



BIRD'S  
FOUNTAIN  
BETTINA VON HUTTEN





BIRDS OF MONTANA

BIRD'S FOUNTAIN



# BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

BY  
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"MARIA," "SHARROW," "PAM," ETC.



D. APPLETON AND COMPANY  
NEW YORK 1915

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**Printed in the United States of America**



*FOR*  
*RICHARD AND HENRIETTA*  
*FROM*  
*MOTHER*

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**PART I**



## I

**T**HE beautiful Mrs. Cloudesley Dorset was having her afternoon rest.

This rite was performed between the hours of three and five, and the members of the household knew that any interruption occasioned by less than a sudden death, or a fire, would be regarded—and punished—almost as a sacrilege.

The temple dedicated to the cult of her beauty that may almost be described as the lady's religion was called the Gray Room.

It was a small room at the back of the house on the third floor, and over it was an empty one, perfect quiet being thus insured to it. The fact that keeping the overhead room empty necessitated the sleeping together, in a place scarcely larger than a cupboard, of Annie Archbold, head parlormaid, and Cissy Kelly, head housemaid, had not troubled the lady whose husband paid these hirelings their wages.

She had merely thought it lucky that the hirelings were friends, so that they presumably didn't mind.

The Gray Room had a large window of dove-colored

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glass, the thick curtain to which, hung from a box-shaped frame to insure the entrance of fresh air, was of dull black silk.

The unpolished ebony bed, which stood in the middle of the room, its head towards the window, was also hung with black silk curtains so draped on movable ebony arms that they could be arranged in many ways, according to its inmate's wish.

The carpet was gray, as thick, as soft to the foot as moss in a damp woodland place, and the fireplace was of plain gray marble.

There was in the quiet room no clock, no books, and only one table; there were no pictures, no mirrors, no flowers.

On the table was spread, over the gray velvet cover, a white linen cloth, and on it stood a business-like array of fat jars and bottles, brushes, and motley folded cloths of various kinds.

There were also three glass basins of various sizes, and an electric battery.

On either side of the bed stood a low, armless chair with a black upholstered seat and back.

The place was, as I have said, a temple. It was also a workshop.

Mrs. Dorset lay on her right side, her long reddish hair, which had had its brushing, loosely plaited. She had only one pillow, and her nightgown was of white

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crêpe-de-chine and quite simple. Its long sleeves were unusual in that they were buttoned from the wrist to the shoulders with smooth, flat buttons.

Her left hand, as she lay with a pad of wet cotton-wool over her eyes, rested on a little pillow on the knees of Clémentine.

Clémentine wore a loose gray cashmere gown and over it an unstarched linen pinafore.

Beside her on a low stool was arranged all that was necessary for her work of manicuring her mistress. The silence in the room was so intense as to seem a tangible thing; it was like a veil, or a thick soft fabric.

The little click of the scissors or her other instruments, sounded to the noiselessly busy woman like loud bangs, and as one occurred she glanced at her mistress's beautiful mouth to see if the sound had disturbed her. Mrs. Dorset did not move; she was an artist in resting, and as she lay there her mind was as nearly a blank as a waking mind can be.

She was dining out that night, so her afternoon drive should be a solitary one. She was going to a ball, and her frock, a masterpiece of Worths' arrived from Paris that morning, was perfection. Archie Hood was to be at the ball.

The knowledge of these things lay at the back of her brain, but her brain was not busy with them; her brain, as well as her body, was resting.

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Clémentine rose, restored the manicure things to their place amongst the bottles on the table, and opening a masked door, disappeared for a moment. When she came back, brushing her newly washed hands lightly together, she filled one of the flat little glass basins with a sweet-smelling amber-colored oil, and began a curious, gentle, soothing massage.

Mrs. Dorset was a very small, very slight woman with beautiful limbs best described as gracile. Her little pink feet were exquisite, but no bigger than those of an average child of ten. When the maid unbuttoned the nightgown sleeves, leaving them folded back like wings, the little lady looked like an exquisite statuette. Clémentine, a broad, big-boned Norman, with flat round nostrils and a mustache, worked quietly on, her soothing, oily, fragrant hands as delicate as butterflies. She was, and with reason, proud of her touch, much as a musician may be proud of his. Presently she rose quietly and seated herself on the other side of the bed.

Without a word Mrs. Dorset changed her position slightly and again lay quiet, half asleep under the blandishment of those large hands.

Clémentine wore a watch, and when an hour had passed she rose, washed her hands once more, and changed the bandage on her mistress's eyes for a cool, newly soaked one.



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The large full eyelids with their very long fair lashes did not flutter as they were uncovered; the beautiful Mrs. Dorset was nearly asleep.

Clémentine watched her for a moment as she moistened her hands afresh, this time with a mixture of spirits of wine and rose scent, and her gaunt face was very tender.

Then, again sitting down, she began the last step of putting her charge to sleep.

She took a little rosy foot on her lap and stroked it, slowly and lightly, two of her great fingers almost covering it as she did so. Round the arch, under the sole, over the pink toes, in a quiet arabesque of hypnotic movement. Five minutes passed, and ten, and slower and slower went the fingers. Clémentine's own eyes closed once or twice, so quiet was the room, so drowsy the motion of her own hand.

Half an hour passed, and then she rose and disappeared as silently as a melting snow wreath. The beautiful Mrs. Dorset was asleep.

## II

**M**AJOR MARCHINGTON thoughtfully stroked his out-of-date gray mustache.

“What’d you say her name is?” he asked.

Lady Barbara Questingham repeated the name.

“Mrs. Dorset. Her husband is a son of old Charles Frederick Dorset, the V.C.”

“Bless my soul! *Not* Cloudesley Dorset?”

“Cloudesley Dorset. Why, do you know him?”

The old lady looked eagerly at her companion.

“Known him ever since he was six years old, though I haven’t seen him twenty times in as many years. When he was sent home from India at that age, I was coming back on leave to be married.”

“Dear me, I never knew you had been married, Major Marchington.”

“I haven’t—much. However—this fellow, then in bare legs and sailor-suits, was on board.” After a pause he added, “What’s he like now?”

Lady Barbara hesitated. “Large—dull—and very rich.”

“A good fellow?”

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"I don't know—I rarely see him. He's a silent, heavy creature. Not at all in my line—or yours."

"Ha. She is very beautiful."

"Isn't she?"

"Brains?"

Lady Barbara laughed. "Oh, dear, no. Absolutely none. I believe she pretends to read philosophy and poetry—you know the type."

The two old people were silent for a while in their corner of a duchess's ballroom, where they were renewing a friendly tie broken ten years before when the Major had gone to China and India. He had been back twice, but on one occasion had stayed only a fortnight and then moved on to America, and Lady Barbara had missed him altogether on his other visit home, she being very ill at the time.

So there was much to be explained, many broken threads to be knotted, a great deal of stale and fresh gossip to be set forth for each other's delectation. They were having a pleasant evening, for although they had never got to the Christian name stage of intimacy they had always had much in common. They were both gifted gossips, not unamiable spyers out of other people's weaknesses and sins, and they were bound by the same code as to what, in the pursuit of such amusement, was permissible.

Also they both liked good food and plenty of it,

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and had no old-fashioned ideas on the subject of early to bed and early to rise.

They liked late, very late, breakfasts, slow, elaborate hot luncheons, drowsy afternoons in drawing-rooms, and much rich food at night.

They were delighted to be together.

After his companion's last remark the old man sat in silence for a moment.

The beautiful Mrs. Dorset, as fresh after her long rest as a girl of eighteen, was waltzing.

She wore green, the green of the youngest and tenderest of lily-of-the-valley leaves, and round her delicate, long throat hung a rope of pearls.

She danced like an angel, her tiny green satin feet skimming over the shining floor like gay little birds.

"It is not mere prettiness," the Major declared at last. "It is great beauty on a very small scale."

"It is."

"And, rare as great beauty is," pursued the old man, "there is an even more unusual thing about her. She really loves dancing."

"All pretty women love dancing—there's an element of danger about it that they enjoy even when they don't recognize it——"

"Dear Lady Barbara, all pretty women do *not* love dancing, nor all young men, either! Look at the faces

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of these people as they pass us. Nine out of ten are busy doing their best. That isn't loving a thing! And many of them are suffering from the heart, or the exercise, or tight shoes, or—indigestion——”

The old lady laughed, her soft fat neck, as thickly powdered as a new-baked cake, shaking in loose little billows.

“What a horrid thought—indigestion at a duchess's dance?”

“Horrid but true. I know. I myself was once a dancing man, but in my secret soul I loathed it. The only thing that made it worth while was, saving your presence, the privilege it conferred of putting my arm about pretty waists and gazing into pretty eyes at a closer range than was usually allowed. However, this little beauty, as I said, loves dancing for dancing's sake. Look at her!”

As he spoke Mrs. Dorset approached them, waltzing with a tall, dark, broad-shouldered man with narrow hips and thin feet.

He danced as well as she, and they looked supremely happy.

Her close-coiffed head, the not too elaborately waved hair packed neatly into a small coil and bound with a wreath of very delicate green leaves—this was before the days when ladies wore surgical bandages by way of head-dress—had fallen back a little. Her eyes were

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half-closed, and her clean-cut bright pink mouth curved in a faint smile.

"By Gad, how well they dance together," exclaimed the old Major.

"They ought to," was Lady Barbara's dry rejoinder. He glanced sharply at her. "Why?"

She shrugged her shoulders, the powdered skin curdling at the movement.

"It's Archie Hood."

The waltz ended, and a hubbub of voices made talking a more difficult matter, but Marchington insisted on an answer.

"Well—Archie Hood—who *is* he, and what do you mean?"

Lady Barbara rose. "It is supper time, my dear friend, and I am ravenous. Convey me to the costly viands."

He conveyed her, and when she was pleasantly busy with the costly viands he went back to the subject.

"Now tell me about Archie Hood. Who is he—and *what?*"

"I believe you have lost your heart to her!"

"I have. Shall I, such being the case, find it incumbent on me to shoot Archie Hood?"

She ruminated with mock solemnity, her wrinkled old eyelids, like those of a sleepy crocodile, crumpling curiously as she looked at him.

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"I shouldn't think," she declared at last, "that it would be necessary to *shoot* him, but——"

"But——"

"You might give him—a piece of your mind for the way he is behaving about her."

"I see. It's as bad as that, then?"

"Oh, obviously. If you hadn't been gallivanting in the effete Orient you'd have seen it long ago. Been going on for months. Odd you've never seen her before."

"I have once or twice—at the opera, and at some picture show, but I didn't know who she was. As a matter of fact I'd got it into my head that she was one of Lady Jerningham's girls."

Lady Barbara burst out laughing. "I wish Ursula Jerningham could hear you say that! Why, my dear man, Amy Dorset is thirty-five years old!"

The old man started. "Impossible!"

"I know it's impossible, but it's true."

"But she looks twenty."

"Not to the female eye. To that penetrating organ she looks at her worst, thirty, and at her best, like tonight, five and twenty."

"Thirty-five," murmured the old man, "thirty-five!"

"Aye. Isn't she amazing?"

"She is indeed. Who was she?"

"Here's another surprise for you, my poor Romeo."

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She was—nobody. Absolutely nobody! I believe her father was a solicitor or doctor or something somewhere in Gloucestershire. If you can so far recover yourself, I wish you'd give me some more champagne."

Major Marchington filled both their glasses and emptied his at a draft.

"I see. And now tell me about Hood."

"Oh, *he's* all right. He's one of the Bagworthy Hoods, a cousin or something. He is mad about this little creature. Aha," she added with much satisfaction, "there they are."

Mrs. Dorset and Captain Hood had threaded their way through the crowd of tables and sat down at one nearby. Major Marchington moved his chair slightly so that he could see them. In the presence of great beauty or charm this old gentleman felt as a crippled man must feel when looking on at a game in which he himself once excelled.

Captain Hood was making love to the lady opposite him—discreetly, but, to the initiated, unmistakably making love.

And she, her beautifully shaped little head turned away, her eyes absently scanning the people near her, was, the old man perceived, listening with pleasure.

"Her hair is dyed, you know," said Lady Barbara, pleasantly, "and her lashes are *really* quite fair."



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Marchington laughed, not quite so pleasantly.

"I suppose a former maid of hers told *your* maid——"

"Yes," returned the old woman, stoutly, "she did."

### III

YOU know perfectly well what I mean," Captain Hood was saying, his dark eyes fixed on the carefully controlled face of his companion.

She laughed. "Everybody on earth means a given thing in given circumstances," she answered with a little air of saying something clever.

"Don't talk philosophy."

She raised her delicately penciled eyebrows. "My *dear* Captain Hood!"

"Well, then, ethics or whatever you call it. I'm no match for you at talk, and I know it."

Her upper lip, one of the prettiest upper lips that was, so to speak, in the public eye for the moment, curled up in a delicious way, and a little dimple appeared in either cheek. She laughed again, but his homage flattered her.

"You are a ridiculous being," she said, "and you are interrupting my supper. Look, there's old Barbara Questingham. Nasty old woman, I hate her."

"She's of no consequence. Amy——"

"My name is Mrs. Dorset."

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She was enjoying herself with all the zest, not of a cat, perhaps, but certainly of a kitten; he was her latest capture, her little mouse, and her soft paw dealt him blows that hurt. Perhaps, one day, she would scratch him. Who could tell?

To him the situation showed itself in a different aspect. He was a wolf, a predatory, sharp-toothed wolf, and she was a delicious, juicy white lamb.

For the moment she was protected by the presence of the flock, but he meant the day to come when he should enjoy crunching her wee bones.

He drew his stolen sheep skin closer round him, and smiled, hiding his teeth.

"You are cruel," he sighed; "you *like* to hurt me!"

And so limited was the extent to which her brain was trained to observation and understanding, that this crude and moss-grown tribute pleased her.

Opening her big gray eyes very wide indeed, the painted lashes casting a shadow on her cheeks as she did so, she gazed at him reproachfully.

"If you are going to say things like that I shan't like you."

"Like me! But *do* you like me? Do you like me at all—ever so little?"

Seeing Lady Barbara's eyes fixed on her with malicious enjoyment, Mrs. Dorset laughed gayly.

"You waltz better than anyone I ever met—except

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a youth at the American Embassy, and he must have been the Nijinski of the Heavenly Ballet, dropped through a hole in the sky."

"That young man means mischief," observed Marchington. "What kind of a fellow is Dorset?"

"I told you I didn't know—except that he's dull. As to Archie Hood, of course he means mischief. It is what he was born for, and thus far he has justified his existence."

"But doesn't Dorset come with her to these balls and things?"

Lady Barbara gobbled a little yellow cake before she answered.

"Oh, yes, he comes to them, but he also goes away from them. He brought her tonight. I saw him."

"Who'll take her home?"

"No one, she'll go alone, in her impeccable Daimler. Oh, she's very prudent, my dear Major. She's a little baggage, but she's technically as impeccable as her motor car."

"Prudent?"

"Yes, and cold-blooded. If she had a brain I should call her a cerebral coquette, but she has no brain. Her little head is stuffed with powder-puffs."

At the other table things were becoming tense, for in spite of his having a definite line of campaign Archie Hood was in earnest. He was violently in love with

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the lamb he intended to devour. Also, he considered that he had been trifled with about long enough.

"But I have something to tell you," he said sharply, his dark, handsome face flushed, his slightly overred lower lip thrust out.

"Tell me now."

"I can't. You can quite well tell your man you are out, tomorrow afternoon——"

"Then he wouldn't let you in," she teased.

"I mean you can tell him after I've got there."

"I can. But—I won't!"

She rose. "Let's go upstairs. I want to dance."

Without a word he followed her, and they went back to the ballroom in silence. At the door she turned to speak, but to her surprise he bowed ceremoniously and left her.

It was a primitive move, but it is always a safe one, and in Amy Dorset's case it chanced to be peculiarly effective. It had never happened to her before!

For a moment she stood staring after the only man who had ever so treated her, her face paling under the artistically applied color, and seeming to solidify into a look of maturity unusual to it. Then, as a man approached, she threw back her head, smiled and said to him, "Willy, will you dance with me?"

Willy Addison-Gore, an elderly and very dull relative of her husband, was enchanted.

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"Will I? Try me. But why this favor?"

"I don't know—I'd always dance with you if you asked me——"

Willy Addison-Gore was dull, but he was no fool like so many dull people, notwithstanding the contrary judgment of the bored.

"Nonsense, Amy," he panted as he capered about under the impression that he was waltzing. "You know I stopped asking you because you always threw me over——"

At this juncture, Lady Barbara and her old squire entered the room, and the lady broke into an unusual feminine ejaculation.

"God bless my soul," she cried, "she's dancing with Willy Addison-Gore!"

"And why shouldn't she?"

"Look at him and you'll see why she shouldn't—and *doesn't!* I've never seen her dance with him before."

"He *is* pretty rotten," commented the Major with the delicacy of language that distinguished his as a nation.

Lady Barbara sat down and arranged on her bodice the priceless laces that might have been placed a little higher.

"She must," she declared with satisfaction, "have had a row with Archie Hood."

## IV

### LETTER NO. 1

*Wednesday*

MOST BEAUTIFUL:

Your letter has just come. God bless you for sending it. I have had a frightful night—I hope you may never have one like it. I was a brute and a swine, and I ask your pardon in spite of your angelic letter.

It is absurd that *you* should beg *my* pardon, no matter what you did to me, but as you ask it, O Lili-Lady, I give it to you on my knees. But one thing I cannot do—I cannot come to see you.

I need not apologize for not coming, for I know only too well that you asked me only out of the kindness of your gracious heart, and I will not tell you *why* I am not coming.

You would be angry if I did tell you. I shall go abroad in a few days for six weeks. My sister—the one who married the Austrian—wants me to look her up and inspect her new son, and it will be well for me to get out of England for a time.

If you don't understand why, well and good. If you do, try to pity me a little.

Perhaps you won't mind, just for once, my signing myself

Your devoted

ARCHIE HOOD.

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## LETTER NO. 2

*Wednesday*

DEAR BERYL:

Of course I shall be at home to tea today—if there's any chance of your blowing in.

I don't believe your lovely nose is peeling and that you're covered with river freckles, but even if you're telling the truth, I don't regret our outing. Hope Kitty Southey *didn't* see us, but if she did she won't dare tell, will she?

*Tout à toi,*

ARCHIE.

## LETTER NO. 3

ALYS, MY DEAREST:

Of course I haven't forgotten you. I have been driven to death by all sorts of tiresome people and things or I should have called you up days ago.

I dreamt about you last night, my splendid Juno, but I'll not tell you the dream.

Goose, how can you bother about anyone, since the other evening?

If you only knew how immaturity bores me! I always think a beautiful woman is at her best between thirty-five and forty.

As to the other lady you wrote about—who on earth told you such a lie?

I hardly know her—we dance together sometimes, but I've never even seen the woman alone. This, to console you, on my honor.

Besides—have *you* ever seen her? Pretty, of course, but no bigger than the statuette on your writing-table, and you know my taste!

Darling, I can't come this evening—have to dine with my



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aunt, and take her to a play. Tomorrow, too, I'm tied up. But on Monday, if you are free, we might go say to Richmond Park and then come back and dine? I am longing to see you. All my love, and don't be a jealous, silly darling.

ARCHIE.

### LETTER NO. 4

*Wednesday*

DEAR VERA,

Sorry, but I can't lunch or dine for at least a fortnight. Full up. Hope you are better. For heaven's sake try not to fuss. We might both be very grateful for the happy times we have had. I never reproach *you*, do I? Bless you, dear.

Yours,

A. M. H.

### LETTER NO. 5

*Wednesday*

KIDDIE DEAR,

Let's go on the river tomorrow. Meet me at Pad at eleven and arrange to dine as well. So you saw me the other day "with a fat middle-aged woman with dyed hair and big pearls"?

You did. Do you mind my being kind to old ladies, you wee loon?

You being only seventeen, I can tell you with safety of my theory that all women ought to be painlessly put to death at eight-and-twenty.

If only you knew how I loathe fat and rouge and—*le reste*. Well, my sweet, meet me at Pad at eleven tomorrow. Until then all my love.

ARCHIE-PARCHIE.

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## LETTER NO. 6

DEAR GERALD,

I roared over your letter. It *must* have been a scream. Women are funny things—up to jealousy point, at which they become more damnably boring than the worst male bore that ever lived.

As to me, Vera is pestering as usual. The girl has no sense at all, and I shall soon have to send her letters back unopened. I've treated her jolly well, too.

You remember my telling you about my mature charmer—husband in China, or something—fat, fair, and forty-odd—whom I met on the Marmora? I'm worried about her, she's getting so infernally sentimental. Heaven preserve me from overripe passion. She's got some letters I'd give something to have back, too. I'm a bit of a fool, you know, and she had a certain charm in spite of her age!

That's the worst of a P. & O., one always gets involved with someone, and this one was a Venus compared with the other women on board. There never *was* such a lot of pelicans on a single boat, since the world began. However,—I daresay it'll be all right, and Millipede is a treasure. I tell you that fellow's skill with women is nothing less than marvelous. I couldn't live without him, but he's wasted as a valet, he ought to be an ambassador.

I have a new flamelet since I saw you, by the bye. A lovely kid of seventeen. Hair just up, freckles. She's the rummest little mixture of ignorance and knowingness that one could meet. Perfectly all right, you understand—a lady. Amusing to hear her views and wonder how she'll turn out.

At present, she adores me and tells me so. She also believes in free love, the baby!

I shan't see too much of her, I might lose my head.

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This is a rotten letter, all about women.

Oh, there isn't a word of truth in what you were told about Mrs. D.

I admire her tremendously—don't you?—but she's not at all my type, and as to my being in love with her, dear old chap, you needn't worry!

I saw the pater last week and his frame of mind is most unsatisfactory. He has a rooted antipathy to debts, and can't understand my partiality for them.

Also, he objects to my being what he calls a roué. This old-fashioned word—reminds one of Crawford! Isn't he odd? I asked him what he'd do if I gambled like you, and he had the bad taste to say he'd prefer me to have any vice rather than that of indiscriminate immorality. Oh Lord!

Well, old man, good-bye for today. Write soon.

ARCHIE.

**M**R. ROLAND IMMENHAM, his umbrella protecting him from the driving rain, stood at Stanhope Gate at three o'clock.

He was a handsome, portly man with a nose rather like Lord Haldane's, and a somewhat Napoleonic eye.

He was well dressed in dark, perfectly cut clothes, and his doeskin gloves were of the exact degree of shabbiness that, paradoxically, was, for the moment, smart.

No man likes to stand in a chilly rainstorm with his feet in muddy patent-leather boots, and Mr. Immenham's distinguished features wore an expression less urbane than was their wont. He was of indoor habits and preferred comfort to nature in practice, though theoretically he was devoted to mountains.

And the rain beat down on him with what seemed to him a cruel persistency; buses roared past, poisoning the air and shaking the earth with their hideous personalities.

Immenham, who lived in Park Lane, bitterly resented the invasion of that moneyed thoroughfare by the

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plebeian vehicles. He hated the crowds of common people who stood in groups awaiting the snorting, bad-smelling, vociferous pests; he hated the ambulatory advertisements that debased the view from the windows of Number 875; he resented the ruin of the roadway that defied even the springs of the most luxurious private cars.

He was, in fact, an aristocrat to his marrow, and should have lived in the feudal days when the lower orders could be imprisoned or even hanged with so much less trouble than they can be fined five shillings now.

"Hello, Immenham!" A tall, thin man with a humorously wrinkled face had come through the gate. "This looks romantic—waiting for someone, eh?"

"Oh no," the elder man returned, sardonically, "I am standing here in this damned rain just for fun—it's a hobby!"

"Well—they say rain's good for the complexion. Is Mrs. Dorset at home, do you happen to know?"

"I left there half an hour ago, and she was in then. I can't tell you where she may be by this time. Why?"

"Hood asked me to leave a note for her, that's all."

"M-m. Aren't you going to see Miss Archbold?"

The other man laughed. "Not today, dear old chap, I say, I'm inclined to think Hood is rather keen about Mrs. D. What?"

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Immenham frowned slightly. "I don't much care about discussing women, you know," he said.

"Of course—of course. But—well, from something he said to me last night I fancied it might be serious this time."

"I dislike Captain Hood," returned Immenham curtly, shifting his umbrella as a gust of wind sent what seemed a small waterfall down the back of his neck.

The other man laughed. "He's not such a bad sort if you know him well. Bit of a petticoat-chaser, of course, but then the women do their full share of the chasing. Devilish good-looking chap he is, you know."

"Yes, he's not bad-looking. His father told Charles Corby the other day that he was breaking his heart."

"Oh, the old man's a prig—and close-fisted. Whereas Archie-Parchie, as Lord Clanroberts' fourth girl calls him, is at least generous. You've heard about that little actress, Vera Pomeroy? He gave her a thousand quid down when they parted—a fortune for a girl like that. Damned ungrateful little swine, too. Pesters the life out of him still."

Immenham looked at the speaker with something like contempt in his fine eyes. "You seem to be very intimate with Captain Hood," he observed coldly.

"I am. I believe he tells me more than he tells anyone else. I've been able to do him one or two good turns, you understand, and—well, he knows I don't talk."

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“Don't you?”

The younger man's grin faded, giving place to a look of resentment, but he answered with a shrug.

“No—I *don't* talk, Immenham.”

A short, rosy-faced young girl in a blue serge coat and skirt, was waiting to cross the road towards them, and Immenham raised his hat to her.

“That's my sister,” he said hastily. “She won't come to the house, as she dislikes Mrs. Jardine—good afternoon.”

The other man, however, stayed him with a gesture.

“One minute—out of justice to Hood. I know you dislike him——”

“Captain Hood's affairs are no concern of mine,” Immenham answered curtly, “but I should have thought he was gentleman enough not to give away the names of the poor fools of women who trusted him.”

“But he doesn't!”

“He does. He told you about Miss Pomeroy.”

The girl in the blue coat and skirt had, at a sign from the man she had come to meet, walked slowly off to the right, and the younger man went on in his curious defense.

“No, no, he *didn't*. She told me about it herself. I met her in the lift one day, and she raised an awful row trying to see him and told me all about it. I know he's a pretty bad lot, Immenham, but he isn't that

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

kind of a cad. He tells me a lot, but—never a name.”

“So much the better then. Good afternoon.”

The big man bowed civilly and hurried on to join the girl, whose arm he linked in his as they hurried to a taxi.

“My dear,” she said, “I am so sorry you have been waiting in the wet——”

“You should have come to *me*, Rose.”

“No—I do so dislike Mrs. Jardine, Rowley, and if it had been fine it would have been fun, wouldn't it, waiting there at the Gate and seeing the people?”



## VI

### LETTER NO. 1

*Thursday*

DEAR FATHER,

Thanks very much for the jam. Tell Maggie it is much better than anyone can buy, and that the Duchess of Brabant ate a lot of it at tea yesterday.

