press packed with dresses*]
She never wears the same frock twice.

ADAM *pushes her roughly aside and searches.*

Dear, dear!

ADAM Beauty, I need you!

MRS. GRUNDY Men are always rough.

ADAM Where are you hiding?

A LADY In a powder-puff I

THE LADIES *break into peals of laughter.*

ADAM [*coming down the stage*] Is this a sign? First I lose
Tom Fiddler—

MRS. GRUNDY [*aside 9 to THE LADIES*] D'you hear that?

ADAM [*descending the steps*] And now, has she also fled
from me? [*Crying out*] Beauty, why do you
hide? Where are you, Beauty?

DESIRE Ah—beauty!

MRS. GRUNDY *and* THE LADIES *[singing]*

Where's Eternal Beauty hiding?
 What a question! Bless his heart!
 In her parlour Beauty's bidding:
 Here we teach her ancient art.

Beauty's fame? A passing fashion,
 Re-invented hour by hour!
 Beauty's flame? A youthful passion!
 Love's an artificial flower.

Six of one is half a dozen,
 Take your choice! We're all the same.
 Each of us is Beauty's cousin,
 Beauty's nothing but a name.

*They break into fresh laughter as WIRELESS and RUMOUR,
 who have re-appeared on the inner stage, close the doors
 from the inside.*

ADAM *[as he turns away]* Adam! Adam! How lonely life
 is!

He sings—

I met a pretty sighing lass,
 As lonely as could be:
 She looked into a scrying glass
 To know her destiny.
 She hoped for a lover,
 She looked for a friend,
 She saw but her own face,
 World without end.

I begged the silly sighing lass,
(As big a fool as she!)
To lend to me her scrying glass
To know my destiny.
I hoped for a lover,
I looked for a friend,
I saw but my own face,
World without end.

I thanked the sorry sighing lass,
(As wise a fool as she!)
And gave her back her scrying glass:
I knew my destiny.
To hope for a lover,
To long for a friend,
And laugh in my lone face,
World without end.

NOBODY [*singing softly*]

World without end
Where the green grass grows,
What will he find there?
Nobody knows.

ADAM [*catching sight, for the first time, of NOBODY*] Hullo!
Who are you?

NOBODY [*forlorn*] Nobody.

ADAM [*concerned*] You're a poor pinched ha'porth of
misery, aren't you? Who looks after you?

NOBODY [*with a shrug*] Nobody.

ADAM Who's your father?

NOBODY Nobody.

ADAM [*smiling*] Well, you've someone to care for you, haven't you? someone to care for, eh?

NOBODY No, no, no! Nobody!

ADAM Hm! It's time we met. How have you come here?

NOBODY I've always been here. I'm the king's jester.

ADAM I'm the king. If I'd known you were here I'd have looked after you.

NOBODY [*with the ghost of a smile*] Nobody's left you to yourself till now.

ADAM [*sharply*] What's that?

NOBODY [*slipping a hand into his*] But now—Nobody wants you!

ADAM [*stung*] Nobody wants me.

NOBODY [*coaxing*] Nobody cares!

ADAM [*heavily*] Nobody cares.

NOBODY [*he lifts a corner of ADAM'S cloak and draws it round him*] Nobody's sorry for you!

ADAM [*bowed*] Nobody's sorry for me.

NOBODY So Nobody's your friend!

ADAM Nobody's my friend.

NOBODY [*snuggling*] How warm your mantle is!

ADAM [*low*] Yet I shiver. Nobody's a cold companion.

NOBODY What has it felt like to be a king and lead a people?

ADAM'S OPERA

II

ADAM Nobody knows what it feels like.

NOBODY Nobody guesses!

ADAM There's nobody to believe, nobody to speak
with, nobody to trust, nobody to understand,
nobody for a friend, nobody to love you,
nobody to care if you live or if you die.

NOBODY Tom Tiddler cares. [ADAM *laughs*] Of course
he cares. When you are killed he'll be President.
It's all arranged.

ADAM Arranged, is it? They don't know me yet.

NOBODY Nobody knows you. Nobody will ever know
you or understand. They will fight to the death
against you because they do not understand.
This is your last fight, Adam.

ADAM You He. It shall be my last victory. Though they
destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see
good. For my son lives, the Love that Beauty
bore me.

NOBODY They will cast out Adam: they will hide away
Beauty: they will stifle Love.

ADAM [*with a quick change of mood and of pose—the leader
once more*] The boy's nurse? Is she faithful?

NOBODY None more faithful.

ADAM Send her to me!

*But even as NOBODY runs out, MOTHER EARTH enters,
singing. The child in her arms is a mere shape swathed and
hidden in the folds of her brown garments.*

MOTHER EARTH

Hush-a-bye, baby, in the tree top,
When the wind blows the cradle will rock,
When the tree shakes the cradle will fall,
Down will come cradle, baby and all.

ADAM [*hastening to her*] Who told you that I wanted you?

MOTHER EARTH [*smiling*] Nobody.

ADAM I've just sent for you.

MOTHER EARTH I knew you would send for me.

ADAM You knew?

MOTHER EARTH It's happened before.

ADAM What do you mean? [MOTHER EARTH *takes no notice of the question*] Who are you?

MOTHER EARTH The nurse. [*Rocking the child, she sings*]
Hush-a-bye, baby, your cradle is green,
Your father's a noble, your mother's a queen!

ADAM [*strangely*] I know that tune.

MOTHER EARTH Do you, Adam?

ADAM [*singing*] You shall have—
How does it go?

MOTHER EARTH [*rocking the child*]
You shall have kingdoms, silver and gold,
And lie under green grass when you are old.

ADAM [*his face working*] I—Fm not so old.

MOTHER EARTH [*coming nearer*] Here are grey hairs, my son!

ADAM It's only a year ago that I found Beauty. I was a young man a year ago—a lifetime ago.

MOTHER EARTH A king can't expect to last long—a true king.

ADAM [*fiercely*] I'm not the king. I'm the pretender. Can't you hear them calling it after me? Pretender! Pretender! Throwing it after me as if it were a stone—Failure! Impostor! Pretender! Not the true king! [*In another voice*] Old Mother—?

MOTHER EARTH Young son?

ADAM I wanted to be a true king.

THE COURT LADIES [*singing behind the folding doors*]
Tut-tut! Did you ever hear of such a king?
Ring a ring o' roses,
A pocket full o' posies,
He hasn't got a people and he doesn't wear his crown
Tut-tut! Did you ever hear of such a king!

Their voices die away.

ADAM Doesn't wear it! My forehead aches under it. I can't rest on my pillow for it.

MOTHER EARTH Take comfort! Flowers fade when the winter comes; but grass grows all the year round.

[*Singing*]

Rock-a-bye, baby, the grass is so green—

ADAM I know that voice.

II ADAM'S OPERA

MOTHER EARTH *[singing]*

Your father's a noble, your mother's a queen.

ADAM *[agitated]* Where do you come from?

MOTHER EARTH From hills and valleys, from green fields and green woods.

ADAM Who sent for you?

MOTHER EARTH Swallows from the eaves called me: homing bees brought me the news.

ADAM What news?

MOTHER EARTH *[triumphant]* That a child was born once more in the house of the Sleeping Beauty, and needed its nurse.

ADAM Old woman, whose voice I know—

MOTHER EARTH *[throwing back her veil]* Whose face you know—

ADAM *[crying out]* Mother Earth, I know you! I know you, my Mother Earth! Oh, the green cradle!
[In another voice] Mother, this is my son. Guard him for me, Mother!

MOTHER EARTH As I guarded you and your father and your father's father, little grey-haired nursling.

ADAM If I die, I die; but if I live I'll escape and come to you.

MOTHER EARTH Living or dead, you will come to me, Adam, as your son has come.

ADAM Let me look at him. *\She lifts 'a veil. He stands looking down at the child* Little son, you are your mother's as yet. I can't hold you. I am clumsy. Do I irk you so, little wailing son? When you come to the years which are mine, I shall not be there to hold you. When they tell you that your mother is a queen, little son, believe them! But that your father was noble—Jaugh when they tell you that! Your father is a beggar who found a kingdom and lost it again, and leaves you neither kingdom nor silver nor gold, but only the rags and tatters of his dream. See, I wrap you in my rags, little son, that by them you may remember me. *[He fakes off his royal mantle and wraps it about the child,\ while he sings—]*

I dreamed a dream in the half light,
Ere the labouring day began:
I found the Sleeping Beauty
Hid in the heart of man.
At the touch of my lips she awakened,
For a space we two were one:
Body and soul I gave her,
And Beauty bore me a son.
Turned, she has turned, forgetting
How she lifted her eyes and smiled:
I, I too have forgotten:
Remaineth the child.
He shall feed upon husks and go naked,
His children shall starve at his side,
His children's children be outcast,

Rejected, denied.
But after long years are over,
And the spell is outworn and past,
The child of his children's children
Shall come to his own at last.
The briars shall bloom at his coming,
The doors of his house swing free,
Here shall he stand where I stumbled.
Saviour and Prince is he.
And Beauty that lieth sleeping
He shall take by the hand,
With a kiss and a kiss he shall wake her,
And they shall deliver the land.

Then he says—

The blessing of fields and the happy flowers be
upon you! May the woods shelter you and the
hills strengthen, and the love of a woman give
you peace, ere you follow me to the cities, my
son, my little son! [*To MOTHER EARTH*] Go
now, and quickly! [*MOTHER EARTH hurries out*]

THE MAN IN THE STREET [*putting his head in at the window*]
Sir, there is trouble. The Son-and-Heir's
missing, and her Highness is that upset you'd
hardly know she's Beauty any more to look at
her. They're coming after you, sir. Run!

ADAM Whither?

THE MAN IN THE STREET Lord! Hasn't he a friend to
look after him?

NOBODY There's nobody.

TOM TIDDLER *enters at the head of THEM. THEY follow, with THE PRINCESS between MR. and MRS. GRUNDY. THE COURT comes in last. THE PARTIES and DUMMY rise in agitation.*

TOM TIDDLER There he is! Take him now! Gooddogs! After him! Tear him! Worry him! Whoop-eel

ADAM [*alone on the steps*] Well, travelling companion? Where is your brother and mine?

TOM TIDDLER Done with you, as I am! You promised us the kingdom and the glory——

ADAM I gave you the kingdom and the glory. Is not Beauty with us and awake? [*He turns to THE PRINCESS*] Are you not the living Beauty? Did I not wake you long ago with a kiss?

THE PRINCESS [*fevered*] Give me back Love my son, and I'll save you yet!

ADAM Love will come again.

THE PRINCESS Give him to me now, my son!

ADAM God Himself cannot make him come again before his time.

THE PRINCESS Cheat! Impostor! Where is Love, my son?

ADAM Departed.

THE PRINCESS Am I not Beauty, his own mother? **Give** me my son!

ADAM We have lost him, Beauty. I do not know where he is gone.

THEY *[listening]* Is he the king, Beauty? Is he the true king?

THE PRINCESS Adam was young: he was bold, he was eager: he kissed me, he took me, he gave me Love for my son. This man is old and trembling: his tongue stumbles, his hands are empty. Do what you choose with him!

TOM TIDDLER Do you not know him, Beauty?

ADAM *\crying out* A kiss and a kiss!

THE PRINCESS I do not know him. *[She turns away]*

TOM TIDDLER What more do you want? Beauty herself denies him. Justice on the impostor! He said he was the deliverer. He said he would bring down heaven to earth. Is there heaven on earth?

THEY Not so! No such thing!
And he's not the true king.
Offender! Pretender!
He's not the true king.

GRUNDY Let justice be done!

TOM TIDDLER There must be a fair trial.

GRUNDY You were his friend. You hate him best. You shall be judge.

TOM TIDDLER But who shall be jury?

SOME OF THEM *\stepping forward as Jury*
A Tinker, a Tailor,
A Soldier, a Sailor,
A Rich Man, a Poor Man,
A Beggar, a Thief 1

TOM TIDDLER Judge then, O Jury, this Adam, your king, your servant! He cut down the briars that were your protection; for how else could you keep yourselves to yourselves? He would have kept them cut down, ay, and let the foreigners in! Think of that! And let you out! Think of that! He would have torn up the barriers that hid Beauty's kingdom from the Wide World. Anyone could come in, and he'd never have charged them a penny. Is that business, O Beauty's people? What's the good of Beauty if you can't sell the sight of her? Aren't we Beauty's people, her chosen people, her lovers? Has anyone else a right to look at her unless we allow it? But all the world could have looked at her and loved her if he had his way.

THE WOLVES Grrr!

TOM TIDDLER I mean it. Anyone could have come in: and then what would the custom-house officers have done? I ask you? They'd have lost their jobs.

THE WOLVES Grrr! Grrr! Steal a poor man's job!

TOM TIDDLER And they'd not be the only ones. No more jobs for the Armies and the Navies!

THE SOLDIER *and* THE SAILOR That's us, you know. That's us!

TOM TIDDLER No job for the army contrors!

THE TINKER *and* THE TAILOR That's us, you know. That's us!

II ADAM'S OPERA

TOM TIDDLER No jobs for the gunpowder makers!

THE APOTHECARY That's us, you know. That's us!

TOM TIDDLER No jobs for the political agitators!

THE THIEF That's us, you know. That's us!

TOM TIDDLER No jobs for the toll-keepers and passport sellers, hedgers, ditchers, pruners and pluckers of the beautiful, impenetrable briar-rose hedges!

THE FLOWER-GIRL That's us, you know! My father was a gardener!

ADAM So was mine.

TOM TIDDLER Don't listen to him! Listen to me! No jobs for the flower buyers, the men going to the city!

THE FAMILIES

Don't keep us from the office, from the office, from the office!

Whatever shall we do if the tube breaks down?

TOM TIDDLER That's it! No jobs for the clerks if you take away their master's job, and if you cut the hedges down, you'll take his job away! For your master is the business man—your master is Tom Tiddler! And the kingdom of Beauty is Tom Tiddler's ground, see? I am Tom Tiddler, the great, the indispensable Tom Tiddler. I throw down the gold and silver that you pick up. If you let Adam take my job away what will become of you all?

THEY How should we know?
 Don't frighten us so!
 What is the matter?
 Don't frighten us so!

TOM TIDDLER I'll tell you what will become of you—
 you'll be unemployed. That's what you'll be.

THEY Horrible! Hush!
 Horrible! Hold—
 Back to the cellars!
 We'll do as we're told.

THE WOLVES \howling\
 Dole! dole! Give us the dole!

TOM TIDDLER D'you hear 'em? Well, that's the songr
 he's going to make you all sing.

ADAM [*passionately*] Not true! Listen to me, my loved
 people! For Beauty's sake, for Love's sake,
 listen to me!

TOM TIDDLER Don't let him diddle you! Muzzle him!
 Stop your ears! He's after your jobs, I tell you.
 He wants your money. Judge him, O Jury!
 Judge the pretender!

THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY We've a few questions to
 ask the prisoner first.

ADAM Ask!

THE FOREMAN Is it true that you told the Wide World
 that we were generous, peace-loving, freedom-
 loving folk—that we wanted to be friends with
 the Wide World?

ADAM True.

THE FOREMAN Why did you tell 'em such lies?

ADAM I believed in you. I was mistaken.

THE FOREMAN How dare you be mistaken? You're the king aren't you? Why didn't you come home sooner to see if we had changed our minds? You know how we change our minds.

ADAM I went a long journey. If I had come home sooner I should not have slept nor eaten.

THE FOREMAN Why should you sleep? What does a king want with food? [ADAM *does not answer*]

TOM TIDDLER Answer, Adam! Are you deaf?

ADAM Deafened. [*He sways*]

NOBODY The king is ill.

THEY How dare he be ill?
 How dare he be old?
 We've a right to his skill:
 He should do as he's told!
 He should do as he's told!

ADAM Will you listen to me? Not because I am wise, but because I have given you all that I have—youth and health and sweet sleep, and the love that was my right——

THEY Why shouldn't he give?
 Why shouldn't we scold?
 Thus a king ought to live:
 He shall do as he's told!
 He must do as he's told!

THE MAN IN THE STREET Well, what I say is—don't be too 'asty! After all 'e's a sport.

ADAM'S OPERA

Act II

THEY That's true, he's a sport;
 Though he led us a dance
 He's a pretty good sort:
 We'll give him a chance.

THE MAN IN THE STREET What I say is—let's be
 friends! We're done with Adam the king; but,
 why shouldn't he be Adam the president?
 That's what I say.

THEY Why shouldn't he now?
 Why couldn't he then?
 If he'll do as he's told,
 He can rule us again!
 Let him rule us again!

THE MAN IN THE STREET Take the oath and reign
 again, Adam! You take my tip!

ADAM What is this oath?

TOM TIDDLER You must promise to——•

THEY [*singing*, Speak when you're spoken to,
 Do as you're bid!
 Soon as our kettle boils,
 Sit on the lid!

 Flatter our vanity,
 See with our eyes!
 Try not to contradict,
 Are we not wise?

 Should we feel quarrelsome,
 Give us our fling!
 Pick up the crockery!
 Good little king!

ACT ii

ADAM'S OPERA

Take off the income-tax,
Pass us the salt
If we are greedy beasts,
Own it's your fault

When we get stomach-ache,
Rub it away
Sit up all night with us,
Do what we say

Work to the bone for us,
Beg, borrow, lie,
Steal for us, starve for us,
Die for us, die

Think as we tell you to,
Do as we sing!
Bow down and worship us!
Good little king!

ADAM I worship Beauty and none other.

THEY Worship us! Us! Us!

ADAM I will not.

WIRELESS and RUMOUR [*wheeling in a barrow piled with stones*]

Told you so!
Told you so!
The more you beat him the sooner he'll go,
So here's a barrow of stones to throw.

ADAM'S OPERA

II

TOM TIDDLER You will not? Judge him then, O people!
Judge your king! What has he earned? Is it life
or death? Is it bread or a stone?

THE THIEF I've never been on a jury before. How do
we judge?

THE RICH MAN We toss up.

THE FOREMAN No, nol We count out. Watch mel

He and the JURY count out.

Eena, dena, dynah, dohl
Katla, weedla, wydla, wohl
Spit, spat,
Shall be done!
Twiddlum, twaddlum,
Twenty-one!
O—U—T—spells out!
With my mother's rotten, dotten, dirty
One, two, three! [dish-clout!
Out goes he!

TOM TIDDLER Out goes he!

THEY *and* THE COURT A sentence! A sentence!

TOM TIDDLER Let perfect justice be done! Beauty, cast
you the first stone; [*He presses a stone upon her*]

THE PRINCESS [*to ADAM*] Give me back Love.

ADAM I cannot.

THE PRINCESS Let justice be donel

THEY Spit, spat—Let justice be done!
 Twiddlum, twaddlum—Justice be done!
 Ba, ba—Let justice be done!
 Grrr—Let justice be done!
 O—U—T spells out!

They help themselves to stones.

With—
 My—
 Mother's—
 Rotten—
 Dotten—
 Dirty—
 Dish—

THE PRINCESS *{flinging the stone}*
 Clout!

The stone strikes ADAM on the breast.

ADAM Oh, my heart!

THE VOICE OF MOTHER EARTH *[far away]*
 When his heart breaks, the kingdom will fall,
 Down will come kingdom, beauty and all.

ADAM Beauty, the child returns. Wait for him! Wait
 for me! Oh, my heart!

He falls.

NOBODY *[Creeping up to ADAM and putting a hand on his
 breast]* Broken.

There is a long silence.

THEY *[softly]* Oh! Oh! Oh!

NOBODY [*sobbing*] It was nobody's fault. But nobody stood by him.

THEY Hush!

THE PRINCESS [*frozen*] What have we done?

TOM TIDDLER [*distinctly upset*] What else could we do?
I'm sorry: he meant well.

MRS. GRUNDY [*irritably*] It's the people who mean well who do the most mischief in my experience. He was quite mad, you know.

GRUNDY [*regretfully*] No humour! No balance! No proportion!

TOM TIDDLER [*fretfully*] I don't see what else we could have done.

MRS. GRUNDY [*briskly*] A good riddance of bad rubbish, if you ask me.

GRUNDY The real question is, what are we going to do now?

TOM TIDDLER [*cheering up*] Easy! We'll turn ourselves into a republic, and I'll be the first president and marry the Princess.

[*Singing*]

Marigold is the bride I seek
Marry gold will I.
Golden thistle won't prick me,
Bought and sold shall this beauty be.
Marigold! Bought and sold!
Marry gold will I.

THE PRINCESS *shivers*.

GRUNDY [./dfe] Marry the Princess? Hm! A little soon, eh, with her husband not buried?

MRS. GRUNDY [*aside*] He was never her husband. The whole thing was most irregular.

GRUNDY [*aside*] Still, they ought to wait till he's buried. The people thought a lot of him. [*To TOM TIDDLER*] I was saying, your Excellency, that p6ssibly certain formalities——[*He hesitates delicately with a glance at the corpse*]

TOM TIDDLER Oh, we'll give him a state funeral, if that's what you want.

GRUNDY [*with a shrug of his head*] Er—They would appreciate it, I fancy.

MRS. GRUNDY [*capably*] Then I'd better see about flowers.

GRUNDY [*approvingly*] Laurel's the correct thing in a case like this.

TOM TIDDLER [*generously*] You needn't spare expense. You know, I'm cut up about all this. He was a good fellow in his blind, blundering way.

THE PRINCESS

He was a cry in the night. I and my land lay sleeping
Over the bannered hills he came as the sky grew red:
The spell of the years dissolved in laughter and
joyful weeping:

He was the message of morning. Now he is dead,

TOM TIDDLER Yes, yes, it's very sad; but we've all got to die some day.

THE PRINCESS

I was the bloom on the briar. Torn were his hands
but he took me,

With me my marriage portion, thankless labour and
pain.

A wind blew hot out of hell, shrivelled my blossom
and shook me.

He was my destinate lover: him I have slain.

TOM TIDDLER Oh, you mustn't blame yourself like that,
Princess. No good dwelling on things. [*To*
GRUNDY] You'd better get a move on.
Memorial service at twelve-thirty, and the wed-
ding at two. Will that suit you, Princess?

THEY Wife of Adam, will that suit you?
Will that suit you, Mother of love?

THE PRINCESS I don't know. I don't care. I'm cold.

THEY She doesn't know: she doesn't care any more!
She is old, she is cold,
She shall bed with despair.
She shall do as she's told.

TOM TIDDLER [*to* MRS. GRUNDY] You'd better get her
into her wedding dress. She can't wear that
one, it's all blood stains.

THE PRINCESS [*shrieking*] Strip it off! Strip me naked!
I have betrayed innocent blood.

THEY Innocent blood!
Innocent blood!
It reddens, it deadens,
The innocent blood!

II ADAM'S OPERA

MRS. GRUNDY She needs rest, that's what it is. Your Highness must come and lie down.

THE PRINCESS I shall dream! O God, what dreams I shall have!

TOM TIDDLER You won't have any time for dreaming once we're married. A kiss, Princess? [*She presents her cheek*] Now then there! Make way for her! Can't you see, it's in her way?

GRUNDY What is, Excellency?

TOM TIDDLER The dead man.

THE PRINCESS [*all the while composing the body, crossing the hands, closing the eyes and smoothing the hair*]

Oh, you mistake him, sir! This is **no** man.

This is some bloody clay that once had breath,

And spent it like a fool on foolish things,

On windy talk of honour, peace and such,

Beauty and loving-kindness. Now he's gone.

No more he'll shame us with his credulous eyes

And speech unguarded. Once on this cold mouth,

Like summer lightening in a summer night,

A smile would come and go. Now you and I

Have wiped away the smile and stopped the speech.

Look how these idle fingers fall again

That late reigned~in an empire! Look upon

This body we have bowed! How easily

We blanch'd this manhood, withered up these springs!

Rejoice, my masters, for the god was clay!

To clay we have returned him. All is said.

Bury him deep and pile your stones on him!

*She rises and goes up the steps to the inner stage, followed by MRS. GRUNDY and NOBODY. The doors are closed behind them** THEY *begin moving towards the lift.*

TOM TIDDLER [*calling after her*] That's all right, my dear. You leave things to me! To THE COURT, *confidentially*] Conservative creatures, women! I know what she wants—law and order, peace and quiet.

THE COURT [*nodding*] Law and order!

THE PARTIES [*sinking into their seats at the card-table*] Peace and quiet! \They *bend over their game*]

CENSOR [*as four of THEM push their way through the press with the bier on their shoulders'*] Way there, can't you?

THEY [*reverently, pitifully*] Hush! Hush! Hush!

THE FOUR \They *lift the body on to the bier, raise it to their shoulders and carry it off, chanting softly*]

Hush! Hush! Hush!

Here comes the bogey man!
Run and hide, my little dears;
He'll catch you if he can!

Hush! Hush! Hush!

Here comes the bogey man!
Go to sleep, my little dears;
He'll wake you if he can!

Hush! Hush! Hush!

We've got the bogey man!
Sleep in peace, my little dears:
And wake you now who can!

Hush! Hush! Hush!——

The voices die away.

TOM TIDDLER [*with a sigh of relief as he settles himself on the throne*] Most satisfactory. Where's his crown?

GRUNDY [*awkwardly*] It—it isn't just the thing for your Excellency.

TOM TIDDLER Nonsense! Bring it here! [*They present it to him*] Briars?

GRUNDY The roses are all withered, Excellency! They don't last long.

TOM TIDDLER [*laying it down hastily*] After all, it's *not* correct for a president.

GRUNDY It's more comfortable without, Excellency. Is your Excellency comfortable?

TOM TIDDLER Quite comfortable! Comfortable throne, comfortable robes, comfortable——[*Turning peevishly*] You might shut those windows! [*They are hastily shut*] Comfortable throne-room, comfortable——[*Reaming largely on his entourage*] Are you all right?

THE COURT [*to him and to each other*] Most comfortable! Are you? Are you? [*Then in unison*] Most comfortable!

ADAM'S OPERA

II

TOM TIDDLER What's that?

Rut it is only the LiFT-Bo?jerJking at his gates.

THE LiFT-Boy Going down!

TOM TIDDLER [*with a jerk of his head at THEM as they enter the lift*] Where are they going?

THEY The cellars, the cellars!
Go back to the cellars!

GRUNDY They are going down to their quarters.

THEY We're nothing but sheep,
We may cry in our sleep;
But we do as we're told,
We do as we're told.

TOM TIDDLER But will they be comfortable?

GRUNDY Quite comfortable!

TOM TIDDLER Then we're all comfortable. What a comfort! All we want now is the Princess.

MRS. GRUNDY [*coming through the doors which she closes behind her*] She won't be a minute, your Excellency!

She yawns. THE COURT waits.

TOM TIDDLER It's a long minute. \They wait] It's very quiet here all of a sudden.

II ADAM'S OPERA

GRUNDY But comfortable.

TOM TIDDLER [*sleepily*] Oh yes, most comfortable!

THEY We do as we're told,
We do as we're told!

The lift doors close behind them.

NOBODY [*dashing suddenly down the steps to the foot of the throne*] Sir! Sir! The Princess——

But he is stopped at this point by GRUNDY.

GRUNDY [*scandalised*] Hush! Hush! Tut-tut! That's not the way to communicate with his Excellency!

NOBODY [*dropping on one knee*] The Princess——

GRUNDY [*hustling him*] Will you wait for the herald. Herald!

PRESS steps forward and puts his hand to his ear.

NOBODY The Princess——[*He whispers*]

PRESS You don't say so!

TOM TIDDLER [*waking from a cat-nap with a jerk*] Eh, what's that?

GRUNDY [*soothing him*] One moment, your Excellency!

PRESS beckons, WIRELESS and RUMOUR step forward to each side of the folding doors and blow three blasts.*

WIRELESS and RUMOUR Listen in! Listen in! Listen in!

GRUNDY [*pleased*] Now!

PRESS [*at the top of his voice*]

THE PRINCESS HAS GONE TO SLEEP AGAIN!

CENSOR [*finger on lips*] Hush!

But there is no need for his admonition, for THE COURT has already dropped into every conceivable attitude of repose-, and has no ears for the voice of DESIRE behind the scenes, and no eyes for WIRELESS and RUMOUR who, drawing back the jolding doors, reveal BEAUTY once more fast asleep on her couch.

DESIRE [*unheeded*] Who'll buy? Who'll buy?
The key is now for sale.

The curtain coves down slowly.

Creeping Jenny

A TALE from *The Babyons*

' Man is the oak, woman the ivy tree.'

Old Saying.

I

THE oak tree grew in Petticoat Lane, and when Mary Anne was sixteen years old the ivy that ran up it in straight pale green lines reached no higher than her heart. When Mary Anne, daughter of Robert Thistledallow, was sixteen years old she was formally acknowledged her father's heir, thus, as he said, smoking out the wasps' nest. But she did not inherit his name. Of that her father's prudence and her mother's passion had robbed her before she was born, though the cold and heat of their opposed natures fought in her while she lived. She would have given much for the name. What they gave her she did not value. She hated her blood and she never had any passion for money.

Her mother, the gipsy Teresa, was a handsome woman of thirty, whose tribe had reappeared one summer, after many years' absence, upon the common land above Babyon Court. Teresa's mates told fortunes and taught charms to support themselves and their husbands; but Teresa had no husband, which was singular by gipsy standards. But Teresa, past her bloom as they reckoned it, kept her beauty and kept it to herself, till, at Lambhayne Races, the spring after her tribe's reappearance, she told his fortune to that amorous yet prudent bachelor, Robert Thistledallow -of Riverhayes Farm.

Robert was fifty—stout, handsome, light-eyed, the ruler of a fawning string of cousins and their wives, a money-getter and keeper, a farmer by training, an inspired dealer by nature, and a fair judge of horses, women and servants. He had, too, a boisterous sense of humour; but though he loved a joke as he loved a badger hunt, he seldom forgave a man or womnn who contradicted

him to his face, and never one who, to his face, made a jest of him. He was too eccentric and independent to be popular, but men liked him well enough : and he knew that a generation of valley housewives, because they feared him a little and liked his looks and his goods, had schemed to become Mrs. Thistledallow, and were now advancing their daughters for selection. He liked the knowledge and chuckled : continued to give good parties at Christmas, Michaelmas and Hallowe'en, and to boast that no woman would ever catch him. In his fiftieth year, however, his housekeeper died and Teresa die gipsy told his fortune at the Lambhayne Races.

When, the following spring, the gipsies resumed their wanderings, Teresa remained behind. She was sick: and a dark, bowed, elder woman, much muffled in a shawl, sought and paid a week's lodging for her at High Babyon, the brown village whose walls rise sheer from the roadside and whose gardens run down the cliff between the moor and the valley bottom. Teresa, the villagers understood, was to follow her wild people when she could get about again.

Teresa, drifting on to the moor at the end of the week to see if the encampment were indeed deserted, and finding her answer in the blackened fireplaces and reviving grass, recovered like the grass between a night and a morning. She was blooming and dewy with health and high hopes as she told her landlady a luck-penny fortune, swung a bundle over her shoulder and sprang away. She had indeed the sideways swiftness of a cat surprised in the woods. Under the woman's eyes she moved once or twice at a tangent from the path, and was gone, t You would not have thought that a creature could be so easily invisible on the open moor. Presently she reappeared, a black stroke whose shadow lengthened, touched and was swallowed by the fringing shadows of the Babyon woods. She ran into them as a drop of water runs down a pane to the pool on the sill: and the moor was once more a pure bloom of colour unflecked by the passing of the human fly.

Teresa, equally invisible in the guarded Babyon woods, dropped lightly down the hot slopes till she reached the river where it entered Riverhayes land. She went as one who knew the place by description : she recognised landmarks with interest. Here, after a pause, she sat down, dabbling her arched brown feet in the musical water, plucking and nibbling sprig after sprig of the luxuriant cress. She was smiling. She was waiting. Here, at the noon halt in the haying, she was found by Robert Thistledallow : and the farm spies reported that they did not meet as strangers.

When work resumed, Robert came back into the fields across the river, splashing through the shallows in his high boots, and the gipsy, still bare-footed, followed, with hazel eyes under strong brows flashing for any one who looked at her, with white teeth flashing only when Robert looked or spoke. She worked with the rest till the dews fell : then, at a crook of the farmer's finger, followed him home. The mystery was explained. Here was the new housekeeper. Now who but old Bob—The men chuckled : the matrons raged : while the younger generation repaired once more with relieved hearts to the forbidden gates and oak-shaded primrose banks of Petticoat Lane.

From the first, however, though there was inevitably incessant discussion of the farmer's son, there was no feeling against the woman. As a housekeeper she was a failure : helpless as a fine lady and careless as a slut ; but though the moment was awaited with excitement in which Robert should discover her inefficiencies, nothing was done by the farm feudality to hasten the catastrophe that all knew must come. On the contrary, the hinds and milkmaids ran at her bidding and hid her blunders whenever they could, for no discoverable reason except that she had a manner which they accepted, as dogs will obey the voice of a stranger who has dogs of his own. They liked her easy lady ways, feared the flash of her eye, and spoke well of her.

Nevertheless the farmer's goods began to waste. The

woman did not care, because she was incapable of realising that in sinning against her lover's pocket she sinned against his soul. It was her season of mastery over him and, reckless of his goods, she was reckless also of her mastery.

For very naturally the half-planned, inevitable purpose which their first meeting had created in the heart of each, had been accomplished. The wild woman could not sleep easily in her attic, whose little window was level with the floor. Gasping like a fish on a bank in the hot nights, she had, on the very evening of her advent, slipped down with her blanket to the half-cut stack in the little paddock fringed with apple trees. There, heedless of river mists and river music, she slept blessedly. For two nights Robert Thistledallow lay awake after her footsteps had passed his door : on the third he rose and followed her. That she meant him to follow need not be doubted. She was thirty and chaste : now, for reasons that seemed good to her, she had set him up in her heart. The attrition of opposites may be the rule, but these two were exceptions : they had the rare disastrous attrition for each other of likeness of purpose. Each was a whip-handler. He had whistled and she had come meekly ; but at heart she came like the Norman Conqueror who, clutching a fistful of earth as he fell on his knees, cried, " This is my land ! " For there was blood in her that turned with as much distaste from the life of the nomad as it turned from the quick dark men among whom she had lived. The gipsy wanted to be a landed woman : the dark blood desired the fair. Robert had the colouring of those Flemish ancestors who had taught Devon to make lace : he had their slow speech and prospering ways : and these things made him so new and strange that she was ready to worship, though she intended to rule. For it was only in their craving for and dependence on rule that they resembled each other : and she did not realise that the resemblance existed. For the rest of the summer, because she was young and quick and he was old and slow, she did rule ; but her passion in the end frightened and wearied him.

In the autumn, moreover, the cold drove her back into the house to sleep, and in the house she was property—a noble mare in a stable : in the house he regained his mastery of himself and her. By Christmas it was plain that she was with child.

Would he marry her ? It was the one question that all his relatives asked each other at the New Year party.

Would he marry her ? It was the one question that her eyes asked him whenever he looked at her. No blinding admiration, no dazzling promise, no mystery, no deviltry, dwelt in her eyes any more : only the doubt, the question, the order—" Will you marry me ? You must marry me. When are you going to marry me ? " He said to himself that he would not be coerced : probably he would marry her ; but he would not be coerced. He began to watch her, irritably : and seeing her unshapely, with her fire quenched, his fire, too, died low. The dust of the ill-swept rooms, the overflowing pig-pails, the weedy gardens, offended his thrift and decency : in dust, refuse, weeds, his inclination vanished. He would not be drawn into discussions : he would not vouchsafe his decision : he let her stay till her child was born, fetching in the new housekeeper, a safe old woman of sixty, to see the discarded mistress through her labour. Even when she was well again he was too prudent or too indolent—it was a mixture of both—to end the situation. The days dragged on, and Teresa was even beginning to gather a rein or two—willingly resigned to her by the timid new importation who had nursed the quality and, in obeying Teresa, found life like old times—when a dispute occurred between the two masters in the house that settled the matter. Sooner or later the child must be christened—what ?

" I call it Isabella," said Teresa.

Robert did not like the outlandish name. It did well enough for a gipsy ; but * Mary ' and * Anne ' had been Thistledallow names this hundred years.

" I have called it Isabella," said Teresa. " It's a pretty name among my people. See, she knows it

already. Don't *you*, Belle ? " And the child gave her in answer the seraphic knowing smile of infancy.

"It's a name not liked hereabouts," said Robert heavily. " There was a trollop up to the Court afore I settled here called Isabella. A Jew had this house then, and she took up wi' him. She bled him finely. Isabella ! They'll tell ye the tale of her if you ask hereabouts."

She pressed her fine lips together.

" It's still a lady's name."

" Lady ! She left two behind her, dead and dying. Would ye call the child after such a one ? "

She said nothing. Her look derided him.

" Answer me ! Would ye ? "

She laughed in his face.

" Noise doesn't muzzle me, Master ! Shout away ! You won't frighten me or Belle here. Belle's the littl'un's name ! I've called her after my own mother. You could have given her a grander name in a gone time, Robert : you could ha' called her Thistledallow. But she's Belle now. Belle Come-by-chance—Belle Haycock—Little Belle Heather-bell, born beneath a roof an' all ! Come, my bonny ! " And she tossed the child till it crowed and gurgled while he watched glowering, and said at last—

" Come now ! Whose house is this ? "

She gave him a witch look from under her half-dropped lids as she turned to the open door and called. The housekeeper came running. Said Teresa disdainfully—

" You're very slow. Here now, take your master's daughter ! That's it ! Hold her right ! Take care of her ! She's weaned in the nick of time, I reckon. Laugh at me, my bonny ! There, take her ! "

She thrust the child upon the bewildered woman, bundled her from the room and turned to him—

" Whose house ? Yours, Robert ! Do I question it ? Didn't you invite me into your house ? " She had a light in her eye. It was an invitation to battle or a dance, but he did not look at her as he weighed his words before answering. In the end he said heavily—

" You'd better be gone."