I wish I *could* come to you for a week, but I can't—too fearfully busy. Is it really eighteen months since you saw me? Doesn't seem possible! No news in particular. You'll have read in the papers about the Cham's visit. That was rather fun. He's very yellow, has odd table manners, and the only English woman he admired was the fat lady of a circus he met at a railway station and tried to buy!

No, I haven't seen Aunt Katie, but I will go soon. I am quite well, although so busy. Sorry you mind about my hair. Between you and me it was beginning to get *dull* and a tiny bit gray, and that I could not bear.

The stuff is vegetable and quite harmless, and—*most* becoming, though a little redder than I meant to have it. Mrs. Graves was a cat to tell you! However, when one thinks of Ethelyn one can forgive her mother anything.

Hope your rheumatism is better. I must send you some stuff Lord Penhollyn told me of. It has quite cured him.

Your affectionate daughter,

AMY.

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## LETTER NO. 2

DEAR LADY EVA,

Of course I am delighted to help you with your new home. I always think epileptics so frightfully tragic, poor dears! I believe it's a most interesting disease—Sir George Bigge-Fease was talking about it the other night, and says it is very psychic.

I wish I could send you fifty pounds, but the Bishop of Thanet wants me to help him with his clerical dipsomaniacs, some of whom seem to be very deserving, so, alas, it must be only twenty-five pounds for you this time.

Has your daughter's baby come home yet? I thought her looking lonely the other day, driving.

Kindest regards, dear Lady Eva.

Yours sincerely,

AMY DORSET.

## LETTER NO. 3

*Thursday*

DEAREST VI,

What a tiresome old thing you have become! Your letter would have bored me to death if it hadn't been *yours*. Of course I'm frivolous, dear—was I ever anything else? Besides I'm not a bit worse than all my intimate friends. What's more, I'm the only one of our little lot who ever reads a word, and you know how fond I am of serious literature. Have you read "Sex and Character"? Fascinating! There's a new book by Allbury, "The Souls of Vegetables," which I am enchanted with. Of course, he doesn't really think vegetables have souls, but he theorizes as if they had.

It is stiff reading, but most engrossing. However, when all's said and done, there's no one like dear old Plato!

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

I do wish I could get away and come to Dulborough for a while. It would rest me so wonderfully. But I can't—every moment is full up to the very end of the month. I sometimes wish I weren't so awfully busy, Vi dear.

You and Sam must be very happy in that lovely old vicarage, with your evenings to yourselves.

My love to you all, especially to Mademoiselle Ma Fil-leule.

I am sending her a little frock today. Very simple, just a few tucks and some tiny flowers embroidered on, but I think you'll like it.

Do make Sam publish his sermons. I often think of that one about St. John. It was beautiful.

Good-bye for today, dear Puritan.

AMY.

P. S. You wouldn't have minded the tableaux vivants at all if you'd seen them. The man in mine was only nineteen!

### LETTER NO. 4

*Thursday*

DEAR MR. BEAUMONT,

Your letter was a great surprise to me, and in answer to it I can only say that you wrong me. I hadn't the slightest idea that you really cared for me, or I should never have danced with you so much. As to the rose—I would give a rose to anyone who asked me. I am sorry this has happened, but I think you had better not come to see me any more for a while.

I am not angry, but it will be best.

Yours very sincerely,

AMY DORSET.

# BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

## LETTER NO. 5

*Thursday*

DEAR BILLY,

You are a wicked, abandoned child to go and gamble. You deserve to be spanked and put to bed! However, as you are only nineteen, and my second cousin, I'll forgive you this time. I inclose the eighty pounds and for goodness' sake *don't* tell your mother. She is an angel and it would break her heart. I can't scold you *really*, but O, my dear, please don't gamble.

Your affectionate cousin,

AMY.

I'm so glad you had the sense to write to me instead of anyone else.

## LETTER NO. 6

*Thursday*

DEAR CAPTAIN HOOD,

Thanks for your very nice note. I do hope you'll have fun in Austria. Please remember me to the Baroness.

Yours very sincerely,

AMY DORSET.

P. S. I have a cold and shall be in all the afternoon if you have time to come to say good-bye. Isn't this weather too beastly for words?

## VII

**H**O, ho! Madame Tanagra in an epistolary mood!"

Mrs. Dorset started. She had not heard the door open, nor the footsteps, over the thick carpet, of her friend.

"Oh, it's you, Lawrence. How d'you do?"

They kissed the air somewhere near each other's ears, for Lawrence Croxley was a woman, and then sat down.

"Could somebody bring me a pair of man-sized slippers?" Miss Croxley began. "It's absolutely pouring and my feet are wet up to the knees."

As she spoke she kicked off her immense patent-leather shoes and held her feet to the fire, which the Arctic quality of the July day had made not a luxury, but a necessity.

"You didn't walk, surely?"

"I pilgrimaged hither from the fastnesses of B'ys-water by the homely and loathly bus."

Mrs. Dorset rang. "Ask Briggs for a pair of Mr. Dorset's slippers, please, Immenham," she said.

The little blue drawing-room was very cozy that wet

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

day, and Mrs. Dorset was dressed for it. For a room whose carpet and walls are sapphire blue, whose curtains and cushions are emerald green, the best auxiliary color is a deep yellow cream, and of this delightful hue was composed the simple frock at which Lawrence Croxley was staring through her very convex-lensed lorgnon.

"That's a nice thing you have on, Amykin."

"Yes, isn't it?"

"Whose?"

"Arthur's"—pronounced in the French way.

"He's the Only One nowadays," approved the thin, brown woman in the old-fashioned coat and skirt. Mrs. Dorset nodded, as the butler reappeared, a pair of crimson leather slippers in his hand.

"Thanks, Immenham."

The slippers fitted beautifully, and with a sigh of the delicious creature comfort experienced only by luxury-loving folk who have traveled on a wet day by bus, Miss Croxley lit a cigarette.

She was a woman of forty-five with the most angular elbows in the world. Sporting boy cousins had been known to hang their caps on her shoulders, under the alleged impression that they were hat-rack pegs. Her brown face, as thin as a face can be, possessed a large, bony nose, and cavernous black eyes that could, on occasion, blaze with rage or dance with malice.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

She was the only child of a frivolous and ruined peer, and lived in cheap lodgings in Bayswater. Under her bed dwelt a large sole-leather trunk in which, under double lock, was a jewel case with V. C. Croxley of Cruxworth printed on it in faded gold letters. The jewel case, which had belonged to the late Baroness, was now empty but for one object—the Croxley necklace.

The Croxley necklace was a remarkably fine one, of large emeralds, and it was, as well as being Miss Croxley's only jewel, the source of a spirited and amusing feud between her father and herself. The old man could not sell it, for it must, at his death, go to his heir, but he had, in the old days, more than once pawned it, trusting to luck for its redemption.

It had always been redeemed by sentimental or infuriated relations, but on Lady Croxley's death, it was found to have disappeared. After a frantic search, his daughter, who had gone abroad after the funeral, wrote from Munich to tell him that she had stolen it and taken it with her.

“I shan't sell it or pawn it,” she added, “for, strangely enough, I am honest. But I shall keep it with me, and sometimes when I wish to be unusually lovely, I shall wear it.”

This simple program she had carried out to the full. Lord Croxley had done his best to get the necklace

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

back—he was one of those unpleasant men who bluster at their womenkind—but he had failed.

He failed because he dared not take the matter into a court of law, and because his daughter, whom he called “a damned ugly old maid,” was not in the least afraid of him.

Once they had even met while the jewel lay on her flat brown bosom, but he dared do nothing, as it was at a political party in a great crowd.

“You’re very fine this evening,” he sneered, his handsome, weak old face distorted by a smile that showed his too white, too even teeth.

“Yes, I’m at my handsomest, I’m told,” she retorted. “Emeralds are so becoming!”

Then she added as she moved away on the arm of a thoroughly ill-at-ease young man, “Don’t grind your teeth, Papa dear—you’ll break them.”

Miss Croxley was, as she had said, honest.

Twice she might have made money by lending the necklace to ladies who wished to scintillate at comparatively small expense, and in one case at least the transaction might have been kept a secret forever, for Mrs. Hamilton Fryer was an American in town for the season and offered to have the emeralds newly mounted for her own wear and then returned to their clumsy, old-fashioned setting before she returned them to Miss Croxley.



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

But Miss Croxley said no.

"They aren't mine," she declared, "and I can't let them go out of my hands. They are only *in* my hands because mine are one degree better than my father's, and here they stay until Joe Charlton gets them."

"You've written a lot of letters, Tannie dear," she began after a pause, using her diminutive of the nickname bestowed by a French diplomat on her friend.

"Yes. It's too wet to go out, and——"

"And someone is coming to see you at about six."

"Lawrence! How on earth!" Little Madame Tanagra's exquisite face flushed with amazement, but Lawrence Croxley only laughed.

"I know! I feel declarations in my bones, and despair and tea and promises of Real Friendship!"

"O Lawrence!"

Mrs. Dorset, like everybody else, depended somewhat as to personality on the person with whom she found herself.

Lawrence Croxley always reduced her to a former condition of rather helpless childishness. Not to her did she prattle of Plato.

"Oh yes, I know, my dear," repeated her friend, smiling at her as one smiles at a delightful child. "Who is it? Pasquier le Breton? Or that good-looking ass—What's-his-name—Hood?"

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"You are talking awful nonsense, but as a matter of fact Captain Hood is coming in later. He's going to Austria tomorrow and is coming to say good-bye to me. There, that's frank, at any rate!"

"You knew I wouldn't go till you told me."

"Cat! However, I must send the note. Here's his to me—read it if you like! It only came an hour ago."

Miss Croxley, suddenly very grave as she gazed at her friend through her glasses, the strength of whose lenses made her look like an ant, thrust out her hand.

"I'd rather see yours to him, if I may, Amy."

Mrs. Dorset gave a little laugh and took up the topmost of the pile of letters on the table.

"Right you are. I'll address another envelope."

Miss Croxley read the note, slowly, twice.

"Well?"

"Amy—I am very fond of you."

"My dear, I know you are, but—I don't quite see——"

There was a pause, and then Lawrence did an odd thing. She asked Amy to let her read *all* the letters she had written.

Mrs. Dorset reflected for a moment. "I don't see why you should," she said slowly, "but I know you aren't—you aren't just being curious. Well, I don't mind, dear. You may read them."

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

While Miss Croxley read the letters Mrs. Dorset stood at the window looking out into the rain.

At last she turned. Miss Croxley had laid the letters on the table, and their envelopes were in the fire, blazing high.

“Well, Lawrence, dear?”

“I was right,” said the elder woman.

“Right! But you must have thought I was—flirting or something——”

“No. At least, not more than usual. And I never minded you flirting, Amy.”

Something in her voice made Mrs. Dorset uneasy.

“Well, then——”

“I’ll go now, dear, and—thanks for trusting me.”

Amy waited while the damp, smoking shoes were squeezed on to her friend’s unhappy feet. Then she asked plaintively, “But what have I done, Lawrence? I’ve never seen you like this—what have I *done*?”

Lawrence Croxley kissed her cheek—a real kiss this time.

“You have,” she answered gravely but gently, “written five letters and never so much as mentioned your husband’s name in one of them.”

## VIII

**M**RS. DORSET, left alone, sat down in the chair in which her friend had sat and held her hands to the fire.

She loved her hands, and with reason. They were very beautifully shaped, with long, slim fingers, pink, smooth palms, and filbert nails. More than these things, counted for beauty their flexibility and instinctive grace of movement.

Withal, they were so small that a man could take both into the embrace of one of his.

But as she gazed at her hands the little lady's mind was far away—it was following poor dear Lawrence Croxley on her homeward way.

“Now she is getting into a bus, and it is full and people are stepping on her feet and their clothes are wet—smelly—and she has to squeeze in between horrid people closer than one could bear to sit between one's own friends! Poor old Lawrence.”

She always thought of Lawrence as being infinitely older than herself, though the difference was one of only ten years and a half. “Dear old Lawrence.”

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

The note had gone to Captain Hood, and Mrs. Dorset knew that he would soon arrive.

"I'm glad Lawrence doesn't think I'm flirting with him. If I *was*," she added softly to herself, "he wouldn't go to Austria."

Ladies who keep Plato's "Republic" and a volume of Pater on the table by their bed are inclined to think themselves literary whether they read the books or not, and of these ladies Mrs. Dorset, as has probably already been discovered by the jadedly sagacious readers, was one.

She glanced at the clock, and, settling herself comfortably in her chair, took up a book.

It was a large, heavy volume, about some obscure Indian religion, and its citations from ancient Hindu philosophers were frequent and lengthy.

Mrs. Dorset, bending over it, made a pretty picture, and the prettiness of the picture was increased rather than diminished, when her eyes closed softly and her head fell against the emerald green back of the chair.

The man who was announced, unheard, stood for a moment gazing at the sleeping beauty.

He was a small, alert-looking man with black hair and blue eyes and a dimple in his chin.

Briefly, he was the Vicomte Jules-Marie Pasquier le Breton, age thirty-four; occupation, the arduous duties of a third secretary to his Embassy; virtues, a love of

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poetry, good temper, and kindness to animals; hobbies, old colored prints and women; vices, *chemin-de-fer* and women.

He was a clever man in his way, and while he admired Mrs. Dorset and enjoyed his own admiration for her, her little literary pretensions at once amused and touched him. She was to him, in an odd way, pathetic.

His English was perfect, but Mrs. Dorset persisted in speaking French with him.

There was, in Paris, an invalid lady old enough to be his mother and to whom he gave the undivided love that existed so curiously in his heart, coincident with an ever-changing series of more or less unworthy affairs to which he referred, in his bi-weekly letters to her, by their correct name of *amourettes*.

To this lady, Madame Samain, he once explained Mrs. Dorset's French.

"It is," he said, "to make weep the angels. It is of an accent to wound the intelligence, though, because her voice is as the cooing of wood-pigeons, to the ear alone it is music.

"It is the French of the English young miss, supercharged with provincialisms culled from ladies' maids from different parts of our beautiful France; it is garnished with scraps of Parisian slang, of the jargon of the Quarter, and vivified by a few words of thieves' argot—words to make to rise the hair on a French

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

lady's head. In a word, it is not French, it is a touching and delightful and pathetically absurd little language all her own, and I wish, my dear friend, that you could hear it."

M. Pasquier le Breton stood there, then, in a rapturous silence, watching the unconscious possessor of this remarkable language.

When she awoke, there he was, a book in his hand, his eyes fixed on her in the most respectable adoration.

"Oh," she cried, of course, "I was asleep!"

He bowed. "The excellent Immenham announced me, but—you, dear Madame Dorset, you were asleep."

He kissed her hand, and she switched on the lights.

"I have brought you a book," he said; "I know you will like it——"

"I adore books," she answered, sincerely enough, for she believed in her fallacious declaration. "What is it?"

It appeared that it was verse.

"Verse but little known in England," he explained. "It is an anthology. There is of Henri de Régnier, of Guillard, of Jean Moréas and—others. If you will allow me——"

He loved reading out verse, as many Frenchmen do; moreover, he had come to read out verse. He did so.

Now here is a phenomenon difficult to explain. Mrs. Dorset was, as women go, very truthful. She had never,

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

for example, told her husband a lie in her life. Amongst her friends it was a matter for good-humored jesting that Amy couldn't fib if she wanted to.

Yet in the very important matter of literature the little lady's untruths were of an unblushing effrontery.

When she said she loved Plato and Walter Pater and the young Weinberg, she thought herself to be telling the truth, but when she said she enjoyed French poetry read to her by a Frenchman in French, she knew she was lying; the angels must have wept.

M. Pasquier le Breton, although he was amused by her French, had yet been deluded by its haphazard fluency; it was bad, he knew, but he believed it to be fairly comprehensive.

Therefore he read on and on, enjoying the beauties of the verse and the little exclamations of pleasure that interrupted him occasionally from his hearer.

"Ah, que c'est délicieux!" she would murmur, or "Ah, mon Dieu," or, most frequently of all, "Ah comme c'est joli!"

He read Raymond's "Le Faune," then his "Bruges," a lovely little poem holding the spirit of the old town in its four stanzas; he read Henri de Régnier's "Odelette"—which she preferred.

"If—it is just possible, madame," he broke off once to say, "that any of the poetic idioms or turns of phrase should have escaped you for the moment, you will give



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me the pleasure of refreshing your memory, will you not?"

"Oh, oui, monsieur. But I have spoken French all my life." She was not offended, but she seemed a little hurt, and he hastened to assure her that her French was wonderful. Which it was.

She had read some of Mallarmé's, and knew Verlaine's "Chanson d'Automne" and repeated it with her guest, peacocking with delight at her knowledge.

"Et je m'en vais  
Au vent mauvais  
Qui m'emporte  
De ça, de là  
Pareil à la  
Feuille morte."

"It's so true, isn't it?" she murmured softly.

"Pardon, madame?"

"I mean life. Life is so sad, so lonely."

It was one of the harmless little poses that he had observed in her, and he was shrewd enough to realize that, although poses, they were in an odd way sincere. Her life, he could see, was not lonely, and, to the best of his belief, it was not sad. Sad women do not dance four nights a week.

"You mean," he said politely, "life in general."

"Yes. Things never last—except the things we wish would pass quickly! And—the poor suffer so."

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He was silent for a moment, for there was real pity in her voice.

"You go among the poor, then," he said, respectfully. "I did not know."

Mrs. Dorset flushed. "I—n-no," she hesitated and then plunged boldly into the truth. "No. I *don't* go among them. They—they don't like me, somehow, and I never know what to say to babies. The poor have so many babies——"

She had told the truth, but the miniature valor of it was obscured for him by her plaint at the end.

"You do not love children?" he asked, his mind in the room at Passy, where a woman who had not walked for eight years devoted hours to teaching and caring for the poor little people of her parish.

Mrs. Dorset felt that something had happened to dull the brightness of his admiration for her.

"Oh, I love children," she declared, which was an untruth told in perfect good faith. "I have three god-daughters! Lady Leonard Vlairgowry's boy is my god-son, too."

"You have no children of your own?"

She shook her head with dignity. "No. I lost a little girl when I was first married. She only lived a few months."

Pasquier le Breton, after a pause, took up his book. "Shall I—go on?"

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“Oh, yes, please; I am enjoying it immensely.” And because of the child who was dead he turned the pages until he came to Rodenbach's “Béguinage Flamand.”

There is in it nothing about children, but it is a pure and lovely poem, full of the poetry so much faultless verse seems to lack.

It is beautiful to have windows in which flowers grow, compared to altars; it is wonderful—more wonderful to a French Catholic than to an English Protestant—to hear nuns described as looking into Heaven through the wounds of the Crucified; it is a lovely thought that the prayers of His people are the only thing to console God in His melancholy over the sins of the world.

These things, and others, Georges Rodenbach says in his poem, and the quiet of the nuns, their gentle happiness, comes to the reader like late afternoon sunshine, as he reads.

Pasquier le Breton was moved by his own voice as it expressed the poet's feelings. Like many worldly and even cynical Frenchmen, there lay at the bottom of his heart a certain childish faith and reverence that nothing could ever change. It is, this faith, like a fine garment that is taken out of a locked chest only on great and sacred occasions. As a boy he had worn this garment at his first communion; as a man at his mother's death-bed; on the occasion of his first realizing his love for

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Anastasié-Claire Samain; on the day when she told him that she loved him.

He had worn it on the day he saw her after the accident that crippled her for life, when he knew what her refusal to give her body to him had done for him, in making him understand the supernal value of her gift to him of her whole heart. He had worn it, the garment of simple faith, on these occasions.

And because he had kept it, often unused but always unblemished, the man had never lost his love of beautiful, noble things. Noble verse raised him for the moment to a height in which the peace of goodness seemed the best thing in the world. His bold eyes softened, his voice trembled.

And then he had a shock; Mrs. Dorset yawned. Delicately, prettily, her little tongue curled like a puppy's and as pink as a roseleaf, her teeth gleaming—but unmistakably, she yawned.

As he walked home through opal evening sunlight that gleamed beautifully on the rain-soaked town, M. Pasquier le Breton decided that he must, after all, not go to his club to dine.

He would stay in his rooms and the faithful bigarreau would make him an *omelette baveuse* and he would drink a bottle of good red wine, and then when the sun had set over the trees in the square, he would write a long, a very long letter to Anastasié-Claire.

## IX

CAPTAIN Hood came half an hour late, but the interview was unsatisfactory both to Mrs. Dorset and to him. He had made his plan and he carried it out, as was his way, but he was an honestly emotional man and he suffered under his self-imposed restrictions.

She, on her side, was frightened. She had known him for a twelvemonth, but during several of those months she had been at St. Moritz, where he was not, and at another time he had been in France, where he belonged to a famous polo club. So they were still full of mystery, each to the other.

And she, as she sat in the oddly upright position so characteristic of her, chatting airily of nothing, and bent—such was her instinctive realization of what was wisdom—on outdoing his indifference of manner by her own, was conscious of an odd thing. The room, with its big wood fire, was warm, but her hands were as cold as ice.

She had always enjoyed the nebulous sensation of danger she had from the first experienced with him, and

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

hitherto she had been able to tease him and thus to keep the scale fairly level.

But this was the first time, partly by chance and partly by alternate maneuvering on both their parts, that they had ever been really alone, and she was frightened.

It alarmed her that her hands should be cold.

However, nothing happened, and after an uncomfortable half hour he left without anything vital having been said.

"You will remember me to the Baroness?" she said, as they shook hands.

He smiled. "With pleasure. And you will no doubt have left town when I get back, so I'll say good-bye until October or November." Eight weeks dismissed as lightly as eight hours might have been.

Hood was a very handsome man with, on his charming face, not a sign of the life he led. His skin, though sunburnt, was clear, and his dark eyes, of so deep a brown as to appear black, held a look of the most extreme sweetness and gentleness.

It was a most trustworthy face, and the signs of weakness about the mouth were faint enough to be not only inoffensive but rather charming.

His greatest danger to women lay in the indefensible but absolute sincerity of his emotional moods. He not only seemed to, but could and did, love Clarissa on a

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Monday, Amaryllis on the Tuesday, and Chloe on the Wednesday. He was not an insincere man, though he was radically and hopelessly untruthful, and his errant heart was as soft as a child's. On this occasion he was more in love than he knew, and his overexpressive face was wan and ravaged, as he said good-bye—and nothing but good-bye.

And when he had gone, Amy Dorset knelt by the fire and tried, before going to dress, to warm her icy hands.

## X

**C**LOUDESLEY DORSET was, as Lady Barbara Questingham had told old Major Marchington, a dull man. The word dull, applied to a metal, by no means signifies that anything is wrong with the metal; it does not even mean that the metal is severely scratched, to say nothing of its being inferior in any way.

Dull means, of course, simply the contrary to bright. But applied to a human being the adjective seems to lose its simplicity, and assumes a charge of intrinsic inferiority. To call a man dull is to stamp him as stupid, which is unfair.

Dorset was not stupid, and he was dull. He was a big, heavily built man with large hands and feet and a stoop.

His thick black hair, just beginning, at his forty-fifth year, to be sprinkled with gray, he wore rather long, but plastered flat to his well-shaped head.

His small dark-blue eyes were short-sighted, so he wore a monocle. He had a close-cropped dark mustache, and his rather thin cheeks were seamed with



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deep, almost perpendicular lines that might have been dimples in his youth, and which even now softened his expression pleasantly when he smiled, which he did not very often.

His position in his own house is difficult to define. He was by no means henpecked; he was not exactly unobtrusive, he was not shy; to his few friends he was not even particularly reserved.

His terms with his wife were perfectly friendly, his appearances at her parties perfectly conventional. But to Lawrence Croxley, who happened to be one of his friends, he seemed to regard Amy as he regarded a very fine portrait of her painted some years before by Sargent; he admired and valued her, but did not ever seek in her the companion he would have failed to find had he sought.

The house in Park Lane was her home, and it was his home, but Lawrence could not regard it as *their* home.

One evening, a few days after the occasion on which she had read Amy's letters, Miss Croxley dined alone with Dorset.

Amy is dining with some people I don't like [his note had told her], and as they don't like me either I have "gone to the country." Will you dine with me, my dear?

They dined very comfortably in the big, oak-paneled room looking over the little garden, now full of flowers.

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Dorset was devoted to flowers and spent a good deal of money on this small inclosure, and Miss Croxley, before they sat down to dinner, was taken down the flight of outside steps from the drawing-room to inspect the roses.

It was a clear evening, the trees in the park showing to their full advantage against a pale gold sky.

"It is somehow a luxurious and delightful thing," Lawrence said, tucking into her belt a large white rose he had given her, "to stand here in a rose-garden and hear the buses and taxis roaring by just this other side of that wall."

"Is it, Lawrence?" He eyed her kindly.

"Yes. This little garden seems far more *the rich man's* than does the biggest I have ever seen—in the country!"

Dorset nodded. "I know what you mean. Yet it is one of the duties of social ostentation to possess a large garden in the country."

"How, by the way, is Maiden Aqualate?"

"Very well, but I miss it. I wish I could be more there, Lawrence."

"So do I, Clow. It is a lovely place. How are the flowers?"

"MacPhail has got two more first prizes; one for fuchsias. Lawrence, upon my word, I believe they are the best fuchsias ever grown so far north——"

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Still talking of flowers they mounted the ugly, convenient iron staircase, and, standing at its top, watched for a while the picture spread before them.

The walls of the garden were of white stone, yellowed and begrimed into a beautiful tone that Pasquier le Breton called "couleur de Londres."

A beautiful creeper spread over the wall delicate green tentacles starred with magenta flowers.

The little inclosure was divided into four square rosebeds by a broad cross of old flagstones, between which certain humble flowers were "encouraged" by Dorset. And the roses were all a-blow, so lovely in their luxuriance that one never thought of their expensiveness and wondered only at their beauty.

In the middle of the garden was a sun dial, and at the foot of the wall separating the roses from the buses, a little fountain plashed.

Lawrence Croxley's hollow dark eyes gazed intently from behind her lorgnon, first at the garden, then over the wall into Park Lane. Buses rumbled by, rocking in their odd, clumsy dignity; taxis crept under their bows like sampans among battleships, and splendid private cars, as big as many a room in which a whole family lives, pursued their aristocratic ways laden with ladies in evening kit and their attendant, unornamental men-kind.

Beyond them people walked slowly for the most part,

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for the most part enjoying the exquisite ending to the exquisite day.

"I wonder," Miss Croxley said thoughtfully after a long pause, "that the poor aren't more bitter against the rich."

He did not answer, and she insisted, "Don't you?"

"N-no." It was part of the man's dullness that he was slow in speaking.

She, who was quick in word as in thought, shrugged her bony shoulders impatiently.

"Clow—*why* don't you wonder?"