Her look hardened. She said nothing.

He mumbled—

" You're too masterful. It don't go down with me. No ! ' Belle,' would you ?Two of you—it would be two too many."

He went to his desk and was busy with keys. Then, from a cavity below the desk face, his heavy body used as a screen to hide his simple secrecies from the scornful woman, he took out a chinking bag, untied it and counted out twenty coins, bright as his infant daughter's hair : and as he counted them, elaborated his decision. He would tell her now that he had meant to marry her ; but she was too masterful. He had meant to keep the child and call it Mary from his mother ; but now he would not. She might keep her Belle. But he was dealing fairly by her none the less. Here was twenty guineas, dear money, easy earned. Let her take it and the child and begone, and good luck all round.

She had sat down in the high chair by the fire, and now, with her pointed chin pressed into her palm and her pointed elbow digging into the chair-rest, she laughed at him as she listened, till he was red with the insult of her continued, impudent laughter. When she had laughed enough she leaned back against the horsehair, and then he saw, drawing herself up out of the slackness of illness and ill-training, bodily, like a snake rising from its own coils, a new Teresa, a lady dealing with a tenant, a fine lady, cool, vicious and remote. She dismissed his money with a glance as an impertinence. Then she dealt with his notion of saddling her with his child. She told him, with a faint gesture of dislike that stuck his pride full of pins, that it had been burden enough in the bearing. Well—it was born, and now he might keep his own. Some day perhaps she might return and see how it had thriven. She did not know, but it might be. Meanwhile—and she dropped mockingly to the gipper whine—" Good-day to you, kind gentleman ! "

And so left him and his house within the hour, pausing

only to bestow upon the new housekeeper the silk gowns that had been given her, and upon the blubbering eight-year-old errand-maid a string of corals from her own brown long neck. There were no petitions, no delayings. Instead, she sprang away from Robert's doorstep like a young mare loosed from a stable, coat dusty and staring, but with the clean gait of the wild.

Robert, her farewell ringing in his ears, stood for some time in his empty, deserted room looking at his rejected money. Then, with a certain satisfaction, he put it all away again. Then he went upstairs. The excited maids peeped after him—"The master's gone to see the littl'un ! What now ? "

II

HE had indeed gone to take stock of his property. "What now ? " he too asked himself. He was angry and perplexed, yet, looking down at the pretty sleepy creature in its cradle, he found that he had a pleasure in being a father. The child, though unwanted, was now at least undividedly his.

He saw in it, too, a certain protection. He was not disturbed by any fear of a slur upon his morality : he surmised rather that his legend would be enhanced by a scandal so virtuously concluded, and he was right. It was not long before the mothers of the marriageable returned to hunt him : and the hunt continued until his increasing age and preoccupation with his farm and his child made it clear to all that the gipsy would be the last scandal at Riverhayes, unless indeed it were a scandal that a man should be so taken up with a mere natural daughter. For Robert's curt references to ' my brat,' ' my young one,' mellowed as the years passed into tales of ' the little miss,' ' the young madam,' and after a chance talk with a travelled crony, into ' Princess.' For the crony had seen the little heir to the throne at Tunbridge Wells, and reported her to be " own sister

to little miss here, but for her clothes." What had she worn ? " Oh, a black hat tied with blue ribbons, a muslin dress, and a black silk pelisse over it. Ay, the wife said it was a pelisse ! " Next market-day Robert, on his way home, turned aside to his sister's house to leave a parcel for his daughter : out fell a roll of ribbons and one of these new-fangled pelisses. " Nay, black's not mourning, 'tis the fashion." And while his sister exclaimed at his extravagance, he called noisily to his small daughter to come down and try on her present.

" Bring her down ! Bring down the little princess to say good-day to her father ! Dress her up, sister ! See, child, the Duke o' Kent's daughter has no better." Then, behind his hand, " And they're as like as two peas, they tell me, the young princess and missy here." And so went off to his bachelor home, rubbing his hands and chuckling, quite sure that he was a happy man and a wise one.

Indeed, the mistress and mother had, in five years, so died from his memory that he could plume himself on his sagacity in discarding the dross while retaining the gold. Why, he had seen in its cradle what a little madam it was and had not let it go ! He had known how to order his house. He had not been jockeyed into sharing with a clamouring, feckless woman—not he ! but he had kept his daughter : he had kept his flesh and blood. Here would be something of his own to have in the house to serve him when he was old.

And he was likely to be proud of her, he told himself. The good old burgher strain was coming out in her already, the strain of merchant princes who lived softer than kings. The arched foot, the light walk, the small head and finely modelled features, the widely set eyes, so mild a blue yet so arrogantly browed—all these good points in his daughter he recognised with delight, thinking it but natural that the long-historied blood which she inherited from him should obliterate the ragglegaggle in her. Her guinea-golden hair and fair cheeks confirmed his title-deeds. Let his sister then take care

that missy had what she wanted. He could pay for frocks and ribbons and what-not. And his daughter was not to run with the village children neither ! Later there should be a school, a young ladies' school. Time enough for that ! Meanwhile let his sister look to his daughter !

Mrs. Drax looked to her.

Mrs. Drax, Robert's sister, was his feminine shadow, thinner in mind and body, hard cider to his port ; for with five daughters to rear she had not been able to mellow her nature as he had done in the pleasures of saving, gaining, and enjoying money. But she was honest. Robert paid her handsomely to bring up his daughter, and she reared the child with scrupulous care. It was her pride to do so : she honoured her own virtue when she ringed in the youngster with particular observance, gave it an egg for breakfast while her true-begotten children ate their porridge, sashed and shoed and combed it while they paddled barefoot in the river or ran shouting against the wind in the tousled fields of spring, let them run hatless while Mary Anne wore a fine Leghorn straw. Mrs. Drax took a bitter pleasure in this pampering of the cuckoo in the nest, this niece by courtesy, not law. If everybody were in their true place, Mary Anne would be dragging at a trollop's heels, binding brooms or plucking berries on the moor : instead of which, let everybody see her waited on by her betters ! Let Thistledallow's whim be obeyed ! She would do her duty by her charity niece and see that moneys destined for the come-by-chance should be spent solely upon the come-by-chance. All the cream should be hers for which her father paid, and her cousins humbly should drink the skim she left, never forgetting that though they were poor and their cousin rich, they were the daughters of a married woman and had surnames to show.

Thus Mrs. Drax, in season and out of season. The first f which the little Mary Anne learnt about herself was that she had no name. She hunted for it among the primroses and celandines of the hedges one spring, saw it

blooming on the far side of the ditch, a solitary bloom bigger and paler than a cowslip, fell in as she reached to pluck it, and came home with muddied pantalettes but the flower in her hand, and was punished in moderation—Mrs. Drax had no intention of being shown unkind—for running away from home, dirtying her clothes and talking nonsense. Next year she found the oxslip plant again, but by then she was six and knew well enough that the flower was not her missing name. Children were seen and not heard in Mrs. Drax's parlour and Mrs. Drax's kitchen, but be sure they saw and heard.

It is not to be said that she was treated with unkindness. It would indeed have taken a cruel woman to be unkind to the willing, obedient child : and Mrs. Drax was not a cruel woman. Strife was breath to her : her brother's energy was in her, but, hampered as she was by her sex, her widowhood, her poverty, her children, she could only rule by hectoring. She hectored her farm into prosperity and her girls, who were too much like her to fear her, into fine free-tongued, impudent young women, of whom she was proud as a cat is proud of the kittens it cuffs when they claw her too sharply. But there was no need to cuff Mary Anne. Mrs. Drax found the little Mary Anne of more use to her than her own robust daughters. The child liked to knit, to sew, to sit quietly in the grandfather-chair by the window darning Mrs. Drax's tablecloths, or in the best kitchen to run over her cousins' muslins with the smoothing-iron or gauffer her aunt's caps and pillow-frills. She was always ready to take the heavy earthen colander and sit in the triangular cottage garden shelling peas and stalking strawberries, watching sideways the while from under her golden lashes the bees scuffling in the canterbury bells at her elbow. And when she was seven she was trusted to make the butter, carrying it out at five in the morning to stand on the cool brick mouth of the well that wa' frilled with hart's tongue and shaded by the blossoming elder : and there she churned the scald cream round and round with her bare hand, softly

and patiently, liking the movement and the quiet and the scent of flowers and dew, in no hurry whatever for the butter to come. Indeed any quiet piece of work was to Mary Anne's taste, any small job that nobody wanted to do, that needed no discussion and drew upon her no notice. "A quiet little thing!" was Mrs. Drax's praise of her at Mrs. Drax's most amiable; but it was always coolly said. Mrs. Drax liked spirit.

As for her cousins, Georgina and Bessie, they called her Creeping Jenny. Mary Anne was so pleased at the name when she first heard it that she was usually betrayed into a confidence: she, too, had seen that her long plait of hair matched the amber flower. But her Cousin Georgina soon put her right about the reason for her nickname. She was a Creeping Jenny because she slipped about the house as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth: you never knew when she was in the room with you. Georgina supposed that Mary Anne wanted to overhear Georgina's secrets. Was that it? Wasn't that it? Bessie had caught her listening, hadn't she now, only last week? Why didn't she answer? Look how red she was getting! Oh, the quiet little thing! the good little thing! Oh, it was mean to be as good as Mary Anne! Georgina did hate a Creeping Jenny!

Mary Anne, in a scarlet-cheeked agony, crept away; for it never occurred to her to defend herself. She could not have done it. She was a dumb-souled creature, shy in grain—shy, not like the colt who will one day nuzzle in your coat for sugar and stand to be saddled, but shy with the alien shyness of a butterfly. "Yes, Aunt Drax! No, Aunt Drax!" Mrs. Drax got no more from her at any time and resented it, and told her twenty times a week that there was many a lawful orphan who would be grateful for a kind aunt and a good home, and be ready to say so too. Let Mary Anne consider what it meant to be a beggar tramping the commons on a wet night, with no Aunt Drax to mix a posset or pack a naughty girl off to her warm bed. Let Mary Anne pray to God Almighty to make her o-rateful to her

auntie who made no difference, for all there was a difference, between Mary Anne and Mrs. Drax's own Georgina and Bessie. Let Mary Anne pray for a grateful heart ! " Do you hear me, Mary ? "

" Yes, Aunt Drax," quoth Mary Anne.

Was it not an aggravating child ? But then God Almighty never did deal justly by Mrs. Drax. Was it not the usual ill-fortune that undeservedly dogs a deserving woman, that Georgina should be abed that autumn with the scarlet fever just as the early berry, the king fruit of each bramble-head, was bursting ripe ? There was Bessie to send blackberry picking; but Mrs. Drax knew her duty and had put Bessie to bed with her sister that she might catch the fever too and be done with it. She would have packed Mary Anne also into the double bed with her cousins, but Georgina fell ill on a Saturday, and on Sunday Mary Anne was bound to go to church that she might say good morning to her father. This was too formal an arrangement for Mrs. Drax to break ; and when Robert, meeting his sister and his daughter in the churchyard after service, missed his nieces and heard of their plight, and heard too his sister's prical plans for his own young madam, he humm'd and hah'd and looked down at Mary Anne—

" H'm ! D'you want the fever, child ? "

Mary Anne was instantly in her usual flush at being addressed and she had no words, but she shook her head. He watched her.

" Scarlet fever ? She looks as if she had caught it already. Well, child, do you want it ? "

" No," she managed. Her little heart was beating as fast as a caught sparrow's under her starched rnuslin ; but how was her father to deduce from that whisper the frenzy of distaste that was upon her ? To be three in a bed with Georgina and Bessie, to toss and talk and be watched and made to answer, not to have the cool night to herself—this was a future of nightmare : her eyes were saucer wide with the fear of it. It lent her strength to repeat her " No ! " and look imploringly at her father.

" Mary Anne will have what's good for her," said her aunt. " I can't be nursing first one child and then the other all autumn. Let her catch it and get it over."

" No ! " said Mary Anne a third time.

" You be quiet, miss ! " Mrs. Drax gave her niece's arm a shake. The sharp possessive movement annoyed Robert.

"Will you come home with me, Princess, eh f Pay Papa a visit ? "

" Now, brother, don't tease her ! "

" Will you come, Mary ? "

Mary Anne's eyes wandered from the strange father to the familiar aunt. Which was the more terrifying ? To be three in a bed with Bessie and Georgina, or to face the unknown ? Slowly, once and for all she decided : thus, her life long, she made her decisions : and being made, nothing changed them.

" Yes, Papa, please."

" Robert, she'll do no such thing ! Who's to look after her ? "

" There's old Judy," said he.

" And you so particular ! What, let your own daughter (after all, she is your daughter, Robert !) be a month with none but old Judy to keep her clean and tidy ! You're out of your mind, brother ! Come now. Mary Anne, kiss your Papa good-bye and come home .' He's had a joke with you."

Robert hesitated, half convinced.

" Maybe you'd better," he was beginning. But the look on his daughter's face stopped him, though he was not an observant man. The firm red lips were trembling, the eyes were no longer blue skies but blue lakes. In silence, under the eyes of her father and aunt, Mary Anne fought her disappointment and so won the first round against unfriendly fate. For Robert was flattered. The child wanted to come home with him ! She preferred him to her aunt ! He picked her up, the small creature, and swung her, while she gasped with terror, into his waiting curricie, and jumped after her, bending

down good-humouredly to his sister as he gathered up the reins :

" You send along her traps, Selina ! Judy'll do for her well enough. Why shouldn't she pay me a visit ? 'Twill save you the nursing."

" Such goings-on ! " Mrs. Drax pressed her lips together as she thought of it. Two children abed and no one to pick the blackberries ! " What will the parish think—me letting you take Mary Anne from me at the church door like, as if I were no better'n a hired nurse to be rid of ! "

" Come now, sister, don't scold ! "

" Or a mother to be rid of ! Well, the girl's used to it, that's one comfort ! "

Robert's face grew black.

" Stay your tongue, can't you, before the child ! "

" I ? I've no cause to hold it. It's well the girl should know her place, Robert Thistledallow, though it suits you to pamper her like a prize rabbit. But I'm her own aunt by nature though not by church, and I have my duty to her. She shall hear the truth from me while she's young enough to profit, little as she likes it or you like it' What, is she not to know the difference between her state in life and a girl's like my Georgina ? Now listen to me, Robert Thistledallow ! If you take Mary Anne from me now when I'm ready to continue in duty——"

" Oh, hold your noise, sister, before the neighbours and all ! " quoth Robert : and lifting his whip, he flicked off his irritation on the fine young mare between the shafts as he bowled away. They were light blows, but, to his little daughter watching him, he was an awful figure as he beat the mare—red, hairy, immense, Samson with the jawbone in morning lesson. When he turned to ask her how she did, and whether she was pleased to be going home with him, he got no reply, only the sight of drooped eyelids and hands that clasped and unclasped. But it was her luck to be so pretty that silence did not matter, and to have a father who hated talking unless

he had a mind to be garrulous. So she came back without mishap to Riverhayes and old Judith, who remembered the gipper seven years banished, and told the gipper's daughter tales of her : while foolish Ellen, the help, had coral beads to show, and her own version, picked up from farm talk and a grandmother who knew everybody's business. Ellen was the daughter's daughter of Clemency, the wise woman and gate-keeper up to Babyon Lodge : and Ellen's mother would have been no better than she should be, but that she was dead : and Ellen's father, as Ellen confided to her young mistress with an awe-struck giggle, was the Black Man, they did say. But that Ellen was the best hand at butter in the valley, while her grandmother was known to bewitch the churn against those who flouted her granddaughter, Ellen would never have shown her nose inside the farm gates, said Judy—" and you remember that, Miss Mary ! "

Mary Anne, listening as was her wont in silence, was nevertheless friendly to Ellen, and Judy, her duty done in the warning given, made no further objection to their companionship. Pale-eyed, clumsy Ellen, grateful for good words, resigned to harsh ones, adored the pretty little girl, and with this sorrowful, silly Ellen, Mary Anne was quite at ease. It was as if the older girl's weakness called into being a latent strength in the younger. She was kind and masterful with Ellen, saved her from the follies of her clumsy hands and feet, taught her her own mature neat ways and her own prim speech ; for, with Ellen, Mary Anne found her tongue. Judy, seeing in the older girl's slavish devotion a relief from service, saw to it that Ellen had neat print dresses in which to attend upon the young mistress, turned her from kitchen-maid into nursery-girl and maid to the young mistress.

For Mary Anne definitely had become the young mistress of the farm. She so pleased her father, sat so demurely at meals at the other end of the long table, was so meek a butt for his humour, so curious an orna-

ment to his parlour when his cronies visited him, that when Georgina's fever was cured (but Bessie died), and Mrs. Drax in tears and in mourning visited her brother to demand the return of her charge, Robert refused to part with the little girl. He said bluntly that she did not cost him a tenth of the thirty pound a year that he had paid Mrs. Drax, that she was well enough where she was and had better stay there. Mrs. Drax asked indignantly what sort of an upbringing was this for a girl in a bachelor's house ? Robert said that old Judy saw to her, that she had a maid already, the little madam, and that he had in mind to let her go in a year or two to the young ladies' seminary in Exeter.

What ! where the Miss Eypes went and Lady Stockland's granddaughter ?

Ay, that place ! Did she know aught against it ? Wouldn't it be good enough for Robert Thistledallow's daughter ?

Mrs. Drax tittered herself into a speechless fury at that, and the brother and sister parted without compliments. Presently the news went round the parish that old Bob Thistledallow was set on making that brat of his into a lady : and the farmers' wives who had not married him were very sure that, fine school or no, the girl should never set foot in their parlours, to delude their sons with finicking gentility and bring the bad gipsy blood into an honest family. Was virtue to go for nothing ? Let Bob Thistledallow be shown his place, and the girl hers, money or no money !

Thus did Mrs. Drax, though she avoided open quarrel with her brother, avenge the death of her daughter, the failure of her bramble jelly, and the loss of thirty pounds a year.

Of the feeling against him and his Robert was unconscious. But his daughter knew it in the cold shoulderings of the boys and girls of the village dame-school, through the giggles of Georgina as she repeated the gossip of her mother's kitchen. The child's defencelessness invited attack : and it came one day to stone-throw-

ing. Judy heard of it through Ellen at last and kept the child at home on the score of a cold. The cold passed ; but Mary Anne stayed at home. The school-mistress, in slow Devon fashion, planned to talk to Robert Thistledallow when she met him, and did not meet him, and in time forgot about her missing pupil. The days, weeks, months, the years went by and no one sent to fetch her back to school. Mary Anne, having got her letters, spelled over books now and then on wet afternoons, but not often. She liked better to knit and sew and make butter, and wander on the common with Ellen, listening to the strange stories that Ellen could tell of fairies and the Black Man and the Babyons.

III

ELLEN knew all about the Babyons, as plain dwellers know all about Olympus and the private lives of gods. Hills, moor and sea, Babyon common and Babyon woods, these bounded the elder girl's universe : and on their moors, in their woods, between their hills and their sea, the Babyons had, in their day, met and conversed as men with men and women and had been smitten strangely by the fate that is stronger than Babyon.

Ellen knew their names and their attributes and their legends. She could tell you what Norman wife first brought a frothing demon to Babyon in her dower chest, and whom the mad devil possessed and whom he spared : and what the fortunes of the race had been under the Red Rose and the White. But she liked best the nearer times, to tell why a long-dead Sir Jamie broke his faith with a long-dead dark Hariot Babyon and spilled his own life three months later—" up here on the moor where we are standing—the very spot, Miss Mary ! " Mary Anne stared at the billowing crimson tableland, all astray, but Ellen knew the death spot by a sign, and showed her how to part the heather tufts, and bade Mary Anne mark the rust-red moss with its fairy-fine

red stems and pinhead flowers velveting the earth between the tough roots. " Did you ever see red moss afore ? " demanded Ellen. " It grows where blood's been, Granny says. Granny knows the spot. Sir Jamie had gone galloping from Miss Hariot all down the drive. Granny says you can hear the hoof-beats still on a July night."

" But wasn't Miss Hariot dead ? "

" Dead and walking, deary ! Great-granier saw her too. Great-granfer knew well enough what killed Sir Jamie. Yellow hair he had, your colour. And so had his lady. They were fair men, the Babyons, eighty years ago, black as they are now. I seen their pictures. She was so little, that Lady Babyon—little as you, Miss Mary! "

" Was she, Ellen ? Well, go on, Ellen ! When Sir Jamie saw the ghost and ran away, what did his wife do ? "

" She drove after him in her coach, fast as she could pelt. She screeched when she found him, Granny says her dad told her, like they owls in summer. Oh, and she did take on. But she didn't die till long after—not till after the duel."

" Oh, Ellen, what's a duel ? "

" A duel, Miss ? That's a fight about Miss Isabella."

" I thought you said she was called Hariot ? "

" No, Miss, another Miss Babyon. Miss Hariot had been in her grave twenty-five years. She rested quiet once Sir Jamie come to her, I reckon ; though Granny says they did say she and Miss Isabella was like as two blackberries. Have you picked your basket full, Miss ? We ought to be turning."

" But why was there a duel about Isabella, Ellen ? "

" Why, Miss, she was wild as a wild horse—witch wild. She wanted to run away with a dirty Jew from Taunton. My granny says ' good riddance ' ! But Sir Ludovic stopped it. Oh, Sir Ludovic, he was a handsome man ! "

" Who was he, Ellen ? "

" He was her twin brother. Darker they were, dark Babyons like their Cousin Hariot. He and the Jew fought one night in the woods above Riverhayeg.

They were lying atop of one another when Granny found 'em. Ay, she found 'em : warm still. And never a sign more of Miss Isabella. They say, some of 'em, the Black Man took her."

" Did he, Ellen, do you think ? "

" There's not much he can't do, Miss Mary. But Granny says he'd have met his match in Miss Isabella. Granny would have hanged Miss Isabella with her own hands if she could have caught her, the bloody murderess ! "

" Ellen, you mustn't say words like that."

" No, Miss Mary ! But Sir Ludovic was a handsome man to be killed so. Since his day the Babyons have all been black as death and devils to cross. Look at young Sir Charles now, up to Babyon. And yet he's one to laugh too. He'll toss you a shilling soon as look at you. Once when Tom Jasper was after Granny for witching his heifer, Sir Charles come along on his horse and the stone struck it and it reared like a breaker. Sir Charles he leaned over and slashed Tom Jasper proper with his whip. Cut his cheek and all, he did. Tom Jasper ran for it. And Sir Charles he gave Granny a guinea. Oh, he's as kind as a fine day, Sir Charles is. Twice I've had a shilling from him too, Miss Mary."

" Have you, Ellen ? "

" Ay."

" Ellen ! "

" Miss Mary ? "

" How old is he ? "

" Twenty-one on his birthday."

" When is his birthday ? "

" May-day, Miss Mary."

" Ellen, does your Granny like him f "

" She says he's like his grandfather again. She says she can't say more. But Sir Ludovic were browner."

" Ellen ? "

" Yes, Miss Mary ? "

" Would she like me, your grandmother ? "

" We can try, Miss Mary," said Ellen doubtfully.

" She don't like people much. Will' you come a walk one day, to the Lodge, Miss Mary ? "

" Does your Granny live there ? "

" Why, Miss Mary, she keeps the gates. We've always lived to the Lodge. My great-grandfer Jabez, he were put there by Sir Jamie."

" Shall you keep the gates, Ellen, when your Granny dies ? "

" Shan't I, Miss Mary ? I oughter. I'll ask Granny. Will you come with me, Miss, this afternoon ? "

" Not this afternoon, Ellen. When she asks me."

Ellen's face was doleful.

" She don't ask people, Miss Mary."

" Then I shan't go with you, Ellen."

" Well, Miss Mary, I can ask her."

" Yes, Ellen, ask her ! "

No more could Ellen extr from her young mistress. Ellen never guessed how keenly Mary Anne longed for that demanded invitation. She wanted to see the fabled outskirts of ual Babyon, to pass under the immense stone gateway at the entrance to the estate. It was a gateway of legend. There were two coloured pillars which Sir Endymion had brought home from Italy, supporting a cross-beam of marble ; and on the marble sat the Babe itself, the point-cared babe of the Babyons which you saw on the tomb of the church and on the blue china bowl that had come to Judy from Babyon Court one lean Christmas before Judy had taken service at Riverhayes. Mary Anne had seen the lesser gates of the estate, plain stone arches not more than fifteen feet high, with a Babe on each little larger than a real baby : it was the great gate that she wanted to see, She might want ; but nevertheless she would not go where she was not wanted. So Ellen must ask ; though, as a result of it, Mary Anne might never pass under the gate of wonder into Babyon. It was hard to decide so, and harder to wait ; but she decided so, and waited.

Astonishingly Ellen returned with favourable news. Granny, it seemed, might like Mary Anne if she saw her.

So it came that Mary Anne proceeded by invitation one afternoon up the overhung lane that wound between the moor and the woods, struck into the Roman road and so came at last to the gate and tea with Ellen's grandmother, who was subservient with her : and when the swinging kettle on the huge hearth of the tiny room had boiled and the precious tea had been made (and none but Robert Thistledallow in the Babyon valley could afford tea like Ellen's grandmother) told her stranger stories than Ellen's of Babyon—Babyon—Babyon—till the child's imagination glowed like the Babyon chimneys under the westering sun. Clemency had no other stories : and no treasures that had not found their way to her from the big house at the other end of the avenue. Yet old Clemency, the children considered, was as rich as a dream. She had two carved chests filled with clothes, ladies' clothes, and a box of cobweb laces, and a tea-caddy with a shell on it, and a round cracked silver mirror that made Mary Anne look like an ugly doll, and that too came from the white parlour at Babyon ! When my young Lady Babyon went home to her people and the house was shut up for a generation the housekeeper had bestowed it upon Clemency.

" Oh, but why did she leave Babyon, Sir Ludovic's wife ? "

" Why, little miss, how should she stay, the poor young creature, with old Lady Babyon dead and Sir Ludovic dead—dead : and Miss Isabella gone like a bad dream ? What should she do but shut up the place and go home to the living, she and the heir unborn ? Ah, she nearly lost him : he was a seven moon child, and no wonder. He was Sir Henry before he was born ; but he never came to Babyon till he was a man and married : and his mother, my young Lady Babyon that was, she married again. Ay, Miss Isabella scattered them."

" Did Miss Isabella never come back ? "

" Not she. I saw the last of her the day she gave me that gown I was showing you, the green lute-string there. *She* wa' always giving, so that yo, would be glad to

fling back in her face. She said ' Good dog now ! ' to-you. That was Miss Belle. ' Down, Clemency! Good dog now ! ' May she die in a ditch ! "

Clemency's voice was so calm that Mary Anne was as little afraid as she would have been to hear Judy swearing at a cockerel in the seed-bed. Aunt Drax could be bitterer when Mary Anne let the butter grow sleepy or iron-moulded a cap. Aunt Drax grew hot and red and screamed till the window-panes rattled, and Mary Anne wanted to cry because noise frightened her, and, iron-moulding more linen in her fright, would be slapped till her head rang all for a spoiled handkerchief that would wash clean again if you were clever. Aunt Drax stayed crimson-red all day and never stopped talking if the standing cream did not skim off in an inch-thick blanket : and Aunt Drax was terrible if you skimmed the pan that had stood only twelve hours instead of twenty-four, or let the cat lick the skimmer before it was dipped in boiling water and sand-scoured. How terrible was Aunt Drax !

But old, old Clemency whom even Aunt Drax feared was not terrible at all. She was so bent that Mary Anne herself was taller and stronger, and she sat quietly by the fire stirring her pot: she had a nice plump pink old face, and she said ' May she rot in a ditch ! ' in a thin tired voice no louder than Mary Anne's when they called her Creeping Jenny. Mary Anne was made bold by such gentleness.

" Oh, but—I saw a cat once—dead in a ditch. No, Clemency, don't ! For I looked at it. You don't know how cold and poor it looked. Ellen and I put dock leaves over it. Besides I think she must be dead long ago, that Miss Isabella. Wouldn't she have come back to Babyon unless she were dead ? How could she have helped it ? "

Clemency stopped stirring.

" I'll know when Miss Belle's dead. The day will be brighter, and the dusk lighter, and the night stiller, and the world gayer for me when Miss Belle's gone out of

them. She breathes my air still, I tell you, children ! There are times when I feel her coming nearer to me, drawing my sweet air, till I've run to the window to see who's passing; but there's never aught to see but the gipsies on the moor. Miss Hariot, she came and went long after she was buried : Sir Jamie, he saw her : Father saw her; That's so strange about the Babyons : they come and go to the folk that love them or hate them : and Miss Belle, I tell you, she comes and goes. Ten years ago I felt her near—the spring you were born, Missy. When I heard of your mother at the farm there were times, what with living alone and thoughts scaring round my head like a spider under a glass, when I wondered, was it Miss Belle come again ? So I let Judy Parry have my Ellen in prenticeship to spy for me. But Ellen's no use to me : she feeds from any hand : Ellen was all red eyes for your mammy when she flitted, and, fool as she is, she's my blood, and no blood of mine could weep for loss of Miss Belle. Besides, Miss Isabella had been nearer eighty than seventy. Seventy-five to-day I am, and there's five years between me and Miss Belle. And yet, I tell you, child, till yon gipsy left I felt Miss Belle drink my air. From hilltop to hilltop I could feel her thoughts fleeing and returning like swallows in September making ready to go. This summer it's been the same : she's sucking my air again, till the common air and the woods air and the winds themselves are so flat to me as river water where it meets the sea, and I choke as I breathe. Why, I feel her now, Missy ' I could swear, but that I've sworn so often for nothing, that she was tramping down the pike-road towards us. Missy, I'd tell you something—but you'll be afraid."

Mary Anne was staring.

" I'm not quite afraid," said she.

The old woman stared in turn.

" Are you not ? All the valley children are afraid of me. What are you then, I'd like to know ? That's what I had to tell you ! Little flaxen come-by-chance

as *you* are, you've a look of the Babyons. Ay, you have, and be you proud of it ! You're not like Miss Isabella, no, nor like him, Sir Ludovic : you've no laughing eye : and Sir Henry was nothing—he was that Caroline, his mother, over again. Good riddance ! You've no look of him, nor of young Sir Charles up to Babyon now—ay, he came home for his holidays but yesterday—and he a true Babyon, nose and eye and look. Wait ! Who is it then ? Look at me, child ! Don't blink ! There ! There 'tis'. I know who you're like. It's the old lady, my father's Lady Babyon : Mencia, Sir Jamie called her. She was waiting-woman to Miss Hariot when my father knew her first. But she was old Lady Babyon to us, with white hair and a face like a leaf that's yellowed off in height of summer. Yet for all that you've a look of her. Now what call have you, Missy, to resemble a Babyon ? The old lady, she was no Babyon but a Traill ; but she was chosen into the Babyons : they choose their own sort. And my Sir Ludovic had a look of her now and then, when he was afraid of anything, when he was afraid of Miss Belle." The old woman caught the child's wrist and peered with once blue eyes into the calm little face. " My Ellen says you're afraid of your own folk : yet you ain't of us. Now why ? You're yellow-haired like your dad and yet—I wish I knew your mother's breed. Why aren't you afraid of me and Ellen, Missy, like the rest of the village ? "

The wrinkled face thrust so close to her own made Mary Anne uncomfortable. But she was aware that she was a visitor and must be courteous. Her eyes evaded Clemency's and she turned her head uneasily, seeking an excuse to disengage herself. She found it.

" Somebody wants you," said Mary Anne, and twisting her hand out of Clemency's grasp she pointed to the door. Two tall women stood on the threshold, blocking out the light.

Ellen rose with a cry and her hand went to the string of red beads at her throat. Her eyes were on the younger of the strangers. But Mary Anne, the grave ct" ',

watched old Clemency : and into her mind as she watched came the clear picture of her sampler at home, with its two cross-stitch carnations on grey crumpled linen and a straggling text beneath—' Prepare to meet thy God ! ' She thought it looked like Clemency. And when Clemency spoke, the words popped out violently yet slowly, like Mary Anne's slow needle popping out with a rasp of drawn thread from the ill-stretched sampler on its frame—" You ? Here ? Again ? At last ? " These were the words. And Mary Anne was interested, though she was not enough accustomed to strangers to take in the meaning of the conversation that followed, as clearly as she took in the meaning of the women's gestures and glances.

" You ? Here f At last ? " rasped old Clemency all over again. And this time Mary Anne thought she was like a clock getting ready to strike.

The taller of the two women answered her. She was old, older than Clemency : her skin was a network of wrinkles, so innumerable yet so fine that her old cheeks had rather the air of young smooth cheeks veiled with a gossamer-fine net or illusorily dappled by the shadows of woodland. The quick moving eyes had sparks of gold light in them, and soft depths and hard surfaces: they were memorable eyes ; but her lips had become part of the modelling of her face, undistinguished from the rest of the skin by any trace of colour. Her arched eyebrows were black, and her hair, though streaked with grey and dishevelled, was a darkness about her face ; but when she turned her head the knot upon her neck was smooth brushed. Her nose was sharp and curved and her whole face had a bleak worn iron look, as if it were a carved rock face from which the winds of heaven and the scouring sands had filed away every flower, every moss, every layer of surface soil, and had then smoothed the very bones of the rock to a grey polish that was not soft to the touch.

The woman who stood beside her, so like her but richer, softer, wilder, was such a rock still flushed with rest-harrows and bramble blooms and the garlands of

July. She had a smiling mouth as red as the strings of coral at her throat, and white teeth. Her hair wreathed about her temples like briony in autumn : her coarse skirt billowed, her shawl flaunted, the scarlet scarf about her head trailed upon her shoulders, and the sprig of heather at her breast was astir continually.

" It's her," whispered Ellen : and clutched at Mary Anne's arm. " 'Tis your own mother, Miss Mary ! I tell you, she gave me her beads, but now she don't know me. Tell her who you are, Miss Mary." But Mary Anne shivered and shook her head, and dragged Ellen back with her into the darker outskirt of the room, and the younger woman's light glance rested on her but momentarily and passed her to rove like a bee on to the chest, the brass pans, the little window, the rose nodding under it, Clemency's shawl, Clemency's face, and back to the older woman. For the older woman was speaking and Mary Anne thought, delighted, as she listened, ' That is how to speak ! I will p r i s e till I can speak so.' The tone was careless, casual, with the carelessness and casual friendliness of one immeasurably superior. Yet the speaker's skirt was torn, her shawl dusty, and the legs that disappeared into men's heavy boots were bare.

" Ah, is that Clemency ? Still here, Clemency ? Good woman ! Give me a chair and get me some milk. So ! " She seated herself—" We're neither of us as young as we have been, Clemency. I have walked beyond my strength."

And behold, Clemency brought the chair : Clemency went to her cupboard and returned with milk in a jug and a delicate glass. Her hand shook as she filled it and gave it to her visitor and stood watching her, twisting her hands together, while the seated woman drank. She did not speak again till she took the glass from her. Then she said—

" And you come here, to my house "

Said the tall woman—

" My brother's house."

Clemency raised a hand so furiously clenched that

Mary Anne, watching, caught her breath. But the tall woman said sharply—

" Now, Clemency, don't be a fool ! " Then—" My shoes are wet. Take my shoes off, please, and dry them for me ! " And at that old angry Clemency gave a strange cry, and her hand dropped to her side.

" You're not changed, Ma'am ! Oh no, you're not changed."

It was as if she had tumbled on to her knees in her grovelling, feverish haste to do as she was bidden. She pulled off the heavy boots as if they had been glass slippers and set them up to dry, and made a lap of her knees for the small arched naked feet, rubbing them softly as she cried—

" Where have you been, Ma'am, these fifty years and more ? "

" Up and down the earth, Clemency, up and down the earth."

She stretched out her thin length, relaxing to the warmth with a cat's gesture of pleasure. Her voice purred : " And now I've come home, Clemency, to lay my bones by my father's."

" And by your brother's, Ma'am ? "

" Ay."

" And your mother's, Ma'am ? She didn't last the week after you—and him."

The woman stared at her—

" The family vaults—too full, eh ? Well, I shan't trouble the sexton. I've seven sons to bury me, Clemency : and a grandson or two : and there's all the heather. But I thought Fid lie beneath Babyon heather. The air here, it's sweet enough to drink. More milk, Clemency ! " Then, as the old woman poured it—

" Is there henbane in it ? " She laughed, and to the amazement of Mary Anne and Ellen, Ellen's grandmother laughed also. It was as if the two old women had some bitter good joke between them. Said Clemency, between the spasms of her laughter—

" It's not for lack of wishing it in, Ma'am, in the

old time." And the tattered beggar who so strangely dominated her nodded with an air of comprehension :

" Probably not ! Well, I'll spare you the trouble. I'm dying, my girl ! "

That made Ellen laugh in her turn to herself, to hear her grandmother called a girl: while Clemency answered with the same propitiating note in her voice that had welcomed Mary Anne—

" You'll outlive me, -Ma'am ! You were always as strong as death."

" And as cruel as the grave ? "

" Yes ! "

The stranger put her hands to her own flat breast :

" Does it gnaw you still, Clemency, your old trouble ? "

" Like a rat at a piece of wood," the other answered her, dull-voiced.

The stranger pressed at her breast, yet gingerly, like one who touches a bruise :

" Now it gnaws me, Clemency."

Clemency started :

" You, Ma'am ? "

" With a difference, Clemency."

" What difference ? Speak plain, Ma'am ! "

The woman laughed :

" Once I read books. I wear my rue with a difference. That means, my poor Clemency, that my flesh has something to show for it. You've sorrowed all your life, but you can't show the marks of it on your breast, can you ? Now I haven't sorrowed ; yet I——" For a moment the watching child thought that she would have unbuttoned her close bodice ; but she checked herself and laughed in the face of her white-haired contemporary. " No, I won't show it."

Clemency's gnarled hands caressing the smooth foot were shaking.

" Don't say it, Ma'am ! Don't say the word I It's never been among the Babyons, that way of dying."

" I do say it."

" Let me see it. 'Twill be no more than a sore.

Herbs I have, and charms infallible—they all come' to me for healing when Dr. Scrupous has delivered them to the tomb."

" Old Scrupous ? "

" Nay, his son : and he has a nevvv—new-fangled—says there's no power in a charm."

" No power ? " The light careless laugh quavered through the room as if it had been of one nature with the firelight leaping on to the cob walls and the raftered ceiling. Then the younger woman joined in—

" No power ! "

Old Clemency listened to their laughter till, unwillingly, her own face relaxed and she too began to titter. " 'Tis what he says. But for all that, Ma'am, so you'll trust me——"

The seated woman moved her head in a slow negative.

" Your charms are no use to me, Clemency, for good or ill. I'm too far gone."

" Let me look, Ma'am ! "

" Into my breast ? Never ! "

" Mother, have done talking ! " said the younger woman. " Ask your questions and come away ! " She was pattering restlessly about the room like a dog in a strange parlour. The older woman nodded agreement ; but she did not stir. Instead she asked—

" Clemency, does the child at Riverhayes flourish ? "

" At Riverhayes—at Riverhayes ? " Clemency looked from the older woman to the younger, and her mouth opened in amazement : and Ellen cried again—

" I tell you, 'tis the gipsy lady, Gran ! " She gave me my beads—>——" and ended in a Confusion because the younger woman rolled on her at last a laughing eye. Clemency's face begao to work :

" The gipsy ! "

" My daughter, Clemency ! " said the old woman.

" Did you go with the gipsies, Ma'am ? Was that the way of it ? I never thought of that. And I cursing you as a great lady at some foreign court like iny father saw : or in a theatre maybe : or maybe starving in a ditch ! "

" All three, Clemency ! " said the taller woman harshly. " I'm the queen of little Egypt, and I tell fortunes : and a dry ditch is warm lying when the wind blows in November: better than a roof-tree is the height of the hedge above you, as my daughter learned. She had no peace till she learned. So I sent her back to Babyon ; but the slut got no nearer than Riverhayes."

Cried Clemency with a shrill of triumph in her voice—

" I was in the right of it then ! The child's a Babyon then, a fair Babyon ! And Robert Thistledallow's done well for himself and his bastard ! "

The older woman reared herself as she sat, like a snake uprising on its own coils, but the younger woman thrust in arrogantly :

" Let me, Mother ! Who are you giving the name to, old woman, with this on your hands ? " She had been gentling the ecstatic Ellen as you knead a puppy's head and neck and ears ; but now she spun the stumbling creature round, and forward into the firelight and held it under the eyes of the two crones—" Isn't it yours ? "

Clemency glowered at her :

" Ay, 'tis mine at remove : and it waits on yours, gipper ! " And, still trembling from her sudden rage, she turned back to the elder woman, crying—" My father on your father, Ma'am, and I on you, Ma'am, and better than you. Ay, he let me wait ! "

"Was there ever a child, Clemency?" said the tall woman in her passionless voice that contrasted so strangely with the fury of the other two.

" Born to your brother ? There was the lawful one, Sir Charles's father. There was none born to me. And you know why, devil gnaw you for it ! I took the keeper in the end to still the gnawing : and this is his child's child ; though my daughter never told me who the father was."

" The Black Man," piped up Ellen, pleased with her knowledge : and the old woman shrugged.

" Like as not," said Clemency. " It being so, I have hired her out to serve in her turn——"

" The gipsy at Riverhayes ! " concluded the younger with a laugh.

" The Babyon at Riverhayes ! " said her mother sharply.

" Nay, the bastard at Riverhayes," said Clemency mouthng.

It was then that Mary Anne, overborne by the strangeness of the scene and the aspect of the three women, and the sense that was growing on her of being once more the target for flights of stones, began to cry softly. Ellen heard and ran to her.

" Miss Mary, Mary, don't 'e now ! " On which the two strangers, turning with the same gesture, for the first time perceived her.

" Another of yours ? " said the younger to Clemency.

" Nay, of yours," said Clemency, tasting her triumph.

The elder woman lifted her eyebrows, but the younger gave a cry and swept across the room to the child : and Mary Anne was folded in strong arms and her cheek pil- lowed on a brown neck and a dress that smelt of burnt turf and heather and the open : and struggled in terror against this onslaught, and was hushed as a bird is hushed by caging fingers into a forced docility. She was cried over and crooned over, and held away to be looked at, and kissed again, wildly kissed, cradled and caressed till, at last released, she fled back into her corner, an outraged creature, full of fear.

" I never thought to find her here," the elder woman was saying thoughtfully.

" She's a gipsy," cried the younger. " She fought me, Mother ! Look at my hand ! " And she showed with a laugh the new-moon dents made on the back of it by resisting fingers.

" She's a quiet child," said Clemency. " She's good to my Ellen. Ellen brought her."

" How long have you known f " said the elder.

" Not till this hour, Ma'am ! She never came afore. But I knew when I saw her. 'Tis my lady again."

" My mother ? " The tall old woman stared at the sobbing child. " Yes, it's Mamma. Here, child, come here to me ! "

Mary Anne came, for she was trained to instant obedience : and looking up at the stranger, her tears ceased. The woman did not try to touch her and there was respect in her eyes. She found it easy to answer when the woman said—

" What is your name ? " She did not say ' Missy,' or ' my dear.'

" Mary Anne."

" What else ? "

" I haven't got an else. I'm not like the others. I'm like Ellen. Not like Johnnie Daw—he's a natural; but I'm only a natural daughter. Aunt Drax says it isn't the same. Father doesn't mind. He speaks to me, and Judy speaks to me, and Aunt Drax has to because she's my aunt in nature not in law ; but Cousin Georgina won't till I get a husband : and who'd marry me or Ellen without a name to sign ? "

It was the longest speech Mary Anne had ever made to a stranger.

" That settles it, Mother ! I'll take her with me ! " cried the younger gipsy eagerly, masterfully, brilliant as a child with a new toy.

" You'll not, my daughter."

" I will, I will! See how I must, how I will! " She had thrust the child aside in her eagerness to combat her mother's opposition and dispel it by gestures, quick smiles and persuasive speech. Overwhelming creature that she was, there was no hint in her rich vigour of any belief that she could dominate her elder. She flowed over the other's protests like sunrise flowing over a hillscape : she coloured the discussion, but she did not alter the shape it took.

" Dear Mamma—my own child—my own little Bell ! Can I leave her ? Would you have me abandon her—mine—ours—now—having heard what she has to say f And I always meant to take her. Why did you let me return if no such thought were in your mind too ? "

" You discovered maternal uneasiness, Teresa : a little late perhaps : still, I was ready to quiet you. I too—"

she stared across her daughter to meet Clemency's eyes and her hand once more stole to her breast—"I too, perhaps, was ready to be quieted. Well, now you've kissed the child and seen that she's rosy. Let that be enough ! To take a tame bird and let it fly in the woods, that's murderous. The others'll peck it to death."

"Mother, I want her."

"Better not, Ma'am," croaked Clemency.

"It's not to be thought of. Our people are strict. They would not countenance you. You know it. At Riverhayes or in the forest, still you can't give her a name. Let her stay where she's known, and marry and right herself. She has an air—or will have. What's the boy's name, Clemency, living at home now ? "

"Sir Charles, Ma'am ? What—are you meaning——" Clemency's cackle grew joyous and the older woman's cold laugh chimed in : the two tasted a jest. But the younger woman raved on—

"I tell you I'll take her ! I will, I will ! No name ? She shall make her a name ! She shall be the white gipsy they talk of, that's to come and lead us home to Egypt. I see it clear—clear." Her voice took on the chant of the fortune-teller—"She shall sit in your stead one day, Mother, and work the charm that you can't work, the charm that'll make us a people with vineyards and houses. Watch and I'll prove it ! Give me the cards ! " She snatched at her own draperies and drew forth from a hidden pocket a tattered pack. Some of them slipped from her hand and fell scattering to the floor, the painted pictures uppermost.

"111 luck," cried Clemency, and stooped clutching.

"Let them lie ! Read them as they lie ! " the gipsy commanded, and fell on her knees beside Clemency.

"Fools ! " said the elder woman. Her face, tilted back on the head-rest of her chair, was white with fatigue or pain or contempt. She glittered at her daughter from under half-closed lids—"Fool 1 "

It was the latest sound that Mary Anne heard as she escaped.

For out of the uncomprehended babel, with the speech of the eldest woman ringing through it like the speech of a river through the confused speech of woods, one sentence only had a human accent—'I'll take her with me I' She understood that sentence to the exclusion of all others. To her timid heart it was a sentence of death. Mary Anne did not doubt the power of the dark woman to take her out of security into a larger Mrs. Drax's kitchen, full of stonings and reproaches and fond assaults. She was to be stolen by gipsies : this, the village child's nightmare, was to be her fate. To this fate had Ellen, treacherous, trusted Ellen, lured her. She was at first so paralysed that she could only couch, passive as a rabbit, on the seat against which the gipsy's impulsive gesture had whirled her. Nevertheless, as once before in her short life, having a decision to make, she made it : and, having made it, only ropes could have held her back. She would run while they talked.

Shivering with fright yet unhesitating, she began to creep like ivy from Ellen's side. It was easy to sidle from the chair, drop behind the table to her knees, round the chest, and flatten her small body to the wall to avoid the circle of light from the lamp. She was nearing the safety of the high chair's shadow when a dropping turf lit up the room blindingly for a long instant : and she stiffened where she stood, like a hedgerow creature of the dusk when the chance flash of a lantern surprises its night paths. But the three women took no heed of the falling turf, and Ellen's simple face was still a worshipper's as she watched the gipsy's quick finger counting and checking. The light died down to leave the room darker than before : and Mary Anne moved again, first behind the chair in which the elder woman sat, then to the curtain behind which the green lute-string hung, then on hands and knees again to the door. It was closed, not latched, and it yielded. Like ivy through a crack in a wall she slipped her little body through the narrow opening and was out.

To her left the avenue was an interminable, ever-

narrowing streak of grey, roofed and walled with dark trees ; but to her right the dying day came streaming through the black frame of the great gateway, and the marble Babe, high above her as she raced through, was bathed in clearest crimson. Once outside the air was fresh, the world radiant and full of friendly movement. As she ran down the chequered lanes between hedges of gold, pleiads of midges met and passed her, their minute bodies lit by the level western beams along which they slid dancing. Cows, turned out to graze on the roadside grass, lifted their heads to watch her : birds settling to rest were still lively in the bushes and she could hear a church clock chiming a mile away. Her fear lightened as the distance grew and no footsteps followed her, but it did not lighten enough to check her wild running. Physical distress at last sent her hand to her throat and she began to gasp and reel ; but she ran on, till, as she turned into Petticoat Lane a loose stone brought her rolling to the ground, where she lay half stunned but more exhausted, with the trickling water of the ditch soaking her clothes.

Here she might have lain for hours had not her Cousin Georgina been tempted out by the golden evening ; but Cousin Georgina, sweethearting with the red-haired farmer's son from Queen's Tanleigh, tripped in her turn over Mary Anne's hat and so found her. Georgina had sense enough not to let the farmer's son carry her cousin to her mother's house, for Mary Anne's room had been let to a lodger, and Georgina had no mind to share her bower with a Creeping Jenny ; but she revived the child with water and a slap or two on the wrist and a hail of questions : got no answer : found no bones broken : set her on her feet and presently on her way. Indeed, with cousinly prickings of conscience, she even strolled behind her, her wreathed poke bonnet sufficiently close to the red head from Queen's Tanleigh, till Mary Anne was safe on Riverhayes land. Then she went home, joyfully ensuring supper and welcome to herself and the farmer's son by the tale of how Uncle Thistledallow's Mary Anne had been gadding about the lanes like any

gipper-woman and was probably coming—though the little dumb fish would say nothing—to any sort of harm you pleased.

The family made an excellent supper : and Mrs. Drax in her state black bonnet and cachmire shawl set out next day to see her brother.

But Mrs. Drax was ever a disappointed woman. The twenty-four hours had got ahead of her ; for Mary Anne had stumbled home in the twilight into the arms of old Judy, already frightened by Ellen. Ellen had come home in a panic by a cut through the woods, with nothing to say for herself, without her young mistress : and Judy, in her rage against Ellen, in her solicitude for Mary Anne, her sense of a mystery somewhere which the two children conspired to hide from her, and a lively sense of the danger of letting Robert hear of his daughter's undue absence from anybody but herself, had gone clamouring to the parlour with her own version.

Robert disliked her outcries and his daughter's dragged looks, and the sense of being smothered by womanites. Mary Anne had better go back to his sister at this rate, or to school. He did not care where she went ; but he must have quiet in the house. Mrs. Drax, seen through the office window advancing upon Riverhayes in Sunday bonnet and shawl, decided him. He loved to get the better of his sister : and let her renew her offers of guardianship and her warnings of the necessity for supervision of a girl with gipsy blood in her, before he told her that all was settled : Mary Anne was to go to school. Cost ? Let it cost ! He had money to spend on his daughter : and who had better right to his money than his daughter, he asked his sister ? And Mrs. Drax was discreet enough not to indicate who, in her opinion, had a better right ; but to listen instead as if she liked it, to her brother's declaration that Bob Thistledallow's natural daughter would be found a better match than another man's lawful begetting, in education, in looks and in dower, when it came to marrying. A duke might be glad to marry Mary Anne when she came back to

them, a lady. And so much did Robert Thistledallow enjoy his own eloquence and his sister's disgust, that with no more than a fortnight's delay he did ride over to Exeter, and there took counsel of his lawyers, who were also the lawyers of the Eypes, and the Powdells, and the lesser Babyons. A school was found and inspected : compliments and money passed : Mr. Robert Thistledallow was content to leave the matter of milliners, mantua-makers and the forming of his daughter's character in the hands of gentility undreamed of at Riverhayes. He returned home, gave Judy a night to pack in, and in the cold October dawning jogged off again with his meek child at his side.

He was more pleased with her than ever. She made no fuss, asked no questions : had said good-bye to Judy without emotion, but sweetly. He did not know, it would have meant nothing to him had he known, that to blubbing Ellen she had refused to say good-bye. In the days that had elapsed since the unlucky visit to Clemency's cottage Mary Anne had had no confidences with Ellen. She ran from her as from a dog that had snapped at her once when she stooped to pat it. She was blind to Ellen's piteous looks, deaf to her appeals. Ellen, it was clear, had much to tell; but Mary Anne would not listen. And when Ellen at the end of the week came, tear-streaming, to show her money and report her dismissal, still Mary Anne would not listen.

" Now you're to go to school, Miss Mary, they don't want me. But you'll tell Judy to keep me on, Miss Mary, till you come again ? Miss Mary, you'll want a girl to wait on you then ? "

Mary Anne shook her head. Mary Anne would not look at her nor lift a finger.

" What's come to 'e, Miss Mary ? Can I help it if the gipsies came to Gran's door ? Can I help it 'twas your Mam, Miss Mary ? I'll never tell, nor Granny, not unless you bid us."

" It wasn't my Mamma. Go away, Ellen, or I'll call Judy."

And to all Ellen's wails came the same answer—" Go away ! Go away ! "

If Mary Anne had been cleverer she might have been less cruel; but she was too unstrung to reason. Indeed, throughout her life, she judged by the fact as it occurred, never by the motive behind the fact. Motives went for nothing for her : people did what they did. She had trusted Ellen : she had taken off her protective armour to play with Ellen : and Ellen had betrayed her in a naked hour, to shock and shame and fear. How should the hunted be merciful ?

" Didn't mean no harm, Miss Mary Anne ! "

" Go away, Ellen, go away ! "

Ellen had run as fast as her stumpy legs could carry her down the farm road to open the gates for Master and Miss Mary Anne as they drove away, and wept and dropped curtsies in vain. Mary Anne, faced with exile that Ellen had brought upon her, would not look at her.

And indeed she may be forgiven ; for she did not know where she was going : she did not know the name of the town or the house in which her father left her, and, as he kissed her farewell, when he would come for her again. She had not asked him and he had not told her.

The farm, when he jogged home to it in the twilight filled with the sense of being a father such as few daughters knew, had an emptied look that pleased one side of his nature as much as it displeased the other. He sighed as he sat down to his solitary dinner and felt himself a good father suffering loneliness for his daughter's good. It was pleasant, nevertheless, to have the parlour to himself again. His tobacco-box—where was his tobacco-box ? Mary Anne ! No Mary Anne came creeping. But presently he found his tobacco-box and had another need of his daughter for four equal-flowing years. But once a quarter she wrote him a dutiful letter in an Italian hand : and once a year he went to see her and brought back from each visit marvellous knee-slapping tales of his Mary's needlework, piano-playing, French dresses : and in her last year at the school the tale of her

all-remarked resemblance to the young Queen-to-be. And Mrs. Drax repeated all the stories to all the mothers of the village : and the village repeated them on market days to the town : and the town talked to its doctors, its solicitors and its clergy, who went now and again to the city of Exeter : and though it took four years for the news to reach Miss Lavendell, she did hear at last that her select seminary harboured an unsuitable pupil, and greatly distressed she was. For Mary Anne was a model pupil, and the schoolmistress, like every other woman whom he chose to flatter, had a soft corner in her heart and an indulgent smile always ready for that bright-eyed buccaneer, Robert Thistledallow, when he visited his daughter.

The lady did not, however, hesitate one instant between her feminine instinct and her duty to her school-Miss Adeline Eype was the new parlour boarder. Miss Adeline Eype was daughter to a baronet and cousin to a baronet. If Miss Eype should write home to her parents that her particular friend was a Miss Thistledallow who lived on a farm near Babyon : if Lady Eype should ask her mother-in-law, who, as every one knew, had been the wife of a Babyon before she married Sir Hervey, what she knew of the Thistledallows, and learn that there was no Mrs. Thistledallow and consequently no Miss Thistledallow, whatever Mary Anne chose to call herself, what, oh what, would be the effect on Miss Lavendell's school ?

There was only one thing to be done : and Miss Lavendell did it, in tears, on lavender-tinted note-paper,, with a lavender monogram in violet ink. A chaise and a French governess were ordered to be in attendance the next morning, and Mary Anne packed, supped and slept by herself that night, and drove away next day without seeing her schoolfellows or saying good-bye to laughing Adeline Eype. The French governess, when they reached the farm gates, would not have any one sent in search of the farmer; but pressed instead as she departed hastily a lavender envelope addressed to Robert Thistledallow into Mary Anne's hand.

IV

THUS, at the age of fifteen, Mary Anne, by courtesy Mary Anne Thistledallow, came home for good, grown to her full height, a tiny blonde woman with a rounded figure, a pretty walk and a quiet face, slow-spoken and speaking seldom. She melted quickly and thankfully into the middleground of the farm : she took up duties so quietly that Judy did not perceive that Mary Anne did any work in the house or garden. If the furniture began to show a polish, if the silver was brighter, the china more often used and better arranged on its shelves when its use was over, Judy never saw. But Judy was very kind in teaching Mary Anne to cook, and was glad of help in the dairy and the still-room, even in the brew-house. Regimental rows of cordials increased the cellar ranks : and Robert Thistledallow, who had thought to himself that an old man must look to lose his appetite, began to hurry home once more to his •dinner and his supper and his Sunday tea. Mary Anne seldom played upon the piano that her father had bought her, but she sewed every evening on delicate muslins that he thought pretty : and he would chaff her before his cronies about her bottom drawer. He liked to see her blush. Mary Anne never said anything. It never occurred to him in his amusement over her, in playing with his pretty china doll and calling her Vicky before strangers and asking her questions about the contents of her bottom drawer, that he was tormenting her. But it was torment to be displayed—French dresses, white stockings, sandal shoes, smooth braids and womanly shape, item by item—to every invited guest. It was, however, her duty to please him and he wanted her to adorn his house : so she sat at the head of his table at his dinners, and performed her part to his liking, not talking but serving the guests. He liked to see her curtsy, as she had been trained to curtsy on a rising movement to the principal woman guest, and then

usher out her flock and leave her father to pass the bottle and talk as he pleased.

Yet there was a fly in his wine. Robert's dinners were better than ever, and his invitations were accepted by his cronies of three counties : it was worth a journey to dine, wine and sleep at Robert Thistledallow's. But the wives and the daughters had made up their minds about Bob and his daughter. They would not sit at table with a gipsy's brat, French dresses or no French dresses. Robert Thistledallow had been indiscreet : his daughter, who could not restrain him, paid for his indiscretion. The delicate dresses, that were so out of place in that countryside, had to be paid for : and she paid for them every Sunday as she sat crimson-cheeked in her pew, or crept down the aisle afterwards, conscious of the raised eyebrows of the county ladies, the titters of farmers' daughters, the stares of the men. Once she saw a late schoolfellow in the Eype pew. Miss Adeline Eype caught Mary Anne's eye, flushed and half smiled ; but her mother touched her arm and she did not stop in the churchyard on her way to the Eype carriage with its coachman in livery and its crest upon the door, though Bob Thistledallow had his girl on his arm and was waiting. Old Bob told his girl what he thought of her fine friends all the long way home : and Mary Anne had nothing to say.

She had nothing to say when invitations were sent out, nothing to say when refusals came in. She said nothing when Robert, salving his pride, called in his innumerable family to feast with him and inspect his treasure. He had no fear that these invitations would be refused. Sisters, nephews, nieces, cousins, cousins' wives, spinster god-daughters, and callow great-nephews in trade at Exeter and Taunton, how eagerly these flocked to do honour to Robert Thistledallow's table and Robert Thistledallow's money ! And there was always Aunt Drax. Mary Anne, sitting at the head of the table in her wasp-waisted muslin, with bare shoulders and cow-slips in her hair, said " Yes, Aunt Drax ! " and " No.

Aunt Drax ! " like the sweet modest piece that her father called her : and under the table wrung her hands together because the hand of the clock in the corner moved forward, for all her prayers, to the unavoidable moment—

" Shall we go into the parlour, Aunt Drax ? "

Aunt Drax would go out, and Aunt Page would follow, and Mrs. William Thistledallow, and Mrs. Thistledallow Darcourt, and Mrs. Robert Dear, and Cousin Susan and Cousin Roberta and Cousin Georgina, and old Miss Crane, Mary Anne would accompany them with the childish sick fear of them upon her ; for the parlour was the ring and Mary Anne's tea-table the stake to which she was tied : and there, once a fortnight or so, they baited her.

She gave them poor sport, for she never said anything but " Yes, Cousin Susan ! " or " I don't know, Aunt Drax ! " But they continued to accept every invitation, for the dinners were good and there was the hope of the old man's money. How rich he was no one knew, but he had made half promises. Mrs. Drax reckoned on a third at least and the family furniture. Mrs. Drax's Georgina was Uncle Thistledallow's god-daughter : Cousin Tom was his younger brother's only son : Cousin Susan's husband, dead at sea, had been his favourite when they were boys together : Cousin Bob was called after him : and Aunt Addie's grandson, as all save Mrs. Drax agreed, was his living image. In short, each had a special claim to push as occasion served : and Robert Thistledallow liked the flattery, and in his will, made some five years before, had satisfied many of the claims. Mary Anne had her slice, but not more than her aunt. For Robert, though he did not own it, agreed in his heart that she must pay some penalty for being no lawful daughter.

Mrs Drax, however, changed his mind for him.

V

THE occasion was a dinner, a small family affair in honour of the safe return from London of Cousin Bob, employed upon old Bob's business. Cousin Bob and Cousin Bob's partner were overcome by old Bob's port long before the host had settled down to his third bottle. Their weak stomachs spoilt his evening, for he had no pleasure in drinking alone. So, leaving one young man to sleep in his chair and kicking the legs of the other impatiently aside, he betook himself to the ladies a little before his hour.

They were gathered, some half-dozen, about Mary Anne's tea-table, busily discussing the preparations for Georgina's wedding : and Mrs. Drax was appealing to Mary Anne's good sense just as Robert stepped the two steps down into the parlour. He paused behind the screen that shut off draughts from the room to listen, for his sister often amused him. But that night she did not amuse him.

The four Drax girls from High Babyon, Georgina's second cousins, and the two little Thistledallow girls beyond Exeter, were of course to be bridesmaids, said Mrs. Drax: and Georgina, whose kin'd heart, said Mrs. Drax, could not bear to let any one feel slighted, had suggested asking Mary Anne also. But though Mrs. Drax was very pleased that Georgina should call cousin with Mary Anne whenever they met, Mary Anne herself, sensible girl that she was and had been brought up to be by her aunt, would no doubt feel that——

" Oh yes, yes, Aunt Drax! With six already: it would be an odd number."

" It's not so much the numbers, Mary Anne, it's what folk would say. But there, we needn't go into that. And Georgina will be pleased to see you in the church."

" Thank you, Aunt Drax ! "

" You do understand, Mary——" it was Georgina's turn——
" that it's no ill-will. It's what his people would think."

" Mary Anne understands," said her mother complacently. " For her to be bridesmaid at her cousin's wedding, just as if there was no difference between you, why, there'd be questions asked and remarks passed. Mary Anne knows that well enough. Don't you, Mary Anne ? "

" Yes, Aunt Drax."

Robert went out again quietly as he had come, so quietly that none save Mary Anne, who had inherited his sharp ears and quiet tread, was aware that he had been in the room.

Relieved, she bent lower than ever over the white satin she was quilting; for Georgina's wedding-dress was cut to Mary Anne's pattern, and the sewing had, as a matter of course, been left to Mary Anne. Mary Anne's hands left no dulled mark on the surface : she never pricked her finger nor ravelled thread against it. Georgina's troubles were over when she heard her mother tell Mary Anne that she would be given an opportunity to prove upon the wedding-dress that she had learnt something useful at her fine school after all. Mary Anne, quilting the yards of satin in shell pattern, wondered if she should ever quilt a wedding-dress for herself. She did not think it likely. She was relieved that her duties at her cousin's wedding were to be limited to work upon the wedding-dress. She did not want to be bridesmaid and run the gauntlet of eyes; but she knew her father. For her to be bridesmaid would not satisfy him : he would expect her to be chief bridesmaid and travel with the wedded couple on the honeymoon. She prayed that he would let things be; but, watching his darkening face behind the screen, she had awaited an outburst that would drag her into the candlelight. She knew well enough how the discussion would run and shrank from it in hot embarrassment, dreading his protests, her aunt's retorts, his insistence, her aunt's martyred yieldings and final concession—" Well, my dear, if your dear father really wants you to be bridesmaid, of course it's not for us to

deny him. Heaven knows that I don't wish, and Georgina don't wish, to make things hard for you. We only thought it would be wiser like, but Lord, if your father don't mind, we needn't. Well then, it's settled, Mary Anne, you're to be bridesmaid after all, just like your cousins. Aren't you a lucky girl now? Why, there's not one girl in a million placed as you are placed who——"

For once, however, Mary Anne anticipated an evil that did not come to pass; for her father had made no protest, and the rest of the evening passed off peacefully. When the guests had left, however, old Robert's voice came muffled from the dining-parlour in a call, and when she answered it she found the little panel door in the wall open, and ran down the flight of stone steps to the cellars which it concealed. There, candle in hand, she found her father stooping over a bin. He spoke off-hand as he held his lantern high and peered and fumbled in the straw:

"What's all this high talk about your cousin's wedding, Mary? Han't she asked ye?"

"To the wedding?"

"To be bridesmaid."

"No, Papa."

"Hm! What's here?" He tapped at the edge of the bin.

"Isn't that the Madeira, Papa?"

"You're right. And this?"

"That's the '97 port."

He grunted.

"You know more than most cackling women. You're right, that's the '97. What's this?"

And with that he put her through her paces and secretly marvelled at the excellent knowledge and still tongue of his mouse. He did not realise that quick intelligence, if it cannot spend itself normally, will turn to hoarding. Yet it was his own case: lavish as he could be, he was yet a hoarder; for his wealth was so much greater than he allowed any one to guess that his very generosity would have been pronounced meanness by his con-

temporaries had they been better informed. He hoarded, not as a miser, but for the pleasure of mastery over material things. If he had owned a wife and governed a baker's dozen of children, it is questionless that his nature would have been satisfied, and he would have been no more of a riches-monger than a masterful man must be. This he knew dimly ; but wondering over his daughter's knowledge he did not comprehend that her acquiring spirit was like his own. Money was his obvious treasure ; but hers was knowledge. She also hoarded, but she hoarded facts—fact upon fact, whether it concerned wines or farming, the lore of the seasons or the making of clothes. So she too made herself rich and busy, coldly, as her father did. Later her knowledge was to serve her and she was to bless it ; but in her youth it was an instinct that she obeyed not knowing what she did. Already, however, the instinct served her with old Bob. He concluded his examination with a chuckle and a declaration that he would trust his Mary with his own keys, so he would : " And that's more than Pld say of any other woman alive. I wouldn't trust your aunt in my cellar. And now let's see if you've a palate. Run, child, and fetch me a glass—two glasses."

And when she came down with the two glasses, glasses with folded feet and baluster stems and the portrait of Robert's grandfather engraved on one of them, all set out neatly on a painted lacquer tray, he had been busy with duster and corkscrew and was holding a cobwebbed bottle against the light that streamed down the cellar stairs from the parlour. He gave the liquid a doubtful look as it flowed into the glasses, but all he said was—" There, child, taste that ! "

Gravely Mary Anne tasted, swallowed, tasted again.

" Well, do you like it ? "

" No, Papa."

" What, are you no better than your aunt ? "

" Papa, you've given me a glass at Christmas, every year. This doesn't taste the same."

" What ? " He snatched at his own glass, tasted, spat, and went off into a shout of laughter : " Corked, by the Lord ! I knew it : and you knew it too, did you ? Mary, you'll be the death of me. Tell you what, Mary, we'll save it for your Aunt Drax. She'll know no better. ' A wine indeed, brother ! ' ' Take the bottle then, sister, if you like it I ' And she will too. I tell you she'll drink every drop. But you're a caution, Mary ! What you know you know." Then, with a change of tone—" So you're not to be bridesmaid ? D'you know why, since you know so much ? "

" Yes, Papa ! "

At that he set down the bottle which he still held, straightened himself and, catching up his candle, holding it high to survey her the better, took his daughter by the chin. She flushed as she always did at any sudden touch, but she looked him straight in the eye. In the faint light the pupils of her eyes had dilated, flooding the blue irids. The change of colour altered her expression : her innocent look was changed for a stare, black and unfathomable.

" D'you know why ? " he repeated.

" Yes, Papa."

" You do, do ye ? And you but fifteen ! " Then she began to colour till in mercy he released her. But as she turned from him hurriedly his voice checked her, one foot on the lowest step of the stone staircase : " How long have you known why, Miss ? "

" About being bridesmaid, Papa ? Aunt Drax told me to-night."

" I mean the why." His voice had swollen and, Stealing a look at him, she saw that his face too had the swollen look which always witnessed the sudden coming or return of anger. Old man as he was, he reddened as easily as she : " Come now, answer me, can't you ? "

" Oh, Papa, I've always known why."

" Who told you f "

" Aunt Drax."

What did she tell you ? "

" That I was a——" She hesitated : then, dropping her head, she said—" That I was like Clemency's Ellen, That it was good of you to keep me."

" H'mph ! When did you hear ? "

" Oh, when I was very little."

" Mary," said he heavily—" look ye here, Mary ! Mary——" There was a pause. Then the father began to bluster—" Let them say what they like ! I tell you you're as good as your cousin and better ! Can't you believe your own father F Well, wait till you marry. That'll show."

" Aunt Drax says——"

" Well, what does t'old bitch say ? "

" She says nobody could marry me hereabouts. Papa, I don't mind——"

But he was roaring—

" Not marry ! D'you know what I'm worth ? "

She shook her head.

" I'm worth——" He checked himself. " Well, I'll show 'em when the time comes what I'm worth. Mary ! "

She waited.

" How old are you, Mary Anne, my dear ? "

" Sixteen next week, Papa."

" Would ye like a birthday party f "

She looked at him quickly, a " No " on her lips ; but read as quickly in his eyes that there was only one answer to be given, and gave it—

" Yes, please, Papa ! "

He slapped his leg with one of his roars of laughter :

" Ye shall have it : and a present worth having. I'll show 'em, one and all. Send Judy to me in the morning. I'll order your birthday dinner. And, Mary——" he tugged at his pocket and hauled out a wallet of leather, leather-strapped—" Mary—if you're not good enough to be bridesmaid to my sister's brat, still ye shall have a new frock ! " Then, as she hesitated—" I say ye're to rig yourself out from top to toe—and smart now ! Ye're not to spare. Here ! " He selected a bill and rammed it into her hands.

" Papa, it's fifty pounds ! "

" Damme, an't you my daughter ? A smart rig now ! Spend every penny, and if you want more, tell me ! I'll show 'em there's a difference between my daughter and Clemency's Ellen ! Not good enough to marry hereabouts, aren't ye ? Not good enough for your cousin's wedding ? Well, that's as may be. They shall come to your birthday party and maybe they shall learn a thing or two. Off to bed wi' ye ! "

Off to bed went Mary Anne. Her bedroom under the thatch was breathless with the stored heat of the day ; but outside the night was moonlit, cool and sweet-breath'd : and her adored garden shone in the bright light. She leant out of the window when she had brushed her hair and made ready for the night. Her golden plaits dangled against glossy twigs of myrtle as she drank the night scents and identified one by one the pale glowing patches in the universal grey foliage, patches that were by daylight her flowers, her white lupins, her pansies, monkshood, marguerites, carnations, sops-in-wine, lilies, canterbury bells and scented double stocks. Her eyes wandered and feasted. It came into her mind with an exultant rush of realisation that the flowers she had sown, watered, planted, divided, would not have had lives but for her. She had made and tended them, mothered them into life. Her throat swelled on a wave of feeling for the flowers which had responded to her ; their loveliness, their kindness filled her heart and emptied her mind of all human perplexities : and so she had peace, though she could not sleep. Thrice she tried to settle in the hot room, but the close indoor darkness choked her like a blanket flung over her head : and she returned to the window-seat at last, content to spend the night there watching her garden and listening to the reedy fluting ,night-song of some bird that was cousin to the nightingale, and to the hoot of owls and the tireless murmur of the river. The black bulk of a haystack in the once-orchard at the end of the garden cut off the silver line of the water, and she began to

have a longing for which her orderly mind could not account, to slip through the dark house, out and down the flagged path, to make her bed in the hay for the rest of the night. But the light streaming like a yellow flag from the parlour window below signified that her father was still up, and forbade the venture. So she sat drowsing in the hard window-seat with a shawl over her till the birds struck up, the garden began to lighten, the black patches turned to martagons and scarlet poppies and the white to pink poppies and lilies : and true day rose and she with it.

The light still burned as she crept downstairs and peeped through the crack between door and lintel upon her father. Relaxed and unshaven, he had slept as he often slept, sagged in his chair. But when she came to him later with a cup of his green tea, she found him stirring and gruff, slamming down a heavy hand on the paper beside him, and bidding her to let her dustings and his papers be, and to be off to the dairy.

Yet there was but one paper lying on the table with the dried pen upon it : and that was in his own hand. Her quick eye had taken note of it, with its crossings out and interpolations, and she believed it to be the draft of a business letter.

VI

MARY ANNE never forgot her sixteenth birthday.

The square polished parlour was filled with Thistledallows, and near-Thistledallows : and the table was laden as Robert loved to see it. The beef, the mutton, the ducklings, the boiled fowls and cold bacon on the side table, the flour, butter, eggs and honey that made the bread and the crusts of the pasties and the pastries, the fresh fruits, the conserves, the cheese, the ale, perry and cider, all were his growing and making. He could boast that even the lobsters were his own, for he owned a slice of the cliff and foreshore six miles away, a cove,

three fisher cots and a string of smacks : and even the Madeira and the port had lain in his cellar long enough to make him forget that it had had any connection with any land that wasn't Thistledallow, or any care but that of his own wise trafficking brain. Even his Mary in her silk gown was more his own than most men's daughters. She had no one to look to but him, no hope of grace, favour, countenance, from any mortal but her powerful father. That was sweet to him, and he smiled at her benevolently. Indeed his white-faced daughter should see what he would do for her, he thought to himself, as he plied Mrs. Drax with " a bottle got up specially for you, sister 1 " and admired his Mary Anne's command of countenance as she filled her aunt's glass, but herself modestly refused even a sip. Robert in that hour felt and looked and knew that he looked more like forty than sixty. His red handsome face was a sun beaming on his kith and kin. He piled their plates and refilled their glasses, broadly complimented his nieces and his cousins on their looks, figures, gowns and conquests, and was agreeable to the young gentlemen who had not his privileges or his slow reckless tongue.

But he took so little notice of his daughter that more than Mrs. Drax remarked it : and young Cousin Bob who had thought to himself that a pretty gilded Mary Anne, turned Thistledallow by marriage, would be less of a drag on a Thistledallow born than a Drax or a Dear, lawfully begotten but dowerless, thought better of the notion and devoted himself to the twenty-five-year-old Roberta Dear. Roberta was plump and had a loud laugh that old Robert encouraged, for he joked with Roberta more than Georgina or Mrs. Drax liked, and snatched his kiss as he filled her glass. Mrs. Drax had a pang as she reflected that Robert was still a personable man, and was sourer than ever with Mary Anne because she, the ninny, showed no dread of a step-mother. Didn't the chit understand that there would be no place for her if her father brought home second cousin Roberta ? And so—

" Not enough sage in your stuffing, my dear ! " quoth Mrs. Drax.

" **Oh, Aunt Drax, I'm sorry.**"

" Ah well, you're young to keep house. And they'll not have taught you cooking at your fine school, I reckon. But your father was always a patient man."