"Because—a glass can only hold a certain amount of liquid——" He broke off, frowning at his own inarticulateness.

"Well, go on," she urged.

"And whether it's full of wine or of water, it can only be just full to its brim——"

She sighed. "Oh, I see. And the rich man's the wine-glass, and the poor man's—a nasty tin mug—is that it? Your argument's bad. Wine and water are very different things."

"Different in quality. I mean that—in his tin-mug life, the poor man gets all that the rich one does."

She glanced at him and laid her hand on his arm. "Go on, Clow," she said gently.

"Oh, I was only being banal. It's not worth explaining."

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"Please."

"Well then, dear, love and hate, and birth and death—the poor man has 'em, and—we have no more."

His plain, deeply lined face was flushed, and he ended his little speech with a harsh laugh.

"Romantic this evening, am I not?" he added, going on quickly. "Immenham will apply for the Chilterns if we don't go and dine."

Immenham, who was only not like a bishop, as the saying goes, because he was like nothing but the perfect butler he was, admired Miss Croxley, and in a silent, respectful manner he had long since made this fact known to her.

Naturally she regarded his liking as appreciation, and as naturally she returned it.

The dinner was perfect, and, without a word having been spoken on the subject, the table was much more simply arranged than it would have been had Mrs. Dorset dined at home.

The little lady liked table decorations, and possessed four little golden dishes that she liked to have arranged before her laden with deviled almonds, chocolates, scraps of crystallized ginger, and peppermint fondants.

Now, these little golden dishes Cloudesley Dorset detested. They were not on the table tonight. Nothing was on the table except things strictly necessary to the

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servings of a civilized meal, and even these things were of the simplest kind.

A bunch of pink and white roses stood in a glass bowl in the middle of the plain cloth, and there were no shades on the wax candles.

While the two friends were eating their fish the door opened and Mrs. Dorset, wrapped in a filmy white and silver cloak, came in.

"Oh, you poor dears," she cried. "What a horrid table. It is too bad of Immenham."

"You forget that I like the table plain, Amy," Dorset said, unsmilingly.

"And so do I, dear," put in Miss Croxley. "Is that a new frock, you extravagant quean?"

"No—Oh, no; I've worn it twice before——"

At Lawrence's shout of laughter, the little lady stared in unfeigned surprise. "What's the joke? Well, I must be off—and tell my fib about Clow's being in the country—good-bye."

Cloudesley Dorset followed his beautiful wife down the iron steps to the green garden door and stood there until the great dark-blue motor car had borne her away.

A walnut shell would, he thought, have done nearly as well. He wondered why she, probably the tiniest woman in London, should have chosen what was certainly one of the largest cars.

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As he shot the bolt in the door, he paused for a moment, looking up at the open window of the dining-room; through the curtains he could just see Lawrence Croxley's profile.

When she had reached her lodgings, at about eleven o'clock, Miss Croxley sat down by her open window to think.

Like many people who live much alone, she had the habit of talking to herself; and to this habit she added a more peculiarly personal one: that of expressing her thoughts in dialog form.

After a few minutes concentrated silence she began:

*Clow*: "Yes, she is prettier than ever."

*Lawrence*: "You think she's perfectly happy, Clow?"

*Clow*: "She seems quite contented."

*Lawrence*: "I said *happy*."

*Clow*: "I shouldn't suppose her to be perfectly happy. Why should she be? No one else is."

*Lawrence* (maudlin as usual about Amy): "I always feel that she *ought* to be. She's so little!"

*Clow* (densely): "I don't see what her size has to do with it."

"There! that's the first of it. Then we talked about the inevitable Lloyd-George—I wonder why the London Press has conferred the Order of the Hyphen on him? And about Ascot, and about that book, what was its

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name—"The Bower of Delight"—and then I began again. Let me see—Oh, yes."

*Lawrence*: "Clow, why don't you take her away for a bit—to Maiden Aqualate?"

*Clow* (idiotically—he is a thick-skull sometimes!); "Take whom away?"

*Lawrence*: "Amy."

*Clow*: "Why on earth should I take her to Maiden Aqualate when she is bored to tears, away from London which she loves?"

"And then," the lonely lady at the window went on, dropping the dialog form of thought, "then I put it to him bluntly. Did he not think, I said, that Tannie was getting to be too fond of London? I said London, and I meant London. He *can't* have thought I meant anyone in particular! And yet he said—what were the exact words? 'Oh, yes,' he said, 'you mean Hood?'"

For a few minutes she was silent, her thoughts mingling with the sounds of the voices of the passers-by in the street below.

It was a dark night, and the lights in the open windows opposite were the only stars.

"'You mean Hood.' I wonder if it would have been better if I had pretended to be surprised? At all events, I didn't. I—Oh, dear me, I just said, 'Clow!' Dear old Clow, I was so surprised at him. To think that he has seen it all the time, and never said a word. Of course,



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if he doesn't *care*—but he *must* care, in a way, even though he doesn't love her. Suppose she were to—but she never would. After all, Tannie is a cold little thing. I love her, but she is rather inhuman. And I suppose that is what makes Clow so calm about it. Poor dears, both of them.”

After a pause, Miss Croxley rose, drew down her blind, and began to prepare for bed.

“I do wish,” was her last remark to herself as she switched off the light, “I do wish Tannie hadn't married poor old Clow. He *isn't* the man she could possibly love, and young Ridgway had great charm”—then, remembering that the young Ridgway of Amy Dorset's youth was now in his middle age as penniless as he had been then, she was seized with laughter so audible as seriously to annoy an old lady who, together with a pug-dog, dwelt in the next room.

## XI

CAPTAIN HOOD did not go to Austria, and, as things turned out, his sister's son was a year old when he had the honor of making the acquaintance of his attractive uncle.

Hood was now quite sure why he did not go; he had fully intended to do so, not, as he told Mrs. Dorset, because he felt it necessary to flee from the danger of her charms, but because he knew, with the wonderful and dreadful cunning of men of his type, that flight would be to her the greatest lure.

It was not anything she said at the unsatisfactory interview in the library in Park Lane; she had said, he remembered, remarkably little.

It was more an atmosphere that hung about her, an atmosphere less assured, more wavering than her usual one. She seemed, somehow, less able to defend herself, more influenced by him.

Moreover, she had not chaffed him, and he knew that this meant much. So he stayed on in town.

A few days after their talk they met in the Park as she was taking her afternoon drive.

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He bowed gayly, but did not attempt to speak to her, in spite of the inviting accident of her motor being for the moment held up by the traffic.

She felt the blood rush to her face; she had believed him to be in Austria by that time; indeed she had mentally followed him on his supposed way, Dover—Calais—Paris, a day there (no doubt passed in brilliantly fascinating, though reprehensible, society!), and then the long night in the Vienna Express. Vienna she did not know, so it was to her a dream-city full of handsome, full-busted women, corseted gray-blue officers, good food, and excellent man milliners. Here, no doubt, she had thought, he would stay for a day or two, and then—a rough journey to his sister's castle in the mountains. The castle, in her imagination, was an ancient and buttressed affair with broad ramparts and winding staircases. In reality it was a violently ornate modern house full of luxury, but justified in calling itself a castle only by its vast size.

A few minutes before meeting Hood, Mrs. Dorset had been dreaming about this aristocratic fastness, peopling it with large, beautiful ladies, not one of whom would make even the faintest effort to withstand the charms of the young Englishman. And—there he was walking with Toby Elliott and obviously in the best of health and spirits.

There was a big ball that night and the beautiful

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Mrs. Dorset was, of course, there. She was looking her loveliest, but she complained of a headache and left early after wasting, as some of the dancing men thought, an hour of valuable time in talking to a stupid old man with a long mustache.

The poison of the dancing men was very much old Major Marchington's meat.

He was greatly pleased when the little lady asked him to take her to a cool place for a rest.

"One gets sick of dancing sometimes," she plained in her soft voice, making with her long lashes the play that had become second nature to them.

"You dance so exquisitely," he returned, pointing his compliment with a bow, "I should have thought you would never tire of it. Fishes never seem to weary of swimming."

She smiled at him.

"What a charming thing to say!"

"It is a true thing; I have spent many a happy moment in the last fortnight, watching you dance. Particularly," he added, "with Captain—what's-his-name—Wood? No, no, Hood."

She was looking away from him, but he saw her little ear turn scarlet, and there was a pause which he broke.

"He's not here tonight, I think?"

"No, I believe he isn't. At least," and her futile air of indifference gave the old man, in spite of his not alto-

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gether unmalicious curiosity, a pang of pity, "at least I haven't seen him!"

They were sitting on a little balcony, and there was between them and the open ballroom door a tall screen of trellis-work over which were trained Dorothy Perkins roses. The old man and the woman, whom for some reason he could not help regarding almost as a child, were practically alone.

She was tired because she was sad, and for a moment she allowed herself to be silent as she looked out over the trees in the square at the crescent moon.

Marchington, in his turn, watched her. He liked and admired her, but, after all, he thought, he was taking Lady Barbara to supper and he could score off his old friend splendidly if he could get Mrs. Dorset to discuss Hood.

"I'm a selfish old fellow," he began presently, "but I wish Captain Hood would come."

"Why?"

In a moment she had assumed the odd little air of languor that he had perceived to be her idea of a correct society manner and which, as a matter of fact, she had half-unconsciously modeled on that of a six-foot duchess.

"Why? Because it gives me very keen pleasure to see you dance with him."

"Thanks for the compliment! But you ought to see

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him waltz with Miss Clark, the red-haired American girl. She is wonderful, and besides," she added, gravely indifferent and impartial, "she is nearer his height. I am *really* too small to dance with such tall men!"

"Nonsense. By the way, tell me about him, will you? He interests me."

So she told him all she knew, lulled into suspicionlessness by his old-gentlemanly and frank demeanor.

"Oh, there's not much to tell. He's one of the Bagworthy Hoods, you know, and his mother was a daughter of Lord Esdaile's. He's a guardsman, of course—a charming man in his way, but not at all clever. *You* know what guardsmen are."

"Of course!"

"He never reads, I mean, and doesn't care for good music—he says quite frankly," she added, laughing, "that musical comedy is *his* line!"

"I see. He's a dashed good-looking fellow—I suppose he's a great pet with the ladies, eh? That sort of thing?"

Amy Dorset shrugged her shoulders. "Of course, that goes without saying, doesn't it?"

"It does. But on the whole," he persisted, "he's a good fellow, and you like him."

"Oh, yes, I like him immensely." Her air of detached friendship whetted the old man's appetite for more information, but a glance at her bravely held little head

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stayed him. She looked not only unhappy, he saw, but in a way indefinably pitiful, puzzled.

For a minute they were both silent, and then, as a taxi rushed up to the house and stopped with a noise such as one might imagine to resemble that made by the gates of Hell, the beautiful woman rose suddenly and, forgetting her companion, leaned well over the parapet and looked down.

"It's Pasquier le Breton," she said, her lips drawn straight over her teeth. "*Such* a delightful man. I—I think I must go back to the ballroom now, Major—Major Markham."

## XII

July 20

MON ADORÉE,

I seek from your great wise heart, a counsel. A woman, I hear you say gently but with the sadness I also so well remember. Know, however, that in this matter I am blameless. I am more than blameless. She is one of the loveliest creatures the mind of the good God has ever been able to conceive, and—I am scatheless. Adamant I have stood before her, pure as ice in my heart. Sexless as an hour-old she-infant I have kissed her hands. Listen, she is, as I have said, most beautiful. She is about eight-and-twenty, she looks twenty at night, and twenty-four by sunlight. She is married and of excellent position.

The husband is a silent, slow-witted being, quite unworthy of being the husband of such a woman; a slow, uninteresting man whom one sees but rarely, and never regrets. They live in a large house in Park Lane, the street of millionaires, to which enviable class they belong. There are no children, though they lost one years ago. *Enfin*, she is the lady of whom I have told you, who speaks the amazing French!

As to morals, I hear on all sides, *une béguine*. And this, you must note, in the odd English way which is perfectly consistent with a series of what they call here “desperate flirtations.” Since you and our good Henri were here, London has changed. With the demise of the excellent Queen Victoria there was a regrettable change of morals in society. King Edward, genial man, was not so strict as his



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lamented parent, and he of course was the bell-wether of that delightful flock, London society.

King George and his virtuous queen have, as you know, once more changed the tone of the court, and society is in process of reverting to the manners, even if not altogether, dear friend, to the customs of the reign of the Great White Queen, as I am informed she was known to certain of her dark-skinned subjects.

One is virtuous—ah, but virtuous—these days, and many ladies, once gay as well as great, are creeping back into royal favor by the stony ways of devotion to charity. You will understand.

The lady of whom I write, then, is well regarded. She leads the most blameless, if the most vapid, of lives. Many men have loved her, but she has loved no one. She is an adept in the more Gallic than British art of when to stop.

I, hitherto, have regarded her less as a woman than as a kind of Mayfair *Undine*, and unlike the lady described by G. Shakespeare, she has, in spite of a long list of obvious adorers, escaped calumny.

And now—I am frightened for her.

You, dear friend, in your cloistral life, are the only person of whom I can ask advice in this most worldly crisis.

The man about whom you are wondering, is an eater of hearts of the most pronounced type. His victims are legion and well known to everybody, though to do him justice that is less his fault than theirs.

The Englishwoman in love has infinitely less reason and discretion than the Frenchwoman in that happy condition. There have been scandals innumerable about one young man, and on two occasions he has with much dignity sustained the difficult rôle of corespondent, and these difficulties are

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doubled, you will gather, when the gentleman has no intention of marrying the lady.

Therefore, as Captain H. has twice been able to carry off this painful situation with success, we must concede to him a certain cleverness. The crux is this:

So far as I have been able to inform myself, he has never up to this time really loved. He has always been in love—indeed, he is credited with the unusual power of being in love with several women at the same time—but never before has he loved. And it is, of course, Madame Tanagra whom he now adores.

That he adores her is obvious. We are now the twentieth July and up to the fourteenth there was only a little chatter, and that exclusively about him. Since the fourteenth this has changed, tongues are beginning to wag about her as well. It was a yachting trip that did it.

A friend of Mrs. D.'s and of mine sprained her ankle, and decided to escape from the great heat by taking a run to Scotland on her yacht.

Captain H. being her brother, naturally went when he was asked, and my poor, silly little Tanagra went as well. I was there because I am suspected of being the slave of the lady of the sprained ankle. She is a kind soul, and a good musician, but she is of the school of old young women of whom we are happily spared many at home. Sixty, a massaged and painted face, a saffron wig, and obviously wonderful stays. She has no designs on me, and when we are alone we discuss music and poetry, and other things that matter, but in public I am what the lower classes—isn't it a horrid way to describe "the people"?—call "her best boy."

This to explain my miserable presence on the *Seagull* for five days.

We were in all ten souls, including the daughter of my charmer, and the daughter's baby—and much was the mirth

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over Vi's being a grandmother. Simulated mirth, designed to flatter, for what could be more natural?

However, your charitable liking for my diffuseness is leading me astray and I lose myself.

The facts, bald and plain, are these: Captain H., who is, so far as women are concerned, a bad man, is violently in love with Madame D., and she, who is, though uneducated and in many ways a stupid little being, as innocent as a child, is violently in love with him. The husband, whom no one seems to know except a horrible girl (they are girls up to eighty, if unmarried) named Croxley, who grinds her teeth with rage when she beholds my unoffensive little person, goes nowhere with his wife. He makes no attempt to protect her from the attacks to which her remarkable beauty lay her open; she has no father, no mother, no child.

And the odd thing is that I, I, the wicked Frenchman, am the only one who seems to see in the affair anything more than occasion for a tolerant laugh or a malicious sneer.

You will see the tragedy, my beloved saint.

My poor little *Undine* has awakened, and I fear she is finding her little stunted soul only to lose it. The man, as I analyze him, is, while in every way charming, and in many ways a good fellow—for all men seem to like him—is not the man to carry on successfully a great love affair. He has done what you once told me—unjustifiably, as you will admit events to have proved!—that I had done. He has wasted his substance, the substance of his heart, thrown away in useless shreds and tatters so much of the fabric that there now remains nothing out of which to make the great warm cloak of a real love. He will love her for awhile and then—he will love someone else. And she?

She, who has never suffered even little things, must then suffer the worst agony of all—the great disillusion.

She is piteous; she has changed from the rather artificial

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woman of the world, full of potty, silly little poses, and airs, to what she should have been years ago, had she loved then. She has become timorous, hesitating, bold, sad and gay. It is a belated girlhood that has come to her, a too late young love.

It makes tears come to my eyes to contemplate her.

Tonight she and he—in company with several others, of course—do me the honor of dining with me at the Ritz.

And—it is now time for me to dress—I felt I could face them better if I had told you about it. Dearest of friends, best and wisest of women, advise me. Here, in England, no one interferes. Nothing is anyone else's business. Even now, in the reign of King George and Queen Mary, a dreadful, inhuman tolerance holds sway over people. And tolerance can be the cruelest thing in the world.

I, the reprobate Frenchman, I wish to *help!*

Write and tell me, out of your white wisdom, what to do.

I do not mind "interfering." I have no horror of being snubbed. I see danger to an unarmed soul, and I must warn that soul.

Tell me how!

Thy

JULES.

### XIII

**A**T ten o'clock in the morning of July twenty-fourth Cloudesley Dorset went up to his wife's door, and, after a second's hesitation, knocked.

She was not in bed—not for her the delicious but presumably unhygienic trick of lying late in that pleasant place. The room, the bed-clothes thrown back, the windows wide open, was empty.

“May I come in, Amy?”

The big man stood at the dressing-room door, which was ajar, and spoke without looking in.

“Y-yes—Oh, yes, come in.”

Her surprise was as audible in her voice as it was visible in her eyes. “Is anything wrong?”

He neither smiled at nor resented the question. Her astonishment at his appearance in her rooms at that hour did not strike him as in any way remarkable.

“No,” he answered with his usual gravity, “I want to talk something over with you, if you don't mind.”

“Of course I don't mind. And *you* won't mind if I go on dressing.” She had had her bath long ago, he knew, and her hair was dressed.

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As he sat down she slipped off her yellow dressing-gown, which lay like a pool of sunshine on the marble floor, and showed herself in a short petticoat, and black stockings and shoes.

Taking from a glass table a little crystal box filled with a thick black liquid and a tiny brush, she went to the cheval glass and proceeded skillfully to make up her eyes.

"Wait a minute," he said, and she turned.

"Why?"

He laughed awkwardly. "Nothing. Go on. I—I hadn't seen you with light lashes for a long time, that's all——"

"Ah, yes! I always feel the Bon Dieu might have done the blacking and saved me the trouble, however——"

For a moment she worked deftly, dipping the brush into the black stuff, and brushing the long, curved lashes with a skillful hand. Then, as he did not speak, she pivoted on her absurdly high heels.

"Eh bien—what did you want to say?" she asked, kindly enough.

"I saw Lawrence yesterday, and—she thinks you don't look well."

Her stare, while droll, one eye being furnished with heavy black fringes, the other with pale gold ones, was unaffected. "Not well! I——"

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Turning to the glass, she peered anxiously at her still unpainted face.

"It's true—I look yellow," she declared in dejection.

"Yellow!"

Dorset pulled at his mustache, his face unrelieved by either sympathy or amusement.

"She didn't mean you didn't look pretty," he explained. "She meant you looked ill."

"Oh, is that all! You did give me a fright, Cloudesley."

Her relief was touching and comic at the same time, but still his heavy face, a face which was going, as he grew older, to be with its deep lines and loose throat something of the bloodhound type, did not change.

"She says you ought to go to the country, Amy."

Amy laughed gayly, and worked at her other eye. When it was finished to her liking, she sat down at the dressing-table and rubbed some white cream into her face.

"The country," she repeated in deep scorn; "as if the country ever agreed with me! Lawrence is a goose."

"But you don't look well," he persisted, mildly, kind if not particularly interested, "and it's very hot. Why not run down to Maiden Aqualate for a week? Lawrence would come too, if you asked her, I'm sure she would."

His wife dabbed some faintly pink cotton wool over

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her cheeks, and then dried it on a little lace-edged handkerchief. "No doubt she would. She likes the country and cows and crops and mud and dust and gardens and dogs and—and trees, and dew, and——"

"Maiden Aqualate isn't exactly a cottage," he said, with his impersonal gentleness. "You can't complain of discomfort there."

"Of course it isn't a cottage, Clow. It's a very beautiful place, only—I happen to dislike it. You know I do."

"I do know, and I'm sorry. But—as you really are overtired—you've got too much color on your right cheek—can't you regard it as a hospital, and go down for a short cure?" Before she could answer, he had gone on. "At any rate it would cure that—that yellowness you mentioned."

Tragically she turned to him, her eyebrows knotted with misery. "O Clow, am I *really* yellow? Is it very bad? When did you first notice it?"

He rose. "I never noticed it at all, Amy—don't get excited. It was *you* who spoke of it. Only—would you care to come down just with me—and Clémentine, of course—for a little rest? I—I could read aloud to you——"

She gave a little high laugh. "Oh, you funny old thing; fancy your reading aloud to me. I hate being read to—although it's very kind of you to suggest it—Clémentine!"



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

The beetle-browed maid came at her call and stood by the door. "Le chapeau de Madame?"

"Oui, sivoov play," answered her mistress, adding rapidly, in her extraordinary accent, that she would have the new riboux with the paradise. While still in her short petticoat and little embroidered linen cache-corset, his wife adjusted the hat, and helped her maid arrange a veil to her liking, Cloudesley Dorset stood in silence.

Then, as the maid arranged a white skirt on the floor and her mistress stepped delicately into it, he withdrew.

"I shouldn't have bored you much," he said, quite without pathos or humor, "I thought it might do you good to be alone."

She smiled at him as she slipped on a white blouse. "It was kind of you to think of it," she answered, cheerfully, "but it would kill me to be in the country just now."

When he had gone and she was ready, she bade her maid good-bye, went into her bedroom, closed the door, and taking from a locked drawer a little packet of letters, put it into her velvet bag.

"There!" she said, running out her tongue at the dressing-room door, "so much for you, my excellent Clémentine!"

## XIV

**A**MY DORSET had bad nights that week; when she had slept she had dreadful dreams, and when she waked, it was to horrors both of memory and anticipation.

It was now ten days since she had faced the fact that she loved Archie Hood, and the knowledge had, of course, lost part of its terror in becoming an integral part of herself.

“I am a part of all that I have seen” may be changed, for application to women, to “I am a part of all that I have felt,” and hitherto the little Tanagra lady had felt so little as to *be* in a sense almost nothing.

Pasquier le Breton’s analysis of her was remarkably correct except that he, being a man and in no way dependent on her for his happiness or even his comfort, had not been impressed by the utter selfishness of her life.

To him, as to most men, a pretty woman is her own excuse for being. In that she was lovely she fulfilled her destiny so far as he was concerned. His appeal to Madame Samain for advice how to help his little

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*Undine*, was the result of his sudden realization that his little *Undine* was, after all, a human soul with a personal destiny to fulfill to herself.

And this was the problem that was troubling her in her mental penumbra.

Side by side with her chilly virtue had always walked two attendant spirits: a thoroughly up-to-date theoretical knowledge of evil, and a pleasantly sneering broad-mindedness towards it. It had always pleased her, as it always does please fundamentally simple-minded women, to be considered worldly-wise and cynical.

And now in her need she had no one to help her, no one to whom she could go for advice—not even some dead and gone great man, for the knowledge of books had been but an innocent pose. She was, surrounded by friends and acquaintances, exceptionally alone.

For three days since their return from Southampton, she had not seen Hood, and this was not only her doing, although it was by her wish. He had no wish to see her for the present, for being in his way a very wise man he had decided, as he expressed it mentally, to let her have her scenes out with herself.

One scene he knew he must face, but when it came he would have not only the right, but the duty to console her with kisses and tenderness and promises—any prom-

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

ises she might ask of him! In the meantime, though he was desperately in love with her, he prepared to keep out of her way. He was in love with her, and restless and unhappy in not seeing her, but he was not lonely. He was one of the men who never allow themselves to be lonely.

His little flirtation with Lord Clanrobert's second daughter was not at all bad fun, and Beryl Spottiswoode was possessed of a perverse charm that whiled away several of his hours very pleasantly. In fact, in the ardor of the chase he had gone, he feared, rather too far, and Mrs. Spottiswoode would, for a time, require skillful handling, not because she had been given too much of what he called his devotion, but because she would continue to demand devotion on an increasing scale!

The lady he called Juno had gone away, to his immense relief, in a jealous fury.

When the moment came, as it probably would, that he wished to see her again, she would, he knew, come hieing to him.

He was one of the lads to whom, when they whistle, the women come.

So Captain Hood was in his banishment not broken-hearted, although he sincerely and often violently longed for the day when he should have what he called his "*enfin seuls*" hour with Mrs. Dorset.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Beyond the *enfin seuls* hour his imagination did not fare.

Whereas her imagination, poor, little, undeveloped growth that it was, struggled on in clouds of bewilderment and helplessness.

While he was thinking of kisses, she was months ahead considering the horrors of her divorce!

The divorces of one's friends are beautifully easy to bear, she found, but one's own is a very different pair of sleeves.

Amongst all the horrors of the immediate future only one thing seemed to give her any comfort. Cloudesley would not mind.

After years of self-concentration, of a selfishness practiced so consistently that her husband had come to mean nothing to her, it was odd that she should give him even this poor thought, but she did.

Cloudesley would not mind. He would hate the publicity, of course, but he would arrange it all with the skill possible only to the very rich, and doubtless he would allow her to divorce him.

In the midst of her intense preoccupation, she remembered over and over again to be glad that Cloudesley would not minding losing her.

*Undine* was indeed stirring in her sleep.

XV

1.45 A. M., 25 July

MY BELOVÈD,

I am just home after dinner, a play, and supper with the party of whom I wrote you tonight.

In *her* eyes is the questing look of women's eyes who are beginning an unhappy love. Women in the pain of love. The words remind me of two lines of music I meant to send to you before:

“Tout dort. Seul, à mi mort, un rossignol de nuit  
Module en mal d'amour sa molle mélodie.”

Is that not music? Say it aloud and see. Thy

JULES.

## XVI

**A**RCHIE HOOD'S *enfin seuls* hour came a few days later, but not quite as he had imagined it.

Through a mere hazard, he found himself alone with Mrs. Dorset in a picture gallery where he had taken refuge from a sudden shower, and whither she had come to see the paintings of an unsuccessful young man who was in love with her.

It was after one o'clock and on a Friday, so the place might have been fairly empty had the artist been a good, or even a popular one, and, as it happened, not a soul was there except Mrs. Dorset.

He found her in the last of the rooms, sitting on a velvet seat, staring at a picture with eyes that did not see.

Things had matured during the yachting trip so that the correct thing was for him to take her into his arms and kiss her.

He did so, and she returned his kisses.

"My dear, my darling," he murmured, "I—I do love you so."

It was perfectly true that he loved her, he was shak-

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

ing with an emotion none the less real because he had voiced it in a kind of formula he had used for years on similar occasions. He *always* said, "My dear, my darling, I do love you so," but she did not know this, and, in any case, although he had always, in such circumstances, meant what he said, he had never so absolutely meant it.

The rain beat down on the skylight, shutting them by its sound into a little world of their own.

"Amy—tell me, tell me you love me——"

She raised to his her beautiful eyes, round which unshed tears had slightly smeared the black stuff, giving her a tragic look.

"I—I adore you," she said, in a faint voice, her velvety pink lips trembling.

They sat on the sofa for a long time. What they said doesn't matter.

The artist, roaming about looking at his own pictures, found them, but, as he had a cough, he found Mrs. Dorset standing by a sunset at Venice and Captain Hood surveying with every appearance of interest a study of young polar bears gamboling on ice.

"You'll see me this evening," Hood said as he put the lady into the taxi that she refused to share with him.

"O Archie, how can I?"

"I am coming. You must have a headache and stay at home——"



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

She gave a nervous little giggle. "Must I have a headache? How cruel you are to me!"

"You must have a very severe headache. Amy—darling heart—promise me you will. If I can't see you I—I shall go mad."

Very handsome he looked, his dark face glowing with the joy of conquest, under the dripping umbrella.

She looked at his tall, slim figure and blazing black eyes with another kind of pride, the pride of ownership. He was the most beautiful man she had ever seen, and he loved her, therefore he was hers; therefore she was proud.

"Come at half-past nine, then," she said, almost in a whisper.

She drove away in a whirl of excitement and happiness. For the moment her fears had dispelled like vapors under strong sunlight; she remembered only that they loved each other and that she should see him at half-past nine—in seven and a half hours' time. She would, she decided, studying her face intently in the glass, wear the gray and silver teagown.

For his part, Hood drove straight to his club and had a drink.

## XVII

**T**HE DORSETS were going to Deauville that year, with a party of merry souls who had seen each other constantly all through the season, and were extremely intimate. There were Lord and Lady Tolhurst, there were the Penhollyn-Digbys and Leicester Browne with an E, there were Sir George Aubrey and his pretty Syrian wife, there was Baron von Schmidt, the son of the great Frankfort banker, his fiancée Lady Ida Belfield whom Mrs. Penhollyn-Digby was chaperoning; there were two comparatively unattached young men, and there was Lawrence Croxley.

She was not particularly popular with the party and she knew it and did not care a rush.

She loathed Mrs. Digby, and Ida Belfield she disliked. The Tolhursts were what she mentally called decent though dull, but at least one of the young men she considered dull and not even decent. So she went, as she told her grandmother, a terrific old lady living at Hampton Court, as a leaven.

“They must be pretty bad,” commented Lady Brath dryly.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Lawrence nodded. "They are. But they are the only lot going off in that way—en masse—and it's a place where one need never be alone."

"It's Mrs. Dorset, I take it, who dislikes solitude?"

It was a blazing hot Sunday, and the two ladies sat by the open window looking out over the park. There was a positive glare of flowers; if they had expressed themselves in music, the result would have been displeasing.

Old Lady Brath, who despised her granddaughter for her unmitigated plainness, looked at her angrily.

"Very expensive place I'm told, Deauville."

"Awful."

"Are you going on your own?"

Miss Croxley's mouth tightened. She had not for her grandmother's temper the respect it inspired in most people, for her own temper, she knew, could be quite as violent, but she was furiously angry.

"I never go anywhere," she said quietly, "except on my own."

"Ugh!"

Lady Brath, in her day, had been a famous "guest." For, months at a time she had lived at other people's expense, which was the more clever of her in that her malice, hatred, and all uncharitableness had gained her a universal dislike. And Lawrence knew this, and she knew that Lawrence knew.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

There was a long pause.

Over the flower-beds under the window the big butterflies dipped and planed. It pleased Lawrence to remember the pretty Spanish word for this most flowerlike of God's creatures.

"Isn't *mariposa* a charming word?" she asked, absently.

"Mari-*what?*" snapped the aged lady.

"Nothing. I was thinking aloud." And she made up her mind to tell Cloudesley Dorset the word when she saw him that night.

"How is that little idiot going on?" Lady Brath asked suddenly.

"She's very well. And *very* pretty. There never was a prettier creature."

"I never could see it, myself."

That most blighting of rejoinders, "No, *you* wouldn't!" sprang to Lawrence's lips, but she did not utter it. As a child she had been taught to respect old age, and even her unreasonable grandmother could not quite destroy the feeling that old age, *per se*, deserved great courtesy.

"A little flirting fool, no brains and no soul, and"—to the aged woman her last accusation was by far the worst—"old enough to know better."

Lawrence did not answer.

She had been motored out by some friends who wanted

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

to see the gardens, and was to wait until they came for her. She sat still.

"A silly, middle-aged butterfly," went on Lady Brath venomously.

Lawrence started. What a pretty name for poor little Amy—Mariposa. She would call her by it. "Tanager" was pretty, but "Tannie" was hideous.

An infinitely tender smile lit the bony dark face in the sunlight.

Lady Brath, from her height of seventy-odd years, regarded Amy Dorset, who was five-and-thirty, as practically an old woman, but to Lawrence's five-and-forty the little creature seemed very young.

"Barbara Questingham was here yesterday," announced Lady Brath presently.

"Was she?"

"Yes. Her hands are very much twisted with rheumatic gout. But then she always overate. She tells me your Mrs. Dorset is compromising herself with one of the Hood boys."

Lawrence flushed angrily. "It's not true," she cried, "and Lady Barbara is a malicious old cat."

Her grandmother chuckled. "Aha! If it weren't true you wouldn't mind her saying it! I suppose young Hood is one of the Deauville party?"

"No, he isn't." But poor Lawrence spoke without great conviction for she could picture the unexpected,

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

quite-by-chance arrival at the Hotel de la Normandie, of the man in question.

"If it's the one I remember, he's a nice boy——"

"Boy! He's thirty-five if he's a day."

"That's what I said; a nice boy."

"Yet you think Amy old, because she's thirty-five," blundered her granddaughter. "O grandmother," she added nervously, "don't cackle!"

But Lady Brath, now in a high good humor, did cackle, and with real delight.

"All female children," she declared, "are ten years old when they are born. That explains many things."

Lawrence rose wearily.

"There's Jimmy Bowes looking for me, so I must go. Good-bye, grandmother."

The old woman caught her hand and held it very tight.

"Barbara may be a cat, but cats are sharp-eyed. And she says that young Hood is really in love this time. If he is, and if it lasts—she says your Amy person has quite lost her head——"

"That's a lie——"

"About him. *Quite*. So it has occurred to me," went on Lady Brath, still holding her granddaughter's hand in a vise, "that if they are both really serious, there might be—*Lawrence, look at me!*—a chance for you."

Lawrence Croxley made no attempt to withdraw her

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

hand. Instead, it seemed to the old woman to melt and shrink in hers.

“Good-bye, grandmother.”

Four fierce black eyes gazed into each other for a moment, and then Miss Croxley left the room.

In the passage she stood still, pinching her blanched cheeks with icy fingers.

Then she went out into the sunny garden and joined her friends.

## XVIII

**M**ILLIPEDE!"

"Sir!"

Millipede appeared in the open door, a bunch of pink roses in his hand.

"Ah, the flowers have come——"

"I went out and got them myself, sir. They are beautiful. All pink and white."

Hood nodded. "Good. Did you get the chocolates with violet stuff inside?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the roseleaf jam?"

"Yes, sir. Went down to the City for that, sir, to a little Greek place I know of. I also got some Mandarin orange preserves——"

"Excellent. Well—I hope you remember all my instructions."

"Yes, sir. I am to prepare the tea-table, *and* the cold supper—I have made the lobster salad, sir, and the champagne is in the ice-chest—and I am to be out of the house by four-thirty."

"That's right."



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Hood went on writing, and the valet, a sudden grin wrinkling his odd face, asked demurely, "As to my coming in, sir?"

His master frowned, but did not look up from his letter.

"You will be back at half-past seven, as usual."

Millipede retired to his pantry, and went on with his work of arranging several pounds' worth of white and pink roses for the decking of the flat.

"One of our prudent fits on," he mused, with a smile to himself. "Supper all ready and me to be back at seven-thirty, as usual! That means, of course, that she's a topper. Also that he's not quite sure of 'er. Ah, well," he concluded, drying his hands after filling the last vase with roses, "after all, it's 'is business, not mine, but I'd gladly risk a fiver on 'er not living a hundred miles from Park Lane."

Silently, deftly, he posed his gay roses in the living-room, a bowl on the table, vases here and there, one or two single flower glasses budding as it were, in unexpected corners.

He loved flowers, this servant whose duties were more confidential and less respectable than are those of most servants, and flowers, as is their way, seemed to return his love by lasting better for him than they did for most people.

Hood did not look up from his letters or speak again,

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

and after five minutes the man withdrew, and the master heard the outer door of the flat close behind him.

The room was a large pleasant one, overlooking Hyde Park.

There were some, not many, books, the carpet was a fine Persian one, the chintz, at once cheery and sober-colored, suitable to a man's abode. There was a piano, for Hood sang a little in a high throaty tenor, but there was also a pianola, run by electricity, and flanked by a big shelf full of rolls of very light music.

Some good sporting prints brightened the sober walls, and on the big table stood a very beautiful statuette of a cricketer about to bowl.

Hood had been earlier in his life a fairly good all-round athlete, and there were in the room several souvenirs of his prowess.

Over the mantelpiece hung a remarkably beautiful pastel of a young woman in the dress of 1880, a very charming young woman who would have been pretty but for a slightly underhung jaw. This was his mother, whom he deeply loved. In Mr. Millipede's opinion, the room looked rather bare during what he called the Banishment. The Banishment consisted of the temporary withdrawal to a cupboard of some twenty elaborately framed photographs of ladies, that as a rule stood about on the tables and pianos. Millipede, who had a real affection for his master—he would, if circumstances had

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

allowed it, himself have been just such another, faults and all!—always regarded the Banishment as a rather serious thing.

It always presaged for his master a really rather serious love affair, and in these really rather serious ones Millipede had seen Hood as really rather suffer.

Not for the tall one with red hair were the photographs removed; not for the overblown one; not for the one who laughed so loud. But they had been removed in their turn for Lady Wellbury, and for Eve Raspail, the French actress, and for poor little Mrs. Orbett, who killed herself——

Of these things Millipede thought as he repaired that afternoon to his club, The Yellow Posts, which social center was situated within a stone's throw of Park Lane.

Mr. Immenham was at the club, reading the *Spectator*.

“How do, Immenham. Haven't seen you since that day in the rain. Charming pretty girl, your—sister, if I may say so.”

Immenham looked at him haughtily. Then he went back to his *Spectator*.

“I trust all is well at 875, the Lane?”

Mr. Millipede never felt himself insulted until he was kicked. Moreover, he was a born tease.

“I was at your 'ouse this morning,” he said with an

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

air of irresponsible gayety. "Hoped to have the pleasure of seeing you, but that pie-faced William opened the door. I don't like William, he's got no chick. None. Miss Archbold tells me 'e's leaving."

"Yes," answered Immenham.

"Fine girl, Miss Archbold, and she's even better in mufti than in uniform—though a parlormaid's cap can look like a crown on a pretty girl."

Even this poetic remark failed to draw a reply from Immenham, so Mr. Millipede withdrew to the billiard room where he had a match with a marquess' first footman.

A few minutes later Mr. Immenham went his way, for it was his afternoon, and he was a gentleman at large.

Millipede, for his part, finished his game—losing with good grace—and after a long walk in the Park, and a bit of supper at a bar kept by a friend, he went back to the flat.

He was a good deal of a scoundrel, being a servant for the possession of whom Don Juan would have been tempted to fight Captain Hood, but he was a man full of human sympathy, and it was with a real thrill of vicarious excitement that he opened the door of 27 with his latchkey.

It was exactly seven-thirty.

The place was perfectly quiet, only the ticking of a

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

grandfather's clock in the hall broke the silence; the sitting-room door was ajar.

After a short pause the man went into the empty room.

The blinds were undrawn, and the glory of the sky turned the dusk to darkness. The roses filled the room with their scent and on the floor lay a deep red rose. Millipede had arranged only pink and white ones.

A song was open on the piano, which he had left closed.

Two tea-cups had been used and of these one was still half full, the cream standing thick on top. The cakes were almost untouched, and half of a chocolate fondant stuffed with violet cream lay on a plate.

In a brass bowl lay the ends of seven cigarettes, three consumed to the last quarter of an inch, the other four burnt irregularly and only for a third of their length.

Millipede stood for a moment studying these details, his face wrinkling half in amusement, half in concern.

"I'd give something to know," he said to himself, "which of 'em smoked the cigarettes to the end——"

Then he set the room in order.

## XIX

**A**MY dear—dear little Mariposa—won't you tell me?"

Mrs. Dorset laughed, a small flame of bright color on either cheek belying the artificial pink under which it glowed.

"Tell you what, Lawrence? I've nothing to tell—except that I shall be late for the garden party if you don't let me go."

Lawrence Croxley, who looked very old and wan, and even plainer than usual, caught her friend's hand in hers.

"Amy—I know you'll think me an interfering beast, but—it's only because I am so fond of you, dear." Poor, time-worn, piteous, unavailing plea!

Again Amy laughed. "Of course you're fond of me—so am I of you, but Queen Alexandra is to be there, so we simply mustn't be late. Good-bye, dear old thing."

Miss Croxley made a final effort. "Good-bye, dear—and O Tannie, do for God's sake let me have a talk with you before next week."

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"All right—all right, whenever you like," returned the little lady, impatience in her voice and in her face, "but I must go now."

It was four o'clock, and one of those nerve-racking days when no man can tell at what minute a downfall of rain may occur; one of the days that seem to choose dates fixed for important garden parties and other out-of-door fêtes for their appearance.

Miss Croxley, who was wearing a new frock of brownish linen, in which her sallow skin looked yellower than ever, stood thoughtfully by the little fountain when the garden door had closed, and gazed at the cloud-charged sky.

She was very unhappy about her friend and she had a guilty conscience as well.

An hour before as she stood in the telephone room, looking up a number, the bell had rung and she had answered it.

"Hullo—Captain Hood speaking. I want to speak to Mrs. Dorset, please."

With no idea of disguising her own voice, Lawrence replied, "Mrs. Dorset's dressing."

There was a pause and then he went on.

"I see. Well, will you please give her this message. Just say that my sister in Essex—she'll know the name—has called me to the country on important business—got that?"

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"Yes."

"I'm going by the seven o'clock train, and as I wish to see Mrs. Dorset about the costumes for the dance on Friday—*got that?*—I'll call today about six. Do you understand?"

Lawrence answered, "Yes," adding after what seemed to him a long pause, "sir."

"At six," he went on, impressively. "Tell Mrs. Dorset I'm sorry to ask her to come back early from the garden party, but that it is *most important about the costumes.*"

"Yes, sir."

"Thanks very much, I needn't wait for an answer, as I know Mrs. Dorset is anxious to know about the costumes——"

He rang off, leaving Miss Croxley facing the telephone as if it were the judge before whom she was being tried for life.

She had not mentioned the message to Amy, and Amy would not be back until after seven.

"I must tell Immenham to tell him she said she'd be out till late."

As she spoke the sun came out, the sudden warmth almost as tangible as rain. Lawrence picked a rose and, shaking off the wet from the last shower, tucked it into her belt and went up the steps.

At the top an idea struck her. "I'll see him myself!"



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

He'll hate it and so shall I, but I may be able to persuade him——”

No woman on earth was less adapted to persuasive arts, and certainly the female creature did not live who could less hope to influence a man of Archie Hood's kidney. However, a forlorn hope is better than none, and Miss Croxley, as she drank her tea, was not so hopeless as she might have been.

Hood's greeting, when, according to orders, Immenham had ushered him in without a word, disheartened her a little, it was so unruffled, even so cheery.

The wretch was too sure of himself to be annoyed even by her hated presence.

“How d'ye do, Captain Hood?”

“How are you, Miss Croxley? Mrs. Dorset not yet back from the flower show?”

“It's a garden party. Won't you sit down? No, she's not back yet. In fact she won't be back until late.”

Hood allowed himself the luxury of a half smile. “Won't she? That's bad luck for me, isn't it?”

Miss Croxley fixed her gaze on the white carnation in his coat, thinking at the same time two distinct things: that only a strict regard for the canons of good taste prevented Archie Hood from burgeoning into bright colors and soft fabrics; that he would have liked to wear rings and an inch more of hair on his head.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

This was one of her simultaneous thoughts. The other was that he was chuckling over her supposed state of ignorance about the telephoning.

This perception prompted her unprecedented plunge into the thick of things.

"I never gave her your message," she declared bluntly.

"What!"

"No. It was I at the telephone——"

He flushed with anger, his rather soft-looking lips pursing like a girl's. "You! Why didn't you tell me then?"

"Because I wanted to hear what you had to say. Besides, it was your own fault for assuming that I was a servant."

"And why, may I ask, didn't you at least tell Mrs. Dorset what I said?"

Lawrence looked at him squarely. "For one thing," she answered, "Amy knew all about the costumes. Her costume is finished and hanging in a cupboard in her dressing-room. So," she wound up with a peculiar clarity of voice, "you lied."

For a moment he lost, in his disappointment and anger, his self-control; he said rude things.

When he had stopped speaking she said, "All these things are things any man would have felt under the circumstances. I am glad, however, to think

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

that I know very few men who would have *said* them."

He made an unqualified apology, which she accepted.

"Incidentally," he returned, trying to laugh, "it's the first time I've ever been called a liar."

She looked meditatively at him, little flames in her deep eyes. "I am," she said, "so constituted that I cannot understand how people can bear to *do* things that they cannot bear to have named."

He rose, flushing again and scowling, his heavy eyebrows meeting over his nose.

"I think I won't wait any longer," he said, stiffly.

"Oh, please don't go. I will not inflict any more of my odd notions upon you. Also—my *other* reason for not giving Amy your message was that I wanted to speak to you myself."

The man's experience had been such that it is scarcely remarkable that his first thought was, "Good God, *you too!*" He was not a coxcomb, but he knew that neither ugliness nor age had the power to instill wisdom into some women, and, flashed like lightning through his mind, Mrs. Lowndes, his portly Juno, must be older by two or three years than this black-avised spinster.

On the whole it was to his credit that his face held no betrayal of his involuntary thoughts.

"You wish to speak to me?" he repeated with courtesy.

"Yes."

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"If I can be of any service to you——"

She rose suddenly and came close to him.

"You can," she said with abruptness, "to me and to several other people—by leaving Amy Dorset alone."

Burning at the stake was the least he would at that moment have condemned her to. He did not know what to say; he was furious, outraged, alarmed, and horribly embarrassed.

"Miss Croxley!"

"Yes, yes, I know I'm doing a perfectly unheard-of thing, but—she's—she's so alone and I'm fond of her."

"You are evidently assuming things that are entirely wrong—mistaken," he stammered. "Because I have danced a great deal with Mrs. Dorset, it doesn't follow that—that——"

"That *what?*" she interrupted, inexorably, knowing the value in argument of letting one's opponent express the situation.

"That—that there's any reason for asking me to—to let her alone. The phrase is, besides," he continued, feeling ground under his feet again, "very offensive to her."

"To whom?"

Amazed at her stupidity, he committed himself. "To whom? Why, to Amy, of course."

He saw his blunder at once, and that she had trapped him, and blistered. "What's more, if there were any

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

interfering to be done, I suggest your leaving it to—Dorset.”

“To Cloudesley,” she repeated, “but he——”

“He’s her husband and if he objects to my dancing with his wife he can tell me himself. I refuse to discuss the matter any further with you, Miss Croxley.”

He bowed as he spoke and went towards the door.

“I don’t think he objects, as yet,” she said, “but—he—*knows*.”

Hood turned fiercely. “What does he know?”

In a way she was defeated, for she knew now for certain what she had almost known before making the attempt: that no effort of hers could ever prevail with this man. But side by side with her defeat was her triumph.

The enemy was retreating under heavy fire and with great losses.

“He knows,” she said quietly, looking at him through her lorgnon, “what everybody knows, that you are making love to his wife. But he also knows what thus far only she and you and I know—that she is letting you.”

Before he could speak she had rung the bell, and he was obliged to go.

Heavy-hearted she made her way home. Victory or defeat, it had been a bloody engagement.

## XX

**M**ISS CROXLEY'S face, as she sat in one of the door corners of the bus, was so grim and unpleasantly concentrated that nearly every one of the people traveling through the wet with her, paid her the tribute of a disapproving thought.

"Cross old frump," said to herself the pretty girl with openwork stockings and an aged Burberry.

"Stop a clock, that face," mused the girl's neighbor, a slightly bemused char-lady.

"I pity her husband," thought a little bride with a net bag full of household purchases.

Miss Croxley, as if she felt this weight of disapproval, raised her eyes and swept across her fellow-passengers a comprehensive glance of fierce loathing that startled some of the more timid.

"Pigs," she called them, mentally, "vulgar brutes. Ugh—that bad-smelling woman in the man's ulster and cap."

She was in a vile and very furious temper, and as the bus turned into Hyde Park Road she was deep in a

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

review of the things that that morning in particular embittered her world.

She loathed buses; she execrated the earth-shattering vans that roar through the streets, like railway trains gone mad, laden with bricks or flour or beer-barrels; she hated in a wilder way the poisonously uninteresting vehicles like degraded broughams with the seats running the wrong way, commercial chariots usually piled from ceiling to floor with bales of cloth or cardboard boxes that in their abundance leave just room for a plain elderly man and his notebook and pencil, or at best, his newspaper.

She would have consigned to an overheated perdition the wandering slackers who blow from out-of-tune brass instruments incorrect and hideous versions of music every note of which one knows in its pristine form. She hated fat women of fifty with bulging faces and torsos obviously in need of pneumatic readjustment; she hated dirty unshaven men in greasy and foul frock-coats and rakishly set hats who abound in London and are more or less unknown elsewhere. She hated undersized, spotty-faced mashers of eighteen who leered at the maidens of their own rank, and she hated the maidens who bridled at the leer!

She hated the painted young men who in musical comedies follow the heroine about with ill-taught gestures of their common, white-gloved hands.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

She hated smart women of known class who look twenty behind, and sixty in front.

She abhorred what is known to those who like it, as "wholesome English food"—food which she wrathfully described, as she went on with her list that day in the bus, as woolly mutton and soapy potatoes.

She despised curates who, as a type, she believed to have swallowed their own chins and disposed of them as Adam's apples. And no words could describe the intensity of her rage as she thought of the driveling idiots of pedestrians who apparently think themselves brilliantly clever in crossing the street at an angle of ninety degrees, wambling along in their imbecile self-approval almost in a line with the current of the traffic.

Boys on bicycles she would have strung up by their thumbs, and at the mental spectacle of the trailer lunatics her vituperative imagination failed her utterly.

Yet Lawrence Croxley was an exceptionally kind woman in many ways, and often denuded herself of the little luxuries that to women are so much more necessary than necessities, that she might be able to help some needy acquaintance.

One's minor hatreds are very vital things, and if lined up and classified as she lined up and classified hers between "the Grove," as the people in her street designated the Grove of Westbourne, and the Marble Arch, many of us would probably discover our own lists to be nearly



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as long as that of the poor lady with the grim face under the shabby brown hat.

As she alighted, insisting to the conductor's very articulate disgust on a complete stoppage of the vehicle which she so loathed, she suddenly realized how she had been using her brain, and she laughed.

"'Black and oblong thoughts,'" she said under her breath, as she made her way towards Park Lane. "I am an old fool. Now for some round and white thoughts."

"Hello, Lawrence—you'll be run in if you wander about in Park Lane talking to yourself!"

It was Dorset.

His heavy face was as inexpressive as usual, as he went on, "What is it that you were saying? It can't have been about 'round, white thoughts,' but it sounded like it."

"It was too, Clow. I—I'm in the vilest temper today—I came all the way from *là-bas* thinking of the things I hate, which is a criminal proceeding."

He was silent, and they plodded on under his umbrella to his door before he spoke again.

"Yes, but what *was* it about round thoughts?" he persisted, with the mild obstinacy she knew so well.

As the door closed behind them, shutting them with its heavy clang so suddenly and completely away from the crowd and the ugliness of the workaday world, she

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turned her head away from him, a sudden blush almost hurting her face.

It was the first time they had met since her talk with her grandmother, and she realized and feared the fact.

"How lonely the poor roses look in the rain," she said, hastily.

"Yes, Lawrence—tell me about the round thoughts."

"Your initials, C. D., mean not only Cloudesley Dorset, Clow," she crowed in delight at the coincidence, "they also mean Constant Dropping! You'd wear away any stone."

He opened his eyes wide, thus dropping his monocle, and smiled. "Rather odd, that. Well—what *did* it mean?"

So she told him, as they stood in the little dripping garden, under the umbrella that was so wet that it looked as if it had been oiled.

"It's from a poem, I forget by whom. It begins:

" 'The silver girl she came to me when Spring was dancing  
green,'

and goes on—Oh, I've forgotten, but the first stanza ends:

" 'And I'll get you into Heaven yet, you damned old fool.' "

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Dorset gazed at her solemnly. "Yes—but what about——"

"Wait. I've forgotten the words but they are something like this:

"And all my black and oblong thoughts went crying to the  
wilds

And all my thoughts are round and white, like any little  
child's."

"I see. It's rather good, that. So your thoughts are round and white, Lawrence?"

She shook her head, her eyes suddenly as wet as even the roses round her.

"No, Clow. They have been black and oblong—with hard edges and corners that cut——"

He laid his hand on her arm. "Poor old girl," he said, gently, "I'm sorry. Let's get in out of the rain."

## XXI

**D**ORSET, explaining that his wife was out, asked his friend to come into the study. "There's a fire," he added, as an inducement.

"Amy out at eleven o'clock!"

He raised his somber eyes to hers and was silent for a second before he answered.

"Yes," he then said, slowly, "she has gone to her dentist."

There was another pause, during which she could not decide whether the expression in his dogged eyes meant entreaty or defiance.

She shrugged her thin shoulders and sat down. "I'm sorry to miss her," she said. "I haven't seen her for several days."

"She's very busy. Will you lunch with us?"

She shook her head, from which she had taken her hat, and smoothed the rough black hair in which the few white ones shone out like good deeds in a naughty world.

"Can't, thanks. Lunching with Vera Undershaft."

She liked the library, which was old-fashioned and

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comfortable. There were in it, besides several thousand books, many things sympathetic to her; there were pipes and easy chairs, and a large, sensible writing-table on which stood a shabby despatch-box. A week-old Aberdeen might at a pinch have been drowned in the ink-well, and there was a huge waste-paper basket, nearly as big as poor Lawrence's whole sitting-room.