The patient man grinned across the table :

" More port, sister ? Mary Anne, help your aunt to her port."

" Yes, Papa."

Mrs. Drax sipped.

" A wine indeed, brother ! "

Bob's shout of gratification set them all dutifully chuckling, as Mary Anne's lavender pink gown slid away from her Aunt Drax, and Mary Anne sat down again in her place and helped her aunt to more duck and less stuffing without a word.

" How stupid she is ! " thought Georgina. But Mary Anne's stupidity could not damp the party. Never had old Bob been more entertaining, lavisher in immediate benefits and hints of future benefits : benefits not too much in the future either. Old Bob said quite plainly that he had a surprise for every one that very night. But in vain Mrs. Drax manipulated the talk, in vain were Roberta Dear's eyes beseeching question-marks : old Bob would not be hurried. Not till the cloth was drawn and the preserved ginger and the sugar-plums set before the ladies, and the ratafia and cherry brandy poured into the small-cupped glasses with baluster stems and huge feet, and coaxed to the ladies' lips, not till Mary Anne was usually beginning her " Shall we go into the parlour, Aunt ? " did her father loose upon them his surprise. He rose, glass in hand :

" Sister Drax—Miss Crane—Cousin Roberta—ladies and gentlemen all—I've a health for you to drink, a birthday health. D'you know the day ? What ? Don't tell me you've forgotten Mary Anne's birthday ? Eh, Mary, have you no presents to show ? "

Mary Anne shook her head, imploring him with her

eyes to deflect attention from her. She was in a glow of embarrassment : her cheeks burned till she put up her little cold hands to cool them, and then checked herself hastily lest the movement should also be remarked upon. If they would only leave her alone and not look at her ! It was a pity that her hot cheeks turned her delicate good looks into a prettiness more to the taste of the country people among whom she lived. They delighted her father.

" Look at her ! Look ye, young Bob, there's a pink may-tree for ye ! Have you brought your cousin no birthday ribbon from London ? And you—Tom, Georgina, Roberta, and you, sister—have you nothing for your own niece on her birthday ? What ? Didn't know it were her birthday ? That's not cousinly. Has she or her father ever missed yours ? "

He delighted in their blank faces as he flashed at them his bold challenging smile.

" Papa—Papa——" implored Mary Anne.

" Hold your tongue, my dear ! Well, sister ? "

Mrs. Drax was ever one to snatch victory out of defeat.

" Why, brother, what a notion ! Is this Mary's party ? There now, how you spoil her ! Happy returns, my dear, and may you long have your kind father to spare you the worritings that come to the rest of us poor folk. And your birthday, is it ? Well, to be sure ! If I'd known I'd have brought you a lace or a ribbon to mark the day."

" That's kind of you, sister," quoth Robert. " Thank your auntie, Mary Anne ! "

He waited for the timid " Thank you, Aunt Drax ! " before he continued :

" Don't let it trouble you, Selina ! Mary Anne has no need of your presents. She's not asked you here to beg from you, but to give. I've—she've a surprise for you all. Mary, open the cupboard door ! "

She was as bewildered as his guests, but she did not show it. With her air of being in His ponfidence that so

flattered him, she slipped out of her seat : and the guests behind whose backs she passed swung round in their chairs to follow her movements. She could see herself approaching in the dark polished oak as a wavering pinkish shimmer ; but she could not see how, against the oak, her hair shone as if she wore a gilt helmet on the nape of her white neck. Her father, watching her as she turned the key, had a sudden memory, the first for many years, of the girl's mother, bronze-helmeted, brown-necked. What had become of her, he wondered. Dead ? Not she ! Teresa was as hardy as his Mary was tender. He leaned forward and gestured imperiously to young Cousin Bob to slide the bottle in its lacquer stand along the table, helped himself, washed away that memory with a draught, and turned again to his daughter :

⁶⁶ Well, Mary, what have ye got ? "

" Here are parcels, Papa," said Mary Anne doubtfully.

" Parcels, are they ? Well, hand them round ! "

She went about the table with her hands full.

There was a packet for every guest, little bundles, some light, some heavy, and each was addressed in Robert's copper-plate hand—

To her kind Aunt Drax, from Mary Anne.

To her dear Cousin Georgina, from Mary Anne.

To her second cousin Bob, from Mary Anne.

And so on, down the long list of relationships, ending with a little packet—

To her father's old friend. Miss Crane, from Mary Anne.

Each packet contained a neat roll of money or notes. The second cousins had twenty pounds apiece, the first cousins, fifty. Georgina, the bride, had a bond for 9 hundred pounds, and Mrs. Drax, the fattest parcel of them all. Pushing away her plate, she tore it open and began then and there to check the bonds it contained—

" Twenty, thirty, forty—" her black eyes snapped—" sixty, seventy—my dear brother, how obliged, how kind ! Eighty, ninety, a hundred—what, more ? Upon my honour, two fifties ! Oh, brother, brother,

brother, here's two hundred pounds ! " And she rose from her chair and swooped down-the long table-side with arms outstretched to her dearest, dearest brother.

He ducked and held her off, laughing :

" 'T'an't me ! You've to thank Mary Anne, sister ! It's all her plan, all her doing : so give your thanks, all of you, to Mary Anne ! "

Mrs. Drax gave them handsomely as, folding the bewildered girl to her bombazine, she bade Heaven witness that here indeed was reward for the training she had given her motherless niece.

" Cast your bread upon the waters—yes, Georgina, kiss your Cousin Mary ! The dear child ! And her birthday—and we never knew ! Indeed, brother, I've always said we should keep her birthday. And she must be chief bridesmaid, Georgina, now—indeed, I had planned it, hadn't I ? But there, we hardly liked, brother, to ask you to spare her for so long. But two hundred pounds ! Noble, I say, quite noble ! And all because Mary Anne wanted to please her old auntie, and her cousins and Georgina. Ah well, many a time Georgina's brushed your hair for you, Mary Anne, and buttoned you : and Bessie, too, for that matter. Ah, my poor Bessie ! And little doubt if Bessie were here and alive she would have had her present too—her share, as one might call it. But with her in the churchyard that would be too much to expect. Well, Bob ? Well, Roberta ? Have you thanked your cousin ? Have you said thank-you to Mary Anne ? Have you thanked my niece that I brought up to remember you all so kindly ? "

She was thanked then, the stunned, frightened girl. Her father had given her no hint of what was brewing in his eccentric mind ; but she sufficiently understood his methods to realise this—if he said that she was the giver, she must say so too. And here the training of the select school in Exeter helped her. She was never so much the lady of her father's ideals as in that undignified moment of terror (for her father's suddennesses always terrified her) when she had to receive the praises of her

elder relatives and endure the hand-clasps and the waist squeezings, the rompings and the embarrassments of her boy and girl cousins. She was shy and courteous, slipped in and out of embraces like a shadow, persuaded her Aunt Drax to sit down again, and curtsied to her male kinsfolk with so quiet an air that the joyful bustle subsided sooner than Robert liked : he could have watched the scene for an hour. However, he had not **finished**:

" Well, has my daughter pleased you ? Drink her health then ! Mary Anne ! " And he had them standing, while Mary Anne sat smiling with lips pressed together, twisting her handkerchief and praying for her father to make an end. But still he had not finished :

" Have you drunk ? Now sit and hear me ! Still, all of you, while I drink to my own daughter, my own flesh and blood, and a good girl ! You've given your kith and kin their own presents, Mary, to pay for all their civilities, and you're quits, I reckon. So I tell 'em now, before you, and you before them, lest there be mistakes later, that they get no more from Robert Thistledallow, this or t'other side of the grave." Then, as Mrs. Drax half rose—" Wait ye, sister ! Wait a bit, all of ye ! Your bellies and your purses are full : sit quiet now and see me give Mary Anne her present on her birthday. Here, child ! "

He reached backwards to the cupboard and drew to him out of it an object that at first sight the craning family took to be a framed picture, and held it up. And then they saw that the yellow mahogany enclosed an oblong of parchment in lawyer's copper-plate, with signatures and a seal.

" There you are ! " Robert shone upon them. " No crowding now ! I'll hand it round in a moment. It's your father's will, Mary Anne, drawn up in sane mind. And there's naught doing there, sister, for I went to the doctor in Exeter before I signed. Don't snatch now—you shall read in your turn. See, here's set down all the sums that have passed between me and the pack of you,

and what you've had to-day : in consideration whereof—that's fair enough, sister !—I leave all of which I die possessed (read it, Mary ! 'Tis your birthday present !) to my natural daughter Mary Anne, by courtesy called Thistledallow. Don't crowd now ! Here's my signature and here's witnesses and all. There's a copy to the lawyers, fear of accidents ; but this, my last will and testament, is to hang on my wall here, to remind my guests and neighbours to give honour where it's due, and that's to the mistress of this house while I live in it and after I'm gone. See, Mary, I put in a nail last night. Hang it up now ! Carefully, girl ! " For Mary Anne's fingers shook as she took the frame from her father's hand and, stepping on the hearth-stool, hung her present over the mantelshelf while the stunned table turned to Aunt Selina for a lead, and did not turn in vain.

Mrs. Drax rose out of the mob of relatives like a thunder-cloud rising over a village. She had plenty to say, had her brother given her a chance ; but he would not. He, too, had risen. He, too, had the light of battle in his eye. He, too, growled a thunderous warning—

" Better not, Selina ! You've as much as you'd have got anyway. If Mary gives you more when I'm gone, that's her own doing : and I dare say if you're civil, civil to Mary Anne, she'll be civil to you—eh, Mary ? You'd never let your auntie or your cousins starve, if she's civil, if they're all of them civil, would you now ? " He flung his arm about her and drew her to his side. " Eh ? Answer me ! " He took her by the chin and turned up her face to his.

" I—I——No, Papa ! " said Mary Anne.

" That's a good girl. Well, Selina ? " He challenged his sister over his daughter's head.

Mrs. Drax was a warrior. But, like those warriors who lead successful armies, she knew when to run away. Here was calamity so overwhelming that her very anger was stunned. Also, the wine she had drunk slowed her

wits. Instinct, the same instinct that made her brother the richest farmer in Devon, cried within—'Least said——! Least said——! ' If anything were to be saved from this pillage of her hopes, it would not be by resistance. 'Least said, soonest mended! Least said——!' Mrs. Drax met her brother's bright eye, cocked and whimsical as a robin's, for a long moment. Then she dropped her own, bit her lip, swallowed, spoke—

" I'm sure," quavered Mrs. Drax, " that we're all pleased enough, brother, that you should make good Mary Anne's misfortune to her as far as can be——"

" Ah, I'm sure o' that," responded Robert. " So's Mary. An't you, Mary ? Now give us a kiss and saj ' Thank you,' and take your aunt and the rest of them into the parlour. We'll be along presently."

" Thank you very much, Papa ! " said Mary Anne in her low, unemotional voice, and kissed him on the cheek. Then, for the first time in her short life, she disobeyed him. For though she left the room with her Aunt Drax and the rest of her guests, opened the door of the parlour across the passage, ushered them in, and softly closed it again, she herself remained outside, listening, and as the shrill voices rose in a common swell of anger and excitement released, she slipped away to the side door, took her bonnet from a peg and hurried out, skirting the garden till the hedge of the orchard hid her. Then she began to run, past the byres, across the meadow, up over the hilltop, on and down into the green tunnel of the lovers' lane where no one came weekdays, and cast herself down at last panting beneath the oak tree that marked the boundary of her father's land and the Babyon woods. In that quiet place, with no one to spy on her, she put off her habit of restraint as a runagate nun might put off her convent serge, and huddling herself in her own arms, fell a-crying, crying, crying, as loudly and pitifully as a starved kitten.

VII

UNTIL that hour she had not felt resentment at her state : and even at that moment of revolt she did not question her father's kindness, nor the right of all her relatives to remind her of her inferiority ; but she did feel it intolerable that her father should use her shame to punish the kinsfolk who wearied him. She knew, with a wish towards gratitude, that she was championed ; but his method of protecting her was a humiliation too bitter for her to endure. She knew well enough that she was bound to her father's house and pleasure, that he was treating her with unheard-of liberality, and that his liberality would make her not only despised but hated. She knew, too, that no protest would alter his purpose and that he would expect her to enjoy with him the broad jest that set her in perpetual pillory. Her tears increased as she thought of her lot, now and to come. She pictured her life alone after his death till she beat the moss with her little hands, and cried with a bitterness that surprised her own ear, " I ought to have a name of my own ! Oh, I ought to have a name ! " The more she thought upon her wrongs, the hotter burned her cheeks, with that strange sudden anger which she could always feel against any one who betrayed her. Thus, hot-cheeked, had she once turned, and for ever, against Clemency's Ellen. Now she felt the same hot flood rush to her cheeks, and her heart grow cold as it turned slowly, but for all time, against her father and her mother. " They didn't give me a name ! " cried Mary Anne. " What's the good of his money, his money ? He ought to have given me my name ! " cried Mary Anne.

She was in a state of excitement and emotion such as she had never before experienced. She wanted to calm herself and could not: her control, once so completely lost, was not to be recovered easily. It was as if a wildness in her character, long completely repressed, had

seized the reins and was driving her body furiously into excesses of conduct that bewildered and frightened her even as she committed them, but that she yet enjoyed committing. And so she continued to beat the earth with her hands, to cry and sob and choke and fling herself into unnatural positions, and found relief and excitement in such abandonments. Yet so much did the luxury of being unobserved contribute to her state, that it would have been impossible to her to relax her soul and body in any spot less screened. But here, walled and roofed in greenery, she was in the free air and yet the very sky could not see her, and any faint sound, the mere crack of a twig in that stillness, would have warned her to have done.

A sound did so warn her. There was a stir in the copse not ten yards away and she whirled to meet it, stiffening where she sat into normality, unable to believe that any one could have come into her range of hearing undetected. Nor could any man or woman of her acquaintance have thus approached her ; but this was a creature of the wild. Leaning against a lost tree, already half obliterated by its black hangings of ivy, stood a tall woman holding aside the bramble trails of the bushes to right and left of herself and the tree. Her black stuff dress had the green tinge that comes from exposure to sun and rain, and her maroon shawl was duller than the reddening bramble cones. She had but to stand still to be part of the wood : she had but to move, to lift her chin so that the sunlight splashed it, to be the life of the wood focused in a human being. She moved now, with a gesture eager, deprecating, amused : emotions rippled one after another over her face like flecks of sun and shadow. She took a step towards the young girl and, seeing her thus, separated from her background, Mary Anne knew her. She v/as the younger of the two women encountered long ago in Clemency's cottage.

Once again Mary Anne would have fled from her, but this time the woman saw her intention and with a

step, barred the exit from the glade. Mary Anne retreated : her hand reached behind her to the oak for support : she would not speak first. She looked at the woman and the woman looked at her as they shared the silence.

" What is it then ? " said the woman at last.

Her voice was tender, and she pursed her mouth as if she were addressing a bird or a kitten or a very little child.

Mary Anne looked down at herself, smoothed her frock, put back her hair and straightened her bonnet over it, so that only the stain on her cheeks and the brightness of her eye hinted at the past storm. She was indeed, like a garden, the better for the storm.

" Well ? " said the woman.

Mary Anne looked at her again and opened her resolute mouth—

" I haven't anything to give you," said Mary Anne.

The woman whitened :

" Nothing ? Have you forgot me then ? Well, it's six years ago." She took a step nearer—" Are you in trouble ? "

" No," said Mary Anne.

" I was in the hedge : I saw you running : I heard you cry." The woman took another step forward—

" I heard you—you—you little thing—putting your curse on us."

" Will you let me pass, please ? " said Mary Anne, and took a step forward.

The woman spread out her arms across the entrance :

" Pass ? No, you shan't pass. Ah, you don't know me ; but I know you. You're Robert Thistledallow's daughter. Tell me, is he unkind to you ? "

" No," said Mary Anne.

" You're happy ? "

" No," said Mary Anne.

" Why not ? What is it ? What do you lack ? You can tell me. You remember me, I see you do. You guess, don't you ? I'm your mother. You can tell me your trouble. What is it, eh ? "

Mary Anne came a step nearer. The woman fawned as she spoke again :

" Tell me ! I know, for I've read your fortune many a time. But tell me I It eases the heart to tell: and I'm your poor mother. So tell me ! What is it ? What do you want ? "

" I want to pass, please," said Mary Anne politely.

" Brat ! Devil's brat ! " The woman lifted her hand and struck wildly at the set rosy face, and Mary Anne fell back against the oak, her hand to her smarting cheek, and her cry rang through the woods. On that the woman rushed to her—

" I didn't mean it. You angered me. He and you—dumb devils ! Belle, little Belle, I didn't mean it ! Let me see ! Did I hurt you ? Lift your hand ! Lift, I say ! Will you not ? You left your claws on me last time. Don't fight me so ! I'm your mother : don't I know all your comings and goings—don't I bide my time ? Look at me ! What are you screaming for ? You'll have my people on us. I say I didn't hurt you. I'm your mother ! Listen, I say ! " And Teresa's strong hands wrenched apart the locked fingers that hid her daughter's face and stooped to read. The blue eyes were alive with fear, dislike, revolt ; but behind these emotions shone so pure an anger that Teresa's gaze shrank before it. She cried—" How can you understand ? For all that I'm your mother I Why do you hate me so ? "

" Let me go ! " cried Mary Anne, twisting in her mother's grip, and screamed again. This time, to the astonishment of both combatants, a hail answered and there was a noise of footsteps crashing through the brushwood.

Teresa, her gipsy instinct roused, relaxed her hold, harked a moment, then rippled into the bushes like a snake and disappeared. The trails were still shaking from her passage as a man's figure filled the opening.

VIII

A YOUNG gentleman goes for a stroll and thinks about his debts and his unrequited passion. Because he shares his passion with young gentlemen of rank by the dozen, and young gentlemen not of rank by the fifty, it does not appear to him ridiculous to be romantically in love with the fair hair, pink cheeks, blue eyes and dignity of his sovereign as displayed in Parliament, at the Abbey and in her Drawing-room. Though he did not upon her royal Uncle William's hint and tattoo her portrait on his arm, he did discuss, with other infatuates, the alleged private marriages of Henrietta Maria, the Queen of Hearts, and the first Virgin Queen. He did go to see a portrait of Leicester at a friend's house : he did wish that cloaks were the fashion and streets less well paved. In short, he fancied himself into the pleasantest fever and could have remained a happy melancholic for years if his purse had allowed him to remain in London.

But a passion for one's sovereign is more difficult to cherish in the country, with a neglected estate to overhaul, a neglected grandmother, agent, major-domo, garden, and gamekeeper to placate, and a county, a parson and a village to call upon, receive and patronise. There was everything to be done for the stables, the kennels, the granaries, the barns, the gardens ; but, as in London, his purse betrayed him, and for the fiftieth time he cursed his own and his father's expenditure. So noble a fortune—where had it gone ? He was sure he had not a spendthrift's vices : he spent no more than made life pleasant. He had, in retrospect, no patience with the half-remembered father whose aimless melancholy had embittered his own life and divorced him from his wife and family, until at Waterloo he laid it down with the rest of his burdens. Why, thought Charles, could not an old man, a man near forty, be content to settle at his home ? But Sir Henry's sense of duty, though it sent him on sudden visits to his family seat, could

not keep him there. As a compensation for his neglect of Babyon he had spent money like water in useless grandiosities for its adornment. A huge new wing had been added : the house had been refronted like a Greek temple : the woods sacrificed to the new gardens and shrubberies,; immense stone gateways had been set up at every exit, and the road round the estate was the wonder of the county. And if the father had satisfied his scruples by lavishing money on the property, the son would have been content. But, though he enlarged it, Sir Henry did not keep it up. The spending mania, Babyon wildness cropping out in a new form, was not to be satisfied by such sober follies. Melancholy and bored, Ludovic's son found in spending his excitement and his anodyne. He did not gamble : he did not drug ; but without ostentation and without cease, he spent. Whatever he saw—horses, jewels, houses, pictures, curiosities, rarities or commonest tourists' joys—these he must buy. Having bought, his pleasure was over, and he would give away his accumulations as fast as he could find any one to relieve him of a burden. The pictures and the statuary, indeed, went home to Babyon ; but for the rest—" Help yourself ! " said Sir Henry to the greedy world : and in time—" Help yourself ! " said Sir Henry to greedy death : and to the ghouls of the battlefields, stripping the bodies on the night of Waterloo—" Help yourselves I " said his stiff lips and glazed eyes. But to his only son there remained but the wreck of the fortune, and the only son in the five years of his majority had dispersed the wreck in the ordinary experimental extravagances proper to his period, his age and his position. Thus, at twenty-six, Sir Charles Babyon came home perforce to Babyon Court, to live on his dwindling rents and see his patrimony fall to pieces because he could not afford to keep it up, and be glad to compromise with his grandmother Caroline over her jointure, by having her to live with him in the empty swollen house.

Caroline, who had married, a few years after the death

of Ludovic, a Sir Hervey Eype, had brought up her son Henry, and later her orphan grandson Charles, in her second husband's home. On his death she found herself a second time dis-housed and thought Babyon, in spite of its tragic memories, a more comfortable place of retirement than the Eype dower-house. After all, it was sixty years since poor Ludovic had been killed, and he had not been killed in the house. So she returned, a brisk and coquettish eighty, and ruled amiably, got on well with her grandson, promised to leave him her savings rather than bestow them on the grandchildren of her second marriage, encouraged him in all his extravagances and did not cease to impress upon him the need for marrying money.

But Sir Charles wanted to rescue Queen Victoria from the hand of the assassin, and he would have liked to win the Derby, and he had bought a couple of hunters for which he could not pay. The Queen lived in London : so did the Jews, and his tailor, and his harness-maker, letter writers all. He sighed for London and led the rat-hunts in the barns, and strolled daily through the thinned Babyon woods marking down the timber that must be sold and the many tall trees that the ivy had ruined in the days of his minority, and considered his immediate need of a thousand pounds and the estate's need of a round ten thousand, an ill-treated, unhappy young man, for he loved his woods. As he strode along the leaf-mould paths, blue with towered bugle, on the evening of Mary Anne's birthday, and swished off thistle heads, he harangued his correspondents in so loud a voice and swore so fiercely at the fierce bramble trails clawing his sleeves as he broke through the wild ways they were closing, that some village children picking bilberries on the skirts of the wood, fled in alarm before his scowl and his inexplicable thundering monologue. But his dog was not disturbed by his thunders and his threatenings : his dog knew Charles.

Thus Sir Charles Babyon progressed, until a cry reached his ears and hurried him towards the belt of sunshine

that was a background for the wood. Oh, the boon of a new happening, thought Charles, in his standstill county ! And the cry was in a woman's, in a young woman's voice ! The voice was enough for Charles. He ran : he pelted : not till he reached the white and yellow radiant fields did he pause, panting, and dazzled by the sudden warmth and the slanting rays, put his hand to his eyes, seeking a direction. Then the cry, now unmistakeably of a young lady, was repeated on his left. He plunged through a dance of midges, round and into the golden shoulder of gorse, and found himself, though it was still his property, in a place he did not know, in a glade starred with tormentil, late milkmaids and soapworts, pink, white, lavender, cherry, azure and purple. A royal oak dappled the sunny place with shifting shadows, and Charles checked and flushed as he beheld, leaning against the oak's grey pillar, the living, breathing and agitated simulacrum of the august ruler of his imagination. Here was the hair like yellow silk, parted and looped over the ears : here the smooth broad forehead and ingenuous cheeks, and the obstinate mouth which would not demand the succour which the blue eyes sought. She was no higher than his shoulder : she wore a fashionable silk dress of a tint between rose and lavender, cuckoo-flower colour : her bonnet had fallen among the cuckoo-flowers at he' feet. She had been crying : she had almond-blossom tear-stains on the soft shelves of her cheeks : she was e x l y like the Queen in the Abbey : at least—she was more delicate than the Queen in the Abbey ! Her face changed at sight of him ; for her face was more expressive than the Queen's in the Abbey ! She was relieved to see him : she was shy : she was flushed : she was tiny : she was perfect : she almost seemed to know him : she was certainly enchanted to see him : and the Queen in the Abbey was not to be compared with her ! The Queen ? The Queen after all was a mere doll in an unbecoming crown and her face, he had thought at the time, was too full. The

Queen ? The Queen should come to Babyon to learn grace ! Here was a delicate air, yet with fashion ! Here was a model for any queen !

He plunged handsomely into speech, and never guessed that, to the long-lived woods, his speech was but an echo sixty years and more delayed.

" I heard you call. Can I be of any assistance ? Has any one alarmed you ? I am sure some one has alarmed you. Which way did the rascals go ? If you will wait a moment while I knock their heads together——But you are faint, you are frightened, you must not be left, of course you must not be left. Assistance ? Refreshment ? May I not take you to my grandmother ? Or shall I escort you home ? You live here ? We have not—that is, I have not the pleasure of acquaintance ; but I—but we—I am Charles Babyon," said Sir Charles Babyon in a hurry, falling in love.

Charles Babyon ! He was Sir Charles Babyon ! This was Sir Charles Babyon who had caught Tom Jasper stoning old Clemency, and had beaten Tom Jasper and given Clemency a guinea and shillings to Ellen several times ! Was this indeed that Sir Charles Babyon, son of the gods, a hero in his own right, very kind ?

She looked at him. He had a full brown face with a sun-flush. He had strong black eyebrows and hot eyes, a beaked nose and well-cut lips : his dark hair, brushed forward fashionably over the high forehead, was loose and curly. He had broad shoulders and was buttoned into a tight-fitting, narrow-waisted coat ; but he moved easily, as if the world belonged to him. His manner to her, however, was cautious, as if she were china and he might break her : and this manner of his gave her a feeling of security : she felt protected : she looked up to him with her eyes, with her spirit, as to a dark glowing tower of kindness : she liked him so much. See, he had driven away by his mere approach the wild woman who had touched and tampered and whined, who had struck her on the cheek. Mary Anne's hand went up again to her bruised cheek as, with a look and a movement, she

put herself, her passage home, her after life and her soul's salvation, confidently in his hands, revelling in his adequacy and rule.

He stooped to her, questioned, listened to her stammered tale of a beggar woman and a sudden fright, and he was angry with her for excusing her calls for help. Mary Anne said that she should not have been so silly : she should not have screamed. But indeed she should have screamed, he told her : it was the perfect thing to do : only an excessively intelligent woman would have so instantly, so wisely, done such a thing. How glad he was that she had screamed ; for gipsies, tramps and so forth would always and naturally take advantage of a lady, of an unprotected young lady. In f he was infinitely obliged to her : gipsies had no business in his woods : he would give orders : he would see to it that the miscreants were hunted down and brought to justice : transportation : out of the country, One had one's duty to one's neighbour.

Mary Anne in sudden bright terror cried—

" Transportation ? Oh no, no ! It was a woman ! "

A woman, was it f That, in Sir Charles's opinion, made it worse. However, there were proper places of detention, and he would see that the gipsy cooled her heels in a Bridewell, and considered her sins—trespassing and night-running and terrifying a lady !

Mary Anne had a vision of that dark proud face shrinking under blows dealt instead of giving them : and then of a cunning creature bribing the gaoler to send word to a nameless daughter. Mary Anne stammered out that the woman had done her no harm, that she had not even begged of her : she would rather the woman were let go : and was commended by an enraptured young gentleman for her final perfection, for her exquisite exhibition of womanly compassion.

She raised her wondering eyes to his and found that he meant his praise of her, that it hid no mockery of her creeping jenny ways. She saw quite plainly, though she could not believe it, that, in her country phrase

he could not take his eyes off her. Indeed he did not try, but met her timid look with a gaze so bold, so inquiring, so eager, that she turned from him and began to play with the runnels of ivy upon the great trunk behind her, stammering that she was infinitely obliged to him and that she ought to go home. She did not, however, stir. He requested respectfully to be allowed to escort her home, and did not stir either. There was a pause. The tracery of the ivy was absorbing Mary Anne. Her pink, pointed finger-nail ran down the pennants of the ivy one by one, while Charles developed out of the crowd of courtesies the question that he wanted to ask, that she did not want to answer. He was too polite to ask it directly, but he cleverly wondered—was she fatigued? Had she not better sit dow'n? Had she come far? Was she alone? He supposed that she must be staying in the near neighbourhood; for her friends would not have allowed her to come far alone?

No, she had not come far. Her finger reached the top of one ivy trail and began to descend another. Not very far: only over the hill.

"By Riverhayes? Oh, did you come by Riverhayes? That's a property now with a strange romantic story. It belongs——"

She broke in quickly—

"Yes, yes—to my father."

"What? You are Miss Thistledallow? Why then, we are acquainted. I have the pleasure of your acquaintance. We are neighbours. Better than neighbours. My cousin, Adeline Eype—were you not schoolfellows? Were you not friends? I am certain that I have heard Adeline speak of you."

In her wonder she let the ivy be. Her eyes said—"Is it possible that you know? If you know me, then you must know what there is to know of me: and yet it makes no difference to you? Then you can't know."

But indeed he did know her not uncommon history. He knew her for old Bob's heiress, and had heard it lamented by his grandmother that so much money would

probably be the portion of a girl doubly disqualified, a girl neither legitimate nor a lady. And Adeline had overheard the comment, Adeline, who had had an elder girl's careless liking for the little outcast and a quick, picture-painting tongue. She agreed with Caroline that Mary Anne's situation made it impossible to know her; but she told them so eloquently why she lamented it, money or no money, that Caroline tut-tutted her out of the room and Charles was moved to cross-question her afterwards concerning the blue eyes and the quiet ways of the disreputable heiress, and for quite half an hour was resolved on making the acquaintance of the pretty girl whom Adeline was forbidden to know : and forgot all about her then ; but found now that this half knowledge of her enhanced his admiration. He was young enough to find illegitimacy romantic. He wanted to tell her—— He did not know what he wanted to tell her : so he, too, turned to the ivy and had ripped off a long trail before her little shocked exclamation stopped him.

" Oh, don't ! " softly said Mary Anne.

" What ? "

" The ivy. Why do you tear it ? "

He was the principal landowner——

" It kills the trees. It clambers over them and sucks them. A trail like that——" he spanned the delicate growth——" can kill a young oak in twenty years."

She said oddly——

" Ivy has to live too. It must hold on to something." Then she put out her hand, arresting his as it worried at a second tight-glued climber——" Must you ? "

He was serious.

" I would not see a strong thing killed."

Said she——

" I would not see a weak thing killed."

They stared at each other : then said Mary Anne as if there had been no break in their talk——

" I was at school with your cousin. I am not her friend."

Charles looked down at the ivy——

" Shall I let it live this summer ? " And then——

" Indeed she regrets it—the circumstances—she spoke of you with friendship."

She nodded—

" Yes, if you please—for the summer. She speaks of me?"

" You should hear her."

" I saw her once in church—since—after—after I came home. She did not speak to me in the church-yard coming out."

He hesitated—

" She spoke of that too. She regretted——Indeed, dear Miss Thistledallow——"

She winced.

" I have not—I am not—sir, that is not my name. Your cousin is right. I cannot have friends."

He cried out, ardently—

" You—you can have only friends."

She stammered—

" I ? If you knew——"

" I know."

She was scarlet.

" My misfortune ? "

" What has it to do with you—or me ? I know you for yourself. That is all I care to know."

She turned on him—

" Oh, how can you talk so ? I have known you for ten minutes."

" What is time ? " cried Charles, inspired.

It struck her as a deep thought. She waited in profound admiration, in growing excitement, with parted lips, for him to continue. He continued—

" Time ? You called to me for help. I came. I saw you standing there. I thought—'I was born for this.' " His voice was hushed. He admired the workings of Providence. He told her, awed—" These things happen."

" Oh, do they ? " cried Mary Anne.

" You see they do."

She said doubtfully—

" In books——"

" In life. Books are shadows of life. ' Whoever loved that loved not at first sight ! ' That's Shakespeare or—Dr someone."

" Oh ! Oh I see ! " said Mary Anne.

" Yes. So you see, at the sight of you—the first sight—frightened—turning to me for help against——"

She stopped him with a little fierce gesture—

" It was my mother," said Mary Anne, despair in her voice.

" What ? "

" It was my mother. I saw her once before. She frightens me. Nobody knows. Now you know. You say you know about me—that I am not Miss Thistle-dallow—that I am only Mary Anne. Now you know this too, how can you want to know me ? So I will go home," said Mary Anne. Then, as he stooped to her—" Please, please, I will go home."

" I will come with you," said he.

" No, no ! "

" Yes."

" My relatives are all there—my father has made his will. They are all so angry with me." And she shrank, It was inevitable that his arms should go round her.

" Angry ? With you ? How dare they ? "

⁶⁶ He told them he would not leave them his money. They were all talking. So I came away up here to get my breath. They will think me ungrateful. When I go back he will be angry that I came away. So I must not stay any longer. Please let me go home."

" I will come with you."

" It will be worse."

" I will talk to your father."

She faltered—

" What can you say ? What can you do ? We don't know each other." But all the while she felt that she knew him. His shoulder pressed against hers. She was between him and the rough of the tree. Her mind said—' He is like this o, ' ' It was bliss to listen to his sure voice.

He was saying—

"Do ? I am a Babyon. We always know what we'll do."

"Oh," she cried—"what will you do ?"

"It will be best, I think, to take you home to Babyon," said Sir Charles, a-glitter with the excitement of burning boats.

She stared, mazed.

"To Babyon ?"

He laughed.

"Will you marry me ?"

She took it like another blow upon the cheek. She didn't draw away from him, but her eyes filled.

"Will you ?"

She said—

^{<e} You are worse than my mother. Please let me go home."

He revelled in her incredulity.

"Try to understand—marry !"

Her eyes brimmed over.

"No-one could want to marry me. Why should you want to marry me ?"

"Why ? Leave that to me. Will you ?"

She began to understand that though he might be a madman, at least h, meant what he said : and he continued to smile and say—"Will you ?" and he sounded sane.

"Will you ?"

She was much agitated.

"Will you ?"

She faltered—

"What you wanted, I would do."

"Would you ?"

"Yes."

"Would you kiss me, Mary Anne, if I asked you ?"

"Yes."

"Kiss me, Mary !"

She swung back in his grasp a moment, staring up at him, making up her mind once and for all. Tiptoeing, she lifted her head and kissed him.

Then he knew that he loved her. He had had an odd pleasure in holding himself back, in urging the live part upon this creature of tremors. For he had not been sure. He had been afraid of his own fantastic impulse and yet proud of his impulse. He had said to himself—' I've gone crazy—like all the Babyons. Who else but a Babyon, on sight, in half an hour——I'm all the Babyons in a nutshell—more than them all. But if she has the courage—then she'll be right for me—right for Babyon. Let me see if she has the courage—the little thing.' " Kiss me, Mary Anne ! " Then, when her timid Lips touched his, then her obedience amazingly touched his heart and he exulted as he held her fast and kissed her again and again, frightened yet willing under his kisses. He had been right. All the Babyons in him had not failed him. Here was the adventure of his life ! Here was the perfect woman, already loving, already beloved. At the back of his mind, completing his heady happiness, was the recollection that if, madly and amazingly, he married this pretty child, he need no longer worry about his creditors and the estate. But he was scrupulous not to let his thoughts dwell upon the matter. For this headlong, frantic Charles had his code. He could admire himself for so magnificently upholding the Babyon reputation : he could see himself as a Cophetua ; but with his whole heart he resolved to be a kind king to his beggar-maid.

⁶⁶ Mary Anne, Mary Anne, we have known each other twenty minutes; but I think I love you, Mary Anne. Do you hear me ? Do you understand ? I say I love you, Mary Anne ! "

IX

THUS was she wooed : thus she satisfied her father's ambition : and if she had studied all her life to satisfy it, could not have done so more completely than by walking home in the dusk on her stranger's arm and introducing to the shocked turmoil of the parlour—

" Aunt Drax—Sir Charles Babyon! " blotting out utterly her father's anger with—" Papa, Sir Charles was very kind : he will tell you how he helped me," and leaving Charles, gay, dashing, delighting in the adventure's oddity, to carry on the course of the play. Robert seconded him like an old or who happens, out of time, on the part of his life. Before Mary Anne could say to herself, " I am loved," she found herself betrothed : and before she grew accustomed to the Babyon Mizpah ring upon her finger, had a second ring upon it, and found herself, the nameless, the Creeping Jenny, young Lady Babyon of Babyon Court in the county of Devon.

She was so happy that she thought sometimes that there was a sun inside her breast instead of her former heart. She had but one cloud in her sky—what if she proved unworthy of her husband's amazing goodness to her ? For consider his goodness ! He had given her his name, his ring to wear, his house to rule : he had put her on a level with every one else : he had made of her a lady !

" Who is that driving by ? "

" Young Lady Babyon. Don't push now ! Keep back ! Wait in the porch till she passes ! "

" Who's the little miss getting into the coach ? "

" That's Mary Anne—Thistledallow, they call her."

" Oh, so that's old Bob's Mary Anne ! "

" What are you talking of ? That's not Mary Anne. That's a married woman. That's a lady—Sir Charles Babyon's lady."

" Good-day to you, my lady I Did you see her smile at me ? "

" Do you know who that was, driving with Miss Adeline ? That was young Lady Babyon ! "

But oh, suppose she did not bear herself like a Lady Babyon ! What if her birth and her breeding betrayed her ? Her voice was not quite the voice of Miss Lavendell at Exeter. She had not the drawling certainty of old Lady Babyon, the crisp flutter of Adeline Eype. She spoke like the Devon folk, softer, neater, but still she

spoke like the Devon folk: she herself could hear it. Would not the others hear it ? She must speak as little as possible, decided this dumb Mary Anne, lest a rustic phrase betray her. For how could she bear to live if she, by a rough accent, an unguarded movement, a foolish phrase, betrayed Sir Charles and his glorious bounty ? If any one should laugh at him for marrying her, how should she feel, what would she do ? Her happiness shivered and rocked like a card-house built too tall as she thought of the invisible dangers that beset her new path ; for the gay, blessed, whirling, laughing honeymoon was over, and Sir Charles and Lady Babyon had come home to Babyon Court. Charles was busy spending money, and she had been thrice to see her father : and at her last visit had been told bluntly not to come again—" Letting yourself down ! I'll not have it ! And you, Mary Anne, you should know better. At this rate your aunt and your cousins will be dropping in on me, sure of seeing you ! Where's the joke on 'em then ? Stay at Babyon and be a lady. When I want you here I'll send word."