She loved, too, the portrait of Amy as a young wife, done in a charming way by a rather inferior artist, that hung on the one blank wall.

"I love that," she said suddenly, nodding at it.

"So do I. It's exactly like her."

For a moment they stood looking at the pretty girl in the gold frame, silent.

Miss Croxley broke the silence. "Clow—tell me about her, then."

The people whom her disagreeable expression had offended in the bus would, had they at that moment been flies on the wall of Dorset's library, hardly have recognized her as she spoke, so much sweetness and even benevolence was there in her harsh face.

The library windows gave on Wessex Street, and Dorset, as he tried to marshal his thoughts in order to do as she had asked him, gazed silently at the rain against the dull background of the houses opposite. When in London there comes a momentary lull in the roar of the traffic, it seems a tangible thing. And such a lull

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happened now and in it the middle-aged man began his description of the wife of his youth.

"She was," he said slowly, his voice loud in the pattering of the rain, "just like that. Very pretty, very ignorant, very simple. And," he hesitated, "very good."

"She is always good."

"Yes. She knew little. Her father had never bothered much about her, and her mother had already been dead some years. I remember how surprised she was to find that Queen Anne was married. She said," for a moment his inexpressive face relaxed to a half smile, "that Anne is such an unmarried name."

Lawrence nodded. "So it is! And—she was twenty when you married her, wasn't she?"

Yes. We went to the Lakes for our wedding journey, and it poured all the time."

"And then," she insisted gently, for he was busy lighting a pipe, "where did you live?"

He threw the match away and after a puff or two at his pipe, began coaxing the fire with the poker.

"We lived in Ambles in Sussex."

"Ambles. Is it a house?"

"No. It's a small town, not far from Chichester. I owned—still own, in fact—a house there—left me by an old aunt of my mother's. There's a picture of it just over your shoulder."

She turned, and saw, in a tarnished gold frame, a

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little pencil and chalk drawing that in its dark corner in the lea of the jutting mantelpiece she had never noticed.

"Take it down," he said, and she did so.

The drawing, which was very badly done, represented a plain Georgian house flush with the pavement. The door, which had a portico supported by fluted pillars, was at the top of a flight of six steps; the windows were large and there were two on either side of the door.

The front of the house was covered with ivy which was trimmed with great exactitude into squares round the windows. To the left a wall extended, and over the wall woolly and indistinguishable trees stretched up into a sky equally woolly, but very blue.

Lawrence Croxley's heart contracted. It was here that this dull, middle-aged man whom she loved, had brought his young wife fifteen years ago.

Fifteen years ago she herself had been living at Cruxworth with her father and mother still in luxury although a shorn and diminishing luxury. She had already refused, to her father's rage, the only marriage offer she had ever had, before or since, and her mother's wearing, terrible, apparently endless last illness had begun. And across the hills to the south, unknown even as to his very name, Cloudesley Dorset was beginning his life with the wife he had chosen.

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"It's—a dear old house," she said, suddenly, her voice sounding very loud to her, though not, to all appearances, to him.

"Yes. There was a mulberry tree behind the house, a large tree, said to have been planted by Charles II. She was so pleased when I told her that it's called the mulberry, the wisest of trees, because it does not risk its new leaves till all danger of frost is over."

"Was the garden pretty?"

"Yes. My aunt Sybilla loved flowers and had worked hard over it."

Lawrence drew near to the fire. "Did *she* like it too?"

"You mean Amy? Yes. Yes," he added, gravely, "she used to be fond of the garden."

There was a long pause, and then Miss Croxley rose, suddenly. "Well, I must be off," she exclaimed with great briskness; "tell Amy I'm sorry to have missed her."

They shook hands, and he opened the door. In the hall, which at that end of the house was, that dull day, rather dark, Dorset said, "By the way, Lawrence, I want you to do me a favor."

"Right. What is it?"

"I want you to come and dine with us tonight—here."

She reflected. "Let me see, this is Tuesday, isn't it? I'm sorry, Clow, but I'm afraid I can't. I've promised



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Basil Humphreys to chaperon a girl and him to His Majesty's."

Dorset stood still, his face indistinct in the faint light. "Ask Basil to get someone else. He has three sisters."

"I know, but——"

"Look here, Lawrence," he went on, taking her hand in his, "I *said* it would be a great favor, and it will. I am very much troubled—about Amy—and I want—I *need*—your help."

She knew by his voice that he was deeply moved, and for a moment her heart throbbed in a wild way. Could it be the touch of her hand that so stirred him?

Then with a mental shake she regained, as she afterwards regarded it, her senses; at last she was feeling something vital about his wife. Honestly, she tried to be glad.

"I'd do anything in the world to help Amy, Clow," she answered steadily, "but I promised Basil——"

"You must put him off. You will?"

"Yes."

With a gentle pressure he released her hand. "You are—a good sort," he said. "Thanks. Half-past eight, then."

"All right. I'll telephone Basil. And—who else is coming? Is it a big party?"

They had reached the door giving into Wessex Street,

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and before answering her question Dorset hailed a passing taxi and put her into it.

"Thanks again," he said, closing the door.

"And—how big a party? So that I shall know," she went on hurriedly, "what to wear."

He looked at her. "There is no party, Lawrence. It's only Amy—and you—and me—and—Hood."

## XXII

DEAREST,

I am awfully worried and badly frightened. Cloudesley has just told me that you are coming to dinner—you and Lawrence Croxley. What can it mean?

I told him this morning that I should be at home tonight, then an hour later he sent word by my maid that he had asked a friend to dine, and just now he's told me that it is you—"the friend"! What can it mean? Can he suspect anything, do you think? Oh, I am so frightened.

My beloved, I shall be so glad when we no longer have to lie! God bless you, my dearest dear. Perhaps we can have five minutes' talk alone tonight, for Lawrence often goes to his study with him. I love you.

AMY.

Captain Hood read this note at seven that evening. It was brought to him by the excellent Millipede, and read under the fire of two angry eyes under a beflowered hat.

"No answer, thanks, Millipede."

When the door had closed the owner of the angry eyes—she also owned a redundant figure and a great deal of native and foreign hair of a fine amber hue—burst out.

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"That letter's from a woman, Archie Hood.

He put it into his pocket. "It is, my dear. What then?"

"It's—it's a love-letter."

He lit a cigarette, laughing as he did so.

"My name is Don Juan," he declared, "I am the ladies' pet; my beauty is fatal, to see me is to love me——"

She, however, refused to laugh. "You are deceiving me," she snapped. "I know you are. You are lying to me."

"But I have just told you," he teased, his beautiful dark eyes glowing with malicious amusement, "that my name is Don Juan!"

She leaned towards him, her tight stays creaking a little, a dull flush creeping up her throat to her undeniable double chin. "Archie—show me that letter. I have a right to see it."

The light died out of his face and he frowned.

"My dear Alys, don't be an—a goose," he retorted, as civilly as he could. "I certainly will not show you my letter, and you have no right to ask me to. I have never asked to see yours."

"That's because you don't care! You don't love me any more—I don't believe you ever *did* love me. You have lied and deceived me from the first!"

His morals were indefensible, but it is certainly to

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his credit that he did not make one of several answers that occurred to him.

He did *not* remind her that their cursory love affair had been more of her seeking than of his; he did not recall to her mind the fact that she was well over ten years older than he; he made no reference to the circumstance that, although she was a widow of several years' standing, he had never in the most remote way hinted to her that his feelings were of the kind that lead to matrimony.

Neither—and perhaps, to a man of his spoiled and impatient nature this, of all these reserves, was the most praiseworthy—did he tell her the truth: that he was utterly sick of her, and would have ceased seeing her long ago, but for a genuine kind-hearted dread of hurting her!

As the devoted Millipede had said, Captain Hood undeniably had two good points.

What he did say, after a pause, was, "My dear Alys, I am dining out, and fear that I must go and dress."

"Where are you dining?"

He looked at her too fat face, with its incipient chops and purplish bloom, and a feeling of sincere self-disgust came over him. "Why on earth did I ever even look at you?" he reflected, adding more kindly, "You poor old thing!" However, he had looked at her and—there she was.

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"I'm dining at the Brook-Bellwood's in Belgrave Square," he lied suavely. "Their telephone number is 6801 Victoria if you'd like to make inquiries!"

She sighed, and producing that friend in need, a powder-puff, began to repair the dilapidations of tears and temper.

"I'm sorry, Beau-boy," she said, "it's only because I love you so. I have given you my whole life, you know."

And again he achieved merit—this time by not suggesting that as she was forty-eight and he had known her only about six months, he could hardly claim the possession of what was known as her best years. Instead, and in his relief at her descent to earth, he was very kind to her, kissing her good-bye, patting her hands, and thanking her for coming to see him.

At the door she turned. "Beau-boy—couldn't we dine tomorrow—at La Mandolina?"

"I—I fear——"

A few years ago her upturned, pleading face would possibly have been irresistible. Now, it was at best only pathetic. "Darling, I *have* been so unhappy, fearing you'd stopped coming—*do* say yes, and we'll have spaghetti and white truffle salads and zabajoni!"

He winced. The ghosts of old meals can haunt and hurt a sensitive soul, and in his way Hood was sensi-

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tive. He was also not ungrateful, and she had in a way pleased him, only a few months before.

"All right," he said, reluctantly, "I'll try to arrange it. At seven-thirty then, upstairs."

She was all smiles. "Oh, you dear," she cried girlishly, "what fun it'll be. And—darling—you *do* love me?"

It was part of his code, such as it was, that Hood, in his incidental liaisons, avoided as much as possible the word love. After all, the utterance of the word is by no means always a necessity in the most passionate scenes.

And now, when he did really love Amy Dorset, he felt a thrill of self-approbation as he realized his skill in having so little degraded the word he devoted to her. It is characteristic of him that his having degraded the sentiment itself in his thousand and one simulations of it gave him not a pang.

With a tender smile he kissed Alys Lowndes' hand. "Dear," he murmured, "my feeling for you is something I can't easily talk about—even to you."

Then, finally, she left, and he went into his dressing-room, where Millipede was busy.

"Get me a gin and vermouth, Millipede," he said. "I—I'm tired."

Millipede ventured a sympathetic half-grin, and went to mix this drink.

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"I think," Hood told him, setting down the empty glass, "that I shall be out the next time that lady comes."

The man nodded. "Very good, sir."



## XXIII

**A**S dinner went on Mrs. Dorset grew more confident that her vague fear had been unfounded, and in consequence of this feeling her manner became easier and less constrained.

She had had a bad afternoon, her usual rest being changed, as it had been changed more than once of late, into a period of mental stress of a force that threatened to annihilate her former conception of things.

She loved Archie Hood, and looking into the future she could see only him, but her brain was not well enough focused to make her vision clear. How or when they were to be together she could not even guess; all she knew was that they would, must, be always together.

She was one of those modern products, a woman without either much practical sense or much imagination; she had a variety of small, superficial tastes which she herself believed to be convictions, but she had never channeled her forces, and now, at a great crisis, her mental powers were beyond her control.

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She did *not* know what she meant to do; in fact there was nothing which she definitely meant to do; she subconsciously meant things to do themselves. She was an empty cup held up for Chance to fill.

When she was at last dressed for dinner, a little more color than usual on—not in—her cheeks, a long string of pale corals round her neck as more propitious to her looks than pearls, she sent Clémentine out of the room and stood for a moment before the glass. Anxiously she scanned herself. Pale, yes—tired, yes. Haggard, thank God, no.

Her frock was perfection, her hair in its happiest mood.

“I wonder,” she thought, “what is going to happen. I wonder *why* Clow invited Archie? I’m glad poor old Lawrence will be here, in any case.”

Unconsciously she realized that even if a highly improbable battle, murder, and sudden death were to ensue, Lawrence Croxley would stand by her.

When men descant on the untrustworthiness of women to women they should remember that nearly every beautiful woman who ever lived has possessed a woman friend of Lawrence’s kind.

Amy met her guests without betraying her inner turmoil, and watched her husband as he greeted them.

Dorset looked tired, and had at first little to say.

Miss Croxley was arrayed in all the glories of a new

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frock and looked, according to her possibilities, very well indeed.

She was one of those thin women who look their best with their bony structures well exposed; the lines of her shoulders were good, and her long throat carried with an odd, gypsy-like grace her small well-set head. For some reason, unexpressed even to herself, she had chosen to wear the necklace that night, and it was very worthily, though not softly, bedded in her brown bosom.

In her cheeks was a deep flame of natural color, and as she bowed politely to Hood, this color seemed to leap up for an instant in a way that only Dorset observed.

"You are looking," he said to her as they went in to dinner, "splendid."

Again the color leapt, though she laughed. "Clow! If you take to making compliments the solid earth will crumble away under my feet."

The talk was general and meaningless.

Of the four who partook of it, only Hood knew what he was eating, and he was one of those lucky people of preëminent digestions and manly, non-existent nerves who make excellent breakfasts on their hanging day.

To him the salmon, the game, the champagne and the rest had even more than their usual savor because of the undefined element of danger that seemed to brood in the room.

Towards the end of the meal, his opinion of the situa-

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tion was that Dorset certainly must smell a rat of some kind, but could probably be put off the scent by a little exercise of the ingenuity that had in the matter of husbands done its possessor such yeoman's service.

A few weeks' absence might do it, or a hint as to a half-engagement to Etheldreda Yelverton, a second-cousin whom the gods evidently intended him to marry some fine day; or if necessary someone with a taste for situation-molding might be told about Beryl Spottiswoode. With a guiltless face and an inward chuckle, Hood told himself that *no* man's name could escape unscathed from even the most careless linking with naughty Beryl's.

"If I told this old living skeleton," he decided, smiling courteously at Lawrence, who was speaking to him, "or better still, had someone else tell her, she'd trek over here first thing and tell Dorset." So his mind was beautifully easy.

Dorset's was not. He knew that his wife was for the first time in her rather pathetic, emotionally limited life deeply in love. And he was frightened for her. He disliked and distrusted Archie Hood for one thing, and he realized far more than, in the plenitude of her new happiness, Amy did, what in this matter she stood to lose.

He was deeply sorry for her, and having asked Hood to dine with the intention of trying to see exactly how

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matters stood, he had asked Lawrence Croxley not only because he had of late grown very fond of her, but because he felt that in the event of any precipitated crisis, she would be a comfort to his wife.

As for Lawrence, she was very much agitated, and could have screamed with nerves and irritation several times during the dinner.

Of all the people in the room the one who had the coolest judgment and the most unbiased view of the situation was the butler.

Immenham knew of his mistress's visit to Captain Hood's rooms; the impish Millipede had taken great delight in telling him. He also knew that daily letters were exchanged between Mrs. Dorset and Hood, and that the matutinal box of violets from Solomon's was sent by Hood.

These things constituted a disquieting whole, but the dignified, observant man knew more.

He knew that the lady he served was wasting her heart on an altogether unworthy man.

He knew this, was constrained to look on at the tragedy, and was powerless to help.

He was the cleverest, most sensitive man of those present in the room—for pie-faced William's successor going in and out, did not count—but he was a servant, and therefore could do nothing to avert the catastrophe.

And this, as well, was in its way a tragedy.

## XXIV

**W**HEN they were alone, Amy walked to Hood and drew him out of his chair. "O Archie," she murmured, "I am so happy!"

"Mind the door," he retorted sharply; "someone will be coming in."

The little creature, all aglow, laughed aloud. "No they won't, dearest. Besides—what would it matter?"

For a long time he silently held her in his arms; in his arms not in the way usually meant by the phrase, but literally, for she was so slim, so light, that she was as easy to lift as a child, and there was to him a subtle and sensuous charm in this holding, close to his breast, her little feet hanging over his arm, the woman whom he loved and who loved him in such an unchildlike way.

When he at last set her down, she smoothed her hair with absent, skillful fingers. "What an *awful* dinner," she said, "wasn't it?"

"Ghastly. I can't bear Miss Croxley."

She was surprised. "Lawrence? But why, Archie? She's such a dear."

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"I don't like her."

"You must try—just to please me," she wheedled, "for she's one of my best friends."

"Sorry, but I really can't bear her."

There was a pause, and then she said slowly, "I am sorry, dearest. She is one of the people who will always remain my friend, even if——"

"Even if what?" His splendid eyes had assumed an unpleasantly watchful look, which she did not see.

Immenham at that moment coming in with a telegram, she answered evenly, enjoying, he saw, the touch of acting. "Even if everyone else disapproves about Psyche."

Psyche was one of his pet names for her.

As she read the wire and wrote an answer, the butler stood at attention, but his eyes were fixed on a small mirror in which Hood's face was reflected. And when the door had closed on the servant, and Mrs. Dorset had once more sat down, she took up the subject of Lawrence again.

"I think," she began, "that dear old Lawrence knows."

"I *know* that dear old Lawrence knows."

"I—I am glad," Amy said, thoughtfully.

"Why?"

"It will make it easier—afterwards."

Hood rose with a brusqueness that startled her.

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"Will you come tomorrow at four?" he asked her.

"Oh, I—I cant."

"Darling! I—I have some books I want to show you."

He had been vaguely uneasy a moment before, but something in her face set him ablaze, and ensued an outwardly beautiful love-scene, passionately reverent and reverently passionate, though on his part conducted with, so to speak, an eye on the door. At the worst, Archie Hood was a love-making expert, and now at his best he gave a magnificent representation of a man ready to count the world well lost for Love.

The best of it was that he believed in himself, with his whole heart, and for the moment utterly forgot his half-fears of a few minutes before.

When the moment came when Amy, having promised to go to tea with him the next day, for the purpose as she believed, to settle the future, asked him with her exquisite face all a-quiver with love and trust, if he had ever loved anyone before, he assured her, his eyes shining like stars, that he never had.

"You know one hears awful tales about you, darling," she said, a little later.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I've sown a few wild oats—like other men, but it meant nothing."

"And—and—" she was a little shy about asking,



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but she forced herself to do so, "there is no one *now?*"

And he swore passionately that she was the only woman in his life.

How far he believed himself to be speaking the truth no one can tell, but it may be taken for a fact that he was not lying unqualifiedly.

And yet separated from her indiscreetly placed head only by one thickness of fine black cloth, and one of thin silk, there were letters from three different women each one of whom loved him and had every reason herself to be loved by him! However, Amy, in her ignorance, was as happy as if he had been the honorable man he honestly believed himself to be.

Meantime in the library Lawrence and Dorset sat smoking, and very earnestly talking.

Dorset had made up his mind at dinner as to what he would do, and according to his way had done it promptly and unpicturesquely.

"Amy's in love with that fellow, Lawrence," he had said, as he blew out the match with which he had lit her first cigarette.

In her nervousness she gave a great start. "Good heavens, Cloudesley!"

"Yes. And you know it."

After a moment she retorted, "Well, what then?"

He gave a short laugh. "She's at the wrong age for her first love affair."

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"*Every* one is! The first one ought to be saved up for the third," she said, incoherently.

This he disregarded. "I've been watching him to-night especially. That's why I got him here—to study him."

She looked up. "Well?"

He answered deliberately, neither kindly nor unkindly.

"I don't think he's worth it, Lawrence."

The sound she made might be called a snort.

"I should think he *wasn't*, Clow!"

"Oh—you dislike him?"

"I detest him. He's a contemptible cad," she cried, jerking her cigarette into the fire.

Dorset reflected. "No—I shouldn't go so far as that. Men seem to like him, and men never like a fellow who is really a cad, you know."

"Perhaps *you* like him, then?"

Even the scorn in her voice, which was rather funny, did not stir him out of what she stigmatized as his sluggish justice.

"I don't like him. I know nothing about the fellow, but—he's very much in love with Amy, but I fear he'll make her suffer. And," his voice softened, "the poor little thing has never suffered."

"No," Lawrence's voice was far more pitiful than his.

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"I'm going to speak to her about it tonight," he murmured.

"Oh, Clow! Why—accentuate it?"

"How do you mean?"

"I mean," she faltered, "that your discussing it will—crystallize it—you can't ever disregard it again——"

Dorset frowned. "Nonsense. Amy and I are perfectly good friends, and friends can discuss—anything."

Then she took her courage in both hands and asked him a question. "But—don't you *mind*? Don't you—love her?"

An odd smile stirred his mustache as he gazed for a long minute into the fire. "Don't mind? My dear, Amy never loved me."

"Yes—but *you*? You are different. Don't you love her?"

"No. I haven't loved her for years."

She made a little muffled sound like a moan.

"O Clow!"

"Not for years. Indeed, I have," he went on quietly, as if he were discussing some rather dull business deal, "been wondering whether, in the event of Amy's marrying Hood, I could ever persuade you to marry me."

The room literally swam before Lawrence's eyes—as rooms sometimes do—the floor touched the ceiling and slowly descended and steadied into its usual place.

"Me!"

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He smiled gravely. "Have I shocked you? Yes, you. I am fonder of you than of anyone alive, Lawrence; we have the same tastes, we are the same age—I was far too old for Amy—and," he ended unexpectedly, with great vehemence, "I'd trust you with my immortal soul."

In her turbulent, mad, unhoped-for happiness she dared not even try to speak for a moment.

At last she said, "This seems like some perfectly mad dream, Clow—and after all, we came in here to try to help Amy, didn't we?"

He bowed his head. "Yes, we did. I beg your pardon, I won't refer to—to the other matter again."

## XXV

**W**HEN Dorset, a little later, put Miss Croxley into a taxi, Immenham of course stood at the door.

He was the most perfect of butlers, and it is one of the paradoxes of domestic life that the more perfect a butler is the less he is regarded by his employers as a human being.

Dorset talked before him almost as freely as he talked in his absence, yet he would have been amazed to hear that his butler knew nearly as much of the affairs of 875 as he did himself.

"Then you really think I had better wait until she speaks to me," Dorset said to his guest as they went out into the warm evening.

"I do, Clow. She's certain to tell you, and—if she does it will be so much better—better for *her*, I mean."

Immenham's serious eyes rested on the speaker's face with repressed amazement. She was almost handsome, as she stood there, the emeralds glowing on her breast, and a new expression glowing in her eyes.

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Never had he seen her look like that, and he wondered what had happened.

Half an hour before he had let Captain Hood out, and *his* expression had been far easier to analyze. The butler knew quite well what it meant, and as he whistled for a taxi his mind was full of a mixture of hatred and scorn that would have mightily surprised the happy lover.

And now Dorset was saying, quite without either hatred or scorn, "He certainly is a very handsome fellow, Lawrence."

She laughed and got into the taxi. "Oh, yes," she answered, her face in the open window, "he's handsome enough. But—" and Immenham saw her eyes darken, "I don't trust him."

Dorset lowered his voice a little. "No. But—we both know her. What she wants she must have. Nothing on earth can stop her."

The chauffeur, a beery-eyed old fellow, obviously a survival of the growler cabby tribe, climbed to his seat and looked round.

"Wait a moment, chauffeur! Dear Lawrence, you have been so good tonight—I can't imagine what we should do without you——"

She smiled at the unconscious "we," but she also winced a little.

"I've done nothing, Clow. Good night. And—you'll

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send me a wire tomorrow. There's not a bit of use in my saying a word, to *her*, you know. Oh," she added passionately, leaning forward, and speaking louder in her vehemence, "if only it was a *good* man—someone we could trust!"

Dorset gave one of his rare laughs, and his glass fell out of his eye. "We are like two old hens," he said, "fretting over a duckling! Besides, there's just a chance that she knows him better than we do. After all, he's a gentleman, and there's no doubt about his caring for her."

And then Lawrence with a sudden "Hush!" glanced towards the open door and after a few words in a whisper, drove away.

Immenham's face, as his master passed him, was of such beautiful blankness it was a pity Dorset did not even glance at him.

An hour later, Amy Dorset, her hair brushed and fastened smoothly away from her brow, her face gleaming with some kind of grease, her hands in brown rubber gloves, lay in bed, thinking. In the light of her reading-lamp, her eyes looked oddly incomplete with their lashes washed clean of their black cosmetic, but a smile of happiness curved her pretty mouth.

She was very happy. She adored Archie and Archie adored her, so all would be well. How, she could not yet quite see, but the means hardly mattered. Eventu-

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ally, largely by Dorset's help she felt, she and Archie would be married. Then she would always be happy.

There were many things she meant to do for him. For one she meant to learn to darn his socks. It is odd that the spoiled and useless little creature should, in her happiness, turn to the homely services of love rendered to their husbands by humble and uncosseted women.

She would darn his socks and when he came home she would run to the door and meet him, and—and then she would *put on his slippers!*

The ridiculous side of this plan did not appear to her, for she had little sense of humor.

She had read of wives drawing off muddy boots and substituting for them nicely toasted slippers, and this domestic picture appealed to her in a curiously potent way.

"I suppose," she mused, "I ought to get up for breakfast with him, but——" Her toilette was a matter too complicated to be hurried through, so this suggestion she rejected, which was just as well, as Hood himself did not eat breakfast, and was never out of his room till after eleven. They would travel, she dreamed on, they would go to Italy and Spain and all the women would envy her her handsome husband!

They would have a house in the country, not too far from town, and motor up to plays and parties and



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things. Perhaps they had better keep on Archie's flat—just a *pied-à-terre*.

(She loved scraps of French, and they had become so natural to her that she used them even in her thoughts.)

Archie should help choose her clothes, as Charlie Oswood did for Nancy.

Then her face became rapt and serious and she clasped her hands in their brown gloves. Her wedding-dress! It couldn't be white, of course, and widows wore gray. Hers should be yellow—a pale golden color, and *very* simple. *La ligne* should be perfect, but there should be no *fla-fla*. Arthur should make it, and Plauçon the hat. The hat——

Suddenly she sat up in bed, the color ebbing from her little oily face until it looked like a mask. Money! She would have no money! And Archie was as poor as a church-mouse!

Clytemnestra could not have looked more tragic than did Mrs. Dorset in that terrible moment.

She had utterly forgotten that she possessed not a penny of her own.

Dorset was so rich, and in his uninteresting way so generous that she had long ceased to remember that all the money was his.

And now she remembered. It *was* his!

Suppose he refused to give her any.

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What would Archie say? Of course he wouldn't really mind, for he was too noble to care about such things, but—how were they to live?

Suddenly she burst out laughing and, switching off the light, settled herself for sleep.

Of course Clow would give her money. He was so rich that a few thousands a year wouldn't matter to him, and he always did whatever she asked him.

“Dear old Clow,” she thought drowsily, “he is always good to me.”

Her fears of the evening had gone. Clow did not know, and when, as soon as she could find time, she told him, everything would be all right. Thank Heaven he would not care!

Her last thought as she went to sleep was that she would need rather a lot of money to make Archie and herself comfortable, but she must not be greedy. She would suggest eight thousand pounds a year to Clow.

## XXVI

**T**WO days later the interview between Mr. and Mrs. Cloudesley Dorset took place.

The scene of action was the library; the hour, half-past nine at night.

Dorset had waited, undisturbed in his habits, until his wife had suggested having a talk with him, and when she came in and sat down, as was her wont, in the largest chair in the room, he said kindly :

“Well, my dear? And what have you to say to me?”

In the softened light she looked very young, very much a child, though the delicately acute lines of her nose and chin were not those of extreme youth. She wore a flesh-colored tea-gown, neither white nor pink, and her lovely arms were bare but for loose sleeves of a small-patterned, transparent lace.

He sat opposite her, his blood-hound look rather accentuated by the fact that he had worked hard all day and was tired.

“Cloudesley,” she began, and then—for she had never called him Cloudesley—he realized that she was bent on conducting the interview with artistic propriety.

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"Yes—Amy?"

"I am very fond of you, you know."

"Are you, my dear?"

"Yes. I—know I haven't been much of a wife to you, but then you didn't want me to, did you?"

"I have never complained."

"Exactly. Well—and you have been very good to me. I—yes, you have been awfully good."

She paused, dropping the rope of pearls over her little hands, and pulling it through his fingers.

"And now, Clow, something has happened."

He nodded gravely. "I thought something had."

"I—I wondered if you knew," her voice faltered a little, and she dropped the pearls, grasping the carved arms of the chair and sitting bolt upright.

"Did you—did you see?"

He smiled. "I think you'd better go on, and tell me," he returned. "I am all attention."

"All right." There was a pause and then she began again.

"You remember when we were first married?"

"Yes."

"When we lived at Ambles?"

"Yes."

"We were really quite fond of each other then, weren't we?"

"Yes."

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"I used to think—I—I loved you, Clow. *Really*, I mean. But I didn't, of course, and of course you knew I didn't, didn't you?"

"I have known for many years."

She smiled happily at him. "Of course. And you didn't mind, did you? I mean, of course, our tastes were so different—and all that. You didn't mind, did you?"

"No, Amy."

"I am *so* glad. I knew it, of course, but it is good to hear you say it. And then Uncle Michael died and you got the money and we came to town."

He nodded, puffing hard at his cigar.

"Well, Clow—you know how all one's friends have love affairs, and flirtations—well, I may have had a few flirtations, but I never had any love affairs, did I?"

"Wait a minute, Amy." Cigar in hand, he leaned towards her. "I have always known," he said slowly, "that you were—what is nowadays called a good woman."

A little puzzled but pleased, she nodded. "Oh, yes, I was always good. And it wasn't," she went on not without a note of pride, "for want of temptation! You see, you didn't love me, so of course you can't understand, but—lots of men have!"

"I am sure of it."

"But—well, *you* know! Besides, I always thought

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that kind of thing so bad for one's looks. Don't you remember how Agatha Brainton went to pieces during her affair with that South American? And then, of course, there's the nastiness of having to lie and—all that."

"Yes."

She had made her plan, but now she gave it up and plunged into the middle of things.

"Clow—I am in love," she said.

And looking at her beautifully radiant little face his heart smote him. For many years he had regarded her as a being, half child, half nymph, wholly irresponsible and spoiled, and now he realized what Pasquier le Breton had written to his friend at Passy: that the poor little *Undine* had, after all, a soul.

"My dear," he said gently, in a voice she had almost forgotten, "tell me about it."

And she told him; told him quite truthfully the whole story.

He listened in the unbroken silence that achieves full information so much better than questions do, and finally, her voice trembling, her eyes wet with tears that even in her genuine emotion she did not forget to remove gingerly with the tip of a finger, she came to the end of her tale.

"It is—so wonderful, Clow—I—I didn't know how wonderful it was! Honestly—you know what a selfish

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little pig I am—I would *die* for him. I'd even—I'd even lose my looks for him. So you see!"

"Yes, Amy, I see. You are really quite sure?"

"Surer than I am of my life." There was a pause, and then he asked her what she wished him to do.

She shrugged her shoulders, plainly feeling that in this domestic difficulty she had done her share, and now expected him not only to accomplish, but to think out and decide upon his.

"You want to marry him?"

"Of course. I don't," she added with a return of her odd little worldly pomposity, "altogether believe in marriage, but as society is constituted there is nothing better."

He restrained a smile. "I see—and—he?"

"He—Archie, you mean?"

She looked such a child that he flinched at the necessity of enlightening her. Then, realizing her thirty-five years, and the people amongst whom she lived and their lives and their tongues, he went on.

"I mean, does he want to marry you?"

"Clow! Of course he does. How can you ask me such a question!"

"I'm sorry, but—it's a question that must have an answer. You surely know that in these cases the man very frequently doesn't. Remember Southvale and Bill Eversley and——"

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She cut him short with a gesture of magnificent scorn. "Southvale! And Bill Eversley! Really, Clow, you amaze me."

He apologized. "You see, Amy, I hardly *know* Hood. So—he has said he wants to marry you."

"Of course he has—a thousand times."

Dorset drew a breath of relief. "Good. And—does he know you're telling me?"

She shook her head. "No."

"But—why didn't you tell him you were going to?"

"He knows, of course, only I didn't say *when*. If I didn't tell you," she went on with the ingenuousness that contrasted so oddly with some of her mental phrases, "how could I ever marry him?"

Dorset felt that in pressing the point he was being a brute, but he went on nevertheless.

"Can you remember," he asked slowly, "when you and he last discussed the possibility of your being married? I am going to help you all I can, Amy, so please help me to help you in my own way."

She nodded. "All right. Let me see—Oh, we haven't talked about it lately—you see," and she blushed splendidly, "we have been *so* happy."

"I see. Well—I am sorry, but I have promised to play a game of bridge at the club——"

They rose with the courtesy which had so smoothed their life together, and shook hands.



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"Thanks for telling me," he said. "I'll see Burnaby tomorrow and—perhaps—before I do that you'd better ask—Hood to come and see me."

"Oh, *thank* you, Clow," she answered. "You *are* a dear. If only all husbands were as sensible as you there wouldn't be any scandals."

Then she left the room and he went out.

As the butler helped him on with a coat he caught sight of the man's face.

"Anything wrong, Immenham?" he asked.

"No, sir, thank you. That is—I'm rather worried, sir—about—a domestic matter——" Immenham's face looked drawn and worn and Dorset, conscious of an absurd surprise that this excellent servant should have any domestic, or any other, life of his own apart from 875, looked kindly at him.

"I'm very sorry," he said.

"Thank you, sir."

And then Dorset, urged to it by some obscure longing he could not analyze, asked his servant a question. "Are you married, Immenham?"

The man shook his head, a dull flush in his cheeks.

"No, sir—not now."

Dorset went his way toward Pall Mall. "Poor beggar," he thought, "what an answer; *not now*. Ah well, perhaps he, like me, doesn't mind, as that poor little thing said."

## XXVII

MY VERY DEAR,

The season is over. The last ball has been danced to the end; the last big dinner partly eaten, and I trust digested; many great houses are closed; every day continues the exodus of the great, the comparatively great and the would-be great. It is, though the day is still but a pale streak in the sky, the twenty-eighth of July.

Yet here in his eyrie still roosts thy Jules, and here he is to be—for diplomatic and of course desperately secret reasons—for another two days.

The first of August will of course see me at Passy, dear friend, and then begins my month of perfect happiness with you—and our good and dear Henri. But, although so soon I am to see you, yet must I talk with you tonight.

You know that I took your advice about my little *Undine*.

I sought her out and talked with her. I told her about you and tried to persuade her to go to Honegate.

She was interested, she admired your miniature almost enough to satisfy even me; she would, she said, love to know you. But—she was going with friends to Deauville.

And always, always, at balls, at concerts, after dinner, at tea—her beautiful questing eyes watched the door. And when he came—in spite of the trust, what relief in her face! Alas, Love is always haunted by some fear. He, the lover, is a very handsome man with Spanish coloring—did I tell you, and in his bearing, all the graces belonging to his

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good birth. His manner is perfect—not even too triumphant, though, alas, I fear me he is triumphant.

At first, she had moments of sadness—not of regret, but of sadness—but now those moments have fled, and last night I knew why. She has told her husband!

She is not of those to whom "*ce n'est pas pêches qui pêchent en silence*," and now that her husband knows, she too is triumphant.

And how, you ask, do I know that she has told? I know in two ways, and here is the first.

Bigarreau, the scoundrel, has a friend, and the friend is Hood's valet—and it seems that Hood left her letter telling him of what she had done on his table this afternoon.

This man, Millipede—what an excellent name for the confidential servant of such a being as Hood!—told Bigarreau that Hood was in a towering rage over the letter. He was furious with her for telling, and in his anger burst out and told his valet all except the name—and that the faithful one learned from the letter.

Bigarreau, knowing that I was dining at the lady's house (of such odd chances is history made!), told me; so that I might warn her! The good Bigarreau!

However, God forbid that I should be so foolish as to interfere when no interference can be of use, so I ate my dinner in silence, and tried not to watch my host and hostess.

She was in great beauty, and so happy as to break one's heart. What is worse than waiting for some dreadful blow to fall on a happy, unsuspecting head?

The husband, who, as I have told you, is a dull, uninteresting man, was perfectly undisturbed and made, as they say here, a very good meal.

M. Hood was not there, but I soon learned that a great violinist was to play later, and that some people were com-

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ing in to hear him. Of these people I knew by instinct M. Hood was to be one.

And—the woman who loved him had told her husband of her love, and instead of being, because of her courage, the proudest and happiest man in the world, I knew that Hood was angry, furiously angry, and probably frightened. It was to make tremble with disgust, and I have no shame in telling you that I trembled.

And she—so lovely, so appealing in her great happiness, now a new, serene happiness—was all innocently flying colors to which, poor heart, she had no right.

She was flying the colors of a brave, fine, worthy lover who existed only in her imagination!

Me she rallied for dullness—teasing me in her amazing version of our beautiful tongue.

“Vous n’êtes pas gai, Mossieu,” she said, sweetly, “êtes vous malhouroux?”

“Madame,” I replied, bowing, “not all the world can be happy at the same time.”

At that she blushed, her temples, which are of a peculiar transparent quality, flushing like the top of the Jungfrau at sunset. “Ah, yes,” she said, softly, “I am very happy. You will know, soon. Everybody will know, soon.”

What will you? I could not show her that I did know. Nor could I tell her that her rapture was but a mirage, a dream. I was dull, tongue-tied, my Anastasie-Claire, and she showed her surprise. To others, the dinner was doubtless like hundreds of others (although the cook of Madame D. is, by the grace of God, a Frenchman!); to me it was a torture.

And the memories that rose in my heart! “Oh, the dear old days when I was so unhappy!”

When the ladies had left us I went and sat by an old man who greatly amuses me—an ancient and disreputable

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peer whose daughter honors—(no, since last night I must say *honored!*) me with a great aversion.

This old man, Lord Croxley, lived much in France in his youth, and when I see him I make a point of talking to him. It pleases him to speak French, and he speaks it beautifully.

An unreverend, unrespected graybeard, but of a fine sense of humor, and an unimpaired memory. In sitting down by Lord Croxley, I placed myself but one seat away from Mr. D., our host, and again I had occasion to feel a rising of my blood against him. His wife had told him of her love for another man, his beautiful child-wife, and he was as unmoved as a monk who had never seen a woman since his mother weaned him! An ugly man with deep lines in his face, and an immobility of countenance remarkable even in England.

Curiously enough, Lord Croxley's first remark to me bore on the matter of which my mind was full.

"I hear you're going to France, Dorset," he said. "Lawrence was telling me."

M. Dorset shook his head, and filled his glass with port.

"No," he answered, "Amy was going—not I—but she has changed her mind, and we are going down to Maiden Aqualate."

"Are you, indeed? I haven't seen Maiden Aqualate since your uncle's time—fine old place it is. Have you had any changes?"

Me, I had frozen hands, but this insensible husband was unmoved.

"Not many." That was all.

Angry, I believe, at not being asked to go down to inspect the place, old Croxley made another remark.

"I hear—that old daughter of mine must have told me,

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I suppose—that you've taken a great liking to Fred Hood's son."

Dorset regarded him. "Lawrence can't have told you," he said, and again that was all.

I found myself unable to understand the situation, which you will admit is an incredible one, and a few minutes later I seized the opportunity created by one of the younger men who follows the modern fashion of drinking nothing, of going to the drawing-room.

The day had been fine for a wonder, but a thunderstorm was gathering, which met my mood agreeably.

I went straight to Mrs. Dorset, and asked her to go out on the balcony with me.

The sky was dark and the air heavy, though sweet with the smell of the roses in the garden. She came at once and for a moment we stood looking up at the black sky. Then she spoke.

"Oh, M. Pasquier le Breton," she said, as impulsively as a young girl of sixteen, "how wonderful it is to be happy."

"Madame," I replied, "it is." How *could* I say I was glad she was happy, under the circumstances?

She noticed the omission, but disregarded it.

"I hope," she said after another pause, "that you like Cloudesley—my husband?"

I did not, but I lied convincingly, amazed by her query—

"Because," she burst out, "he is—the best man on earth!"

To say that I was *flambé*, dear friend, is to say nothing. She burst into a peal of the prettiest laughter—at my face, I suppose. "You think me mad, don't you?" she went on.

Again I lied, and then to my horror she laid her hand on my arm and said quietly, "I have always liked you and I want you to know—I am the happiest woman in the world. I love someone very much—absolutely—and my husband is going to arrange for me to marry him."

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Dearest friend, I give you my word that I found myself on the point of falling. My respiration failed me and I was dumb.

"Is he not wonderful?" she went on.

I kissed her little, lovely hand and murmured God alone knows what, but she was content.

"You see," she explained simply. "I have never been unhappy before, but—I have never been *happy*, and there's such a difference."

Willingly would I have been dragged at that moment to the block. It was frightful.

Finally I stammered an eulogy of her husband—it was one degree easier than lying about her lover—and she agreed warmly.

"Yes, he is an angel. I am glad I told you, monsieur, I knew you would be glad."

"But will not Monsieur Dorsette [it is thus that it pronounces itself] be very lonely without you?" I asked.

She laughed merrily and kindly. "No. You see, dear monsieur, he never cared much for me—and he doesn't object in the least. Also—you promise not to tell?"

I promised.

"Well, I think he will not be alone long. He will marry again, and, I *think*, a very dear friend of mine."

"Just Heaven, madame," your poor Jules cried, outside himself. "You cannot mean that your husband has confided to you as well as you to him?"

"Ah, no," she answered, amused by my distress, for they train themselves, the English, to be amused by other people's emotions, "not that, but—for a long time I have seen that a dear friend of mine is very fond of him—fonder possibly than she knows, poor darling!—and of late he is seeing her every day, so I *hope* he will marry Lawrence—Oh, I've told you her name!"

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Like a child she clapped her hand over her mouth, and then we each made a little exclamation of horror, for just behind her, in the window, stood the lady of whom she spoke, the daughter of the old lord who speaks French so well!

It was a dreadful moment, and a very long one.

Then Miss Croxley said quietly, "Some people have come, Amy dear," and our hostess had fled, and she and I were alone.

"I heard," she said.

"I feared it," said I.

For a moment we looked steadily at each other and then she held out her hand, and I took it. A bony hand, my beloved, a strong hand.

"M. Pasquier le Breton," she began, "let's be friends, because if we do, we may be able to help Amy."

"I am more than willing," I replied.

"I don't know how *you* feel," she went on, in the rough, bold way I had always hated, but now began to like, "but I *loathe* Captain Hood."

It behooves a man to be more prudent in speech than a woman, though women must in their acts be more circumspect than men.

"I can't say I like him," was my cautious reply, "but——"

"I know, I know!" (An impatient lady, this.) "Of course you don't like him. Well, now listen to me. We women are fools, but God—the good God, as you polite Latins call him!—has given us intuition. And instinctively I have always disliked that man."

"She loves him," I ventured, for in the plenitude of her partisanship she bewildered me.

"Yes, and to do the reptile justice, I believe he loves her. But what," she went on, extending herself in a blaze, like a prairie fire, "is the love of such a man?"



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"Mademoiselle—how can I say?" (Thy little Jules being the diplomat indeed!)

There was a pause, and during it came to us the soul-splitting wail of a violin in process of tuning.

"Levinski is going to play!"

Together, of one movement we drew into the shadow, and listened. Perhaps the music soothed us to a riper comprehension, a mellower kindness; who can say?

At all events, this woman who had been strong enough to bear hearing her love-story told to a man she disliked, without making a single remark about it, came to appear to me in a rather noble light. She reminded me in her stoicism of you, dearest and sweetest of women. I need say no more.

When the music ceased she spoke in the gentler mood I so strongly appreciated.

"Monsieur," she said, proving her rarity by pronouncing that shibboleth of a word without the suspicion of an *h*, "we will be friends, you and I. And by way of beginning our friendship I will show you something."

From her flat bosom she produced three letters, which she gave to me. "I must go now," she said, "for my father is here, and he is—not quite himself, and the sight of me would incense him. Read these letters—they are all dated, and the one signed 'Psyche' is from Amy—and, tomorrow come to see me"—giving me her most unfashionable address—"and we will confer."

I bowed. "Mademoiselle," I replied, "I am honored by your friendship and your confidence, and will do my best to prove worthy of them. Good night."

She disappeared into the now nearly full drawing-room, but shortly came back. "I forgot to tell you," she said, with a furious blush, "that these letters were sent to me anonymously—I have no idea by whom." Then she left me.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Dear friend, I will not offend you by the perusal of the letters. It suffices to say that they are written to M. le Capitaine Hood by three different women, one of them our poor *Undine*, and that they prove, beyond the shadow of a doubt that, however sincerely he may love Madame Dorset, he is that contemptible thing, a man who deceives and distresses women, and who is a liar and incapable of fidelity.

One of the poor souls, indeed, writes in such misery that tears come, as I read, to my sinful eyes. And the worst is that all these letters were written within the last week, which shows that the man beloved of my poor, sweet *Undine* has not even honored her with a temporary cessation of his ignoble game.

My heart aches for her. Tomorrow I shall see Miss Croxley, but—what shall I say to her?

Alas, it is beyond me.

To me he seems like the animal described by La Fontaine in the "Pest-Smitten Beasts": "Death alone is capable of expiating his crimes."

To you, my sweet saint, good night—or rather, good morning, for the western sky is bursting into the bloom of sunrise!

God be with you.

JULES.

## XXVIII

**I**T was Immenham, the decorous, self-respecting Immenham, who had sent the three letters to Miss Croxley.

The impish Millipede the night before the dinner-party had, to tease the man whose superiority both amused and irritated him, brought the letters to the Yellow Posts, when, finding Mr. Dorset's butler alone, he had proceeded to enjoy himself.

Every man to his humor, says the poet, and it chanced to be Mr. Cosmo Millipede's humor to torment people who refused to appreciate him according to his own bill of lading.

"Mrs. D.," he had declared, "is not the only one." Then he produced the letters, explaining airily that he had "borrowed" them.

The man, though a scoundrel, was undoubtedly devoted to his master, yet he sacrificed, in his love of a bitter prank, his master's welfare to his own wicked sense of fun. It is difficult to explain, but so it was.

"Besides," he grinned, sitting on the table, "you wouldn't dare tell Mrs. Pish."

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"Mrs. Pish?" With a gleam of hope poor Immenham looked up from the paper he still feigned to read.

"Yes—Pish. Read the letters and you'll see. That's 'is pet name for *your* one! Spelt rather odd, but that's what it means."

Immenham, who in his delicacy had refused to read the letters, stirred uneasily in his chair. His mistress was certainly not Mrs. Pish.

"If Captain Hood knew you," he said slowly, "he'd kick you out."

Millipede glowed with satisfaction. "Not 'im! I'm perfectly invaluable to that man, and he knows it."

"Ugh!"

"Well, I may not be your taste, but I am his! And if you don't believe me——"

"Look here, Millipede," asked Immenham, fixing him with his large, clear, discomfiting gaze, "it's only three weeks since you were standing up for the Captain through thick and thin. Why have you changed?"

The other man laughed. "Haven't Hood and I been real friends. Only—well, you're so damned superior, Immenham; you never meet a chap half-way; you don't know what good-fellowship means. And as you and I both know that your little lady is making a——"

"*Shut up!*"

Millipede edged away a little. "All right, all right, no offense. But you just about think she's a little wax

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

mother of God, and—well, it amuses me to prove that she isn't. See?"

Immenham resumed his paper. "I see. And that's quite enough from you, thanks."

Spreading the three letters alluringly on the table beside poor Immenham's half-pint, the Pucklike Millipede departed, saying that he would come back shortly.

No sooner had he gone than Immenham, his face rather pale, took them, read them, and with a sigh, and putting them into his pocket, left the public-house.

He would make use of the letters somehow, though how he hardly knew, and—he was a good man but he had been sorely goaded—Millipede would never dare make a fuss about his loss!

Like many clever people, Rowland Immenham made the mistake of thinking that only he realized and perceived under-surface things. He knew Archie Hood to be an untrustworthy man, but he believed that no one else knew.

So, once he had made up his mind, it was not without satisfaction that he addressed the three letters in a disguised hand to Miss Croxley and posted them. It would, he feared, be a shock for Miss Croxley, but she was a good woman and could be trusted to do her best with the knowledge he had thus assured to her—he, Immenham.

## XXIX

**P**OOOR little Amy Dorset received the two letters—naturally Lawrence and Pasquier le Breton had not sent her her own—the next afternoon as she waited for Hood to come to her.

He had not come the evening before, to her amazement, for in the letter that had so incensed him she had told him that her husband wished to see him, and in her odd, untimely simplicity she had expected her lover to accept her husband's generosity as easily as she herself had done.

Hood's attitude during the twenty-four hours subsequent to his receipt of her letter, is extremely difficult to analyze. He himself made no effort to analyze it, for subconsciously he knew that he had on the matter several quite distinct sets of feelings. He was violently if not deeply in love with Mrs. Dorset, and he believed with perfect sincerity that to own her—not merely to possess her, but to own, so to speak, her life—would be the acme of happiness to him.

If she had been free he would have married her at once. But at the same time he had never contemplated

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

the forcible freeing of her. Divorce had not occurred to him, and he was not of the eloping kind.

Danger, the pleasant, triumphant danger of successful intrigue, was the breath of his nostrils to him, but he did not enjoy the atmosphere of the divorce court. Also, he had, oddly enough, always rather like Cloudesley Dorset, and although he had had no qualms about injuring him without his knowledge, he shrank from facing the man's realization of his injuries.

The world, he felt, was doubtless overfull of husbands, but on the other hand he was not ungrateful enough to refuse to grant that without husbands there could be no wives; and wives were his favorite pasturage.

So he was, even in his irritated anger, sorry for Dorset. Remained the detestable fact that he, Hood, was over his handsome ears in debt, and what in Heaven's name was he to do with a penniless wife? He had never forgotten, as Amy had, that the money in the Dorset household belonged entirely to its head. Altogether, he was in a most unpleasant mess and spent a wretched evening, first at his club and then at Beryl Spottiswoode's.

Beryl cheered him with flagons and comforted him with apples, so that the end of the evening was not so bad as the beginning, but he knew that the morning would bring its revenge, and it did, as is its horrid way.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

A note from Amy, brought in at ten o'clock with a brandy-and-soda, did not mend matters. She was puzzled by his depression, but as yet perfectly unsuspecting, and she expected him without fail at half-past five that afternoon.

After a miserable hour-and-a-half in bed he rose, and when he was dressed and about to go for a walk before lunch, another annoyance cropped up, as if to prove the truth of the horrid old proverb about the collective habits of troubles. He missed some letters that in his worry he had left in a pocket when he changed for dinner the evening before.

"Millipede!"

"Sir?"

"I left some letters in one of my pockets last night when I dressed. Where have you put them?"

"Nowhere, sir; 'aven't seen 'em, sir."

"You must have seen them—one was on very blue paper."

"No, sir."

Millipede was nearly as gifted in the art of untruthfulness as his master, and Hood knew that the man was a liar, though he did not call himself one.

For a moment the four eyes met, and then Hood nodded. "Oh, all right, they weren't very important, only I certainly thought I'd left 'em in my coat——"

Millipede, who had had a bad night because of the



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

letters, and who was planning all sorts of ways to get even with Immenham, retired with relief in his soul.

For years he had, almost as a matter of conscience, read his employer's correspondence, but he had never made the slightest use of his knowledge, and until yesterday had never taken so much as an envelope out of the flat.

And to think that it was pompous, dull old Immenham who had bested him!

Hood was very much annoyed, for while one of the letters was only one of Alys Lowndes's stupidly sentimental effusions, another was from Amy, and the third referred in unmistakable terms to the most serious difficulty, bar this new one of Amy's having told her husband, in which he for the moment found himself.

He was a fastidious man, as a rule, and although Yvonne Cavendish was extremely pretty, she was not a lady, and he feared she would cause trouble now.

He wished, savagely, that he had never seen her. After all, the whole thing was her fault; she had been married, she had been in some musical-comedy chorus, and knew her way about as well as he.

On his way to his club he stopped at a post office and sent her a telegram.

Amy, meantime, had risen early and gone for a walk.

This was for her a most unusual proceeding, but the

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

morning was fine and she was restless, and it seemed a good way to kill time.

She had not seen her husband since the night before, and she knew that he would be busy until dinner-time, for it was a Wednesday, and Wednesdays he invariably devoted to the business inevitably connected with vast wealth.

After lunch she had her usual rest, but even Clémentine's clever fingers could not soothe her to sleep, and when finally, unable **any** longer to lie still, she found herself in the drawing-room at four o'clock, she looked tired and a little older than usual, in spite of the skill with which her toilette was chosen.

The sun had gone, and it looked like rain—it had been altogether a dreadful summer.

The charming room was full of flowers; tall white Madonna lilies stood about in glass vases, filling the air with their poetic fragrance.

For a while Mrs. Dorset sat quietly reading. She was struggling through "Crime and Punishment," and trying desperately to like it.

Her brows drawn together, she waded on, and then, as the clock struck half-past four, she heard a footstep and sprang to her feet, her face on fire with expectation. He had come—and an hour too soon!

"Letters, madame."

The light faded from her face, leaving it so wan that

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Immenham's heart smote him, and he went out of the room with a sigh that only his perfect training rendered inaudible.

Mrs. Dorset sat down again and read her letters.

### XXX

**T**HERE were three invitations, one for Scotland, the other two for country-house parties, one of which the King of Spain was to grace; the other to a certain Mrs. Beauchamp. This invitation she would in no case accept. Molly Beauchamp was a woman of nearly fifty with a well-deserved bad reputation, although she knew, as the saying goes, "everybody." Archie, Amy reflected, would hate her to go there. There were two bills; then there was a large cheap-looking envelope with a typewritten address.

This she opened, listlessly, her mind busy with his Bourbon Majesty.

The two letters that poor Lawrence had sent to her without a word, were in their envelopes, and with the stupidity of which most of us are guilty at sudden crises, Amy stared at them for several seconds without moving.