Thus Robert. She obeyed him : and did not come again till on his death-bed he sent for her ; for they were literal creatures both. He lost meanwhile no opportunity, by constantly speaking of her, to bait his sister and her people. He never tired of hearing them revile Mary Anne for her pride and lack of heart : he tasted their anger like a fine wine, and rubbed his hands, and his heart warmed to his daughter, and he worked like a young man to increase his substance. Her portion had been big enough to reconcile the grandmamma ; but let them wait till his death to see the true value of his girl. Thus Robert : and died happily ten years before he need have done, of work he had no call to do. Said he, on his last bed, looking from his sister to his daughter—

" Mary ! "

" Yes, Papa ? "

" Let your aunt have the port! Mary ! "

" Yes, Papa ! "

" Do you know what I'm worth ? "

" No, Papa ! Papa, you tire yourself."

" You'll know to-morrow," said Bob—" Wish I could see Selina's face."

" \What's that, brother ? "

" You'll know to-morrow," said Robert, and grinned and died.

But his decision cut the last link between his daughter's old life and her new, and killed any monstrous notions she may have harboured of confiding the difficulties she foresaw to her father. She never thought of confiding them to Charles. To him she must be the lady he thought her, must never let him guess how frightened she was of her ladyhood and the immediate future. She knew well enough that the marriage was a nine days' wonder, and that, in accordance with her bearing, Charles would be the most glorious of all the Babyons or a fool trapped by a farm wench. Thus they might speak of him if she shamed him : and if they spoke so then she would have lost him his place in the county. What if she had lost it him already ? What if the county would not know her ? Could Charles ever forgive it if the ladies and gentlemen did not come to visit them, or were not at home when she returned their visits ? She found that to marry into happiness is not to be happy. And if they visited her, how should she behave ? What would he say to her when they left if she had behaved out of fashion ? Would he be angry ? Could she live if he were angry ?

Then her bridegroom would come rioting in from his important business and stun her fears with his love-making. He had a royal way, had Charles. He rode down her timidities and modesties as he had ridden down the opposition of his relatives before his marriage. He enjoyed opposition that he could overcome. He had said to her on the great day, as they drove away from the church—" Now, you see ! Didn't I tell you to trust me ? I always get my way. It's the Babyon motto—don't you know our Babyon motto ?—' *I go my way!*'⁹

So we do, all of us. I tell you, my little love, I always go my way."

Listening, his little love wondered what would happen to a woman who would not go his way with Charles, and thanked God that she loved him as she loved her life and so would always go his way. Love ? That was a Little, short word for what she felt : and once again the sun in her heart began to glow as she looked at him with the passion of the saved for the saviour. But there was still the black spot on her sun of happiness—Would the county visit her ?

The county visited her and her sun shone brighter as she found herself pleasing her visitors, and Charles. She made no slips : smiled, spoke little, listened well, was formal and beautifully dressed. Charles war. proud of her and showed it, though, to do him justice, he would have laughed at her fears if he had heard them. Charles cared nothing for the county : he went his way.

Nevertheless he was pleased to accompany her on their first state visit to their nearest and most-looked-upon neighbours, the Tanleighs of Queen's Tanleigh, ten miles away across the moor. The heir was marrying Adeline Eype, and Charles was sorry for his cousin, he told his Mary. Ley Tanleigh was a queer fish: he looked before he leapt : he'd be sorry to live between Ley Tanleigh and his pompous mother all his life. But if Adeline liked it, said Charles, that was very well, and there was no doubt that the connection was a desirable one, and no doubt at all that Lady Augusta's invitation must be accepted, though for himself he hated dining at six and on a Tuesday too. Tuesday was his day for the accounts, said Charles, who had shed the young gentleman of fashion for the country squire with his usual enthusiastic rapidity. Nevertheless they ought to go.

They were to drive over early on the day, see the gardens and take tea, and dress there for the formal dinner. The young Lady Babyon would meet the families who had called upon her during the past three weeks, and she understood that it would then be

decided once and for all whether she lived upon intimate visiting footing or formal calling terms with her neighbours.

She looked at herself in the glass as she dressed and was satisfied with the set of her bride's travelling dress. Caroline's terrifying maid had packed her evening gown in silver paper, her wedding-gown recut to show her sloping shoulders and bare arms. Her open band-box held the house-cap and evening head-dress without which a married woman was clothed but not attired. She was tying on her bonnet and adjusting over it the bridal cream lace veil when Charles came in with the Babyon emeralds in their cases. These, not the string of pearls he had given her on their wedding-day, were the thing to wear that night. She was sorry; but he insisted and growing interested in this question of his wife's adornment, he went on to point out that her engagement ring, the Babyon bride-ring, would clash with the emeralds, so newly reset. He thought she had better not wear it in the evening. Here, you see, was the ring for the occasion—a fine emerald set between two brilliants. No, she had better not wear the Mizpah ring as well : " Slip it off to-night, Mary Anne ! "

She astonished him by her look, as if she were near weeping and she shook her head. But naturally he did not give in to a mere sentiment. Not till she turned the hoop on her wedding ringer so that only a second gold hoop showed by the marriage band, was there peace between them. It was their first difference of feeling, and the dispute wonderfully flustered Mary Anne, so that she hardly gave him enough looks of admiration for the Babyon emeralds. He could never be satisfied by moderate praise : and he stayed so long displaying the merits of the bracelets, ear-rings, zone and brooches, that in the end the carriage was waiting before either he or she were ready, and they had to run for it with the emeralds swept up hastily into Mary Anne's travelling bag. And once in the carriage and fairly started he was still not content till

he had opened the bag again and pulled out the contents in order to finish extolling the emeralds, and e x t r , phrase by phrase, the superfluity of comment that alone could satisfy him from his smiling tongue-tied wife.

Thus they drove, contentedly occupied, the length of the avenue and on to the Common : and it amused him then, as he played with the linked dangling stones and tried a bracelet on his Mary's arm, to picture to her the dangerous business such a drive had been a hundred years earlier, and so fell into the tale of his Uncle Jason—his great-great-grand-uncle Jason, a Sir Jason in the end—"but at my age," said Charles, "a younger son without a penny." Uncle Jason had done as gentlemen, younger sons, did now and then—ay, and were hanged for it when caught, gentility or no. He turned highwayman, masked and armed, one desperate afternoon, on this very Babyon Common, stopped a roach and took from the father of a pretty girl two hundred guineas but had gallantly refused to touch the lady's emeralds : had ridden away rejoicing, to dine at a neighbour's, and—to escort the lady in to dinner whom he had robbed in the afternoon ! She had known him by his voice but had kept his secret, and in the end the two had married. "She brought us our money, and if she and Uncle Jason had had a son we'd not be sitting here trying on her emeralds. But there was only one daughter, a mad creature who never married : and when she shot herself in one of her fits all her money went to her cousin, my great-grandfather James."

"I know. He died there." Mary Anne pointed to a mound of heather rising beyond a tr of bog.

"It was somewhere hereabouts," said Charles indifferently. "He shot himself too. Did you know ?"

"Pel heard."

"Poor fool !"

"He mast have been so unhappy," said Mary Anne.

'But to kill oneself ! You know the story ?'

< Yes."

" Well, isn't it incredible ? "

• ' Oh, no ! " she said.

" Oh, yes, I say. Quite incredible. There's no excuse for such an ^{now}—save illness. Then—yes ! Cancer——If I were told that I had cancer—:—"

" Ah, don't ! " breathed Mary Anne. A voice out of her past rang in her ears as if his words had opened a shut door, a shut cottage door—' Don't say the word ! It's never been among the Babyons, that way of dying.' She puzzled over the memory while she listened to her husband.

" But to put a bullet through your head because you're unhappy—" Charles was continuing—" that's beyond me. That's mad, eh ! "

" To be always unhappy—here—" Mary Anne touched her breast—" that would be, don't you think, a cancer ? "

" Pooh ! " said Charles, who was bothered by answers to his rhetorical questions : so he told her that he never knew a woman who could think logically : they always began to feel, which was the end of reasonable conversation : was she afraid of cancer, that she flinched like that ?—" Don't be so silly, Mary Anne ! " and with that kissed her wide eyes till they lost their quaint fixed look. Then he tossed the handful of jewels back into her lap to be tidied and packed away : and as she did so, looked at his watch and thrust his head out of the carriage window to tell the coachman to whip up now or they'd be late.

At this moment Mary Anne, stowing the cases in her travelling bag, realised that her band-box had been left behind. She caught at his sleeve—

" Charles ! Sir Charles ! Oh, please stop ! "

" What's that ? " Still standing, he turned back into the roomy carriage, ready to put out his head again when she finished speaking.

" Charles, my band-box is forgotten/ "

" Well, what of it ? " quoth Charles : and at her look of dismay, abandoned the window, sat down beside

her and began to kiss her once more. She found herself irritated : she began to push him away.

" Don't, Charles ! Not now ! Listen ! My band-box—*my* cap is in it ! "

" Is it indeed ? " He found her unfamiliar eager flow of words entertaining. His one complaint against her was her dumbness. " Well ? "

" Why, we must go back for it."

" My dear, we're late already."

" But my cap is in it ! How can I go visiting without my cap ? Please tell them to stop ! "

" What—now ? Nonsense ! "

" Please, Charles—I must wear my cap ! Your grandmother herself would tell you—I must wear a cap. Don't you see—I'm a married lady—oh, please, please, dear Charles, don't you see ? "

He did not see. For at least six weeks he had been the sturdy farmer, despising the whims of fashion. It was a point of honour not to see. It was no question of *f* would not *'* : he could not see, though he was neither malicious nor empty-hearted ; but he was the Nelson gesture made into a man. He did think it the greatest joke in the world that the loss of a cap should turn his obedient Mary Anne, his crooning wood-dove, into this frantic, stammering piece of vanity. He could hardly believe that Mary Anne should set such store by a finery. She usually asked him to turn back five miles for the sake of a lace and ribbon. Delicious Mary Anne ! He teased her till her stammered entreaties ceased to amuse him : and then told her loudly and firmly, as a husband needs to at honeymoon's end, that there was no question of turning back—" I shouldn't think of overheating the horses. So now stop talking about it, Mary Anne ! "

She stopped talking about it then : sat stiff and still in the corner of the luxurious carriage that old Robert's money had purchased, trying to understand that there was no question of going back, that he, her saviour, her strong tower, her rock, was going to let her walk into a

strange drawing-room dressed as no decent woman dressed, so that every one would understand once and for all that she was no true Lady Babyon, but a farm girl too ignorant of decorum to know that a married woman must have her head covered. Only women without their marriage lines, women like her mother, went without a cap. But now she, Mary Anne, who thought that to be Lady Babyon was to be in harbour, must walk into Lady Augusta's parlour without a cap ! All the great ladies would be there to watch her, to recognise her origins, to say—" Poor Sir Charles ! he might as well have married his housemaid ! " She remembered how her country manners had isolated her at the Exeter seminary, and that, for all she learnt the new way so quickly, the first slips had never been forgotten to her : and she was to go into Lady Augusta's drawing-room, into that formal gathering of well-born, well-bred women, not dressed like a lady ! And they would stare and smile and be kind to her : and it would never be forgotten that Lady Babyon came to dine at Lady Augusta's without her cap. And Charles——

She turned once more to him, and for the last time in their married years with confident affection——

" Charles—dear Charles—you were laughing at me, were you not ? Don't laugh at me any more, but stop the horses. You will stop the horses ? You see I have not my cap."

Charles, cramped with sitting, bored, irritated, half listening, and truly unconscious of the importance of the matter, cried out——

" Oh, to the deuce with your cap ! "

They drove on then in silence for another five miles and arrived in good time at Queen's Tanleigh, were received with cold and courteous formality by their host and his mother. They walked about the gardens, drank a dish of tea, and presently were shown into an uninhabited state bedroom and there left to dress. Mary Anne put on her bride's dress of white satin, decked herself with the emeralds, and went down to dinner on

her husband's arm : and caught every glance, and understood every glance, as she entered the glittering withdrawing-room and curtsied to the gold tissue and gauze turbans of the younger matrons, to the erections of lace and frilled ribbon of the dowagers. She behaved very well, scarcely spoke, " but, wasn't it odd, she had no cap on her head ? What could you expect though of a farmer's daughter ? On the whole we think she did well enough. But to -put on all the Babyon emeralds was to overdo it : and then to appear in them sans cap ! Well, well, one must be civil for Caroline's sake : and of course we all know Charles had to marry money. But Caroline might have seen to it that her grandson's milkmaid observed the decencies. Would you believe it ? Could you believe it f The new Lady Babyon walked into the Tanleigh drawing-room without a cap on her head ! "

X

IF the lack of a glove cost a Mary Stuart her liberty, and the lack of a handkerchief cost a Desdemona her life, need the gods laugh if the lack of a cap cost a Creeping Jenny her mere happiness ? For that, precisely, was the price that she and Charles between them paid for the forgotten twist of net and ribbon ; though it is to be doubted if Charles were ever aware of his bankruptcy. He was faithful to his Mary Anne and she to him. She kept his house well, was careful of his interests, obeyed him, was respectful to him, bore him ten children and reared him six, and never till the day of his death spoke a word to him outside the bounds of her duty. " Yes, Aunt Drax ! " " Yes, Papa ! " was replaced by " Yes, Charles ! " on the lips of Creeping Jenny. But Mary Anne never had been fluent. Charles did not remark a change in her manner to him, though it is to be confessed that he did soon begin to feel that married life was a flatter business than he had conceived it : and

began to absorb himself, sooner than might have been expected from so romantic a personality, in the red clay diversions of a Devon squire. His estate fitfully held his interest, though he was by nature no farmer : and between occasional tidal waves of experimentation and steady ebbs of mismanagement, he dissipated a part of the dowry his wife brought him. The rest he spent on his sufficiently conventional amusements, on his dogs, horses, bets, debts and cellars. As he grew older he drank rather more than was beginning to be considered respectable : and though he did not usually lose the countenance of his coevals, Sir Charles Babyon in his old age was a less considerable person than he had been in his youth. It was commonly said that he had not fulfilled his promise : indeed, it was as if some necessity of his nature had been withdrawn, as if some sap had ceased to rise in him : so that in the last years of his life (he died at sixty-five) he was still the noisy, impetuous dogmatic, and consequently found himself disregarded by the contemporaries who had grown fastidious as they grew old. Inevitably he spent more of his time with his inferiors in rank, though his wife saw to it that his degeneration was not so complete as to affect the status of the heir, Nicholas, their last child and only son.

That she in turn knew how she had affected her husband is also to be doubted. Her withdrawal from him of the affection, admiration and confidence that his nature required for its proper development, was as instinctive as her previous withdrawal of affection from her own father, as her childish recoil from poor Ellen of the Lodge. She was incapable of forgetting an injury, forgiving a betrayal or desisting from a hate : and it was into a hate that her first love for him had been turned. Nor could she understand that she had in any way wronged him by accepting his invitation to regard him as a hero, or to comprehend that a pedestal can suffer a night-change into a pillory. Charles had been the prince of Cinderella's tale, bringing as wedding gifts name, rank,

security and honour, and in his sunshine she had flung off her disguise of rags and ashes—"Throw them into the dustbin : I shall never need them again. Never again, *my prince*, *my saviour* ! And oh, how I worship you for throwing my rags into the dustbin and making me sure that I shall never touch ashes again ! "

And then her prince and saviour, for less than a whim, in pure stupidity (she knew well enough that there was no malice in him), had sent her in her bride-dress back to servitude and the mockings of the ugly sisters.

She did not picture it thus. She had not a mind that dealt in pictures, phantasies or phrases. She dealt with *facts* : with the *fact* that it was Charles—Charles—Charles—and no other who had put her to shame in the Tanleigh withdrawing-room. She re-lived the scene as they drove home together that night, weighed it against his protest of love for her. His love, she judged, weighed light in that balance : and her heart grew cold as it turned against him, slowly, once and for all.

Her life's course was, however, plain to her. Her dowry was in her husband's control : she had no alternative to obedient service. She had borne him two children, nursed old Lady Babyon through her last illness, and seen the best part of her dowry trickle through Charles's well-meaning fingers when, for the last time, the emotion of her earlier days brushed her in passing, as, for the last time, she came into contact with the *others* in the first part of her history. She had speech with her mother again, and her father died.

Charles had a notion that Mary Anne and her children should have their portraits painted. All the Lady Babyons had been painted as young wives, and Mary Anne was looking very beautiful, with a child on her arm and another clutching at her skirts. Charles had made acquaintance with an artist fellow, Dux-Tanleigh, the R.A., a cousin of the Leys and the Shropshire Tanleighs, who had lodgings at Queen's Tanleigh and was busy on his Academy picture—some classical subject or other, pillars and drapery, very fine 1 He had already asked

Charles if he might sketch, if only from memory, the lovely profile of Mary Anne, swore it would be the making of his picture—what was it now ?—Creusa and Medea—and he had already found his Medea. Well, you know, when a fellow asked you, and is a cousin of the Leys, what could you say ?

And so Sir Charles had the picture gallery, with its polished floor and square window, put at the disposition of his new bosom friend, who was to stay at Babyon and paint Mary Anne. As for the Academy picture, he could work at it very well, eh ? when he wasn't painting Mary Anne. Why shouldn't his model sit to him at Babyon when he wasn't painting Mary Anne ? Of course Lady Babyon wouldn't object to the old woman : she knew well enough the sort of people an artist needed to sit to him sometimes. But ask her !

" My dear, Mr. Dux-Tanleigh has begged permission to use a sketch of your head for his Academy picture—some one or other and Medea—classical—he'll tell you the story. We'll go up and see it on the line, eh ? "

" Lady Babyon hasn't given her permission yet." The artist was watching Mary Anne as he listened to Charles.

" She'll give it. Better begin the sittings to-morrow."

" If Lady Babyon permits." Dux-Tanleigh was obstinate.

" Of course she permits it," cried Charles. " Don't you, Mary ? "

" Yes, Charles."

Dux-Tanleigh acquiesced with a proper expression of gratitude, but he was not satisfied : and his portrait of Mary Anne expressed his dissatisfaction. He had schemed a Grace with Loves : he achieved a cold Cnarity with a tidy babe in her arms and a second clinging to her skirts. Charles, however, liked the picture, and superintended its hanging in the gallery beside two ether Lady Babyons, a fair Caroline and a fairer Menella. Lady Babyon, gentle and tongue-tied, did not seem to own an opinion one way or another as to the merits of

the picture : and Dux-Tanleigh, unaccountably nettled, cast aside his suspicion that Lady Babyon had no great liking for the role of Creusa in an Academy picture and availed himself of her husband's permission to persuade her to sit to him. His model for Medea, an elderly gipsy, discovered one dusk telling fortunes in little Queen's Tanleigh, attended daily, a tall, unbowed, dark woman, very well spoken : and Charles, excited over the picture-painting as he was invariably excited by watching the exercise of any craft that he had not himself mastered, wandered in and out of the improvised studio, twitching draperies, opening and shutting windows, and recommending brushes that Dux-Tanleigh was not ready to use. The picture did not progress at a speed satisfactory to Charles, though the Medea was nearing reality. But he wanted to see his wife materialising, and suggested that she should be present at all the sittings—"How can the witch look as she should if she can't see her enemy? You painter fellows have no imagination!"

"But would Lady Babyon be able to spare the time?"

"I'll call her. Mary Anne! Mary Anne! Where are you, Mary Anne?"

The painter and his model could hear the hearty voice of the master of the house echoing down the stairs. A common impulse stirred them : they looked at each other, bright-eyed, questioning and quizzical, though one was a draggled slut and the other a young man of fashion. Suddenly in that look's silence, the gipsy laughed aloud.

"Ah!" Dux-Tanleigh caught at his brush and fumbled among his tubes—"Stay so, please! Just so!" The woman laughed again and stayed just so, her eyes fixed upon the open door : and, as they entered, upon Mary Anne and the panting Charles. Dux-Tanleigh had never had so good a model. In the days of work that followed the woman had never to be told to fix her eyes on Mary Anne or compose her looks into the expression of hungry mockery that

fulfilled Dux-Tanleigh's conception of Medea—witch, mother, murderess, discarded wife and daughter of a king. Lady Babyon, understandably, did not sufficiently concern herself with the woman to give her more than a glance. That too suited Dux-Tanleigh's conception of his Creusa. He admired Lady Babyon's sensitive appreciation of a painter's requirements in a model, though he deplored her invincible lack of interest in her own face. His picture thrived : unless Charles invaded the studio he was able to work in a blessed and profitable silence ; for his model did not offer, and Lady Babyon did not choose to speak to him. Indeed, had it not been for the companionable Sir Charles, he would have worked in ideal conditions ; but Sir Charles would have him break off now and again to taste a port, to attend a rat-hunt, or try a horse, and a fashionable painter must be a good fellow and follow a patron's lead, even though he be a cousin to the Tanleighs and so cousin's cousin to a duke. Thus he missed a sensation. In one of his absences his two models did speak, and to each other, though Dux-Tanleigh never guessed it.

" Belle ! Heather-bell ! Little Mary Anne ! " began the Medea whispering—" Do you know me ? "

Mary Anne did not answer.

" Don't you ? Won't you ? "

Still there was silence. Then the gipsy began again, tossing back her long trails of grey-streaked hair with a laugh—

" How proud we are grown ! Aren't you glad to be home ? " Then, as Mary Anne turned on her a dumb startled glance—" Home, I say. Your home. My home. What, don't you know ? "

" I don't understand you," said Mary Anne, breaking her vow of silence.

" You don't know ? But my mother let it out to you, that evening in Clemency's cottage. And you didn't understand ? You don't remember ? You never knew ? Well now, that's strange." She pondered: " I was quite sure you knew. I was proud of you for it."

Mary Anne said nothing. Presently the gipsy spoke again—

" Child ! "

" Mother ? " said Mary Anne harshly.

" Child dear, I'll make a bargain with you."

" It takes two to a bargain, Mother ! " said Mary Anne.

" Your father's dying——"

Mary Anne blazed at her—

" What's that to you, Mother ? It should be nothing to you. He turned you out. Oh, how he shamed you ! "

The woman's eyes startled and kindled as her daughter spoke. She came nearer : she was confidential—

" That's it ! I've a mind to his house, my darling. Child dear, when he dies and his money and his house is yours—oh, I have heard of your birthday present—I want you to give me the farm—let me the farm. Will you ? "

" No," said Mary Anne.

" I ask no charity. Haven't they told you, there's no such thing as a poor gipsy. Here ! " She fumbled in her breast and drew out a lustrous, dancing river of moonlight—" See, here's a fortune of pearls. I'm the daughter of a king, my daughter. It's yours for Riverhayes."

" No," said Mary Anne.

" I'll not torment you nor betray you. Have I ever betrayed you ? "

" WLen I was born," said Mary Anne.

" Fiddle ! I mean, to your husband ? I've kept the secret. Now give your mother's bones a home. I was happy at Riverhayes when I was young. Now I'm growing old Fid like to die there. Let me ! "

" No," said Mary Anne.

The woman rose :

" No ? No ? Are you a stone ? Fm your mother. Would you have me rot in a ditch as my mother did ? "

" Yes," said Mary Anne.

" Don't! Don't say it ! Dear ! Sweetheart ! Little thing ! Be kind to your mother ! See, dearie, I'll bargain with you. I know you and I know your injuries. He rules you and drives you, your Charles Babyon, and you can't get free of his rules. Now I'll give you a knife to cut 'em with. Let me into Riverhayes when it's empty and I'll put my knife in your hand."

Mary Anne shrank back in her chair :

" How can I give you Riverhayes ? What goes to me will belong to Charles."

" Not so. To you. Tied up as tight as the lawyers can—to you and your children. I've made it my business to know. We have our ways of knowing, for all we go ragged. Robert doesn't like to see his money spent the way my son-in-law has spent it. You'll have the rest of the spending. You can believe that, dearie ! I tell you, Mother knows. So will you let me go to the farm when Robert dies ? I'm but quarter gipper : I'm sick of wandering. I want my home as my mother wanted hers. Will you let me ? I've such a secret for you if you will. You won't ? The secret isn't worth it ? That's what you think. Ah, but you don't know what a secret it is. Come now, promise me, if it's worth it to you when you hear it, will you let me live at Riverhayes and see me sometimes ? Come, I'll tell you without a bargain struck. I'll trust you to do right by me. Aren't you my daughter ? But, daughter, who's your mother ? "

Mary Anne would not look at her :

" You are. You say so."

" And my mother ? "

" One like you, Mother."

" Ay, like me, as you're like me, for all your fairness. But who else is my mother like ? Use your eyes ! Look there ! " And she flung up her wild head and her brown hand with its claw nails towards the darkened painting on the wall close by. Hariot Babyon, the mad heiress, stared down at them.

Mary Anne considered the portrait while the gipsy

cried impatiently, " Don't you see ? Don't you see ? " Then her eyes strayed, puzzled, to the Medea upon the canvas. She said slowly in her cold voice—

" I see that she is a little like the Medea."

" Like the Medea ? Like me ! Like my mother ! And like you when you look at me scared and vicious. Here's my mother ! " She turned to the Reynolds portrait : " Look at her, and her cousin, and you and me, as like as a four-leaved clover, for all you're Robert's colour. And why not, when we're all Babyon women ? "

Mary Anne was stiff with the effort of control. She felt the blood draining away from her face, but she spoke clearly and calmly—

" D'you say I'm a Babyon ? "

" This was my mother, Isabella Babyon."

" That murderess ? "

" That was my mother—your grandmother. You met once, and she knew you for one of us. Besides, I've proofs enough if you care to see them."

" I don't care," said Mary Anne, and began to shake.

" So you won't believe me ? "

" I think I believe you. I believe you," said Mary Anne. " It—it makes a difference." She drew her little figure together, rose, and came stately to her mother—" I don't forgive you—you and Papa—never ! Nor my grandmother Isabella : nor—" she whitened—" nor Charles. But I see, Mother," said Mary Anne slowly, " that you are like me. You are what they made you. It makes a difference," said Mary Anne.

She sat still when the others had returned, breaking in upon their conference, thinking of the difference it made : and crouched Medea watched her and thought of the difference it could not make. Dux-Tanleigh, surprising them, was voluble—

" Just as you are, good woman ! I beg you, Lady Babyon ! If you will stay just as you are I won't keep you ten minutes."

Dux-Tanleigh was no prince of painters, but he knew his world, and he would have dearly liked to understand

the look that he was for ever surprising in the eyes of his patron's wife. As he could not understand it, he painted it.

How could he understand it ? It was the look of a conqueror. She had loved and feared. Then she had hated and feared. Now she hated but did not fear ; for, you see, she was a Babyon by birth as well as marriage. Charles was no longer a royalty : his blood was in her veins. His caste was no longer a mystery : she belonged to it. If she had thought Babyon Court the Earthly Paradise and found it no such thing, at least in Fool's Paradise she had a right to her bed and board. She belonged in it. It seemed that she would be able to live her life.

She did live it.

She reared her children and kept up the house on the income secured her by the terms of old Robert's will. But she gave her husband no more money. Thus, with the years, he became, as his extravagance increased and his income lessened, her pensioner. Yet she never altered in her obedience save in the one question of money, never withstood him save only over money, or when (her only eccentricity) she installed, some years later, the old woman who had sat for Dux-Tanleigh's Medea as caretaker at Riverhayes. Charles had thought such an arrangement fantastic. He had crowed with laughter at Mary Anne's scheme for farming Riverhayes land. His Mary Anne a farmer ! How should she know kelk from crop ? She said that she did not know, but that she was quick to learn. In the end he allowed her whim. Riverhayes thrived. She added to it out of its profits and presently began to use her knowledge on the languishing Babyon fields, bargaining with her Charles for a free hand. Her reputation among the farmers grew : as an old woman she was the local oracle of the country people just as, among the neighbouring families, she was the local legend : a woman who would walk into your drawing-room without her stockings if she chose—"and ylst, my dear, she must be worth thousands !" Thus

did her early indiscretion become the nucleus of incredible yet credible fables. For gentle and simple had a sort of pride in her exploits. It was known that she had twice saved the Babyon estate from shipwreck, and by incredible parsimonies and more incredible shrewd business dealings had lestored the Babyon patrimony to a glory it had not known since Sir Henry's day.

But in spite of the respect that her big neat daughters and the dependants of the neighbourhood and her neighbours in the county paid her, she lived a retired life. She married off her daughters suitably in turn, and was able for the last five years of her life to devote herself wholly to her youngest child. He was fifteen years old when his father died, and had been sent to school unusually early. At sixteen he was as silent as his mother had been at sixteen : nevertheless when infection kept him at home for three months and Lady Babyon nursed him in the silence and emptiness of the huge emptied house, they contrived to form an acquaintance. Perhaps his silence put an end to hers. They talked sometimes, walked sometimes, were happy together. In his childhood she had played the part of a just shadow flickering in and out of his life ; but now she opened her heart to him, and even that strange, oblique confession of hers that his sisters had meant nothing to their mother, did not alienate him.

" I did my best by them : they were very good daughters, very kind to me. I do wish them well."

" Do you wish me well, Mother ? "

No answer from Mary Anne.

" Do you, Mother ? "

" You——" said Mary Anne : her hand on his arm tightened. They had been walking together, he suiting his pace to her old little steps, up Petticoat Lane under the meeting oaks. He looked down at her and was concerned by the look of fatigue upon her small drawn face. The neighbourhood had seen for a year or two that old Lady Babyon was 'failing'; but he had not seen it. Now for the first time he saw it and suffered

a strange pang as he drew her into a little gorse-hedged glade that had been a lair of his boyhood :

" Sit down a little, Mother ! I've walked you too far. See, here's a tree-trunk. It makes a seat."

It was the noble carcase of an oak, long since strangled by the embraces of its companion ivy. He himself had watched its felling.

" It's changed here," said Mary Anne out of her fifty years' remembrance, looking about her.

" Not much," said her son out of his fifteen years' remembrance. " Only the oak down. They had to fell it. It was rotten with ivy."

" Your father hated to see ivy on a tree when I first knew him. Later, he did not care about the woods." Mary Anne was still looking about her. She caught his eye : " Here—here, my son, I first saw your father."

He looked his interest :

" Was he like me ? I mean, am I like him ? "

" Yes. He was handsomer. He had brown eyes. You have mine. They are dull now, but they were once blue."

" Mother, what was my father like when he was young ? Was he always—as he was ? "

" What do you mean ? " said Mary Anne, not looking at him.

" Oh, Mother, you know what I mean. He ate and drank and talked and never listened to any one. He couldn't have been like that, could he, when you and he——"

Said Mary Anne—

" No, he wasn't like that."

" What was he like, once ? Make me a picture."

She shook her head. She dealt in f s . He puzzled :

" Mother—Dux-Tanleigh's picture of him——"

" Yes ? "

" Mother, I've thought about my father. Dux-Tanleigh's picture isn't like him as we knew him. It's like—with those nostrils and the lift of the head—like a horse rearing, beating the air toith his hooves."

Said Mary Anne—

" I shouldn't have thought of it, but—yes, that was your father."

" But, Mother, what happened to him then ? "

She looked at her son as she shook her head and said steadily—

" For many years I did not know anything about your father."

" Mother ! "

" I wouldn't let my eyes see him nor my ears hear him. He was not there for me."

There was a silence between them. Her son broke it at last with his—" But, Mother——1 But we—my sisters——? But there were all of us born ! "

She said patiently—

" Don't you know, dear—don't you know a husband has his rights ? "

He flushed, not she. He did not look at her, but stared at the trails of torn ivy heaped between them, wilting beneath their polish. She put out her hand and picked up a long wrenched-off trail and then, holding it in her hand, with the forefinger of her other hand running round the pennant leaves, up one, down another, as if she were telling a rosary, she told him, halting, faltering, hesitating, awkwardly told him the truth about her childhood, her girlhood and her marriage. She ended with—

" I never told any-one before. I never had any one to talk to."

He made her no answer and for a while she watched him as he sat, frowning, his eyes on the hacked ivies and litter of dead boughs. Then she murmured timidly—

" My son, we must go home."

He turned to her and said loudly, as he helped her to her feet—

" Take my arm. You have me now. Take my arm."

He was not prepared to say any more. Nor was she. They were not talkers. But her eyes were misty with

blessed tears as they walked home together happily. She had him now.

The dragging trail of ivy slipped from her hand and was forgotten, as completely forgotten as those former trails which she had defended from Charles and destruction so long ago. And that incident of her courtship was also forgotten : indeed she had not time for memories now. She had her son now.

And for a full year she had him. Then the same gnawing that had destroyed her mother and her mother's mother, had its way with her also : and Lady Babyon, in life and death as gentle and relentless as the ivy he hated, slept unwillingly beside her ruined oak.

June 1926—September 1927

Qrantte

A PLAY

“For the devil is come down to you, having power.”
REVELATION.

THE PEOPLE OF THE PLAY

In the order of their appearance.

PENNY HOLT.

JORDAN MORRIS.

JUDITH, *his wife.*

PROSPER, *his half-brother,*

A NAMELESS MAN.

A CLERGYMAN.

The scene, throughout the entire play, is the living room of a farm on Lundy, in the second decade of the last century.

The first takes place in the late autumn.

The second is a week later.

The third is early spring of the following year.

The last is a year later.

I.

SCENE I.

// is a stormy autumn night on Lundy, a little over a hundred years ago. The play is played out in a large vaulted room that has been the kitchen of a twelfth-century castle. Of the castle interior nothing is left but the stone staircase and the huge fireplace; but later comers have roofed and partitioned the vast empty square and made a snug enough farm-house of it, though the stone walls and spy-hole windows contrast oddly with more modern touches—Windsor chairs, curtained windows, an unframed print or two pinned on to the walls; but even this modernity is already over a hundred years old. The guns in the gun-rack are of a pattern long obsolete: one print is a Hogarth and the other a tattered sketch of Nelson's Victory: and of the three living creatures in the room two are dressed in clothes that would have been behind the fashion when Waterloo was fought. The third, PROSPER MORRIS, is as well dressed a young fellow as ever had "seaman" stamped on him, though his slight limp suggests that he will not go to sea again now that the war is over. PROSPER is sitting on the edge of the bare table looking down at his handsome sister-in-law, JUDITH MORRIS. She is a year or two older than he is, a fine big creature, with bright cheeks, reddish-gold hair and bold eyes. Her mouth is spoiled or made more beautiful, according to your taste, by a full lower lip on which the upper one closes firmly. The forehead is high and the face with its set frown does not suggest a placid temper. She is sitting, her arms flung out over the table, her chin lifted, listening as if nothing in the world

mattered but the story—or the teller. In the ingle-nook sits JORDAN MORRIS, a stoutish elderly man with an inexpressive face that is yet very like PROSPER'S vivacious one. His wife and half-brother have forgotten him, but he has not forgotten them though he takes no part in the conversation.

As the curtain goes up PENNY HOLT, a pretty shy girl of fifteen, comes into the room softly with two candlesticks which she sets down on a stool near JORDAN. He nods in acknowledgment and PENNY, taking up her own candle, tiptoes away and up the stairs, turning to look back at the others once or twice before she disappears.

JORDAN [*as he strikes a light*] Bed! [PROSPER *breaks off abruptly,*

JUDITH [*eagerly, oblivious of JORDAN*] Go on!

PROSPER [*shyly*] That's about all.

JUDITH Tell me another story!

PROSPER That wasn't a story. I'm no good at stories. But—that's how it happened.

JUDITH That's it, it happened! I can look at you and touch you and cook your food and make your bed and all the time I say to myself—Nelson spoke to him! When you tell me things like that I know I'm alive.

PROSPER [*She has set him off again*] He had such bright blue eyes, and he didn't care a tinker's curse for his dignity. The Queen might be aboard—

JUDITH [*eagerly*] What Queen? Have you seen a queen?

PROSPER The Queen of Naples. She and the Hamilton, were as thick as thieves. And Lady Hamilton's friends, they had to be his friends. She did what she liked with Nelson. But there, it was his weakness!

JUDITH Was she very lovely, Lady Hamilton?

PROSPER Was? Is! She's alive still somewhere, poor soul!

JUDITH What was she like?

PROSPER Not young, but—there was a dance on board. She twisted a veil round her head. She slipped over the deck like a wave.

JUDITH But what was she like?

Her face, upturned to him, is as brilliant as fever. He looks down at her searching for a descriptive word. 'Then, with a start—

PROSPER Like you.

JUDITH *[drawing back angrily]* I won't be made a fool of!

PROSPER *[absorbed in his discovery]* But she is! I never thought of it before. It's the mouth. It's the way you look. You needn't be angry—I mean in looks. I didn't mean you yourself were like her.

JUDITH *[looking at him sideways]* Didn't you?

PROSPER God forbid!

JUDITH Why—God forbid?

PROSPER She was a violent woman. There was no measure with her. She was cruel and loose. And yet she was weak. Any man was her master—except Nelson. She did what she pleased with Nelson. I hated her.

JUDITH I envy her. Truly, am I like her? *[She takes off the scarf and flings it round her head]* Look! *[PROSPER makes a step forward: she falls back]* What tune did she dance to?

PROSPER Wild tunes.

JUDITH Listen to the wind! There's a wild tune. *[She begins to dance]* I haven't danced since I came to Lundy. But I've not forgotten how to dance. I've not forgotten—

JORDAN *[rising from his chair]* Judith, put away your nonsense and come to bed! *[She takes no notice]* Bed!