"Letters to Archie," she thought; "how odd!"

She then realized that the letters had both been opened. Had he sent them to her and forgotten to put in an explanatory note?

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

She took up the topmost one and turned it over idly. She was not a curious woman, and she was perfectly honorable.

The chances, therefore, may be regarded as a little more than even that but for one thing she would have laid the letters aside until she could ask Hood about them. The determining factor in what she did was a simple one; a strong scent of heliotrope reached her nostrils from the letter she held. She flushed suddenly, hesitated, and took the single sheet out of the envelope.

ARCHIE, MY LOVE [was scrawled in a rather firm, bold hand], I can't bear this! I must see you, dear. I hate bothering you, but it is nearly a week since I saw you and I'm such a fool that when I don't, I can't help imagining all sorts of dreadful things. Do write just a line and say you haven't stopped loving me, Beau-Boy? And do come to see me, even if it has to be late. Jessup has gone for her holiday, and I'll unbolt the door, so your key will let you in. Darling, I love you so dreadfully.

ALYS.

The clock ticked along in the even tenor of its way, and a top-heavy lily fell out of a shallow vase.

Mrs. Dorset read the note twice. Then she read the other.

*32 Princes St. Westminster.*

ARCHIE,

For God's sake answer my letter. I am nearly desperate and I don't know what to do. I don't ask much but you

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

*must* help me now. For God's sake come to see me Wednesday afternoon, when I am free. I'll not make a scene, only you must tell me what to do.

YVONNE.

The clock struck the quarter, and Mrs. Dorset did not move.

She sat very quietly in the great chair she loved, her face in the shadow of its wings.

It had begun to rain, the drops tinkling musically against the windows. Presently a hurdy-gurdy burst into a florid ragtime melody.

It played only a short time, breaking off in the middle of the air and then trundling away. . . .

When Captain Hood arrived, he found Mrs. Dorset reading by the fire. She had more color than usual, and looked remarkably beautiful, but she laughingly warned him not to kiss her as the doctor had just been and feared that she was in for measles, a malady then prevalent in the neighborhood.

"Darling—you *mustn't* have measles," he protested, "I couldn't *bear* it if you had to suffer!"

"Couldn't you?"

"You wouldn't ask me," he said, reproachfully, "if you knew how I love you."

She chattered gayly as Immenham set the tea things before her, and when they were again alone, she asked

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

him suddenly, "By the way, Archie, do you know a Mrs. Lowndes?"

He frowned thoughtfully. "Lowndes? No—I think not—unless you mean old Mrs. Baylay-Lowndes, Cyril Heathcote's mother?"

She chose a sandwich with great care. "No, no. The one I mean is younger than Cyril's mother—about fifty, I should say, and still handsome—very made up, you know."

He laughed. "Oh, yes, of course. Lives somewhere in Essex and has a flat in town—I've met her at the Wests'. Why, darling?"

Even in her anguish she could not withhold an involuntary tribute to his gift of lying. It was, she felt, magnificent of its kind.

She was also proud of her own prowess; the telephone book had given her "Alys's" surname, and the memory of a casual inquiry about the lady months ago at a garden party had fitted a personality to the name.

She smiled. "Oh, I don't know. Someone told me last night that the poor old thing is making a fool of herself about some young man, and I wondered if you knew her——"

Hood changed the subject hastily, but without the remotest suspicion, and five minutes later Clémentine, as instructed, came in to tell her mistress that Mrs.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Undershaft had called her to the telephone to say that she absolutely *must* see Mrs. Dorset at once.

Mrs. Undershaft was in delicate health, and as she and Amy were great friends Hood could raise no serious objection to receiving his marching orders.

"I'll see you this evening," Mrs. Dorset said, "if I'm *not* down with measles, that is!"

Hood was no coward, but he saw no advantage to be derived from running the risk of an unpleasant and ridiculous malady like measles, so he made no attempt to kiss his lily lady as he called her. "Darling—you'll telephone me at seven—just to tell me how you are?" he urged, with melting eyes.

She laughed again, and he wondered if she had really fever; her voice sounded not quite itself, and he had never seen her with such a brilliant color.

At the door he turned. "Psyche dearest," he said, "you haven't said a word about—us."

"How do you mean?"

"You've talked so fast," he explained, reproaching her for the very omission that had so relieved his mind, "that you forgot to tell me when I am to see your husband. Can't I see him now?"

"He is out. You have forgotten that he is never at home on Wednesdays."

Hood shrugged his shoulders. "So I had! However—you are sure he wasn't angry?"



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"Not at all angry. Well, I *must* go, Archie!"

"Yes, sweet. It is hard to leave you. However, it isn't for long."

"No," she said slowly, "it isn't for long."

XXXI

Mrs. Alfred Beauchamp. Long Powsley, Herbinton, Sussex. Delighted to come. Arrive tomorrow afternoon.  
AMY.

## XXXII

**M**ISS YVONNE CAVENDISH lived not far from Westminster Abbey, in a narrow street of tall, dark houses.

There were three brass knobs at the side of the street door, and Mrs. Dorset instinctively avoided the lowest. She pulled the middle one but even that was too low, and when the door yielded to her pressure and she went into the dark passage, a man's voice called over the banisters to ask her what she wanted.

Until then it had not occurred to her that she did not know "Yvonne's" surname, so she hesitated in her reply to the unseen man.

"I am sorry," she said, "I fear I've rung the wrong bell. I wanted Miss——"

Breaking down completely, she waited with hard-beating heart to be accused of some dreadful thing, or to be told to go away and mind her own business.

Instead of which the voice said good-naturedly, "Oh yes, Miss Cavendish—top door—I *think* she's at home"—and there was a loud bang.

The stairs were narrow and dark, but there was a

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

fairly good linoleum, and the light at the first landing showed that the house was clean as such houses go.

A polished plate on the first door told Mrs. Dorset that her invisible informant was one Mr. Paul Green, music-engraver.

Pausing for a moment, she went on into the darkness and then emerged again into the light from a small window.

Here she saw the name "Mrs. Keel" on a card nailed to the door, and here, after a moment's breathless hesitation, she knocked.

There was a long pause, and she knocked again.

Presently the door opened and an extremely pretty girl in a voluminous pink dressing-gown stood staring at her.

"Are—are you Miss Cavendish?"

"I am."

Her hair, which was of an unusual shade of real gold, curled and tendriled round her brow in a way that even in such a moment Amy could not help envying.

"I have come to see you," she said gently, "and I should like to have a little talk with you, if you don't mind——"

Miss Cavendish, whose eyelids were red, stared at her for a moment, and then, in a pretty voice barely marred by a shadow of cockney inflection, invited her to come in.

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The little sitting-room was not very ugly; there were chintz curtains, one or two old-fashioned water-colors on the wall, and some books in a very good Sheraton bookcase.

"The place is in rather a mess," Miss Cavendish apologized; "I haven't been just the thing, and——"

"I think it's very pretty," Amy protested sincerely. She did not know exactly what she had expected, but she realized as she sat down that she certainly had not expected this.

"You—you don't come from the Thespian M. A.?" the girl burst out suddenly, a frown on her brows.

"The Thespian—what?"

"No, you don't—so that's all right. I was afraid you might—the Thespian Mutual Aid, I meant. You see, a gentleman friend of mine—he's Cyril Comthorpe's general manager—mentioned it to me, and I said I *wouldn't* go to them. So I was afraid——" She broke off with a laugh, "but you're not, so that's all right." Amy drew a deep breath.

"I have come to see you about a—a very personal matter," she began. "I heard of you quite by accident, and—you mustn't be angry," she went on hurriedly, as a cloud seemed to descend on Miss Cavendish's pretty face, "it's a very serious thing for me, and—I want you to help me if you will."

The girl laughed, drawing her crumpled garment

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

closer about her. "Me help you? That sounds a good joke!"

"It isn't a joke. I am very unhappy. And I fear," she went on gently, "that you are too."

Miss Cavendish jerked her chin up irritably.

"Oh, you needn't worry about me," she said. "I've been a bit of a d—, of a fool, but that was my own lookout, and *I'm* all right."

There was a pause and the two women looked at each other, with, on both sides, an odd mixture of sympathy and repulsion.

"I think," Amy began again, "that you know—Captain Hood."

"Captain Hood!" A rush of color flooded the girl's pale face. "Did *he* send you? If he did, you can just go and tell him——"

"Hush! He didn't send me. I've never even heard him mention your name. If you'll wait," Amy went on gently, "I'll explain to you."

"Go on."

"The situation is this." Amy obeyed, feeling very much as if she were acting. "This letter of yours has come to my hands. Someone sent it to me—anonymously. Will you tell me what it means?"

The girl took the letter, read it, and laughed, a hard, short laugh, full of bitter amusement.

"Yes, it's mine all right."

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

“And it means——”

“I imagine you know what it means. You must be,” Miss Cavendish added dispassionately, “older than me.”

“Yes, I am older than you. Well—would you mind telling me about it? I promise you I will never tell, and—I shall be very grateful to you.”

“I don't mind telling you. I'm not ashamed. At least,” she amended, “not very.”

After a pause she told her story.

“I was on the stage till about a year ago, and then I lost my job. The stage-manager at the Tiara was a great friend of mine. Used to know my husband. My husband left me three years ago—no good at all, he wasn't. I tried very hard to get work and finally got a place as show-girl. My figure,” she explained cautiously, “was not bad. I lived here—rather fond of the place—and Mr. Isaacson—that's the gentleman I spoke of—he used to give me tickets sometimes, or a good dinner. *You* know—little treats of different kinds to cheer me up. He was a good friend to me, Isaacson was. Nothing else, you understand—he'd have married me, if Clarence hadn't been alive. Then I met Archie.”

In spite of herself Amy winced at this, but Miss Cavendish didn't observe it, and went on in her monotonous voice.

“He saw me in Hanover Square one evening, and

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

spoke to me. I told him to mind his own business, but he was there the next evening, and finally, once when it was raining like the devil, I went and dined with him.

“He was very nice, and—it’s pleasant to talk to a *real* gentleman. My father was a gentlemanly man—he was a French polisher at Wycherley’s—but he wasn’t like Archie, and no more was Isaacson. Well”—she broke off with a shrug—“you can imagine the rest. I was awfully fond of him, and he said he was of me and I suppose he was in a way—for a while.

“He used to send me flowers, and chocolates—his manners were lovely——”

Her eyes filled with tears and, inflamed already, suddenly turned scarlet.

“I don’t so much mind his leaving me,” she said with a sob, “but—don’t you think ’e might have done it decently?”

Amy rose and laid her hand on the poor heaving shoulder. “I do indeed,” she said softly; “he is a beast to treat you so.”

Yvonne Cavendish wiped her eyes on a damp ball of cambric that she drew out from under one of the sofa cushions.

“No, he isn’t a beast,” she said, clearing her throat. “He’s only awfully thoughtless, poor boy.”

The interview reached its zenith of misery to Amy



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Dorset when this pathetic creature called Hood "poor boy."

She went back to her chair and took her bag from the table.

"You have been very kind to tell me so frankly," she said. "You have done me a great service. In return, you must let me help you—until you can go back to your work."

The girl looked at her. "Do you mean money?"

"Yes."

"No, thank you. *He's* got to do that. I'm not being nasty, or—threatening—though I've got some letters of his that he'd hate to have anyone see—but it's up to him to help me now and he's jolly well got to do it. Why, I've written him at least six letters explaining, and begging him to come to see me, and he hasn't even answered. He's an awful coward, you know!"

"He must be."

As she spoke a knock came to the door, and Yvonne started. "That's him now!"

There was no place for Mrs. Dorset to go, nor after a first wild impulse of flight did she wish to go.

She stood still in the middle of the room.

### XXXIII

**Y**OU! Good God!" Hood halted on the threshold, his face as white as a sheet, an ugly hunted look in his eyes.

"Yes, Archie, it is I."

Instinctively they both disregarded their hostess who watched them with a curious distress on her pretty tear-dimmed face.

"You—you——" he stammered. "What are you doing here?"

Her childish helplessness, one of the qualities that had so pleased him, had all gone. There stood before him, not the exquisite little Psyche he loved, but a shrewd-eyed, cold-voiced lady with a calm demeanor he would have given half of all he owned to be able to emulate.

"I came to see Miss Yvonne Cavendish," she answered quietly. "We have had our talk, so I will go."

"Wait!" His handsome face had by now regained some of its color, and he was able to control his eyes. They looked straight, even commandingly at her.

"You must explain to me, Amy!"

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"Surely no explanation is necessary."

"But it is."

"Then—someone, I don't know who, sent me a letter Miss Cavendish wrote to you—so under the circumstances I thought I had better come to see her. She seemed to need—help."

"You have," he declared in a voice so firm, so convincing that she stared at him in amazement, "been lied to."

"Lied to?" It was she who stammered now.

"Yes, what has—this girl been telling you?"

"Miss Cavendish has told me exactly what I asked her for—the truth."

He turned his lambent eyes reproachfully on the girl. "Yvonne," he said in a grieved voice, "*what* have you done?"

The poor soul, to Amy's horror, burst into tears.

"I—I haven't done anything," she sobbed, with a change of attitude so complete that the other woman wondered for a second if she had gone mad. "You *know* I wouldn't hurt you, Archie! Only I'm not well, and—you didn't come or write——"

Thoroughly master of the situation, Hood shook his head sadly.

"Listen, both of you," he said. "Yvonne, when did you and I meet? Wasn't it over a year ago?"

"Yes."

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

“And—now you complain that of late I have not come to see you or—written. My dear, it *was* wrong of me—and I am sorry. I quite understand your being angry with me because I neglected you. But—Amy”—he turned to the other woman—“I *cannot* understand *your* being angry with me for neglecting Miss Cavendish. If I *had* come to see her, you would have had a right to be outraged.” His arms folded on his breast, his head held high, with a dignity and grace inherited from some one of his remote Spanish ancestors, he dominated the situation, looking like a grieved angel.

“Surely you,” he went on, still to Mrs. Dorset, “know the world well enough to understand this very regrettable affair? You have every right to my future, but—I deny that you have any to my past.”

She was silent, trying to find a way out of the toils he was weaving round her.

“My solicitor,” he then declared, turning to the girl, who was crying quietly, “has instructions about you. I am deeply sorry for the wrong I have done you but—we shall never meet again.”

She went to him, her hands held out. “I know, I know,” she wailed, “but won’t you kiss me once more? Just once more?”

Amy Dorset recoiled, white with anger and disgust.

“Please let me pass,” she said; “I am going.”

Disregarding the girl, he barred the way. “You

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

must let me come with you, Amy," he said. "I can't let you go alone——"

"You must."

And his supreme egotism it was that at the eleventh hour lost him the day. In his utter indifference to the feelings of anyone but himself, he forgot the very existence of Yvonne Cavendish.

"Amy," he cried in a low voice with an odd break in it, "for God's sake listen to me. I tell you it was all over the moment I cared for you—months ago!"

And at that the poor thing he was deserting could bear, even with the remarkable patience of her kind, no more.

"All over months ago, was it? Months ago, indeed. Look here, Miss—whatever your name is—do you know *that?*"

Tearing open the drawer of the little writing-table, she produced a photograph which she held out to Amy. "There's his picture he gave me not four weeks back—see the date? It was my birthday—see what he wrote? And here's another thing"—she held out a little gold cigarette-case. "Perhaps you'll remember that—you're sure to have seen it, he always carried it. He left it here last Friday week."

Hood was worsted.

"Yes, I remember the cigarette-case very well," Amy said coldly. Then, turning to him, "You had it the

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

day we all motored down to the Braintons for polo. The polo match was on the eleventh."

He was, in his unutterable humiliation, so piteous a spectacle that her heart smote her.

"I shall not tell anyone," she said, "you need not fear. And"—opening her bag she took out the letter from Mrs. Lowndes and held it out to him. "Here is a letter from another one. Alys, *her* name is. Take it!"

Turning to the girl, she held out her hand.

"I am very sorry for you," she said gently, "and you must let me help you. Wipe your eyes, my—dear. He—is not worth a tear."

At the door she looked again at Hood.

"I will not say anything to you," she began. "You know what you are, and you know that I know. And that is all that's necessary. Good-bye."

## XXXIV

31st July.

MY DEAR,

She has gone, our poor *Undine*—gone to stay with a woman I loathe, and my heart bleeds for her in her despair. She went away this morning, leaving a note for her husband telling him nothing about Hood except she is never going to see him again, and saying that she will come back when she can. “A thousand regrets,” I told her, “do not make one despair,” but what she feels is despair, and God alone can help her. Pray for her, Anastasic-Claire, your prayers will fly like white birds up to the sky, to the Great Ear of Mercy.

And now I will, although I shall see you so soon, tell you all about it.

The morning after my last letter, that is, yesterday, I went, as she bade me, to see Miss Croxley.

For a long time we conferred, my new ally, and I hope I may say, friend.

The letters of which I told you were proof conclusive of the man's worthlessness—and worse. For not only had he deserted one of the women at a time when he should have been, if he could be no more, a faithful friend, but he had deserted her in a way contemptible and cowardly; leaving the poor thing in absolute silence, neglecting her letters, ignoring her anguished pleas for help.

As you know, my cherished one, my life is no model for young men, and much have I done for which I must blush,

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

but it is not given to me to comprehend this English gentleman's way of treating a woman who trusted him. That is water of which no decent man could drink.

So we knew, and told each other, Miss Croxley and I, that Mrs. D. must not put her heart into his hands. "He would break it," she said, "and before breaking it he would outrage it; she trusts him as a saint trusts God, and he is—this!"

It interested me to reflect on the strangeness of a worldly, unspiritual woman so loving, and at her age—to my amazement, I had learned that she is five-and-thirty! She is, it appears, quite without religion; the little cynicisms and skepticisms that are current amongst London society women were continually on her lips, and I had felt, when I called her *Undine*, that her soul was a thing rudimentary, unknown to herself, but—alas, no religion at all! Poor soul!

And now she had put, as they say here, all her eggs into one basket, and Miss Croxley and I knew that the basket was, so to speak, "made in Germany"—cheap and useless, and what is more, already worn out and broken!

"If I showed her this letter she would never speak to me again," Miss Croxley said.

"No."

"She is, for all her pretty voice and gentle manners, a perfect pig of obstinacy." It is customary here to call one's nearest and dearest, pigs and even swine, dear friend, so forgive the ugly word!

"And if *you* showed them"—she went on, but this of course I refused to do. It was an impossibility.

To be sure she had, to my surprise, told me of her happiness, but that is a thing very different from allowing a comparative stranger to behold her despair.

"If you told her that you knew him to be a bad man?" I suggested, at the end of my Latin.



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Miss Croxley shook her head. "I have told her a thousand times that I don't like him, and she only laughed. Now she would *not* laugh—she would fight for him, and hate me!" To cut it short, we sent the two letters (not her own, which Miss Croxley kept) to the poor lady in a typewritten envelope without a word.

It went to my heart to hurt her thus, but it was right that she should know, and after all such blows are best borne alone.

I went my way, troubled indeed, but selfishly relieved that my part in the matter was, as I believed, over! Little did I know.

I was dining at the Italian Embassy, and when I arrived, amongst the last of the guests, I was told that my dinner partner was to be Mrs. D.

I bowed and went in search of her. I knew that she must have had the letters, and the first man I had seen as I went upstairs was Hood himself. She was standing by an open window, dressed as she often is, all in white. As I approached her I thought that she could not possibly know, so young, so beautiful, so gay she looked as she talked to the men.

But as I kissed her hand, I knew. Her hand felt like damp marble, and the color on her face was artificial.

She greeted me as usual, and almost immediately we went down to dinner.

Will you believe it, dear soul, your Jules was as tonguetied as a scorpion! I could not think of a word to say, and finally she broke the silence that seemed to oppress me like an evil vapor.

"I am *so* hungry," she said.

The piteousness of the lie, as dinner went on, nearly brought tears to my eyes, but I talked. Just Heaven, how I talked!

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

I gabbled of the Russian dancers, of the weather, of books—I made bad jokes, I was noisy.

It was all I could do.

She answered me occasionally, pretended to be interested, pretended to eat. When she talked to her other neighbor things were a little better, and I had a rest, only to begin again.

It was a ghastly meal, but I had my reward.

As the ladies rose to leave the room, Mrs. D. turned to me.

“Thank you, monsieur,” she said.

While I drank my port, and smoked the Corona I deserved, if ever a man did, I watched Hood.

Have I told you that he is of the well-bred Spanish type? Very dark and brilliantly colored. His hair is vividly black, his large eyes glow like black fire, his well-modeled cheeks are of a fine rich brown.

Tonight, I was glad to see, his cheeks had paled and looked oddly like some kind of clay. The lines of his face looked not exactly friable, but argillaceous, malleable, as if a molding hand could easily alter his whole countenance. His mouth, usually a very handsome, strong-looking one, had stretched and drooped in a way that meant great pain and great anger, and, unless I was much mistaken, some kind of fright.

Something had happened to him, as well as to her, I rejoiced to decide. He was suffering horribly, and base though I knew the fellow to be, his suffering was not wholly ignoble.

“You look not quite well,” I said to him smoothly.

He started and replied that he had a headache.

A headache! Interiorly, I laughed, but I said no more. An hour later Mrs. D. came to me in the drawing-room.

“M. Pasquier le Breton,” she exclaimed, “I am going

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home. Would you be so kind as to come with me as far as my door? I fear I am going to faint."

I followed her in silence, and in silence we drove to Park Lane. I got out and while the footman opened the garden door with his key, I turned to help the lady alight.

She put one foot—a little foot no bigger than a swan's bill—on the step, and then with a sigh, pitched out into my arms in a dead faint!

When she came to, she sat up on the sofa where we had laid her, and pushed back her wet hair from her forehead.

"You may go now, thanks," she said quietly to her maid, and the butler. "M. Pasquier le Breton will stay with me till Mr. Dorset comes in."

Then, after the door had closed, and a long pause had ensued, she said to me, "You have been very kind, monsieur. You have seen that I am suffering."

I bowed. "I have seen, madame."

"Well," she went on, "I am going to tell you about it."

It would have been insincere of me to protest, so I merely expressed my appreciation of the honor, and she went on.

"I love someone," she said, in English, to my relief, for tragedy in her strange French would have been dreadful. "And he is bad. He is a vile and bestial man and he is a liar without honor."

"Dear madame," I answered amazed yet gladdened by her courage in facing the truth, and her bitterness in expressing it, "you cannot love a vile and bestial liar."

She laughed, a hundred cynical little lines that I had never seen before, springing to her face, ageing and changing it horribly.

"Until seven hours ago I thought him the noblest of men. My very soul I gave to him. And now I know that he is a thing whose hand no honest man, no decent women ought to touch. Since I have loved him he has loved—as he calls it

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

—other women; not one, but several. The poor drabs in the street are clean and pure compared to him.”

“Hush—hush,” I murmured, for indeed, dear saint, her bitterness and loathing were hideous to see and hear.

“It is all true, monsieur. I am no young girl—I am thirty-five years old, I have lived for fifteen years in London where people discuss everything, and do most things. I know that men are not like women, and that many men are wicked. But *this* man—he went from me to other women, and from them came back to me. His lips were always full of kisses—a kind of great composite kiss made from the mouths of dozens of women. Ah, bah!” she broke off with an expression of actual physical nausea. “Shall I ever feel clean again!”

It was dreadful—dreadful.

To try to console her I attempted to protect him. I explained that he might be only weak, not a monster; that he might be one of the unfortunate men whom women pursue; that he might not have been able to disentangle himself yet from old liaisons made before he met her.

Then she told me about the wretched girl whose letter I had seen.

“She is not a bad woman,” she declared, “she is young and pretty, and—unprotected. Her husband has deserted her and she worked until *he* met her. And even now she—loves him.”

I wept, but she did not. Her little face so deeply lined, so old, so terrible, looked like stone, and she had no tears.

Then she showed me a letter from the man, received while she dressed for dinner.

It was not a bad letter, but it showed no real understanding of her misery. His pain was very clearly expressed, and his plea for pardon rang true. He had been a fool and weak, but he loved her and he couldn't bear her anger.

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"You see," she cried, when I had read it, "he is only unhappy because he is found out."

"Madame, discovery is the most frequent door to the confessional," I answered.

She paced the great room, twisting her little bejeweled hands together, moving for all her misery so beautifully that it rejoiced my eyes to see her, and as she walked she talked, unburdening her poor heart to me rather than to some intimate friend in the inscrutable way of women.

Then suddenly—and this was the worst—she flung herself into a great chair in which she looked like a little wounded white bird, and cried.

She sobbed, muttering and moaning, and, shall I tell you?—even whispering in a terrible, rough voice, "Oh, damn him, damn him!" and then moaning again, to split the heart, that she loved him so, loved him so——

It was a dreadful half-hour.

Finally she ceased, and after a few minutes rose, her face red and swollen and very dirty from the cosmetic on her lashes.

She came to me, holding out her hand.

"I have no handkerchief," she said; "will you lend me yours?"

By a happy chance, my Anastasie-Claire, my handkerchief was one of the birthday dozen you made for me. It seemed to me, as she wiped her poor eyes and blew her poor nose, that healing must be in the cambric hemmed and embroidered by your dear hands.

Who knows?



**PART II**





## XXXV

I WILL take a little walk, Clémentine," Mrs. Dorset said, dropping her silver-colored chiffon veil again after her contemplation of that portion of the chauffeur that was not under the car, "and when Donald is ready you can come for me."

Clémentine, who sat at the edge of the road, her mistress's jewel-case on her lap, desperation on her face, rose. "Very well, madame. *Where* may I find madame?"

Mrs. Dorset glanced at the very small village sitting in the lap of the downs. "I don't think you could miss me if you tried," she said, "but I shall go up the hill to those ruins—you see?—among the trees." Then she walked up the dusty road.

It was three o'clock of a very warm day; the wayside weeds were white with dust and drooping in the sun; no birds sang; the leaves on the trees near the hilltop might have been cut out of tin, so still and shiny they were.

Two cows stood looking over the edge of the road where it went through a deep cutting, and Mrs. Dorset looked at them with the passive enmity with which one

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regards antipathetic strangers in the street. In her neatly cut buff coat and skirt and close hat that with its evenly placed wings looked like a classic helmet, she was an unexpected little vision, oddly out of place on the lonely spot.

The road gave a sharp bend ten yards from the car, so that to the man walking toward her over the downs she was the only human being in sight.

The man was walking, it appeared to her, in a kind of sea of weather-beaten blanket stuff, and he carried a staff. As he drew nearer she saw that he was a shepherd with his flock.

"Is there a garage in the village?" she asked him as he made her a rough bow.

"A—a what, miss?"

"A garage. A place for motors—motor-cars, you know. My car has broken down, a little way back, and I am in a hurry."