JUDITH Prosper, you've brought me back to life! I'd forgotten there was England and Europe and the world outside Lundy. I'd forgotten I could dance. Dance, Prosper!

JORDAN [*clapping his hands*] Bed, I tell you!

JUDITH [*ignoring him*] Dance, Prosper!

JORDAN Come now, that's enough! Come!

JUDITH [*swiftly and blackly over her shoulder*] I'll come when I choose and not before!

JORDAN Now, you vain fool! [*He pulls the veil out of her hand.*]

JUDITH [*She whirls round on him, but backing a little, so that PROSPER, against his mil, has the appearance of being her ally*] Don't touch me! There, there, you see what he is? D'you see how he treats me? It's 'Come to bed, Judith!' and 'Up with you, Judith!' and 'Do this, you fool!' and 'Do that, you vain fool!' day and night and night and day: nothing in the world to hear but the beat of the sea and the whistle of the wind and 'Get up, Judith!' and 'Come to bed, Judith!' till I don't know which of the three voices I hate most. Three masters! Three masters! It's more than a woman ought to bear!

JORDAN That's enough, now! You go along, Prosper! Time we all went! We may be up again ere dawn. Wrecking weather! [*He rubs his hands.*]

JUDITH I tell you I won't come! I'll sit up all night if I choose. I'll do what I choose!

JORDAN [*furiously*] Stop that now! Spitting and snarling before a stranger!

JUDITH Your own brother a stranger!

JORDAN A stranger to you. I'm tired of your tantrums.

JUDITH [*raging*] Yes, I'm to be your wife and get up and lie down at your bidding; but your brother's still to be a

stranger. Mine's yours and yours is your own, like the fortune you got from me!

JORDAN .You and your fortune! What's the good of going over that?

JUDITH It's been of use enough to you. You've stocked the farm with it. The corn you grow rich on, it's grown from my seeds. I feed the beasts you make your profit on. A cup of milk for a cup of brandy—that's his rate of exchange, Prosper! When the starved ships drive in, he sells them milk and green food: a cup of milk for a cup of brandy, a head of cabbage for a bale of tobacco. That's how he's grown rich, Prosper—cheating the seamen rotten with scurvy! Your seamen—Nelson's seamen!

JORDAN It's poor land: it's all granite here about: green stuff's worth gold to me here on Lundy! Why shouldn't I get what I can?

JUDITH And why do we live on Lundy?

JORDAN There's money to be made.

JORDAN Even though we don't see England for five years there's many'd be glad of my farm.

JUDITH My farm! Stocked with my money!

JORDAN You've got it wrong. My farm—your farm—that's not the way of it! We're the farm's: a woman goes with her man, and a man goes with his land. Come along now!

JUDITH Keep away! Don't touch me!

JUDITH [*to* PROSPER] I haven't seen England for five years.

PROSPER [*between them, remonstrating* Jordan!]

JORDAN [*sullen*] I wasn't going to touch her.

PROSPER [*very much the peacemaker*] Judith! [JUDITH is sitting at the table, her face hidden, her shoulders shaking But Judith!]

JORDAN It's nothing. She has these fits. Let her alone!

PROSPER [*uncertainly*] Well—

JORDAN You're not married. Oh, you needn't look at her! She doesn't hear. She's miles away. I tell you she has these—fits! If she were eighty they'd duck her for a witch as well as a scold, on the mainland. I don't know that it wouldn't be the best for her. She'll be mad for days now—staring eyes, whites glinting, like a Dartmoor colt. And your porridge will be burnt, I warn you! Oho, that's to be married!

PROSPER Then why—[*He breaks off.*]

JORDAN Marry? Why did I? And why will you? Why does anyone? She's a fine woman in between.

PROSPER When Judith came to the door [JUDITH *lifts her bead*] I was fair dazzled. I never thought you'd marry.

JORDAN I was a spruce lad ten years ago. If I'd had your brass buttons and your sword to set me off then, I'd have looked higher than a draper's daughter.

JUDITH Don't you speak against my people!

JORDAN A draper, a cockney draper's daughter, for all her boarding-school airs! Now we Jordans have got old blood in us.

JUDITH Bad blood, black, treacherous blood! I hear its ghosts in every storm, gathering to the old trade.

JORDAN The good old trade! Yes, I hear them, too, my girl. You wouldn't think that of me, would you, Prosper? That's what they call blood crying to blood. My mother was Lundy stock, though I never saw her. You didn't know that, Prosper? Ah, you've a thing or two to learn about your own kith and kin. Yes, the blood's there. My mother's fathers were lords of Lundy and all the ships that passed, eight hundred years ago. But your Mamma—Oh, I don't mean—

disrespect—but she was cockney like Judith here, all for talking and kissing.

JUDITH I'd sooner kiss a beast sweating from the plough: I'd sooner kiss the clods it tramples when it drinks: I'd sooner kiss the rocks that the gulls have fouled—

JORDAN That's being married, brother! That's how it goes when you cross 'em. Oh, I remember Mamma. It was all dear father and dearest Prosper—must have money for a new gown—must have money to go to London—and some to set up Prosper—dear, wee Prosper—but round on you with a snarl if you kept back a guinea to fatten the farm! Gallivanting and furbelows—and the farm could fall to pieces! But you're too young to remember!

PROSPER I don't say Mother was wise. I haven't come here to quarrel with you, Jordan!

JORDAN I've been asking myself what you have come for. Brotherly love?

PROSPER Sounds odd, don't it? But it's true. You're all I've left in the way of kith and kin. And now I'm an idle man—

JORDAN Ah well, I think you're honest; but I don't fathom it. People or land—but you can't have two loves. And so you're for people? I'm for land. Each to his taste! But Judith, she can't see it. Can you, Judith?

JUDITH *\sullenly* What difference does it make to you, what I see?

PROSPER *[he has gone to the window and stands watching the black night]* Lundy's a strange wild place. I wonder you never thought of—

JORDAN What?

PROSPER Why, selling the lease of the farm. You could sell at a profit and settle on the mainland. Better land.

PENNY [*doubtfully*] Was it? I thought I heard voices in the room here—and you all gone to bed!

JUDITH [*not unkindly, gathering the girl in to her*] But I hadn't gone to bed, you see! I was talking to myself, that's all. O Penny! Bare feet! [*She flings out her skirts over the child's ankles.*]

PENNY [*snuggling*, But who answers you, Ma'am, when you talk to yourself? That's what I wonder. Such strange thoughts come. Who is it answering?

JUDITH Your soul, I suppose.

PENNY It frightens me to catch myself at it. It's as if something—someone—were inside me—someone not Penny, that I'm letting out—a stranger. Don't you know what I mean?

JUDITH I know what you mean. [*She flings out her arms in a wild gesture*] A stranger! A stranger in me! And he wants to get out! [*The wind catches up her cry*]

PENNY Hark!

JUDITH What?

PENNY That laugh again. When you said 'stranger'—

JUDITH I don't hear anything.

PENNY I heard.

JUDITH [*impatiently*] It's only the voice of the storm. There'll be a wreck to-night, I shouldn't wonder.

PENNY [*quivering*] I hate storms.

JUDITH I like them. One's alive in a storm. One can let oneself go—go—go! Oh, how the sea must ease itself, smashing down the cliffs, smashing down the ships and the men!

PENNY Don't, Ma'am! A storm's wicked.

JUDITH [*her eyes still alight*] Then I'm wicked. I have storms in my soul, Penny, when I talk to my—stranger. Penny, you must go to bed.

PENNY [*coaxing to stay*] No, but listen to it I [*She laughs*] You aren't like that, Ma'am! Can't you hear how wicked it is? Wicked things come out of it too. [*She begins to sing, half whispering the words*]

'Will ye hear of cruel Coppinger?

He came from a foreign land—'

JUDITH What's that you're singing?

PENNY 'He was brought to us by the salt water,

He was carried away by the wind.'

Don't you know it?

JUDITH Coppinger?

PENNY [*She is throughout the scene as serious as a small child retelling the last story its nurse has told it. She believes every word she says*] It's a dreadful story. Mother told me. She knew the people. There was a girl: she wanted to marry before her sister did, so she prayed to the devil—

JUDITH O Penny, Penny!

PENNY She did. Mother said so—for a lover. And in the next storm, the next wreck, while they were pushing back the wrecked men into the sea—[JUDITH *makes a shuddering movement*] Oh, they do, Ma'am—

JUDITH You've no right to say it, Penny. They are washed up dead, the wrecked men.

PENNY But Mother said they did. And while they were at it, he came. He came up naked out of the sea.

JUDITH Cruel Coppinger?

PENNY Yes. The devil had sent him. The girl was sitting on her horse and he jumped up behind her and rode away

to her home and married her, poor silly girl!

JUDITH Poor?

PENNY The devil was in him, Ma'am. He robbed and burned and killed. Her mother died of grief.

JUDITH [*stirred in spite of herself by PENNY'S earnestness*] What a queer story!

PENNY It's a true story. And when at last they came to take him and punish him, he went out to Gull Rock and waved his sword at the sea, and a ship came up out of it and took him away, no one knows where. [*Stag'fig*]

He was brought to us by the salt water,
He was carried away by the wind/

That came of praying to the devil. The devil always gives you your wish, you know!

JUDITH [*superstition is catching*, Does he, Penny?

PENNY Yes. Mother said so. Mother said—God doesn't always give you your wish because He knows it isn't good for you. But the devil always does.

JUDITH I wonder.

PENNY And then when you're sorry, he laughs.

JUDITH Does he, Penny?

PENNY [*absorbed*] Why, there was another woman, Ma'am! She went up to Devil's Common and called him, and he came—the devil came—

JUDITH [*laughing uneasily*] Hoof and horns complete?

PENNY No, Ma'am! Just like a tramping man. She was sorry too afterwards, Mother said. [*There is a pause. The wind lulls too. At last—*]

JUDITH [*with an odd laugh*] How do you call up the devil, Penny?

PENNY *[wide-eyed]* I don't know, Ma'am! You just pray, I think. You call and he comes. But of course you lose your soul. Mother said so. *[There is another pause'.]*

JUDITH *[staring]* I read once—when they called up the devil in the old days, they had to get an innocent girl to help them. *[Then as she meets PENNY'S eyes]* Penny, you're to go to bed!

PENNY *[unwilling]* O Ma'am!

JUDITH *[strangely]* You've no business here. Quickly now! *[She goes across to the stairs with the girl.]*

PENNY *[on the first step]* Good-night, Ma'am! *[She puts up her face to be kissed]*

JUDITH *[catching her to her with a fierce maternal gesture]* Good-bye, my Penny!

PENNY Good-night, not good-bye! *[Then, with a little gasp]* Oh! How tight you hold me!

JUDITH *[her hands dropping to her side]* I hurt you, did I? That's because I love you, Penny! Loving hurts, Penny! It hurts! It hurts! *[PENNY goes laughing at that goodjoke. JUDITH stands a moment looking after her, then she turns]* Oh, how it hurts! Did I hurt you, Penny? And won't you hurt me in a year or two? You'll go away, marry, forget me. I know it. You'll leave me alone with Jordan again, for all your loving and hugging. *[She turns back into the room]* I know. *[She sits down before the fire staring into the flames: presently she laughs]* Little Penny and her devils! The good child! *[She moves restlessly in her chair]* 'The devil always gives you your wish and then when he does, you're sorry!' Sorry! I'd risk it, if I could have my one wish! My wishes have grown so few. *[She tries over the names]* Prosper Morris! Judith and Prosper Morris! Judith and Jordan Morris! 'You call him and he comes.' Oh, easy, easy, Penny! 'You just pray, Ma'am!'

[She rises and moves about the room as if, without knowing it, the rising wind had forced her into stirring with it] I've prayed enough, God knows! Yes, You know that, God! I've wearied You, I know! But what if You have wearied me? What if I change? *[Again she is silent. Her hand has fallen on PROSPER's cloak that he has left lying across the chair. She fingers it, absently at first. Then she begins to smile]* Why did you send Prosper to me, eh, Lord? English law doesn't run on Lundy, Jordan says. I thought maybe You were out of power too. Yet You've sent me Prosper. Or wasn't it You? He's set me dancing, heels and heart. But You and Jordan aren't ones for dancing, are you? This is queer now. *[She flings up her head: her eyes shine]* Listen! whoever you are, God or devil, my God, not Jordan's, my new God who sent me Prosper! Listen to me now! Let me keep him! Let him stay here on Lundy, a year, only a year—oh less, six months—less than that—a month—let him stay—let him dance with me and kiss me—let me have a month's summer like other women have, and I'll sell my soul to You for him, if You'll tell me how! I will, you laughing God, I will, whatever Hell You send me to! *[Again she is silent, then she laughs harshly]* Fool I am! Sell my soul! That's a safe vow. As if Jordan would let me own it or sell it! It's his and he'll spend it—on the farm. And so I've nothing left to buy him with, O God that sent me Prosper! *[Her face works childishly: she breaks out into bitter crying]* Nothing, nothing! Not even my own soul! *[A laugh is heard. She lifts her head]* Who's that? *[For an instant, as she stares at the window opposite her, something that might be the moon or a man's face shows in the black square of the night. Then, as the wind, that has been rattling at the casement as if it were alive and impatient, gathers itself for a fresh outburst, the face disappears]* Who's there? Who laughed at me? *[As a second gust sweeps past so violently that the whole building trembles,*

the door is burst open and a man's figure pitches forward and falls across the threshold. She cries as she rises to her feet] Who is it? [Then with a half turn to the stair] Jordan!

THE MAN Stop! Don't call! Let me in!

JUDITH Who's there with you?

THE MAN No-one!

JUDITH I thought I saw—

THE MAN No flesh and blood.

JUDITH What does that mean?

THE MAN I'm alone. I mean—alone. A stranger. Let me in!

JUDITH Why yes, you can come in. *[As if her answer had given him a certain strength, he scrambles over the threshold and advances into the room.]*

THE MAN Help! *[He staggers to a chair. She watches him coldly, quite unmoved.]*

JUDITH Who are you?

THE MAN Wrecked. I was wrecked.

JUDITH So have others been—on Lundy.

THE MAN *[stretching out his hands despairingly]* Dying.

JUDITH Die then!

THE MAN Give me life!

JUDITH Why should I? *[She stands staring down at him.]*

THE MAN Cold! *[Hi? drags himself a step forward towards the fire]* Warm me!

JUDITH If you go too near the fire you'll die. You're half frozen. Stay where you are! You want rubbing with oil. You want—*[She checks herself]* Why should I? *[He pulls feebly at his neck and wrenches off a gold chain and offers it to her]* I don't want your bribes. *[She takes down a cup from the*

dresser, fills it, and offers it to him ungraciously] Here! [*He drinks*] Drink slowly! That's milk. • It's worth gold. It's bought with my money. But money won't pay me for it. Can you pay me?

THE MAN I'll pay.

JUDITH [*She cuts bread and reaches it to him*] Eat it slowly. It's all you'll get. There's not much of it, but it's mine. I bought it. How will you pay me?

THE MAN [*famished*] More!

JUDITH Why should I give you more? Will my husband thank you if I keep you alive to learn his secrets, the farm's secrets? Wrecked men go back into the sea, over the granite, at Lundy. [*She dangles the food in front of him*] Are you hungry? [*He snatches at it in vain. She laughs*] You would snatch it by force if you weren't so weak. I know. It hurts you worse than the hunger to be so weak. I know. It fetters you. Your limbs aren't roped or chained; but there you lie: you can't rise or snatch: helpless! I know. There, take it! [*She flings him the crust. He eats and lies back panting. After watching him for a moment she reaches the cup down to his lips, supporting his head as he drinks*] Food and shelter till the spring comes? [*He nods*] Yes, I suppose I could promise you that. Why should I? Can you pay me? [*She rises abruptly, letting him fall back against the chair*] Go! Get out! I've had enough of you! Go! Lose your way in the dark! Fall over the cliffs! Break yourself on the granite, as I have!

THE MAN [*clutching at her skirt*] Keep me!

JUDITH [*staring down at him with her hands locked behind her back*] Shall I?

THE MAN [*He has got to his knees: his arms are round her waist, clinging to her as if she were a rock*] Warm me! Feed me! Let me stay! Take me for your servant!

JUDITH We have three men on the farm, and the girl.

THE MAN *[urgently]* His servants, ^r it I'll serve you. I'll run for you: I'll fetch for you: ca' \you: fight for you, your servant! *[He is on his feet by now, taller than she is. He has taken her hands so that she is drawn a little forward, staring up into his face with wide eyes and parted lips]* This I swear: if you have a wish, turn to me! If it's a message, I'll take it: a desire, I'll fulfil it. If a woman angers you, it's your own quarrel, but if a man lays a finger on you, I'll kill him.

JUDITH Who sent you? Where have you come from?

THE MAN *[swaying with exhaustion, his voice failing]* The sea—the dark—hell! *[He collapses at her feet]*

JUDITH *[staring down at him]* You shall stay! *[She goes to the foot of the stairs and tugs at a rope. A bell out of sight begins to clang. After a few moments JORDAN comes hurriedly down the stairs followed by PROSPER.]*

PROSPER What is it? Who is it?

JUDITH *[with a laugh]* Wreckage! *[Then nodding towards JORDAN]* He knows.

JORDAN *[He is busily wrapping himself in oilskins and slings a rope over his shoulder, shouting]* Lights! Tregarthy! Perrin! Lights! Are you asleep? Who kept watch? Come along now! Out with you! Who the devil missed watch? *[To JUDITH who is standing in his path]* Out of the way! *[He pushes her roughly aside and is brought up short by the figure of the stranger over whom he stumbles]* What's this? Who's this?

JUDITH He gave the alarm. Take care! Jordan, don't be rough with him! He's half dead.

JORDAN Dead or alive he shall tell me what he knows. *[Stooping over the MAN]* What's your ship? Where did she come ashore? Has she broken up? How did you get here? Speak, can't you?

JUDITH He spoke just now. He pointed.

JORDAN Where?

JUDITH North.

JORDAN If he came by the path—

JUDITH He must have come by the path.

JORDAN What, over the barricade?

PROSPER He must have climbed the cliff!

JORDAN Only the devil could do that.

PROSPER [*at the window*] There are no lights!

PENNY He's from the North Farm maybe.

JUDITH He's come out of the sea. His clothes are wringing.

PROSPER [*pulled*] What's happened to the lights?

JORDAN Fetch brandy! [PENNY *goes out*] I want a word with him.

JUDITH [*coldly*] You'd better get on with the salvage. Leave him to me! What can he tell you?

JORDAN [*rising*] That's true. [*He turns to the door.*]

PROSPER What do you want? I'll come along. Ropes?

JORDAN [*over his shoulder, fumbling with his lantern*] Stay here! Help her! You don't know the ways.

PROSPER I can fetch and carry. Brandy—blankets! Can you get the boat out?

JORDAN What the devil do we want with the boat?

PROSPER To get them ashore!

JORDAN In this weather? On these cliffs? A boat would smash like a gull's egg.

PROSPER [*pointing*] He's weathered it.

JORDAN Hm! The devil helped him then. Anyway, he'll be the only one!

PROSPER What?

JORDAN You fool! Oh, come if you like with your blankets and your brandy! But I know Lundy! I say he'll be the only one! *[He goes out.] [Meanwhile JUDITH and PENNY have wrapped the stranger in blankets and lifted him on to a roughly made bed near the fire.]*

PROSPER Judith!

JUDITH He'll do now! *[To PENNY]* Get your sleep, child! *[PENNY goes out.]*

PROSPER *[pricallly]* You'd better make up the fire. They'll be bringing in others like as not. Fill the flask! *[She does not move]* Will you fill the flask for me, and I'll go after them. *[Then, as she does not move, he looks up at her in surprise.]*

JUDITH *[answering the look]* He was right, Prosper, you're a fool! There's more profit in a wreck than in wrecked men. Stay quiet! If we keep this one alive we've done our share.

PROSPER *[indignant]* I'm to sit still, and—

JUDITH You don't know the paths. What can you do? Jordan's master here.

PROSPER He's not my master.

JUDITH He is while you're on Lundy. Lundy's on his side. Scratch Lundy and you come to the granite!

PROSPER Don't you know the farm's half mine! If this devil's tale is true—

JUDITH It's true.

PROSPER *[to himself]* I've half a mind to stay on here.

JUDITH *[passionately]* Prosper, stay! Prosper, stay!

PROSPER *[unheeding]* What's smuggling? Who cares for that? But—false lights? *[To JUDITH]* Is that it?

JUDITH That's it!

PROSPER I served with Nelson. [*He paces up and down the room.* JUDITH watches him,]

THE MAN Lady! Lady!

JUDITH What is it?

THE MAN Your husband—call him!

JUDITH He's gone down to the shore.

THE MAN [*signing unmistakably to PROSPER*] Call him—husband!

JUDITH He means you. [*To THE MAN*] My husband's not here.

PROSPER Yes, my man? What is it?

THE MAN Husband—[*He sinks back.*]

PROSPER He's talking in his sleep.

JUDITH Did you hear what he said.

PROSPER He took me for Jordan.

JUDITH He took you for my husband.

PROSPER But you told him—?

JUDITH Yes.

PROSPER Yes.

JUDITH Then what made him say—?

PROSPER He's only half conscious.

JUDITH He's been through something. You'd wonder he's alive. He didn't look human when he came. But now, doesn't he look peaceful? You'd say it was worth while to be wrecked to lie still afterwards, safe, warm, drowsy—half conscious.

PROSPER He's smiling.

JUDITH It looks pleasant—to be half conscious. Draw in to the fire.

PROSPER How long will they be?

JUDITH It may be hours.

PROSPER D'you sit up for him?

JUDITH I have to. I don't mind. It's warm and quiet. I sit, you know, between awake and asleep—

PROSPER Half conscious.

JUDITH —and dream.

PROSPER What do you dream?

JUDITH [*harshly*] I dream that Jordan's dead.

PROSPER Judith!

JUDITH Dead—buried—forgotten! I dream that I'm dancing on his grave: I in my boat on a fine spring morning, dancing over his green grave! Don't look at me like that, Prosper! I dream it: I can't help my dreams. I'm a good woman while I'm awake. I'm a good wife to him. I gave him what I had. Oh, and he promised me so much! He said it was a fine place here: he said I should be queen of Lundy! So I am! Here I sit on the rocks of Lundy, queen of the gulls! He made a good bargain: I'm cheaper than a servant, easier to keep! He's forty and he'll stay here till he dies. He'll keep me here another forty years. How can I get away? Where can I go? He's got my money! Yes, and if he dies, here I must stay still! Who'd buy me free of the farm? He's spent me on the farm, I tell you. Waking or dreaming, it's black for me. [*She points to THE MAN on the floor*] He shall stay, Jordan or no Jordan. A wrecked man never sheltered in this house yet. It's something new. Look at him, smiling—safe, warm, sheltered! He's brought something with him—a new air—don't you feel it? • When he stood on the threshold I thought he was an evil spirit; but look at him now—smiling! Can he hear us, Prosper—only half conscious? What does he smile at? Is it our thoughts he hears?

PROSPER Judith! Judith!

JUDITH If I were he I could hear your thoughts, Prosper. I wish I could hear your thoughts. Come closer! Put down your cheek to my ear! *[She draws down bis head.]*

PROSPER For God's sake, Judith!

JUDITH Why? Are you afraid? Don't you want me to hear them? I shouldn't hate you for them.

PROSPER *[desperately]* Jordan—he's my father's son.

JUDITH Is that all your thought? Look at me! Is that all—all your thought?

PROSPER *[not looking at her]* I shall go to-morrow.

JUDITH You can't go to-morrow—now. You know too much. You're a coward if you go now. You served with Nelson.

PROSPER Stop, can't you? Let me think!

JUDITH You could stop the wrecking if you stayed. He wouldn't dare if you stayed. Don't you know that? Why won't you stay? *[He makes no answer]* Are you afraid?

PROSPER *low* Yes.

JUDITH Why are you afraid, Prosper?

PROSPER *[tormented]* You must let me think!

JUDITH No, no! You'll go if you begin to think! *[passionately]* Prosper, don't go! Don't go!

PROSPER You make it so that I must go. I tell you he's my brother!

JUDITH He's not! He's not a man at all! He's a block of Lundy granite. You strike at him—yes, I've struck at him—but you only bruise your own hands. We eat together, and I sleep beside him, but I'm not human to him. No one is. His wife and his men-servants and his maid-servants, we're

his cattle. And now you come, out of England, with your kind voice and your kind face! It's been a week in heaven to hear your step and your laugh. I'm not wicked; but I'm young. Do I look so old? Answer me! Won't you answer me! I'm as young as you are. I am. You talked about Nelson's woman. She wasn't young and yet she was lovely and they loved her. You said so. And you said I was like her. And she was wicked and yet you said of her 'Poor soul!' After all she'd had. Then what do you say to me? I've had nothing!

PROSPER Why do you say these things to me?

JUDITH I shall die if I don't say them.

PROSPER You're wrecking us—all three!

JUDITH It's worth being wrecked for what comes after.

[*Pointing to* THE MAN] Ask him! He's at peace.

PROSPER We're all but strangers.

JUDITH Does that ever count?

PROSPER What do you want of me?

JUDITH Warmth—food—shelter!

PROSPER Is that all? Go to Jordan then! He gives you that. It's all that cattle need.

JUDITH You're cruel! Oh, how cruel you are!

PROSPER Are you so merciful?

JUDITH What is the matter with us? Why are we trying to hurt each other?

PROSPER I don't want to hurt you, Judith!

JUDITH [*clinging to him*] Then don't go!

PROSPER I must. This had no right to happen.

JUDITH You shan't go! You can't go!

PROSPER He's my own father's son!

JUDITH *[breaking from him; sullenly]* You've cheated. You don't love me. You've been laughing in your sleeve.

PROSPER Why do you tell lies? Why do you waste our time telling lies?

JUDITH *[stubbornly]* You don't love me.

PROSPER Stop telling lies!

JUDITH You don't—*[In his arms']* Ah, Prosper!

THE MAN *who has lifted himself on to his elbow to watch tbfm, laughs.*

JUDITH What was that? Jordan? *[They stand listening,*

PROSPER *[at last]* No-one.

JUDITH *[terrified]* Somebody laughed. *[PROSPER snatches up a candle, and, crossing to the hearth, peers at the face of THE MAN who has lain back, on his pillows.]*

PROSPER He's asleep.

JUDITH Then he laughed in his sleep. Is he asleep?

PROSPER He's asleep.

JUDITH *[clinging to him]* Prosper, I'm afraid!

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

II.

// is cold early day a week later. JORDAN sits at the breakfast table. His brother is standing at the window, staring moodily forth at a watery sky. The great door is set wide and the narrow path drops away from it. Beyond is the glimpse of a sheer cliff with blank grey sea whose horizon is hidden by the lintel. Sea-gulls are sweeping to and fro. In the shadow of the chimney corner the wrecked MAN sits motionless., a rug over his knees.

PROSPER It's clearing.

JORDAN Umph!

PROSPER The sea's going down.

JORDAN There's a two hundred foot drop from that window. You can't judge the sea from it as you can from your own deck. You won't get across this month, I tell you!

PROSPER Lend me your boat and I'll risk it! It's but twelve miles.

JORDAN Twenty!

PROSPER Twenty then! I'll risk it.

JORDAN Ah, but will I risk my boat?

PROSPER [*He fishes out a purse and stands chinking it in his hand*] What do you want for your boat?

JORDAN Don't be a fool! Where's your hurry?

PROSPER I—

JORDAN A week ago you were all for staying the winter. What's changed you? Penny! [PENNY, who has been to and

fro with dishes, comes to the table, curtseying Tell Madam she's skimped us! [*He puts an empty dish into her hand*] She's to give us as much again! I've been out since three. [PENNY goes out. *He sits "with his elbows on the table, chin in fist, watching his brother"*] Out with it, Prosper! What's wrong? [PROSPER makes an irritable movement] What's Judith done to you, eh? Been giving you the rough of her tongue? I thought it would come to that. Pooh! Don't tell me! I've watched you. Now a week ago she would have fed out of your hand; but ever since that zany came—[*H' breaks off with a glance at the fire*]

PROSPER D'you grudge her to a sick man? She's fed him and tended him like a mother.

JORDAN Mother? Mm! I've only known a step-mother. I was going to say like a farmer's wife fattening her pet goose for pin money. But Judith to behave like a farmer's wife—that would be the end of the world!

PROSPER She saved his life anyway.

JORDAN Pity she couldn't save his wits. Hey! You! Got your tongue yet?

THE MAN *laughs*.

JORDAN Remember where you've come from?

THE MAN *laughs*.

JORDAN I'll make you laugh to another tune when Madam's done with you. We work on Lundy. [*He stands over him feeling him as if he were an animal*] Look at his shoulders, Prosper! Maybe he's not such a bad bargain.

THE MAN *laughs*

JORDAN Stop that. [THE MAN *shrinks back*. JORDAN turns away] I'd like to know where he comes from. He talks to Judith, did you know?

PROSPER How did you?

JORDAN Judith told me. Just babble. He can't remember so much as his name; but she says she'll get something out of him in time if I leave him to her. She will too. She is clever as sin when she likes.

PROSPER What's the use of plaguing him, poor devil? Why does she?

JORDAN Because I tell her. I want to know. No spies here, thank you! And, tongue or no tongue, she does what I tell her. And so I say to you, Prosper, if it's Judith's tongue that's fretting you, I'll deal with it. I'll have my wife civil to my own kith and kin.

PROSPER *\with an effort* Judith's civil enough. But—Look here, Jordan! You know my place, the Halstead Farm—

JORDAN Mine by rights.

PROSPER What's the use of going back on that? I didn't make the will.

JORDAN Mother—

PROSPER Leave Mother out of it! It was hers to leave as she liked.

JORDAN So the youngest got the plum!

PROSPER Was Halstead the plum?

JORDAN Don't you know it?

PROSPER Well then, will you change?

JORDAN What?

PROSPER Change over.

JORDAN What for?

PROSPER Here I'm home with a lame leg and a fistful of prize money! I'm not married. Do I care which plum I pick? Take over Halstead and give me Lundy!

JORDAN Now why?

PROSPER Judith hates it for one thing!

JORDAN She's told you that, has she?

PROSPER It's no place for a woman.

JORDAN It's the place for my woman! Every man's mad once in his life; but he needn't be twice. She was a London woman. I wouldn't marry hereabouts. I wanted something out of the common. Well, some go mad when they marry, and some when they find out what they've married. Women! You give them to choose between a kiss and a kingdom and they're all for the kisses. Judith's as common as the rest of them.

PROSPER Come, it's a good offer!

JORDAN Too good. What's behind it?

PROSPER That's my business! You can take or leave.

JORDAN You think I'll take? I'm all for what I can get, eh? Judith's told you that, I'll lay.

PROSPER I think you're a fool if you don't.

JORDAN Now see here, my father's son! When you were playing bob-cherry with Mamma—

PROSPER I went to sea at twelve.

JORDAN You used your time well, up till then, brother, I'll say that for you. While you ran about with a frill round your neck, would you like to know my doings? I was twenty-five when you went to sea and since 7 was twelve I'd been working on the Halstead Farm. I'd learnt my lesson on the farm, Mother's farm, the farm Father left her. Boy as I was, I ripened that plum. But at twenty-five I'm shown the door! I'm too masterful. I know my own mind too well. It's Mother's farm, remember, not mine! And I can knuckle under or go! I went.

PROSPER I never knew this.

JORDAN Why should you? You were at sea in a brand new uniform that the farm paid for. Well, I went, with what Father left me in my pocket, and you know how much that was! I served five years under other men, learning things. Then I met Holt's daughter—Holt, the man who pitched over the cliff there after gull's eggs. Look out and you can see the drop! And I bought up her lease for a song. I got what I wanted at last, a place to go my own way in. I lived here—here—with not a soul to help me for the first year—lived on gulls' eggs and rabbits and slept on heather. I saw that led nowhere. I had to have money. So I swallowed my pride and I went cap in hand to Mother. And that's where you come in! She left her hold on me to you. Well, you see how I've fared. My farm pays me. I've bought up the lease of the other one. Oh, I let them work at it, but, by God, it's under me! What I say goes on the island. King's law doesn't run here. The ships have to ask my leave to land. Three miles long and a mile broad, and a ninety-nine years' lease. That's what I've made of things, of my life here on Lundy. And now you come, you, and ask me to leave it—me, the master of Lundy—to leave it to please a woman!

PROSPER Fat for lean, loam for granite—that's my offer! If Mother dealt hardly by you, I'm making it good.

JORDAN You won't prize me off Lundy.

PROSPER [*significantly*] No.

JORDAN What d'you mean by that?

PROSPER You don't throw sand in my eyes. Lundy pays.

JORDAN If I've found the means to make it pay, that's my business!

PROSPER And mine. And the Revenue's.

JORDAN What?

PROSPER I've had my eyes open. You're a hard fool, Jordan, but you're a fool all the same. You'll be nipped to-day or to-morrow.

JORDAN Who's to prove—what?

PROSPER [*pointedly*] D'you think there are never words spoken in the ports of the Lundy wrecks? There's talk of a lighthouse!

JORDAN I'll see them build on my land!

PROSPER But on mine!

JORDAN You'd do that? By God, Prosper—

PROSPER There are doings here that must stop, and other doings that must stop along with them.

JORDAN You're not a school child. You've seen men hang and drown. A wreck or two—pooh! What's behind it all?

PROSPER All?

JORDAN All your talk? What do you want?

PROSPER Call it my own way.

JORDAN Aha! Now we're getting warm. We're brothers after all. French brandy and riding lights and Judith—all talk, eh? Your own way! [*He laughs boisterously*] I like you the better for it! Now see here, Prosper, we'd not pull badly. Sell Halstead if you're sick of it and throw in with me! We'll build you a house. And for housekeeper there's Penny, Judith's pet, sixteen year old. Lundy born and bred. You could do worse! [*Turning and shouting*] Penny! [*To PROSPER*] Have a look at her!

PROSPER [*coldly*] I know what she looks like.

JORDAN Pretty little Penny Holt! She can brew, bake, milk, and pluck you her three birds to Judith's one, and that ill plucked. Think it over.

PROSPER I'm not a cattle dealer. [PENNY *comes in.*]

PENNY [*frightened*] The mistress says, sir—she says—

JORDAN Well, out with it!

PENNY I—don't like—

JORDAN Go on!

PENNY I was to say there's no more, sir! The stock's short. And—there was enough on the dish to feed four men—and—and—those that want more must come and cook it.

JORDAN Tell Madam I want her! [PENNY *turns away*]
Penny! [*She turns back*]

PENNY Sir?

JORDAN How would you like to be a farmer's wife, Penny?

PENNY I don't know, sir.

JORDAN A good house now, and land and cows and sheep of your own, and—and a husband, Penny? Wouldn't you like that?

PENNY No, sir.

JORDAN Why not?

PROSPER What do you want to do, Penny?

PENNY I'm to go to England when I can earn my keep. The mistress promised Mother.

JORDAN But if you \were a farmer's wife, Penny—

PENNY The mistress wouldn't let me. She'd sooner see me in my coffin.

PROSPER D'you want to go to England, Penny?

PENNY I don't know, sir.

JORDAN Wouldn't you rather stay on Lundy?

PENNY Yes, sir.

JORDAN In a new house all your own?

PENNY Oh no, sir.

PROSPER You'd rather stay here?

PENNY Yes, sir.

PROSPER Why, Penny?

PENNY It's the mistress.

JUDITH'S VOICE Penny, come here!

PENNY [*delighted to escape*] Yes, Ma'am! [*She runs out.*]

JORDAN [*complacently*] Lundy born and bred! You couldn't do better.

PROSPER She's very fond of Judith.

JORDAN Judith must always be fingering something. England, eh, my lady! Did you hear that?

PROSPER What harm does it do you if she sends the child to England?

JORDAN We've reared her since her folk died. Now she's worth her keep we're to lose her value? No! Come, Prosper! Offer for offer! Partnership, and pretty Penny Holt!

PROSPER [*lifting up his cloak and settling it on his shoulders*] What about that boat?

JORDAN Damn you! Go then!

PROSPER Yes, I'm going. I said so. But before I come back in the spring—

JORDAN You are coming back?

PROSPER Before I come back in the spring—put your house in order!

JORDAN What?

PROSPER Take care there's nothing left for me to find! Let the caves be empty—

JORDAN What do you know—?

PROSPER [*pointing*] I know what's in that chest.

JORDAN No harm.

PROSPER Dead men's clothes.

JORDAN [*fretfully*] I've never killed a man.. I let the sea do that for me. The sea needs no help. Who showed you what was in the chest?

PROSPER It was—chance.

JORDAN Chance? When Judith has the key! By God, I will put my house in order. Judith!

PROSPER Can't you leave it? Dragging in the women!

JUDITH [*entering*] Well? You want me? Penny said [*She sees that PROSPER is cloaked*, Where's he going?

JORDAN To see what the water's like. He's to cross it to-day if he can. Say good-bye to him civilly now!

JUDITH Prosper! Prosper! Are you going away?

JORDAN You can well change your tone; but it's a bit late.

JUDITH I don't know what you mean.

JORDAN Who else am I to thank for blackening me to my brother and driving him out of my house?

JUDITH [*terrified*] Driving—

PROSPER [*reassuring*] It's not true, Judith.

JORDAN You hold your tongue, Prosper! I'm to put my house in order? If I do that I begin with my wife.

JUDITH I didn't drive—

JORDAN Then ask him to stay!

PROSPER Look here, Jordan—

JORDAN Ask him to stay!

JUDITH [*tonelessly*] Will you stay, Prosper?

JORDAN Tell him you'll be glad if he stays!

JUDITH I'll be glad if you stay, Prosper!

PROSPER [*for her ear alone*] I can't, Judith!

JORDAN Tell him that if he chooses to throw in with us he's welcome!

JUDITH [*with bowed head*] Welcome!

JORDAN And that you'll speak a good word for him with Penny!

JUDITH [*in another voice*] Penny?

JORDAN Well, why not Penny?

JUDITH What's this about Penny?

PROSPER [*quickly*] I've told him I'm not staying. He knows why. He's had his chance and his warning.

JUDITH Penny?

PROSPER The rest's impossible anyway.

JUDITH Penny?

PROSPER Good-bye!

JUDITH [*passionately*] I won't say good-bye to you.

JORDAN [*bullying*] You'll take his hand and say good-bye!

PROSPER [*taking her hand*] Let her alone, Jordan!

JORDAN She can be civil. [*JUDITH is silent*]

PROSPER [*with a steady look at her*] Judith, I—Good-bye, Judith. [*Their eyes meet: he drops her hand and pushes JORDAN aside*] That's enough, Jordan.

JORDAN She shall say it.

PROSPER Are you coming down to the shore with me? Then come along, for God's sake!

JORDAN Well, if you're satisfied—[*Then, as they go out together*] But you're not to think we're mere savages here on Lundy— [*The voices die away*]

JUDITH [*da,ed, her hand at her head*] Penny?

She stands rigid, staring in front of her. PENNY has re-entered and is standing at the table piling the used dishes on a tray. As she does so she sings softly to herself.

PENNY Our Admiral's fallen
 At Trafalgar.
 He covered his face
 And golden star:

She clatters with the dishes.

 They laid him softly
 Upon his side:
 Hardy kissed him
 Before he died—

Then, quicker and louder as she gathers up the tray and turns to go,—

 But where was Emma Hamilton?
 Wicked Emma Hamilton?
 Who'll tell Emma Hamilton
 Nelson's gone?

The door swings to after her.

JUDITH What shall I do? What shall I do?

PENNY [*in the distance*]

 Far away and out of mind!
 Out of sight and out of mind!
 Best forget his womenkind,
 Now he's gone!

Her voice dies away.

JUDITH O God, what shall I do?

THE MAN *in the chimney corner laughs.*

JUDITH Be still I can see and hear. There, his foot stumbled and a pebble fell over the ridge, down—down—down! He never heard. He was shifting his load and calling to Jordan that the path was rough. [*Then, as if speaking to a distant hearer*] What can you expect else here, Prosper, but flint and stone? Hush! Jordan is running out the boat! Can't you hear the keel on the beach of the cave? Don't you hear the chain clank as if it hated to set the boat free? It's a chain they used on the convicts forty years ago. Lundy was a prison even then. Clank! Clank! O Prosper, your boat dances on the black cave water, but it dances in chains. I can't see any more. Are you in, Prosper? Has Jordan loosed you? Are you slipping out of the shadow? Are you free at last and out in the sunny air? Free! Oh, I thought you would have taken me! You wouldn't have left behind a dog that loved you; but you left me. You've left me.

THE MAN *laughs.*

JUDITH [*She turns fiercely upon him*] Even you! And I've been kind to you. Stop laughing! Aren't you afraid of what I might do to you if you laugh? Oh, you should be afraid. [*THE MAN rises to his full height before her, the wraps falling to his feet*] What's this? You can stand—walk! You're not helpless? It's a cheat! Why? What was your purpose? I've been your friend. O God, I move in nets—

THE MAN Break them!

JUDITH [*wildly*] Prosper! No, Prosper's gone.

THE MAN The nearer to coming back.

JUDITH He'll not come back.

THE MAN He said he was coming back.

JUDITH Did he? When did he? Oh, God bless you! did he? What did he say?

PENNY'S VOICE Far away and out of mind!
Out of sight and out of mind!
Never heed the womenkind
Once he's gone—

THE MAN He said he'd come back in the spring.

JUDITH To Penny! Is that it? You heard what my husband said? Does he wish it?

THE MAN Your husband wishes it.

JUDITH But does he—does Prosper? Tell me what they said behind my back! Oh, help me! I haven't got a friend in the world.

THE MAN [*significantly*] It was your husband who had it planned out.

JUDITH Have you to tell me that? Of course it was Jordan. Not Penny—not my little Penny! Penny's fond of me. But Jordan—is that what he's planning to do to me? Prosper and Penny? Penny and Prosper? He'll take them both away?

THE MAN Both away.

JUDITH It's to be in the spring, is it? But he'll see that she's too young!

THE MAN Penny will be six months older—and so will you.

JUDITH I'm not so old.

THE MAN Older.

JUDITH She'll think of him all winter. How can she help it? She's never seen a man like him. Jordan's clever. But I can scheme as well as Jordan. I shall send Penny away.

THE MAN *toughs*.

JUDITH I tell you that I will send her away. And if Jordan stops me—there's you to help me. [*With a quick ugly glance*] And that's why you shammed cripple! Afraid to help me? [*Wai/ing*] Oh, when I saved you and you promised!

THE MAN I'll do what I promised, no less and no more.

JUDITH [*quickly*] You'll fetch and carry and take my messages?

THE MAN I will.

JUDITH [*feeling her way*] I might send you to England one day—before spring, maybe—with a message. For if I've a desire you'll fulfil it. Do you remember?

THE MAN I remember. If a woman angers you it's your own quarrel; but if a man lays a finger on you—[*He breaks off with a—*] Yes, I remember.

JUDITH [*not looking at him*] Have you ever—killed?

THE MAN [*laughs*].

JUDITH Oh, you may as well tell me all the story. I know too much of you already not to know the rest. I've only got to say 'He talked in his sleep, in his sick sleep. There's money on his head. He was on board the convict ship that put in a fortnight ago. He slipped over the side at dusk and swam ashore. He'd been hiding on the island a week before he came to us. His story of a wreck was a sham.' That's all I've got to say.

THE MAN That's all you've got to say.

JUDITH Jordan would be pleased with me. You'd be worth some money to Jordan.

THE MAN A secret's always worth money. I'll tell him the rest of it. I'll tell him all I dreamed as I lay in his house, half conscious, while his wife and his brother—tended me.

JUDITH [*after a pause*] You're a clever—devil.

THE MAN You're not; or you'd see that a poor—devil—means well by you!

JUDITH Why should you? I didn't help you for love.

THE MAN I looked through the window and heard you praying to—my gods. 'Oho!' I said—'my own sort!' Then you bargained as you fed me—a woman of granite. I was weak and helpless; but you made your bargain all the same. 'Oho!' I said again—'my own sort!' and liked you for it. And I'll keep my bargain too with—my own sort. You shall do as you please, and if a man lays a finger on you while I'm by—*[He raises his clenched fist.]*

JUDITH *\wrought up* Would you do that for me? Would you do even that? How would you—kill? *[Tfoey stare at each other. Her face changes]* Oh, I don't know what I'm saying. I think I'm mad. Listen! It's he—it's Jordan. But I don't want him hurt. I only want to get away from him.

THE MAN You could have got away.

JUDITH There was no one to go to. But now— Now there might be someone to go to. I think there might be. Listen, I'll tell you.

THE MAN You needn't. I know.

JUDITH There's been no harm. Prosper, he's not like me. He talks about right and wrong.

THE MAN Not like you and me.

JUDITH That's why he's going.

THE MAN He's not gone yet. Must he go?

JUDITH You're my friend. Tell me a way.

THE MAN *laughs.*

JUDITH D'you laugh? Pld be careful if I were you. Aren't you afraid to make me angry? When I'm angry I don't care what I do.

THE MAN And he?

JUDITH Who?

THE MAN Your husband? When he's angry does he care what he does?

JUDITH I don't—[*with sudden understanding*] What?

THE MAN [*complacently*] There's your way.

JUDITH My way? My way? If I made him so angry that— Oh, these aren't my thoughts! You've put them into me. I'm not a murderess.

THE MAN Why no, you're a farmer's wife—living on a rock in the midst of the sea. Here you'll sit till you die with a good husband and a shipwrecked zany to keep you company. Penny and Prosper will marry and settle at Halstead among the cherry orchards, close to the high road where people are always passing. You shall be godmother to their children.

JUDITH Devil! Devil!

THE MAN Friend!

JORDAN [*calling*] Judith! Judith! [*His voice is heard in the kitchen*] Where's your mistress?

PENNY [*within*] In the big room, sir!

JORDAN [*entering*] Judith, are you deaf? Well, I was right about the tide. I told him so. He'll have to wait till the sea goes down, and that's all there is to it.

JUDITH Is Prosper coming back?

JORDAN I should think he is coming back.

JUDITH Coming back?

JORDAN And he's to be treated well when he comes back.

JUDITH That'll be easy for you, Jordan. You always treat people well.

JORDAN Come now, Judith, what's the good of tantrums?

Why can't you work with me for once? It's not that he's my brother—

JUDITH Half brother.

JORDAN Half brother or brother, what does that matter? I don't ask you on that account. My sake? Pooh! We're past that.

JUDITH Well past it.

JORDAN But for the farm's sake, Judith. Come now, you'd like to be a rich woman? Silks and satins, eh? And earrings maybe, like I promised you?

JUDITH Promise on promise.

JORDAN Well, and I'll keep 'em if you give me a chance, if you'll be civil to Prosper. He scatters money as you scatter grain to the chickens—money that should be mine. Let him scatter it on the farm. He takes out enough in rent: let him put some in again.

JUDITH 'And some fell upon stony places where they had not much earth!' It's no good, Jordan, Prosper isn't a fool. He knows where the real profits come from.

JORDAN No, he isn't a fool. He sees there's money to be made. All that talk about the Revenue—that's flam. Why he's ready to buy me out now.

JUDITH What?

JORDAN Offered me the Halstead Farm.

JUDITH He offered you—why did he offer you?

JORDAN He's used his eyes this week: that's why! He knows there's money to be made here.

JUDITH *[softly]* It was for me.

JORDAN And taking one thing with another, I've not lost hope of a deal. And so I say, you be friendly, you be civil, you be a help to your husband for once.

JUDITH O Jordan, you can do your own dirty work.

JORDAN It's the work that puts bread and butter into your mouth. And see here, don't go sending messages by Penny like you did to-day. They don't become you.

JUDITH I said we were short of stores and so we are.

JORDAN Then we shouldn't be. I laid in stock enough for another two months. I believe you fling it to the gulls. Here I pare and pinch—

JUDITH I've done with paring and pinching. You've got your remedy. You can let me send Penny away: that's a mouth the less.

JORDAN I thought you were fond of Penny.

JUDITH Fond? But for Penny Fid have been over the cliffs long ago. But I'll not see the child grow old on this rock. I promised her mother she should have her chance, and she shall have it.

JORDAN She'll have a better chance here if you do your duty by her. That gown of yours would be better on her than on a married woman, and a farmer's wife, God help him! Get her out a blue ribbon—curl her hair—oh, you know the tricks—and we'll soon have Penny *off* our hands. And now what's this about food? You had but to tell me. There's a doe feeding on the upper cliff! Pennyl

PENNY [*entering*, Yes, sir!

JORDAN Get me down one of the guns! Take care now, they're loaded. Penny!

PENNY Sir?

JORDAN My brother doesn't go to-day. The boat can't put out. Run down the cliff and help him with his baggage!

PENNY Yes, sir!

JUDITH [*shrilly*] Penny, you're not to go.

JORDAN [*after a glance at JUDITH*] You heard what I said, Penny!

JUDITH I need her in the kitchen. She's not to go.

JORDAN Run along now, child!

JUDITH Penny, you're not to go!

JORDAN Didn't you hear me?

JUDITH She's not to go.

JORDAN I'm master here.

THE MAN *laughs.*

JORDAN [*Turning sharply*] You hold your noise! [*To JUDITH*] Yes, and that's another of your whimsies that I pay for.

JUDITH [*swiftly to PENNY*] Go to the kitchen! Go away! [*PENNY goes out hastily.*]

JORDAN [*turning*] Call that girl back!

JUDITH She's my servant.

JORDAN Call her back.

JUDITH I won't call her back.

JORDAN [*catching her arm*] You won't, won't you?

JUDITH You're hurting me.

JORDAN Call her back!

JUDITH [*struggling*, Let me alone!

JORDAN Call her!

JUDITH Oh! I will! I will! Penny! [*PENNY enters*] Do as he says! Go down!

JORDAN [*releasing her*] That's better! You take a lesson now!

JUDITH You hurt me! You've bruised my wrists.

JORDAN You never listen until one—

JUDITH You've hurt my wrist.

JORDAN *[awkwardly]* I didn't hurt you. *[He picks up his gun and goes out.]*

JUDITH *[sobbing]* My wrist!

THE MAN *[rising]* Go to the door! *[He gives him a look and obeys]* Which way's he gone?

JUDITH Along the cliff path. He's at the turn.

THE MAN Is the girl in sight?

JUDITH No. *[She comes back into the room as THE MAN goes to the gun-rack and lifts down the remaining gun]* What are you going to do? *[Then, as, without noticing the question, he goes to the door, she screams]* No, no! wait!

THE MAN *[He pauses, and after a moment says]* Well? *[He gets no answer. With another look at her white face and the uplifted hands that makes as if to fend him off, he shrugs his shoulders and goes out]*

JUDITH *[in a harsh whisper]* No, no, no! O God! *[She stuffs her fingers into her ears, only a moment later to drop them again listening. Then as if taking a sudden resolution she runs to the door crying]* Murder! Murder! Prosper! Penny! It's murder! I won't have— *[A shot cuts through the sentence and she screams]* Ah! *[She turns stumbling back into the room and steadies herself against the table. She does not move until the doorway is darkened once more by the figure of THE MAN. He looks at her with a half smile. She says whispering]* Well?

THE MAN *[as he flings the gun at her feet]* For meat and drink, quits! *[He goes back to the ingle-nook and seats himself in his old position]*

JUDITH *[voiceless]* Dead?

THE MAN Over the cliff anyhow. It's a two hundred foot

drop. I didn't climb down to see. His gun went *oft* in his face, they'll say.

JUDITH I never meant it. You know it. I never meant it. God knows—

PROSPER'S VOICE *[in the distance]*

The Victory carried
Our Admiral home—

THE MAN *[his voice drowning the song]* Put back the gun!
I'll watch my time to reload. *[With shaking hands JUDITH picks it up and rams it into place]*

PROSPER And hear the bells
 Of London toll,
For Nelson's body
 And England's soul.

PENNY *[close at hand, in her high sweet voice]*

But where is Emma Hamilton?
Wicked Emma Hamilton?
Who'll tell Emma Hamilton
Nelson's gone?

Out of sight and out of mind—

[She bursts gaily into the room with PROSPER'S cloak over her arm. Then, sobering suddenly as she sees JUDITH'S face] O Ma'am, I'm sorry! I didn't know—

JUDITH *[stonily]* Get back to your work! *[PENNY goes out with a frightened look as PROSPER enters]*

PROSPER *[ruefully, yet happily]* You were right, Judith—Lundy doesn't let you go in a hurry!

JUDITH *[half fainting]* Prosper! *[He catches her as she sways]*

PROSPER Steady, Judith! Steady! [*But his arms go round her tenderly*] Didn't Jordan tell you I was coming back?

THE MAN *laughs*.

PROSPER [*glancing at him, uneasily*] That fool of yours—he bothers me. Where is Jordan?

JUDITH [*in a high voice*] Out shooting—on the cliffs.

PROSPER I thought I heard a shot.

In his corner THE MAN *laughs*.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

III.

// is six months later. JUDITH is sitting idle, her hands in her lap, staring straight in front of her as one dreaming. Her lips move now and then as if she were taking her smiling share in a conversation. She is happy in her dream. She starts violently at the sound of PENNY'S voice. PENNY, alert and excited is leaning against the lintel on the door, shading her eyes from the sun as she peers out.

PENNY She's been in harbour these last twenty minutes. In harbour, Ma'am! Oh, if I were you—

JUDITH Well, if you were me?

PENNY I couldn't sit so still, as if to-day were every day. I'd be down on the beach to—

JUDITH To what?

PENNY To welcome Mr. Prosper.

JUDITH I've learnt to save my pleasures. I hate noise—the splash of the surf and the boatmen shouting and—'Well, Judith!'—'Take care now of that baggage, you fool!' and 'Well, Prosper?'—'Just a moment, Judith!' No. But here it'll be quiet. I've waited five months. I can wait an extra five minutes.

PENNY It's the longest five months I've ever known.

JUDITH [*smiling*] That's because you see England at the other end.

PENNY To go to England—to live in England! There are miles and miles of trees, Mr. Prosper says. The Halstead Farm is on a little hill and it rises out of the cherry blossom

like Lundy rising out of the sea. I've never seen growing cherries. Why, Ma'am, I've never seen a cherry for that matter except— *[She laughs.]*

JUDITH Well, where have you seen cherries then, Penny?

PENNY Only in the glass, Ma'am! He told me—

JUDITH Who told you what, Penny?

PENNY Mr. Prosper. 'Cherries? Look in the glass, my dear!' That's what he said. So I looked.

JUDITH *[sewing placidly]* Did he kiss you, Penny?

PENNY *[in little bursts of laughter]* Ma'am, you always laugh at me. Mr. Prosper—kiss me? I'm not a little girl. Why should he?

JUDITH Why not, when a girl cries 'Cherry ripe!' *[harshly]* Come away from that door! *[PENNY closes the door behind her and comes hesitating into the middle of the room.]*

PENNY *[frightened]* Ma'am, I didn't say anything wrong, did I?

JUDITH Come here! *[The girl comes to her]* I've been good to you, Penny? *[PENNY clutches her hand childishly]* I've tucked you in at nights—I've kissed you—I've loved you. You love me a little, Penny?

PENNY *[in the crook of her arm]* Yes, Ma'am!

JUDITH Then Penny—

PENNY Yes, Ma'am?

JUDITH Penny! If—if ever—if at any time—*[She drops her head on the girl's shoulder]* Oh, Penny, Penny, Penny! I wish I'd got my life again. I wish I were you.

PENNY Me, Ma'am? *[! strikes her. as humorous]* Why, Ma'am?

JUDITH Such a little fool—such a little fool!

PENNY [*acquiescing*] Yes, Ma'am! [*She sits with bet chin on her hand.*]

JUDITH [*watching her*] What's in your mind, Penny? Answer me now! Quick! Quick!

PENNY I—

JUDITH [*imperiously*] Quick!

PENNY I was only thinking—

JUDITH Are you afraid to tell me?

PENNY About my new dress, Ma'am, how to make it fit. You know, the one you gave me—the one you wore the day the poor master was killed.

JUDITH Killed? What are you daring to—

PENNY Why, Ma'am, the accident! I didn't mean—
[*She breaks off, frightened*]

JUDITH What is it, Penny? Am I frightening you? I'm sorry, Penny. You mustn't mind me. It upsets me to talk of—accidents. I don't want to see him again—between the rocks—and—you make me see him again. Penny, I went up the cliff again this morning. I can't keep away. You'd think so much water washing over the rocks would wash away the stain. But it hasn't. It streams out into the sea—a restless stain—

PENNY But that's the sea-weed, Ma'am. It was always there.

JUDITH Oh, was it?

PENNY That's a bad place. That's where Grandfather fell. He was like the master. He would go without a rope. Mother always said that the granite would have the laugh of him in the end. [*A pause: she watches JUDITH: then she says shyly—*] Mother always said that what's done is done: worrying don't help. [*She puts her hand on JUDITH'S knee*] Ma'am,

Ma'am! Don't think that way to-day with Mr. Prosper coming! Don't let it fret you so.

JUDITH I'm not fretting, Penny! Not fretting nor regretting—anything.

VOICES [*without*] Halloo! Halloo there!

PENNY It's Mr. Prosper!

JUDITH *says nothing, but she puts down her work.*
PENNY *runs to the door and opens it.* PROSPER *is standing in the doorway, smiling. A little behind him is an elderly gentleman dressed in clergyman's clothes. In attendance is THE MAN carrying baggage. He enters unnoticed during the bus tie, puts down his load, and slips away quietly to his place by the fire.*

PROSPER [*his arms opening to her*] Well, Judith?

JUDITH [*For a moment she stares at him without moving, as if she could never look away from him again*] Well, Prosper? [*Then, with a little cry, she comes to him, kissing him.*]

PROSPER [*over her shoulder*] Now you must welcome this gentleman. [THE CLERGYMAN *advances smiling*] Make him very welcome, Judith!

THE CLERGYMAN Is this the bride?

JUDITH [*pulled*] But—[*Then, putting aside her perplexity*] Lundy has a poor sort of welcome to give.

THE CLERGYMAN Lundy? It's the earthly paradise. I was here once as a boy in summer.

JUDITH Ah, in summer!

THE CLERGYMAN I used to lie out on the cliff yonder, looking down upon the gulls and the sea so far below that it was like the sea of glass St. John tells of. And then, my dear, the sun would pour down on me like the visible peace of God,

the peace of God that passeth all understanding—*[He turns to PENNY]* Are you laughing at the old gentleman?

PENNY No sir! But—

THE CLERGYMAN Well?

PENNY Lundy's just a rock in the sea. It's England Fid call—

THE CLERGYMAN The earthly paradise! Not yet, my child!

PENNY Shops and houses and people. *[She draws him to the window]* If you look, sir, beyond the cliff, you can see England, blue and shining—*[They talk.]*

JUDITH *[To PROSPER in agitation]* But what does it mean?

PROSPER It's all right. My plans are changed.

JUDITH *[stiffening at the touch of opposition]* But not my plans, Prosper.

PROSPER *[oblivious of it]* Our plans then. He's come out to marry us.

JUDITH Here?

PROSPER Why not?

JUDITH Now?

PROSPER It's all in order.

JUDITH But why? I'm not a child to be arranged for. It was to be at Halstead. Everything's packed ready.

PROSPER *[brushing it aside]* Why, unpack then, sweetheart! You'll see, I've got good reasons—but we must see to the old fellow. *[Turning to PENNY and THE CLERGYMAN]* Penny—

THE CLERGYMAN Is this little Penny Holt? I knew your grandfather, my dear!

JUDITH The gentleman would like to brush off the marks

of the journey. Penny, take him to the master's—to the free room! I must see to the meal.

THE CLERGYMAN The wedding breakfast, hey? Short notice, ma'am, hey? These rovers! It's land and meet: it's kiss and marry, and off to sea again, hey? Off to sea again!

PROSPER That's past for me, sir, with this leg of mine. If you'll step this way—Penny! [*He ushers the old gentleman out. PENNY follows them.*]

JUDITH [*to herself stirring*] Marry? Here?

THE MAN *laughs.*

JUDITH Be quiet, I say! What is it to you? [*She paces up and down the room*] Everything comes that I've bargained for. But it doesn't come the way I planned it. Oh, it doesn't come the way I planned!

THE MAN *laughs.*

JUDITH Be quiet, will you! [THE MAN *shrinks back into the shadow, as PROSPER re-enters*] Prosper, what's happened?

PROSPER Nothing, nothing, nothing! How startled you are at nothing. Give me a kiss!

JUDITH But—

PROSPER A kiss first.

JUDITH You always have your own way. [*Clinging to him*] I've missed you so. Five months instead of three.

PROSPER There was a lot to put through. Besides, looking at it all—from England—where other people are—to wait a little seemed a sort of—

JUDITH Decency.

PROSPER You always read me. Yes, I felt that.

JUDITH I could have felt it too. That's why I know. But that's weakness in me. I won't mourn. I won't be a hypocrite.

I hated Jordan and I hate my widowhood. I'd have married you the next day. You knew that. I'd have come to you without marriage. You always knew that. Oh, don't listen to me! You hate me when I'm like this, don't you? It's because I've missed you so. Now I've got you. Don't frown at me!

PROSPER O Judith, how you'd have startled the Halstead ladies? It's a good thing we're to stay on Lundy after all.

JUDITH Stay on in Lundy?

PROSPER Now look here, this is the whole story.

JUDITH You were to take me away.

PROSPER But there it was, Judith! I had an offer for the Halstead Farm—no time to consult you—it was take or leave it: and you see—big profits.

JUDITH What do you care for the money? You're not Jordan.

PROSPER Why, a man must do something. I can't live on my rents.

JUDITH We could. I don't need much.

PROSPER It's not the need—I want to be up and doing. You know, my girl, I'm beginning to know how Jordan felt. I thought he was mad—

JUDITH So he was,—mad.

PROSPER No, no! It's the island. It's a challenge. It's man's will against the granite's will. But I'll show it!

JUDITH No, no! That's fatal—to think you can! How can you fight a thing without a soul? It's stronger, of course it's stronger—stronger because it doesn't feel. Don't challenge it, don't fight it! I beseech you, Prosper!

PROSPER I don't mean farming. It'll always beat us that way. I don't mean wrecking. But Judith, there's a market for

granite. They're building in London—new roads—new works! Where's the stone to come from, answer me that? Why, from Lundy. It's in the fairway. No land haulage. I can sell them their granite cheap and make my profit. The lighthouse will bring along builders, and here I'll be on the spot, ready for my luck when it comes. [*Hepulls her down on to his knee*] Judith, my sweetheart, I'll take you to court yet. My frowning girl! D'you hate Lundy still? But not with me, sweetheart. You're not a weak thing, a little thing like Penny. You're a partner for a man, eh? Look at you [*He holds her away from him*] Such shoulders! Such strong hands! Aren't they strong hands? I hate a weakling. [*He rises, laughing*] Ah, see it out with me, Judith, for a year or so! See the game out, wife! My wife! D'you know, Judith, that in half an hour I shall say my—wife! Better tell me now if you won't stay here with me; for in half an hour it'll be—what does the Bible say?—'Where thou goest, I will go.' Say it, Judith! Say it, my wife! Where thou goest—

JUDITH [*in his arms*] I will—I will go. I'll do what you want, Prosper. I'll always do what you want. Call him in! What are you waiting for? What else have I to do but what you want?

PROSPER [*putting her from him*] I'll call him. [*He goes out*]

JUDITH [*staring after him, loving him: softly to herself*] Where thou goest I will go.

THE MAN [*shifting in his corner*] And I.

JUDITH [*starting violently*] Oh! What are you doing here? How dare you eavesdrop?

THE MAN I was here by the fire. You knew I was here.

JUDITH I forgot you. I forget about you. [*She moves uneasily about the room*] You'd better go away now. Perhaps you will help Penny. There is a meal to be seen to. I—I can't

see to things. I want to be quiet. I'm to be married here. But you heard that too, I suppose.

THE MAN I heard. Where thou goest—

JUDITH Don't say it! It's blasphemy in your mouth.

THE MAN [*mildly*] Mayn't I say it when it's true for me too? Didn't you save my life? Shouldn't I be faithful? Your people shall be my people—

JUDITH Don't! Don't!

THE MAN And your God my God! Isn't that true? Isn't that my hold on you—the poor zany's hold on the queen of Lundy? Your God is my God! Haven't we proved it? How could I ever go away from you? No, no! Where thou goest—

JUDITH So that's the hold on me! I thought if I sold my immortal soul for them at least I'd get my peace and pleasure here on earth. But are you to be by? Are you always to be by? And that—[*She points to the gun-rack*] always—always on my wall? How the shot echoed! It doesn't always ring in my ears. When Prosper's with me I'm as happy as Penny. I think I'd have forgotten if it weren't for you. But I've sold myself to the devil, it seems, and he wants something on account, now, here, in this happy life I've—bought myself. They always say the devil tries to cheat; but he won't cheat me. I know the rights of a bargain: who better?—I was Jordan's wife. A hold on me? Of course you've got a hold on me, and I on you; but it goes no further.

THE MAN They handcuffed us, travelling from prison to the ship, wrist against wrist. Now you know how it felt.

JUDITH Well I know. But it goes no further. We're aboard ship making for hell: we're a walking conscience to each other: we're a gunshot and a cry. But it goes no further, my friend, this side of hell-fire.

THE MAN When a woman stands up to you, is she always afraid at heart? I fancy so.

JUDITH Afraid? I can be afraid of much—of loss, of loneliness, of the spaces of the sky, and the voices of the waves at night. I'm afraid of ghosts, and strange sounds, and the evil thing they write of in the Bible, the night monster that has her nest in the rocks, in the desolate places where sins breed; but I've never been afraid of a man. Not of you, not of any man! Prosper thinks I was afraid of Jordan. I was not afraid. If I could have feared him, I could have loved Jordan, I daresay. But it was always anger that I felt—anger—till my own anger nearly choked me. You'll never make me fear you, handcuffed though we are. But you may make me angry, handcuffed as we are.

THE MAN Fear your anger!

JUDITH I have nursed anger as you nurse the last flame of your hearth on a winter night. I have nursed anger as you nurse a crying child. It kept me warm and alive to feel it—here! [*She touches her breast.*]

THE MAN Fear your own anger. It killed a man.

JUDITH It was asleep. He woke it. He earned what it brought him.

THE MAN So may another.

JUDITH What other? Are you mad? Who'll ever hurt me again? I have Prosper.

THE MAN And he has you—sweet voice, meek spirit, gentle tongue! And you have me—a faithful servant, a faithful, nameless dog of a servant, with no tricks and no manners, but trained to fly at any man's throat, any husband's throat, who, angered, lays a finger on his mistress. [*JUDITH reels*] Steady, mistress! So now, wrist to wrist, we understand each other, we walk in step. It's always wise to walk in

step. [*H' puts her into a seat and takes her hand, fingering /' /*]
White wrists! The bruise is gone long ago. Shocking, how he
bruised your wrists! That was because you angered him with
your tongue. Why, they're shaking. I can almost hear the
jingle. Shaking—wrist, arm, body! Are you cold? It must be
cold that shakes you, for you don't know what fear means, do
you? You only know what anger means. Yes, you know that.
I think you know at last what anger means.

Voices talking and laughing are heard in the passage as

THE CLERGYMAN *returns with PROSPER and PENNY.*

THE CLERGYMAN Well, well! I'm ready for the bride if the
bride is ready for me. D'you know, I've never married a
couple in a room before.

PROSPER Yes, we're heathens here on Lundy.

THE CLERGYMAN You'll have your church again here on
Lundy before the world's fifty years older. Times are chang-
ing—march of progress—

PROSPER Yes, the lighthouse will bring changes. But as it
is—Lundy's like a rock sticking up out of the past. No
houses: no folk: no law. You know we say that English law
doesn't run here—nor Church law either.

THE CLERGYMAN So you say, so you say! But God's law
runs here, my dear sir! Don't you forget that! [*He chuckles*]
Never a place where God's law doesn't run. Well, Ma'am,
here I am at your service, and here's the bridegroom at your
service, and the pretty little bridesmaid too. Your bridesmaid
does you credit, Ma'am.—You've cared for the fatherless and
it won't be forgotten you. And who's to give the woman
[*with a bow*], that is,—who's to give the bride away? [*They*
stand a moment blankly,]

PROSPER I never thought of that. You know, there's not
a soul on the island since they gave up on the North Farm.

THE CLERGYMAN The boatmen?

PROSPER They're down with the boat, waiting.

JUDITH Let Penny run!

PROSPER There's a delay, the long climb. They were to take his reverence back on the turn of the tide.

JUDITH If he could stay the night—we'd be honoured.

THE CLERGYMAN [*fidgeting*] To-morrow is Sunday: I have no-one to take the duty.

PROSPER Can't we do without?

THE CLERGYMAN Is there really no-one?

THE MAN *seated in the chimney corner laughs as he rises.*

THE CLERGYMAN [*startled*] Who is that?

THE MAN [*humbly*] Your servant, sir! Everyone's servant, sir! A poor piece of wreckage, sir, that the mistress saved from the sea. The mistress's faithful dog, sir, from that day on.

THE CLERGYMAN [*touched, to PROSPER*] Ah, you did tell me—poor soul! What's his name?

PROSPER He doesn't know it.

THE CLERGYMAN Dear, dear! But harmless, you say?

THE MAN [*his eyes on JUDITH*] Fid be proud to give the mistress, as it were, in marriage. Fid be glad to know I'd been the one to give her her choice. It 'ud be a thing for me to remember.

THE CLERGYMAN Poor fellow! Well, and why not?

JUDITH [*faintly*] No! No!

PROSPER Why, Judith, anyone will do. Eh, sir?

THE CLERGYMAN It would help us out of a difficulty,—I positively must catch the tide.

PROSPER Why not, Judith?

JUDITH Why no—no reason— [*She recovers herself with a brilliant smile at them*] It has all come on me so quickly.

THE CLERGYMAN Well then, if you're ready— [*He arranges them*] You'll stand here, sir, your lady here. [*To THE MAN*] You upon her left hand, my good man! Just so! You are ready?

JUDITH [*swaying*] Penny! [*She catches at PENNY'S hand.*]

PROSPER Now, my girl! Look up, Judith, we're waiting. Stand back a little, Penny!

JUDITH I—I—

THE MAN [*very close*] Let the mistress lean on my arm!

JUDITH [*quickly., pulling herself together*] I don't need—I'm ready.

THE CLERGYMAN [*He coughs, opens his book, coughs again, and begins*] Dearly beloved, we are gathered here together in the sight of God—

[The curtain falls. As it rises again]

THE CLERGYMAN I require and charge you both as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed—

THE CURTAIN FALLS ONCE MORE.

IV.

A year later. THE MAN comes in bowed under a load of peat which he sets down by the hearth. He is a handsomer person, with a much more assured bearing than the man of the previous . JUDITH, who is sitting at the table serving a man's coat, rises on seeing him, hesitates, then goes back to her seat.

THE MAN D'you want anything fetched?

JUDITH No.

THE MAN I've brought in the turf.

JUDITH I see. Thank you.

THE MAN Yes, give me a thank-you now and then. That's only fair. I've been a good servant—fetched, carried, run messages.

JUDITH I've nothing against you. Where's the master?

THE MAN [*watching her*] Out on the cliff. [*She flinches*] The cliff. He sent me home. No, you've nothing against me. But he has.

JUDITH It's not my business.

THE MAN Told me if I wanted to better myself he'd not stand in my way. Told me it standing on the cliff with his back to the sea. [*He laughs as she shudders*] But you never go up on the cliff, do you? I daresay you forget what it looks like.

JUDITH He's told you to go?

THE MAN He told me to better myself. [*H' laughs*] Better myself! Good advice.

JUDITH [*with suppressed eagerness*] When do you go?

THE MAN Am I going? [*Dangerously*] D'you want me to go?

JUDITH [*quickly, meekly*] Why should I want you to go? [*She smiles*] But it's true. You could better yourself. I could give you money. You'd be welcome— [*She breaks off*]

THE MAN Here I've got a home—warmth, food, shelter. What more can I want? Here I'm among friends, a'n't I?

JUDITH I—I've been a friend to you—yes.

THE MAN And I to you. [*She says nothing. Insisting* And I to you. [*She acquiesces*] Well then, are you going to let me go, friend, out in the cold world?

JUDITH What can I do?

THE MAN [*persuasively*] Speak to him. Tell him you want me to stay.

JUDITH [*painfully*] We've been married a year now. It's not so easy. He'd think it—strange.

THE MAN Why? I'm a good servant. I've been of use to the farm. The farm's half yours. Say I'm to stay on it.

JUDITH [*with a flare of resentment*] Once and for all—I won't be told by you what I'm to do.

THE MAN [*gently*] Why no! I'm only your servant.

JUDITH [*catching at her control, with studied patience*] It would do no good. He wouldn't listen to me.

THE MAN Then shall I ask Penny to speak for me?

JUDITH What do you mean by that?

THE MAN Everyone listens to someone.

JUDITH He does listen to me. But—he's growing set in his ways. Why has he told you to go?

THE MAN He says I cost too much.

JUDITH [*heavily*] He's right. You cost too much.

THE MAN One never quite knows what a bargain will cost. All the same, bargains have to be kept, or—

JUDITH Well, or?

THE MAN It depends whom you make a bargain with. Sometimes you make it with a man—a trusting man like the master, up on the cliff—up there alone on the cliff. Sometimes you make it with a man not quite like other men, and then there's the devil to pay.

JUDITH I've tried to save money for you. I kept back Jordan's bag that he hid under the hearth. I let it lie. I didn't touch it till a month ago, but—

THE MAN He's found it. He's taken it.

JUDITH He didn't know I had it. But he wanted money for his new cottages. I gave it to him. What else could I do when I saw him wanting it? He and I—it's all one.

THE MAN Husbands and wives—very touching and pretty? Is that how you began with your first husband?

JUDITH You had better not speak to me so.

THE MAN *[sternly]* I've a right to speak to you so. What have you been about? You've been married a year and already you can't ask your husband a favour—for me.

JUDITH I won't ask what—what—

THE MAN What you don't want to ask. And that's friendship in a woman.

JUDITH We're not friends.

THE MAN Yet we share secrets.

JUDITH *[terrified]* Don't lift your voice! *[He laughs.]*

THE MAN Why? Who's in the kitchen?

JUDITH Penny,

THE MAN Ah yes. Once more, shall I ask Penny to speak for me?

JUDITH And once more I say to you, you can catch your times and your hours to torment me: you can fling words at me, little sharp stones that you think will madden me, but still I answer you however often you stone me, I don't know what you mean.

THE MAN Only that I'll ask her to speak for me. Such a kind little soul—kind to anyone—full of gifts and favours. If she asks for me, perhaps your husband won't say no, *\smiling* [such friends as they are]

JUDITH [*she stares at him, then she says chokingly*] How dare you? How dare you blacken my own thoughts of my own darlings—

THE MAN I dare anything, mistress, if it pays me.

JUDITH Prosper loves me: Penny loves me. [*She is much agitated*] Would *anything* pay you to go away—out of Lundy—out of my life? Anything?

THE MAN I'd go for the price of a farm. A man wants a place to settle down in and call his own.

JUDITH I'd save. I'm saving already. I'd send you money every year. And now, now at once I'd give you—

THE MAN What? Those earrings? That chain? Pooh! No, no! Here I'm in comfort and here I stay or—better myself.

JUDITH I don't understand you.

THE MAN [*significantly*] If he won't let me stay, if you won't influence him to let me stay, it would remain for me to better myself. D'you think I can't? Haven't I bettered myself already? I was a man out of luck, with a prison behind me and the settlements ahead when we stood into Lundy har-

hour. But I bettered myself. I was a zany and a cripple in your husband's time. Still, I'd bettered myself. Now I'm overseer of the quarries, with men under me and money in my stocking. Isn't that to better oneself? I took harsh words from you like a dog when I bought my life off you, but now I get soft words from you—always soft words! Look at your thumbs tucked in and your fingers clenched over them! [*He picks up her hand*] D'you know what that's a sign of? Fear, my lady! To have someone afraid of you, that's to rule a kingdom. Then haven't I bettered myself? To-day, if a fool—a man or a woman fool—should try to rout me out of my manger because they begrudge me the straw and the bone or so—haven't I my strength back? Haven't I teeth to show?

JUDITH O God! O God!

THE MAN Let your hands lie easy. I'm your friend. The old promise still holds and—I've proved that I can keep it, eh? Eh?

JUDITH Don't talk so loud!

THE MAN He's up on the cliff. But when he comes down from the cliff you'll have a word with him, eh? You'll stand up for a faithful servant?

JUDITH [*wringing her hands*] I tell you he doesn't listen to me! He's good as gold to me, but he does what he thinks right. He has a will like—like granite.

THE MAN That's because you give in to him. You humour him so. You never give him a cross word.

JUDITH No, I've never done that, have I? Never given him a word that could anger him? It's not been easy. I've never measured my tongue before, You laugh at me. I can see it rising in your face, laughter at me. But I tell you this—laugh as you choose—I repent of my sins. It was not all Jordan's fault, I know that now. But it's not easy to be silent.

It's not easy to submit to a strange will when you have your own strength in your heart. I didn't try with Jordan. I fought Jordan. All the ten years I fought Jordan, my dreams against his dreams. He'd a heavy hand; but he couldn't stop me fighting him. I didn't know what I'd grown into, till—till—Oh, it's not in me to be meek and still! I love my husband. Oughtn't I to be happy, when I love him so? But there it is, it's not in me to be meek.

THE MAN When I watch you two—

JUDITH You never do anything but watch us.

THE MAN It's like watching the sea against the cliff—in summer. Very caressing—a summer sea—

JUDITH [*rising to her feet and clenching her fists*] I will not be stirred to anger. I will not.

THE MAN But in winter—oho! in winter—that's when a cliff gets undermined.

JUDITH Is that what you wait for?

THE MAN I'm your servant. I ,yait here to protect you.

JUDITH Protect? [*Passionately*] I thank God he's sending you away.

THE MAN [*smoothly*] I should have so much to tell him before I went.

JUDITH [*in violent agitation*] Tell him! Tell him then! Tell him what you choose! Did I send Jordan to his death? Tell him then! He'll have you hanged for it.

THE MAN And his wife? Will he have her hanged with me? Well, it's your risk!

JUDITH I did not—kill.

THE MAN Would he forgive you your knowledge—and your silence? Would he? Now I'm the sort who'd think no worse of a woman for serving my gods. But he? Would he?

How much he must love you then! Happy xvife!

JUDITH O God, isn't it enough to repent? I say I *have* repented. I didn't care at first. I only thought of Prosper. But once married now when it should be peace, it comes back on me. I daren't let my eyes close at night till Prosper sleeps, for—what if I talk in my sleep? That's my terror. Do you think people talk secrets in their sleep? Doesn't it hold in sleep, the will to be silent? I've gone into Penny's room and watched her, asleep in the moonlight, and whispered to her sometimes, very softly, so that she shan't wake. She smiles, she murmurs, like a bird ruffling its feathers. She answers so sweetly, such pretty nonsense, such harmless, pretty nonsense. I've caught my own name. But what name do I say in my sleep? If he questioned me while I slept, how should I answer? When I wake and find him stirring, I watch his face with terror to find out what I've said. [*She turns upon THE MAN, catching at his arm with both hands*] It is safe? You've promised me! I'll ask him, I'll beg him, you shall stay somehow. But it *is* safe?

THE MAN Take hold of yourself I You love him, don't you? You'd do again to-morrow what you did?

JUDITH [*from under her burden*] Yes, yes, yes!

THE MAN That's a great woman! That's the woman who helped me. That's the woman I helped. And always shall. If a woman angers you, it's your own quarrel, but if a man—

JUDITH Stop! For pity's sake! There is no need: there could never be any need. Can't you see how I'm changed? I rule myself—I rule myself—

PENNY [*entering*] Please, Ma'am, shall I set on the tea to draw? The master's coming down the hill. QUDITH *nods*. PENNY to THE MAN] The fire's low. If you please, you haven't brought me the turf.

JUDITH *[hurriedly]* Fetch it! Fetch it! *[THE MAN goes out. PENNY is turning back to the kitchen when JUDITH stops her with Penny!]*

PENNY Yes, Ma'am?

JUDITH Were you watching for the master?

PENNY *[smiling]* Yes, Ma'am! *[She pauses in the doorway]* There! He's come! And the tea not on! *[She runs out hastily as PROSPER enters, a dead osprey swinging from his hand.]*

JUDITH *[as he passes through]* Prosper!

PROSPER Where's Penny? *[He goes towards the kitchen]*

JUDITH *[ravaged]* Prosper!

PROSPER *[not bearing Penny! Penny girl!]* *[PENNY runs ///, PROSPER tosses the bird to her.]*

PENNY *[charmed]* Oh!

PROSPER Isn't he a great fine fellow?

As they talk THE MAN returns with his load of turf which he carries into the kitchen. He looks from JUDITH to PENNY and PROSPER, and back again to JUDITH. As he passes JUDITH sees the look as he means her to see it.

PENNY I shall soon have enough to send over by the next ship—and with prices going up—

PROSPER Pretty Penny picked a peck of feathers! Did pretty Penny—

PENNY I'm sure I've got a guinea's worth.

PROSPER And what'll pretty Penny buy with a whole golden guinea? A new frock?

PENNY Oh, I have a new frock! The mistress gave it me.

PROSPER What, a new frock? And I've never seen it!

PENNY Oh yes, sir, you've seen it,

PROSPER I swear I haven't seen it. Put it on! It's Sunday afternoon. Judith, mustn't she put it on? Must see how-Penny looks in her fine feathers. Shoo! **Off** with you! [PENNY runs upstairs. He turns back into the room still laughing} Pretty little thing! Shell have them round her like flies to honey when we take her to London. You know, Judith, if we go on at this rate, what with the land doing well, if my deal goes through with the lighthouse people, I don't say but what a trip this summer—You'd like that, eh, a honeymoon trip at last?

JUDITH [*without expression*] Is Penny to come on our honeymoon trip?

PROSPER Why, we couldn't leave her all alone on Lundy!

JUDITH [*fiercely*] Why shouldn't she? I was left. Often enough I was left to talk to—myself.

PROSPER Why, Judith!

JUDITH Well, Prosper?

PROSPER But Judith—

JUDITH [*sullen*] I only asked a question. I only asked if she were coming.

PROSPER But hadn't you always planned to take the child?

JUDITH Oh yes.

PROSPER Well then, my dearest—

JUDITH [*passionately*] Yes, I am, I am your dearest, a'n't I? Always, ever since the night when we first found out—

PROSPER [*whimsically*] O Judith, Judith! I'm not so proud of myself when I think of that night.

JUDITH [*with a flash*] How different we are! I'm proud of it. [*Adjusting herself to him*] There was no harm.

PROSPER I suppose not. But it came on me unawares, like a wind coming up on a calm day. [JUDITH *smiles*] I don't yet know how it began.

JUDITH [*remembering*] I know. You said I was like Lady Hamilton. You couldn't understand how Nelson—

PROSPER No—and never shall.

JUDITH But if you'd loved her you'd have understood.

PROSPER I never could have loved such a woman. She didn't stick at murder to gain her own ends. Oh, not with her own hands! She was too clever for that. But she was behind the filthy business, the Naples business.

JUDITH Nelson loved her.

PROSPER Yes, and I loved him. I judge her the more.

JUDITH [*wistfully*] I daresay she never thought to be wicked.

PROSPER Never thought!

JUDITH D'you think she slept much at nights—afterwards?

PROSPER Why not? A woman like that doesn't feel.

JUDITH Like that? Like what? You said I was like her once.

PROSPER I didn't. [*Amused*] Did I? Did I really? [*He looks at her*] She wasn't so pretty as you, Judith. The eyes a little, perhaps. Well, anyway, it wasn't for your looks I married you.

JUDITH Why did you marry me, Prosper?

PROSPER Why, you know—women—I never meant to marry. But at sea, away from women, you get to think of them. You get to know what they—stand for: to know you can do without them. And yet they're helpless things, and that makes you ashamed, sorry. Oh, I'm no good at talking.

I don't speak ill of the dead, but I thought when I saw you—'She's borne a lot: she's been patient.' When you broke out at Jordan that night, then I knew how it must have been pent up in you. I knew what a saint of patience you must have been. How could I help being sorry? I wanted to make it up to you.

JUDITH *[slowly]* Then—didn't you want me for myself at all?

PROSPER Why, Judith?

JUDITH I'm not a lame dog, to be taken in out of pity.

PROSPER Judith! Judith! I didn't say that. Hush now!

JUDITH Was it pity?

PROSPER Lord knows what it was! *Do you* remember the rhymes to all your reasons? You think too much.

JUDITH *[fuming from him]* And I thought all the time you loved me!

PROSPER *[irritably]* I did! I do! God, Judith, why do you torment me with questions? Why do you pull my soul about? I thought it would be fine to have a home and make a woman happy. There! *[Softening]* Aren't you happy, Judith? Haven't you learnt to love Lundy after all?

JUDITH Prosper! Prosper!

PROSPER *[he is horrified to find her crying]* Why, my girl?

JUDITH Take me away from Lundy, Prosper! Give me that! I'll work to the bone. I'll live like a servant; but take me away from Lundy and Jordan.

PROSPER Oh, let him rest in his grave!

JUDITH It's such a restless grave. How can he sleep rolled to and fro in the waters! I get up in the night when you are so fast asleep, because he whistles to me from the cliff. And I go to the window—last night I went to the window—

and the moon's in the sky like a fire: not a white moon of peace as she should be: and I see the waves riding in. And on the crest of one, far away on the skyline, riding in, always riding in, rides Jordan. I light my candle and then hear his voice—Tut out the candle! Isn't the moonlight good enough? Four farthings make a penny!' And I blow it out, lest he blow it out for me, and I come back to bed to you, to the warmth of you. But as I sit up in bed and bend over you, O my God, how like you look to Jordan! And then there's a turn and a stir and— 'Judith, come to bed!'

PROSPER Judith! Judith! You're ill! You're not yourself. It isn't sane. See here, you shall go away, you and Penny—a good holiday. I'll take you, and I'll come back here by myself for a few months.

JUDITH Why should you come back? [*Her pose changes. She hardens. She begins to* \ You've got an overseer.

PROSPER Your foundling? Thank you!

JUDITH [*reasonably*] You can trust him. \Smiling[He's as mad about the place as you are.

PROSPER I've just given him notice to quit.

JUDITH But Prosper. Why?

PROSPER I don't like him. I never have.

JUDITH But it's not fair dealing. He works.

PROSPER He's too familiar. I've checked him before now, and to-day settled it.

JUDITH It's not right. It's not as if he could get another job here on Lundy. It's like tossing him into the sea again.

PROSPER Let him go to England.

JUDITH I tell you he's got no home.

PROSPER He's got two hands. He won't starve.

JUDITH I don't want him to go. I—

PROSPER What on earth does it matter to you whether he goes or stays?

JUDITH I saved him. I nursed him. It gives a man a claim on a woman.

PROSPER He presumes on it. I've heard him speak to you so that I've waited for you to check him.

JUDITH I've never noticed.

PROSPER Then you should have noticed. The man's amiliar: not only with you, with Penny.

JUDITH [*in a flare*] Oh—that's why he's going! Now I understand.

PROSPER What have you got into your head now?

JUDITH [*raging*] It's what you've got in your head. I haven't got Penny in my head.

PROSPER What? Judith, be sane! Little Penny!

JUDITH [*half choking*] I—I—

PROSPER That child! That—daughter! What's come to you?

JUDITH [*dully, humbly*] I didn't mean it. It was—a mad flash. I was angry that you wouldn't let him stay.

PROSPER Judith?

JUDITH Yes?

PROSPER Will you tell me the truth?

JUDITH [*quickly*] I always tell the truth—the ex truth. I've never deceived you in my life. It's an insult to say, tell me the truth.

PROSPER Insult or no insult, why do you want him to stay?

JUDITH [*she stands a moment staring at him, her lips moving*

without speech. Finally speech comes, painfully] I want him to stay as a—as a —proof of something.

PROSPER Well?

JUDITH Dear—since we married I've done all you asked me, haven't I? Given in—given way. You promised me England—we haven't gone. Halstead Farm—we're still here. You haven't given me my wishes, Prosper, as you promised. D'you know that, Prosper? I've not had one.

PROSPER Is that fair? I explained the circumstances. You agreed to stay.

JUDITH I know. But sitting and thinking as I do, it came over me suddenly that I've had nothing I've asked for. *\She stands staring at her thoughts.*}

PROSPER You talk as if marriage were buying and selling.

JUDITH *[arguing with the invisible]* When one's made a bargain one oughtn't to be cheated.

PROSPER *\neilled* So that's all it's meant to you, our marriage.

JUDITH *\waking* What? What did I say? I wasn't thinking of you. My thoughts had run away from me. I tell you I don't blame you—coincidence—circumstance—not your fault. Still, you've refused me, Prosper, just as Jordan refused. And sometimes I say—they're half brothers. Do you understand?

PROSPER *[hurt]* Is that how you've been thinking when I thought you were happy?

JUDITH I say to myself, is it always to be that in my life? Am I always to live with a Jordan? *[She sees PROSPER'S face]* Oh, I'm hurting you, a'n't I? I know it's not so. You are your own self. You're not some—ghost, come back upon me. *[She comes to him]* Then prove it, Prosper, just one silly

proof! Let me have something my way, my own way, to please me, because I ask it. Against sense, against wisdom, because I ask it! If you love me: because you love me. Prosper, Prosper, for proof, let him stay!

PROSPER [*the soft-hearted*] If you'll tell me why you want him to stay—

JUDITH [*voluble, feverish*] Say, why *did* I want him to stay? It's past that now. It's a test now. But I'll tell you. Why did I? Oh, foolish reasons! I nursed him. You'll never find a woman turn against anyone she's tended. And then—then—oh, have I to find reasons? It's the luck? You can't live by the sea without believing in luck. You ought to know that. And he did bring luck. You and I, that night, watching him—have you forgotten? If he hadn't come, as he did come, out of the sea—dark—hell—oh, God knows where he came from—should we be here now, husband and wife, standing here so close, touching, kissing? Kiss me again as you did that night, and don't turn our luck away! He does presume. He's not a fool. He can see I—don't want—to part with him. He trades on it perhaps. How should he guess it's because he's our luck! Before he came, no hope, no hope on sea or land. He came, and in a week we were lovers, and Jordan—

PROSPER [*fascinated*] And Jordan—

JUDITH Jordan died—died! It was luck that Jordan died. If you say it wasn't luck, it means you're sorry you ever came, sorry you married me.

PROSPER You've a terrible speech. How can you? You say things that—that decent people don't say.

JUDITH [*her eyes shining*] If you love me—do you love me?

PROSPER I wish I didn't sometimes.

JUDITH You do love me.

PROSPER Yes, I do love you.

JUDITH *[triumphant]* Then our luck must stay. [PROSPER is about to answer when PENNY'S voice is heard.]

PENNY Sir! Mr. Prosper! I've put on my new dress.

PENNY at the top of the stairs, the sunlight from the open doorway catching her, in JUDITH'S dress of the second made over, is a pleasant sight. PENNY has been a neat and pretty child in her ho Hand working dress and white collar; but the cherry and green dress that was too young for JUDITH turns PENNY into a grown woman and a beautiful one. It is not to be wondered at that PROSPER, on sight of her, jumps up with an exclamation of pleasure.

PROSPER *[laughing]* My word, Penny, fine feathers—

PENNY *[seriously]* Oh, no, sir, it's not the feathers' money: it's the mistress's old gown.

JUDITH *[harshly]* I wore it the day Jordan died. I never wanted to see it again. I told Penny so.

PROSPER *[jarred]* Don't spoil the child's pleasure!

JUDITH Oh! *[She turns away abruptly.]*

PENNY *[damped, to PROSPER in a half whisper]* Perhaps I oughtn't to have put it on.

PROSPER *[whispering also; for he finds her as irresistible as a friendly bird]* I'll take the blame. Didn't I tell you to put it on? Pretty Penny! Turn round and let me see!

PENNY *[bubbling; for she finds herself as irresistible as he does]* It fits like a glove. I made it all myself—to go to England in. Is it the right fashion—for England?

PROSPER Pretty Penny needn't worry about fashions, need she, Judith?

PENNY *\ecstatic* Oh, my new gown!

PROSPER *[more and more amused at her]* Have you wished yet, Penny?

PENNY Do I get a wish with a new gown?

PROSPER A wish or a sixpence!

As he pulls a handful of coin out of his pocket and holds it out to her laughing, THE MAN comes in through the outer door. He stands staring, as if struck by the picture that PROSPER and PENNY make. Then his look travels from them to JUDITH standing in the window, her hands clasping and unclasping each other.

PROSPER *[laughing,* Well, which will you have?

PENNY'S small face hangs gravely over his open palm and she is lifting her hand to fish out a sixpence, when she catches sight of THE MAN by the door. He looks at her humbly. Her hand drops.

PENNY No, I won't. I'll have a wish instead, Mr. Prosper. May I have a wish?

PROSPER *[putting his money back and jingling it]* Wish away!

PENNY *[with another look at the downcast figure of THE MAN by the door]* I wish—I wish— Of course, it's not my business—

PROSPER What's not your business? *[Then he, too, catches sight of THE MAN and frowns.]*

PENNY *[quickly, shyly]* He's so miserable. He told me so. Didn't you? *[THE MAN nods.]* He does so want to stay. He's sorry he's vexed you. He loves it here on Lundy. Couldn't you let him stay?

PROSPER Hm! *[He looks uncertainly at her and over to JUDITH.]*

PENNY *[pouting* You said I could have my wish. *[Her*

small hand is on his sleeve. She is more than ever like a bird ready to perch on your finger] That's my wish. Do let him stay!

PROSPER [*with a laugh and a shrug*] These women! All right, Pennyl [*To THE MAN*] You can stay, do you hear? For a while, anyway. And see you behave yourself! No, you needn't thank me. Thank the women! [*Then, with a change of tone as he comes down into the room*] Judith!

JUDITH Yes, Prosper!

PROSPER What about my tea?

THE MAN, *leaning against the door, watching the scene, no sooner sees that the three people are once more forgetting him, than he softly takes out the heavy door-key from the lock of the door against which he leans, and replaces it on the outer side. Then he slinks off noiselessly to his old place by the hearth.*

JUDITH Tea? That's the girl's business. [*She comes menacingly across the room to PENNY*] Penny, take off that dress and go and do your work!

PROSPER [*amazed*] Judith!

JUDITH I don't keep you here to idle.

PENNY I—

JUDITH Other folk can keep you for that! No doubt you'll find plenty.

PROSPER Steady, Judith! Judith! You heard me tell the child—

JUDITH Yes, I heard you. I heard and saw. Quite enough I heard. I heard you give to my servant girl what I'd begged and prayed of you and couldn't get from you—

PROSPER Why, I—Fd as good as told you already—

JUDITH Yes, you say that now! [*She turns on PENNY*]

Don't gape at me! Take off that dress or I'll tear it off—you little snake that I've warmed, you—you—Take it off, I say! *[She catches the girl by the shoulders.]*

PENNY Ma'am! Oh, please! Oh, my gown! *[In JUDITH'S frantic grip the dress tears and the girl's white shoulder shows bare]*
Don't, Ma'am! Don't! Oh, Mr. Prosper!

PROSPER Judith, are you mad? Judith, for God's sakel Do you want to kill the child? Judith! *[He struggles with the halffrantic woman and with difficulty pulls her clear]*

JUDITH I want to. I would. I will. Leave me alone, Prosper!

PROSPER *[to PENNY]* Penny, get out of this! Keep away!

PENNY I didn't mean any harm—any harm— *[She goes out crying.]*

JUDITH There! You see! You take her part. Let me go, Prosper!

PROSPER Will you be quiet?

JUDITH You're hurting me. You're hurting my wrists.

PROSPER *[releasing her]* You never listen until one— *[He turns from her]* I've had enough of it.

JUDITH *[sobbing with rage]* You hurt me. *[Then, as he crosses the room]* And now you're going to her. You're going to your— *[He reaches the open outer door. She cries with a curious, sudden change of tone]* Prosper, where are you going?

PROSPER Away from your wicked temper and your wicked tongue. *[He goes out angrily]*

JUDITH My tongue's my own! I— *[THE MAN who has risen, passes her as he goes to the gun-rack. She stands as if frozen. Then she says in a whisper]* No! No, no! No, I say! No! *[She is upon him, wrenching the gun from him as she babbles]* Never! Never! Are you mad? I don't want help. I don't

want protection! Leave us alone! This is between us—between my husband and me. If I choose to bear it, nobody is to come between us. I've no complaint. I've no need of help. I'm satisfied. I tell you I was wrong. I was mad. I lost my temper. It was my fault. I tell you it was my fault. It's not to be, I say! It's not to be! *[She secures the gun, or he lets her take it from him. As she sways back against the table, clutching it, he looks at her for a moment with a smile, shrugs his shoulders and goes out, pulling to the door behind him. JUDITH, appalled]* No, no, no! O God! *[She rushes to the door, but it is already closed and you hear from without the key turning in the lock. Beating on the door]* Let me out! Let me out! Prosper, it's murder! It's murder! Prosper! Penny! It's murder, I tell you! Prosper! *[She desists, exhausted, listening. There is no sound but the sough of the wind. She turns from the door with a new thought and darts to the window, flinging it open, calling]* Prosper! *[// is clear that she sees him]* Prosper, look' behind you! O my God! He's coming up behind you! Come away from the edge, Prosper, for pity's sake! Oh! the wind, the wind! *[Screaming]* Come away from the edge! Come away from the edge! Come away from—Ah! *[She puts her hand to her eyes as she reels back into the room and collapses on to the chair by the table]* O God, have pity on me! Have pity on me! Have pity on me!

There is nothing to disturb the silence in the room but the whistle of the wind and the sound of her crying, until the key turns and the door opens and THE MAN comes in. He closes the door behind him and stands leaning against it, looking at her.

THE MAN For food, warmth, shelter—quits! *[He comes quietly down into the room and stands at the table. JUDITH rises, shakily, bowed like an old woman.]*

JUDITH I will get you hanged. You can't keep my mouth

shut unless you kill me too. But I pray to God you kill me too. And if you do not, when I have seen you hanged, I will kill myself.

THE MAN You? You daren't die. You would see your dead men: and they would know what we know. You'll stay here with me. I think we'll send Penny away. What do we want with Penny? But you—you go with the farm.

JUDITH I know what you are now. You are the stranger, the evil one. I prayed for you to come, and out of my heart you came—the devil came.

THE MAN Devil? Devil a bit! I wanted what I wanted, like you. And you gave me my chance to get 'em—a farm and a woman. Come here! [*He puts a hand on her shoulders. Terrified, she strives to fend him off*] It's no use your fighting me. I'm stronger than you.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

AUGUST 1923—APRIL 1925.

The %]ng Walts

A TALE

THE morning was a Friday, the month was May; it was the twenty-eighth year of the Eighth Henry's reign over England, and it needed five minutes to be noon. On Richmond Hill, under the great spring-leaved oak, stood Henry the King. His outstretched hand commanded silence, and his huntsmen stilled the restless coupled hounds in dumb show, with furtive, sidelong glances, fearing that outstretched jewel-laden hand, that arrogant glance. Who will disobey Harry the King, calling in that furious voice for silence? Even the midday sun, as a little cloud slipped from its face, poured down such an answering concentration of heat upon the green hill-side that the noon hush seemed an of grace from one royalty to another. There was instantly no sound at all save the panting of the half-throttled hounds and the dry whisper of innumerable caterpillars hissing in innumerable leaves; for there was a blight that spring in the oak-woods.

For one minute—two—three—the silence endured; then a burst of wind brole it: and all the trees in Richmond Park began once more to strain, creak, rustle, and the scent of the May drifted by again in gusts, and high overhead the clouds too renewed their voyage eastward through the heavenly blue. Over the Tower of London, as the wind lulled once more,

they banked together again, a white tower of the sky.

Far below the scent of the white may drifted over the town and in through the windows, doorways, and courtyards of the Tower, and over the Tower green. Through slits in the wall the river sparkled in the noon sunshine; but still it lacked four minutes to be noon.

Across the green to the new scaffold came Anne the Queen, dressed in black damask with a white cape, and her hat was in the fashion. The Lieutenant of the Tower helped her to mount the steps. She had her glance and her nod for the waiting swordsman; then she looked down upon her friends and upon her enemies gathered close about her harsh death-bed; said to them that which was in her mind to say; adjusted her dress and freed the small neck; then knelt. But she would not let friend or enemy cover her eyes, and though she knelt she did not bow her head, but looked again keenly upon the silenced crowd: and for the last time called upon the ready blood to flush her cheeks.

She had always been able to redden thus into beauty when she chose; and now the hot blood did not fail her. It was at its old trick', brightening her black eyes: and this was ever the sign of crisis with her. With that sudden flush she had won her game—how often?—with this king and husband who had now beaten her. She felt a strange pang of longing to remember, to finger once again her glorious victories over time,

absence, malice, envy, a queen, a cardinal, a king—and her own resentful heart.

She was not used to deny herself any wish; so, lifting her head, she let the spell work for the last time: and her executioner, meeting that full glance, hesitated and turned aside, as if his part were not yet ready to be played. Again he advanced: again she looked at him, and had the last triumph of her beauty as she won her respite. He would wait her pleasure for a minute, no more than a minute; but she knew now that the tales they had told of drowning men were true. The dying see their lives in a minute: she, dying, would see again her life.

She turned her eyes away from the frightened faces of her women, from faithful Maty Wyatt's weeping agony: she looked in turn upon her gaoler Kingston, on courteous Gwynn clutching in his hand her last gift, on thankless Cromwell, on Suffolk's exultant face. But here her glance checked, her very heart checked on its beat, for beside Suffolk, her enemy, stood a nearer enemy; it seemed to her that her husband's eyes glittered at her, set in a younger, comelier countenance. So Henry had sent his bastard to watch her die! She smiled to herself as she thought that it was like him, like her fool and tyrant, her Henry, husband, king! She thought that he himself would have been glad to watch her die: he could not for his dignity, so he sent his left-hand son, young Richmond. Yes, to

thus was like Henry, and young Richmond, watching her, was very like Henry: she had seen on many a May morning that eager parting of the full, pinched mouth, that glistening of small, hard eyes.

Suddenly her thirty-odd years of life began to speed across her eyeballs, quickly and softly, like the scudding clouds above her speeding over the Tower in the spring wind. Childhood and youth at Hever Castle—in a flash she saw those spring years pass, and herself journeying to France in the train of Henry's sister. Little thought fifteen-year-old Anne Boleyn that she would ever call the Queen of France sister! But she saw herself, nevertheless, all unconscious, dancing, dressing, laughing, learning, learning always to be a queen. And so home again to England, to the Court at Windsor Castle, like that last lone small cloud above her scudding across the sky to join the massed castles of the air. And there she saw herself for a little while serving the good dull Katharine; but she had no memory of Katharine's lord, Henry King of England. Another face and form flitted across her eyeballs, of another Henry—Henry Percy, heir to the dukedom of Northumberland.

A high wind drove in upon the clouds as she watched, and scattered them all ways, while the executioner whispered with his underling. Thus boisterously, she thought, had Henry the King driven in upon love and lovers. Henry Percy is rated by the

butcher's son, Wolsey, the hated cardinal; and his father summoned; and shamed Anne is dismissed the Court.

Home again goes Anne to Hever, her marriage and her heart broken, and never knows, so innocent is this earlier Anne, why misfortune cut off her happiness at a blow, like a skilled swordsman striking off a queen's head. But when a guest arrives at Hever Castle—then Anne knows!

Henry the King comes to Hever very sure of his welcome. And indeed her father and her stepmother may scour the county for fish, flesh, fowl and fruits in their season; and summon country gentlemen and ladies, and handsome boys and pleasant girls, to make feasts and plan pleasures for the King. But Maistresse Anne keeps her chamber. Henry is master of Hever, not of Anne. Anne knows now who has parted her, with Wolsey's help, from Henry Percy, true love, first love, and she will teach that greedy mouth, those glistening eyes, a lesson. Henry the King is the singular good lord and favourable prince of Sir Thomas and Lady Boleyn; but Maistresse Anne Boleyn keeps her chamber. Let the King learn what it means to part lovers! Let him wait and chafe and learn!

She watched him in memory once more as he rode away from Hever, an angry, hungry king, spurring his horse. She watched him and his train dwindling in the distance to such ant-like folk, and swallowed

up by young green and pure white may hedges, under just such a blue sky in just such windy weather. What a winch! There's no sound at all in the world but the hurry of the royal wind. When will it strike twelve? Is it a minute or a lifetime since she knelt?

More clouds scud across the sky, more years scud across her dying eyes. She saw again her father, and smiled as she remembered that he, too, had been among those who condemned her. Strange father! Coward father! But he had liked his new title, all those years ago—Viscount Rochford sounded well; and her sister's husband was glad enough to be Gentleman of the Privy Chamber; and for herself there was a place at Court again, and jewels. (But Henry Percy is exiled to Northumberland!) Once more she saw that greedy mouth; once more she fell very humbly on her knees, summoned the lovely blood to her cheek, and said her say to Henry the King:

"Your wife I cannot be, both in respect of mine own unworthiness, and also because you have a queen already. Your mistress I will not be."

And so home again to Hever in just such soft blue weather, to read humble letters from a once blustering, king, who knows now what it means to be a lover parted from his love. How did his letter go?

"I beseech you earnestly to let me know your real mind as to the love between us. ... If it does not please you to answer me in writing, let me know some

place where I may have it by word of mouth; and I will go thither with all my heart. No more for fear of tiring you."

But he tires her none the less, and she will not go to meet him. Let him wait! Let him wait his four years!

They scud by like clouds, as her cheek burns with a new memory of hate and reckoning. What of Wolsey? How shall Wolsey be paid if Anne pines at Hever while the King waits unsatisfied?

So Anne Boleyn comes to town again and serves the Queen again, and takes her place at last as King's bliss: queens it at Hampton, at Windsor, and at Greenwich, and holds her state in the Cardinal's own York House. How else should Wolsey be taught what it is to part lovers? (But Henry Percy has married a wife and will not come again!) Let Wolsey learn what he has to pay for crossing "the foolish girl yonder in the Court."

She saw herself again, while Katharine, her mistress, sat weeping and praying and sewing with her dull maids, reigning at the feasts the shaken Cardinal prepared for her; saw herself May Queen on May mornings and Lady of the Revels on Christmas Eves; till, at the Greenwich midnight masque, the French ambassador watching, she danced (mark it, butcher's son!) in public with the King, the flush upon her cheek, and listened afterwards to Henry's own song:—

The eagle force subdues each bird that flies:
What metal can resist the flaming fire?
Doth not the sun dazzle the clearest eyes,
And melt the ice and make the frost retire?

The ice, indeed, is melting, Lord Cardinal! You were not wise to go to France; less wise when you returned to dissuade a king from changing old queens for new. Anne Boleyn has other weapons than her brilliant eyes, her burning cheek, her dancing feet, and quick tongue. Henry has been jealous once; he shall be jealous again! King Henry is not the only lover who sings to Anne his own verses. Besides, Tom Wyatt has a look of Henry Percy (married, out of sight, never out of mind!), and is a bolder man than Percy.

She lived again through the day when Henry stole a ring from her finger and swaggered out to play at bowls with Wyatt. Again she watched all from her window, and heard all—King Henry crying out that he wins: and Wyatt telling him that, by his leave, it is not so—and Henry's chuckle as he points with his new-ringed finger, crying:

"Wyatt, I tell thee, it is mine."

But Wyatt, too, wears a keepsake under his Court suit over his heart. What can a poet and a lover do but draw from that hiding-place the jewel swinging on its chain.

"Give me leave to measure the cast with this, and I have good hopes yet it will be mine."

Once again she saw him stoop, measure, and prove winner; and rise to face the Tudor thunderstorm.

"It may be so, but then I am deceived." And away storms Henry to her chamber crying—"What is Wyatt to you?"

She remembered how easily then she dealt with him and his jealousies: how she struck her bargain: and how, five years later, while she, the new-made Marchioness of Pembroke, sat on the King's knee, and he kissed her, not caring who saw, she heard Wyatt's voice singing to her new ladies-in-waiting his farewell song—

Forget not yet thine own approved,
The which so constant hath thee loved,
Whose steadfast faith has never moved;
Forget not yet!

Poor Tom Wyatt! The scent of the may drifts across the scaffold like the scent of the rose-water that it was his office to pour upon her hands on her coronation day. And there was another May morning to remember—the best to remember!

The flush on her cheek deepened, and her head sank as she saw herself three years ago, only three years ago, journeying to the Tower, this same Tower that now

witnessed her last journey's end. She saw the press of cheering folk at Greenwich, the branches of the oaks cracking under the weight of citizens, the may-bushes clambered over, with gaping faces thrust out, scratched and red and laughable between the pure clots of bloom. She saw again the Lord Mayor and his scarlet haberdashers, and felt the jewels on his glove dent her fingers as she put her hand in his that he might lead her to the State barge.

It waited for her on the breast of the sparkling river, the same sparkling river sparkling now through slits in her prison walls. But then the river was alive with pageantry, and instead of black damask she wore cloth of gold; and the world was full of noise where now was deadly silence and the executioner's foot behind her, breaking the silence.

But her mind rejected utterly that stealthy sound: it was filled with memories of the glorious noises—the cries of all the people and the tinkling of the fluttering, bell-sewn flags as the barge poled out into mid-stream with fifty lesser barges following. All London moved that May morning with her towards the Tower, so that her progress turned the very Thames back upon its course. (Why not, when she, Anne Boleyn, had already turned back history, shaken Spain, defeated Rome, killed a cardinal, and wrecked a queen?) The great fiery dragon spat fire from the foist, and from the bachelor barge came trumpet-calls

once more, and, from the maidens' barge, unceasing, high-pitched singing, sweet as the singing of the waking birds had been when she met Henry Percy, not Henry of England, by stealth under the Greenwich hawthorn trees. Well, she had avenged that lost sweetness! Wolsey had parted her from Henry Percy, and where was Wolsey now? Fallen, as she was falling: dead, as she in another instant must lie dead. But Henry Percy had been gaoler to the great cardinal before the end, had led the cardinal, his legs bound beneath his horse's belly like any other felon, to his prison and his grave. She had taught the greatest man in England what it cost to part lovers.

A smile lit up her fa'ce as she remembered that lesson, and the watchers saw it and wondered, and weeping Mary Wyatt called her in her heart "saint" and "innocent"; and young Richmond thought of his father, waiting on Richmond Hill for the boom of the cannon, and wondered if he should report that inexplicable, triumphant smile. How slowly the man from Calais goes about his business! Look, he swings his sword! Does the kneeling creature know that the French executioner is swinging his sword?

But Anne did not see the present. She was smiling at her achieved past. She saw that she had done what she set out to do, unafraid. She could say, when her sins rose up and looked at her, that she had never, in life or death, been made afraid. She had been fit

mother for kings and queens: and—who knows: wheels turn!—her Elizabeth might yet rule England₃ like her mother, unafraid! She saw again so clearly, lying open before her, the book of prophecies found once in her room, hidden there to frighten her by friends of Katharine. There had been a picture of Henry and weeping Katharine, and herself between them, kneeling at the block even as she knelt now. But when her frightened maid called out, "If this were prophesied of me, I would not have him, were he emperor!" she had answered—

"I am resolved to have him, that my issue may be royal, whatever may become of me."

She murmured the words again half aloud, and heard Mary's gasp from the scaffold foot—"She prays!" and saw the sudden upward flash of faces, watching a movement that she heard behind her but could not see. What? Had so many years, had her whole life flashed before her eyes in so brief a minute? Yet the minute was too long, it seemed, for these watchers. They grew impatient and would hurry her into death. Let them know that the Queen dies at her own minute, not at theirs! Not thus had they hurried her two years ago from Greenwich landing to the Tower. They had led her slowly to the Tower then, that all the town might see her beauty. And Henry, her king and husband, had met her in the gateway and welcomed her most joyfully. She felt again

upon her lips his loving kiss, and his great arm flung about her neck.

It fell upon her neck again like an all-ending blow; and there was a booming in her ears. . . .

The echoes of the gun went rolling round and out over the Tower walls, went rolling over the City and its suburbs, went rolling with the river up to Richmond Hill. Henry the King, motionless beneath the oak, like a panted monarch, like a card-king of hearts, heard the heavy voice and understood the awaited, welcome message.

He started joyfully from his trance and, stripping a little ring from his finger, flung it into a bloom-laden may-thorn bush ten yards away.

"The deed¹ is done!" cried Henry. "Uncouple the hounds and away!"

He clambered to his saddle while the statues of his huntsmen, his horses, and his hounds came to life about him, and, spurring his eager beast, led the hunt westward, ever westward, towards Wiltshire and Jane Seymour, and his wedding morrow.

August, 1928.