The shepherd shook his head. No, he told her, there was no place for motors in the village. There were also no motors.

As he went on she called after him, "Is there a post office?"

He looked back and nodded, not without pride. Yes, there was a post office and the telegraph.

Then he disappeared in his little sea of sheep, his dog walking lazily beside him.

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Mrs. Dorset walked on. The village, she now saw, was even smaller than she had thought, and the cottages which were for the most part white—she noticed one whose owner's taste had declared itself in washing it a brilliant blue—were thatched. Dahlias flaunted, ugliest of flowers, in the little gardens, but there were crimson ramblers everywhere and numerous other roses.

She passed the church, a comparatively new building, evidently added to a squat and ancient ivy-draped tower; the gravestones, moss-grown and ancient, were shaded by huge elms.

The village was made in the form of a cross, and in the tiny square, where geese waddled about, enjoying the wet round the old-fashioned pump, was the post office, a white cottage bearing its placard with an air of pride, the scarlet little box shining gayly under a tree near by.

Mrs. Dorset stood still by the pump, reading the sign over the door: "Bird's Fountain." What an odd name! And all the inhabitants are asleep. Ah, there's the post mistress, I'll go and send my wire."

Pushing open the gate, she clattered up the mossy flagstones on her high heels, and went into the little shop. An old woman with a pink bow under her leathery chin and a pair of very large-eyed spectacles on her nose, rose from her chair, and went on knitting.

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"I—can I send a telegram?"

"Yes, miss——"

In a corner, between a big cheese and a tin of biscuits, was a sheet of dusty blotting-paper, a penny bottle of ink, and a pen like a rusty pin. Amy took off her glove and tried to write.

"Sir Acton Goodwin," she began, and then the pen tore a hole in the form and sent a shower of ink over her little hand.

Now she was as fastidious as a cat and an inky finger she could not endure. "Oh," she cried, plunging the finger into her mouth and sucking it.

The old woman smiled at her. "Did ye prick it?" she asked sympathetically.

"No, but ink has got under the nail——"

As she spoke the shop door opened and an immense old gentleman came in. He was vast rather than fat, for he looked as though he needed blowing up, like a half-inflated balloon toy. His clothes were too loose, his skin was too loose; his white hair—he wore no hat—was like lumps of raw cotton.

"I want a new rake, Mrs. Codling, please," he said, looking with perfectly open pleasure at Mrs. Dorset. "Mine is—bust."

Then he turned to Amy. "I hear, madame, that your car has broken down. Your chauffeur says he'll be another two hours. My name is Bullace, and I should

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be delighted if you'd come up to my house to wait and rest."

While Amy hesitated, in her surprise, Mrs. Codling, her hand before her mouth, whispered audibly to him, "You forgot to tell her you're the Rector, sir."

"Oh yes," he said, beaming, "I am the Rector. Will you come?"

Amy still hesitated for a second, for she disliked parsons, and was, moreover, unused to unconventional invitations. His smile, however, was so friendly and he looked so delighted with her, that she decided to go.

"Thanks very much," she said, "it is kind of you to ask me—I'll come with pleasure."

Taking the rake Mrs. Codling was holding out to him, he opened the door. "Now that is charming of you. It's cool in my house and there will be cakes for tea. All young ladies love cakes!"

She followed him, amused but flattered by his mistake, and together they walked up the cobbled streets the lumpiness of which caused her acute suffering.

"The Rectory is at the top of the road," Mr. Bullace said. "Inconvenient in rainy weather, but the view is very fine. It's built of stones from the Abbey."

"The Abbey?"

He nodded, his lumpy hair bouncing on his sun-burned old brow. "Yes. I often wonder the ghosts

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don't come and claw some of them out—in the night, you know.”

“So you have ghosts?”

Again he nodded, quite seriously. “Oh yes, I believe there are several, but of course *I* never see 'em. Church of England, you know. They *wouldn't* like that!”

Mrs. Dorset, wondering if he were quite sane, stole a look at him.

His very large mouth, tender and whimsical, wore a thoughtful expression, and his brown eyes—Balzac would have called them yellow—were evidently not seeing anything at all.

“*Where* are the ghosts?” she persisted, glad in her heart-sickness, of any momentary distraction.

Carefully stepping over a large earthworm who was journeying over the dusty path they had just reached, on passing the last cottage, the old man answered her.

“In the Abbey, of course.”

She burst out laughing, such pretty silvery laughter that he beamed at her in delight. “And where is the Abbey?”

“Now you are thinking that I am mad, and casting your eye about for my keeper,” he cried. “Well—I'm not mad—not nearly so mad, for instance, as Yester-with—and *there's* the Abbey.”

They had come to a little footbridge under which a tiny thread of brown water crept between thick borders

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of weeds and tiny aquatic green stuff, and beyond the footbridge the path joined an ancient flagged walk that, in broad, shallow terraces, made its zigzag way up the hill on which stood the ruins pointed out by Mrs. Dorset to her maid, as the probable goal of her walk.

"Oh, it was an abbey?"

"Yes. The Abbey of the Fountain of the Birds."

"What an odd name!"

The old man laughed. "Isn't it pretty, though? You see in French—*l'Abbaye de la Fontaine des Oiseaux*—it is very beautiful."

Amy plodded patiently up the steep terrace, her poor little feet in their patent-leather shoes burning like coals, her breath coming in short pants.

"Why was it in French," she asked, "and what have birds to do with an Abbey? Or with a fountain?"

At the first turning, where the path doubled back nearly parallel with its last lap, Mr. Bullace stood still.

"I'll show you in a moment. Now look down and you'll see my house."

Surprised at the height to which the gradual incline had brought them, she gazed at the landscape.

"Is that the house—with the sort of red tower behind it?"

"No. That's Dove Cottage—the red tower is the old columbarium, and square ones like that are very

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rare, I can tell you! *That's* my house—the one behind the copper beeches. It is," he added, "a perfectly beautiful house."

Amy gazed at him, surprised, for his enthusiasm was of a keenness not usually displayed by a man about his own possessions.

"Very old, I suppose? Is it Jacobean?" she asked to please him.

"No—Oh, no. It was built in 1850, I believe; a wonderful house—but you'll see, you'll see. Can you go on now?"

She had, in accepting his invitation to his house, not bargained for a long uphill walk in the blazing sun, but not quite liking to explain this, she assented and they went on.

Presently they reached the top of the hill, and stood leaning against a low stone wall which seemed to have been built to prevent people straying over the edge and rolling down.

Amy saw that the ruin of the Abbey stood on a kind of promontory jutting into a quiet pool of lower land; at their feet, beyond the two houses they had looked back at on their way up, lay the village, beyond which the downs rolled away to the west; and to the left a much sharper declivity than that which they had climbed, led to a great gray-white wound in the earth half grown over with grass and some few young trees.



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"That's the old chalk-pit, where Annie Louise Whiteman was murdered in 1842. You remember," he added pleasantly.

"I'm afraid I don't," she laughed, and with a sudden backward toss of his lumpy hair that seemed characteristic, he apologized.

"Of course you don't remember," he said. "How stupid of me! If it's clear enough, we can see the sea from the other side of the ruins. Let's go and look."

The Abbey had apparently never been a very large one; the whole top of the hill would have held only about half of, say, Battle. And it was very ruinous. The thick walls had fallen, only, it seemed, to be cleared away for use elsewhere, for but little remained of masonry beyond the lower parts of walls that still stood.

Of the chapel, however, there were three pointed windows nearly intact, and one wall sprang up strangely perfect towards the roof that had long since gone.

"And here," the old clergyman explained, radiant with the joy of the amateur cicerone, "was the refectory. One of the seats is still in the church—it's over five hundred years old!"

"Dear me!"

"The cells were here. Look, this one is quite plain—there were eighty, they say, long ago. And many people believe that Richard II came here once and made a retreat."

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"I saw Tree do *Richard II*," she answered; "he was splendid in the scene where he gave up the crown——"

From the east a cool breeze now came to them across the downs, and standing outside the refectory they watched a blue line that was the sea.

"It's a lovely afternoon," Mrs. Dorset said, as if the weather were attributable to her host. "I should think my chauffeur must be nearly ready. *Oh!*" she cried, in a different voice. "I quite forgot to send my telegram!"

Mr. Bullace faced her, his lower lip thrust out thoughtfully.

"Dear me, did you?" he said. "It was doubtless that pen that put you off. It's the worst pen in the world. However, there's a better one at Minge. Are you going through Minge?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I'm going to Long Powsley."

"Never heard of it. Where is it?"

"I don't even know *that!* Yes—it's at Herbinton. I'm going to stop with some people named Beauchamp—'neither the pen nor the pill maker,'" she quoted, laughing.

The old man did not answer; he was gazing intently at the sea. Finally he asked abruptly, "Does your mother know these people?"

"My mother? My mother has been dead for over thirty years."

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As she spoke, she threw back her veil and mopped her brow in a gingerly way with her handkerchief.

The old man turned, and was about to say something which, as he saw her face, suddenly and obviously changed to something else. "Bless my soul," he exclaimed, very loudly, "and I thought she was *young!*"

Mrs. Dorset flushed. His remark was a genuine and painful shock to her. For a moment she stared at him, handkerchief in hand, indignant words gathering chaotically in her mind.

They were never spoken, however, for she knew by his next speech that he was perfectly unconscious of having uttered the sentence that had hurt her.

"That's right," he said kindly, "you will be cooler with your veil up. And now you must come and see the fountain."

She followed him round to the north side of the promontory and sat down on a moss-grown stone bench at the top of the slope which was a very gentle one.

Just before them there were no villages, and very few isolated houses. Indeed, the only house near at hand was the one with the columbarium, and that was well to the left. From it a narrow unpaved path twisted its way up the hill, and about half its way to where the old man and Mrs. Dorset sat, only immedi-

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ately under them, was something at which Mr. Bullace waved an explanatory and proud hand. "That," he said with a touch of ceremony in his big voice, "is the fountain."

Amy leaned forward and looked.

There was half-way down the gradual incline, a kind of natural terrace and in the middle of the terrace what at first looked like a large pool of greenish brown water.

As she looked she saw that it was not a pool; it was a large basin or cavity of stone sunk to the level of its curled-back edge into the earth and so overgrown with little water-plants and mosses of various shades of green and brown and copper and gold as to seem almost incorporate with the downs.

At one side appeared a thing like a large bubble that never burst, and round the bubble the water curved and curled, and doubled and dimpled, settling down only at a distance of a foot to a broken quiet that a little further still became the brown motionless mirror one first perceived.

"How lovely!"

Amy's cry of pleasure was involuntary, for the place was full of an odd, peaceful charm unlike any she had ever felt. The old clergyman did not answer, and turning after a moment she saw that it was for the best of reasons. He was not there.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Presently, on going to the western end of the ruins she saw him running with his odd, heavy nimbleness down the terrace path. He had evidently forgotten all about her.

## XXXVI

**A**S she went slowly back to the stone bench it seemed to Mrs. Dorset that not only the old man but the whole world had forgotten her; Hood she felt in an odd way no longer existed; he never *had* existed; she had blown him into a kind of being, like a soap-bubble, through the pipe of her imagination, and his beauty had been as prismatic, as fictitious as that of a soap-bubble. He had gone; he was not. And yet, how he had hurt her!

“Oh, the brute, the beast,” she wailed suddenly, under her breath. “I hate him,” and she scrubbed her mouth furiously with her handkerchief.

She was a proud woman, although she was vain, and since the night before, when she had so cried before Pasquier le Breton, she had not shed a tear.

To Clémentine she had said only that she had decided suddenly to go to Mrs. Beauchamp’s instead of to Deauville.

And to the eternal glory and honor of Rowland Immenham, be it said that the good Clémentine had not one inkling of the real state of affairs!

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Dorset, on coming in very late after walking back from Bayswater, where he had conferred with Miss Croxley, had made no attempt to see his wife, but gone straight to his room.

In the morning when the car was at the door she went to his study.

"I am just off, Clow," she said, drawing on her gloves.

He looked up from his writing. "Off, my dear?"

"Yes. I am going to Molly Beauchamp's. After all I shan't go to France. I am tired, and a rest will do me good——"

This, he thought, amazed, when their last talk had been of her love for Hood!

But he said little. Lawrence had told him little, for her misery was almost as great as Amy's, and she could not bring her tongue to the telling of details.

"He is—not good, Clow," she had said, "and she knows, and is hurt."

And he had answered, in few phrases, that he understood. Then, looking into her eyes, he had shaken hands with Lawrence, and left her.

To his wife he now said, "And what about—Hood?"

He was horrified and frightened by her laugh which was a dreadful one. "I—was wrong," she said, her face suddenly gray, with grayer lips. "I shall not see him again."

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After a pause she added, "Send my letters on to Long Powsley, will you, Clow? And—thank you for being so good to me. I'll come back when—when I can."

They shook hands with some ceremony, and he let her go, for she seemed to him very much a stranger into whose affairs he had no right to inquire.

Misery swept over her and she began to cry, "Archie, Archie," she moaned, "Oh, you beast—Oh, my dear, sweet love!"

A finer, greater-souled woman might possibly, knowing what she knew of the man, have been able to cast off her love for him as a snake casts off its worn, spoiled skin. The world is full of interests, of deeds to be done, of endurances to be made, of thoughts to be thought, that a finer woman, having made Amy Dorset's mistake, could probably have put it from her as a strong nature puts an encroaching disease, and turned to other, better things.

She, however, could not. In her whole, petty, useless, silly little life, her love for Archie Hood had been the outstanding dominating sentiment, and it had no worthier rivals. She hated the man, now, with a strength of venom surprising to herself; she would have loved to hurt him, to avenge herself on him, but—she wept for him as she sat on the bench. She wept for the sound



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

of his voice, the splendor of his eyes, the touch of his hand.

She loved him, and bad as she knew him to be, she would have forgiven him had he appeared in that moment of her ignoble weakness.

But he did not come, and after a while her tears ceased burning her eyes, and she took out of her bag a little gold-mounted mirror and looked at herself.

"Ugh, what a horror!" she said, aloud, dabbing powder over her poor swollen nose. "What a *fool* I am! Clémentine will see, and so will Molly. *What a face!*"

Miserably she pulled down her veil, and then rising, started down the slope by the winding path that led past the fountain.

"It must be nearly five," she thought, "and the car will be ready. I'll stop and wire Acton Goodwin. He's horrid, but—he's amusing and—Archie hates him!"

She remembered that her husband, too, detested the baronet, and shrugged her shoulders. "Clow won't mind, he has Lawrence." At the fountain she paused. The sound of the entering rivulet in the corner was a pleasant burbling, refreshing to the ear. The water seen from close at hand looked clear and fresh. A bird flew down out of the sky, cocked his head at her, and with a *thirre!* dipped into the water, drank, shook himself merrily and flew away.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

After a moment's hesitation, Amy Dorset took off her hat and veil, laid beside them on the grass her gloves and bag, and knelt at the mossy brim.

It was very still on the little rough terrace; no breeze stirred the grasses, and an elm growing at the foot of the hill was as silent as if it were listening.

In the quiet water the unhappy woman saw her face indistinctly—a little white thing it looked.

"I'm kneeling down," she thought, "as if I were going to pray!"

But she did not pray. Prayer was not one of her habits. Instead, after looking round, half shyly, as if she feared someone might be watching, she bent her little head until her face touched the water. And then she started, flinging herself back blindly, for the water was as cold as ice!

After a moment, however, she dipped her hands in and sluiced her hot eyes and cheeks royally. The plunge once taken, it was delicious.

She dried her face and hands in her quite insufficient handkerchief, and then finally on her weblike petticoat.

"There, that's better!"

Somehow the touch of the cold water seemed to her an adventure; she rose, put on her hat, leaving the veil folded back over the wings that gave her cameo-like profile a look of Mercury, and stood for a moment gazing at the water which had befriended her.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

“Thanks, fountain,” she said, smiling indulgently at the poetry of her own conceit, “you have helped me. I am better.”

Then she went on in the late afternoon light down the hill.

## XXXVII

**A**S she reached the level, as she was to remember all her life, the church clock struck five. That meant, she knew, that, according to his instructions, Donald would have finished repairing the car, and Clémentine would be in search of her.

She stood still. The evening light fell full on her, and an exquisite picture she made, there in the shade of a straggling old elm who had outlived his usefulness and was merely an ornamental derelict.

Straight before her the sunset was going on; a splendid pageant, gorgeous to the point of gaudiness, yet, thanks to the mysterious beneficence of atmosphere, as gentle to the eye as a dove-colored dawn.

Round the odd, red-brick building that the disappearing parson had called a columbarium whirled birds that looked white as snow against the glories of the west, and that nevertheless, even Mrs. Dorset knew must be pigeons.

Off to the left crept, at the joining of the sky and the downs, a dull-colored something that must be a homing flock of sheep.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Evening was coming with night close behind, and everything from the sky to the creatures was obeying her quiet call.

The water of the fountain seemed in some way to have cooled the hot misery in the woman's heart. She herself could not rest as yet, but she could already see the rest that was coming to others.

Evening was coming, and evening to the primitive people who work means rest.

People were going home; sheep were going home; birds were going home.

"What an idiot I am!" she broke off, trying to laugh at herself. "Evening is when one dresses for dinner. It means more powder on the shoulders in summer than in winter, that's all the difference! People—real ones—are not going home. They are going *away* from their homes, to eat and talk and—dance——"

A horrid pang of pain seemed to cleave her to the midriff. *He*, Archie Hood, would soon be dressing to go—somewhere. Where? Wherever it was there would be a woman. A horrible, loving, *giving* woman. Instinctively she knew that in his misery about her, he would go to other women for comfort and distraction. And to him, to this man whom she had adored, for whom in God's own truth, she would have died, one woman, provided she were young and clean and fairly pretty, would be as good as she herself.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

He could kiss, could love, any woman!

She was unjust of course; people in the throes of any strong, primitive emotion always are. Hood, less good than she *had* thought him, was certainly less vile than she thought him now. He had betrayed her because he was inherently unfaithful, but the poor fellow, as a matter of fact, was at that very moment sitting in his flat with tight-clenched hands, as miserable as she herself!

In his way he loved her; he had given her his best and possibly it was not his fault that his best was not better.

The sun had slid down the sky, and rested like a child's balloon on top of a great round hill.

Amy Dorset stood and watched it. Clémentine had not come to fetch her, but she had forgotten Clémentine; her feet ached, but she had forgotten her feet; she had washed the black off her eyelashes but she had forgotten her eyelashes. After a while she walked on, and presently she came to a low wall to the right of the road.

The other side of the low wall, two old ladies were drinking tea.

### XXXVIII

**W**HEN the elder of the two old ladies looked up from the tea-pot she held over her sister's cup, she started, and inscribed a thin brown serpent-like sign on the tablecloth from the smoking spout.

"Marietta," she said in an undertone with a little hiss due to some defect in the fit of her upper teeth.

Miss Marietta turned and followed her sister's gaze. "O Arabella," she cried softly.

Amy Dorset, of course, did not know, never was to know, just what a picture her lovely little head in its Mercury hat made over the wall. She was, in the first place, too intent on herself and her own feelings to realize her extreme visibility in the reddish gold of the late afternoon light.

Her white face, a little snowy triangle lit by eyes that just caught the sun and blazed back at it, looked like something almost unearthly to the two old sisters. She was also cherubic in that to them she was a bodiless head, surrounded and backed by a scrap of silvery gauze that might easily have been a fragment of cloud.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

For her part she saw a charming little lawn with a ripe, red columbarium—whatever that might be!—as background; a firm thick-grown herbaceous border ablaze with strong country flowers blooming, all red and blue and yellow, like mad; to the right, the French windows flaunting in the setting sun like sheets of flame; to the left, and as human interest, two delightfully beautiful plain, horribly dressed old ladies swarming round an abundantly set forth tea-table.

She also smelt several things: hot buttered toast, crimson ramblers, new-mown hay, steaming tea, lavender (a great sheath of it lay drying on the lawn) and piping hot gingerbread.

(“It’s the lady whose car broke down, Marietta, it must be!”)

“Oh, *how* good the tea looks; I wish they’d give me some.”

(“It *must* be, Arabella. And isn’t she pretty!”)

At this point, Mrs. Dorset, feeling like an outcast peri, walked slowly on towards the village.

“Mary *insists*,” Miss Saint declared, in the voice of one who resumes an old discussion, “that she saw Mr. Bullace taking her up to the Abbey.”

“I don’t believe it, Arabella dear. If he had, he’d have taken her home to tea—wouldn’t he?”

Miss Saint gave an odd little grunt that expressed at once amusement, skepticism, and disapproval.



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

“Can one ever tell,” she asked, plaintively, “what Augustine Bullace would do? He has probably gone home and forgotten all about her.”

“The poor thing looked as though she'd like her tea. And the toast is *beautiful* today—”

Miss Saint laughed indulgently. “Very well, my dear; I know what you mean. And I'm sure *I* don't mind,—only look sharp, or—”

It was thus that Mrs. Dorset, just as she was turning off to the left to go to the village, heard a light, scuttering sound, and turning, saw Miss Marietta Saint's agitated, kind face over the wall and was invited in to tea.

## XXXIX

AND so, you see, we have had to give it up," Miss Marietta concluded with a sigh, as Miss Saint disappeared into the house.

"I *am* sorry," Amy said with a heart-felt sympathy doubtless due, however ungrateful to poetic folk the idea may be, to a comfortable internal condition contingent on two cups of tea and much buttered toast. Miss Marietta, who looked like a benevolent and gently bred mouse, nodded sadly and dabbed at her eye with a small brown paw.

"I shouldn't so much mind," she declared, "for people have a right to change their minds, and if one *doesn't* want a house, well, one doesn't, and there's an end of it! If it weren't for Arabella's health——"

"Surely she isn't ill?"

It was after six and the ladies now sat in a cool lake of shadow cast by the house.

Miss Marietta shook her head.

"It's her *colon*," she said, with mystery.

Amy, too, lowered her voice, not having the least idea what a colon might be, but convinced by Miss Marietta's voice of its extreme importance.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"Dear me!" she murmured.

"Yes. And the doctor said she really *ought* to have sea air—a change, you know!"

"Suppose," Mrs. Dorset said slowly, "I took the house for two months!"

**XL**

**MRS. ALFRED BEAUCHAMP,**

*Long Powsley.*

So sorry. Impossible to come after all. Writing.

**AMY.**

## XLI

EVERYONE will easily understand that Amy Dorset never could remember exactly why she took Dove Cottage for two months. The coolness of the little garden after her long walk in the sun had to do with her decision; so, undoubtedly, had the feeling of comfort contingent on her kicking off under the tea-table her high-heeled shoes and stretching, as the French say, her poor "murdered" toes.

Hot buttered toast, too, is a comfort, and so is good, fresh-brewed tea, although the Misses Saint drank the best Indian, and Amy's real preference was for that of China. But after all the chief contribution to her amazing decision was a pair of silhouette portraits that hung, one on either side of old Sir James Pinsent's portrait in the drawing-room. When the tea was drunk, and the remains of the buttered toast congealed into two unattractive, shamefaced slabs of burnt bread smeared with pale grease, Miss Marietta suggested an adjournment to the house.

"You might," she said to her guest, "like to go *upstairs*."

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Amy, who could see that her nose was shining in an unbecoming way, yet who dared not, in the presence of the two old gentlewomen, produce her powder-puff, was glad to assent.

In a room hung with very clean, very faded chintz, whereon unnatural parrots sported in highly imaginative tropical foliage, she washed her face and hands, touched up her lashes—the latter office she accomplished with care, lest the old sisters might, observing, be shocked—and incarnadined with a golden pencil her pretty lips. On her reappearance, the Misses Saint exclaimed as one woman, “Oh, you do look rested!”

For this Mrs. Dorset loved them.

Then she was shown the house.

It was a small house, neither old enough to be romantic, nor new enough to be provided with all the modern comforts. As a matter of fact, Alistair Bowen had built it in 1814, and, like most of his houses, it was a pathetic souvenir of an interregnum.

Bowen had not enough reverence for the great immediate past, not enough appreciation of the architectural giants of the immediate future, to build really good habitations, but he was enough of an oddity himself to impress a certain individuality on the houses he designed.

Dove Cottage was, then, a substantial little house—for it was not a cottage in spite of its name—and a

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

man might, in one room, have murdered his wife without interruption by the people in the next. It had, in short, the invaluable quality of sound-proofness. The rooms, too, were fairly high, the windows fitted close and opened easily, and the doors when shut let in no air.

Bowen had, of course, built a Venetian balcony outside the chief bedroom. Without a Venetian balcony it would not have been a Bowen house. And the balcony, of delicately sculptured stone, was a lovely thing, as well as a place of luxurious comfort.

The dull mahogany staircase was a treasure; it was a little heavy, perhaps, in proportion to the size of the hall, but the wood, ripened and mellowed by a hundred good British winters, had attained a sweetness of color, a softness of outline—for mahogany is more susceptible than oak—that was very attractive indeed.

These details all contributed, of course, to Mrs. Dorset's astonishing decision of staying for two months in Bird's Fountain, but, as has been said, it was the silhouettes hung over the mantelpiece, one at either side of good old Sir James Pinsent's portrait, that really, as she herself afterwards quite simply expressed it, "did the trick." To every season its "slang."

Mr. William Henry Saint, the grandfather of the present owners of Dove Cottage (and to whom, indeed, belonged the further distinction of having engaged the then young Alistair to design the house, where, in the

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

event of his second marriage, Mr. Saint meant his mother and his late wife's mother to end their days) had been a remarkably handsome man.

The miniature likenesses of himself and his wife, "cut" rather later than the period of the designing of the house, represented him as he had been at sixty-five. Amy Dorset, being told these details, stood staring at the silhouettes, counting hard, on both fingers and toes, groping for dates.

"It was cut in 1817," Miss Marietta explained. "His first wife died just after our father was born in 1815. He was a very handsome man."

"And—they lived here?"

There was a little pause, and then Miss Saint herself took up the story. "Yes," she said, "the house was built, as my sister has told you, in 1814, for our dear grandmother's mother and mother-in-law. But in June of 1815, just when it was finished and ready for habitation, our grandfather brought his second wife to see it, and—she liked it. So they came here to live themselves. I believe," she added thoughtfully, "that they were very happy."

"She must have been very pretty," Mrs. Dorset said, not mentioning the resemblance to herself, in the not seeing of which her companions seemed to her to prove themselves unobservant almost to the point of blindness.



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

“She was,” Miss Saint answered dreamily. “She was not well born I fear—but—he loved her, dear grandfather—they were a model couple.”

Amy suddenly remembered a description, given her recently by a friend, of a modern peer and his lady: “A model couple, you know, dear: he goes his way, and she hers, *and they never ask each other questions!*”

Miss Marietta, who had taken down the black-and-gilt frame within which dwelt her grandmother's profile, blew on the glass protecting it, and rubbing it with her handkerchief, said meditatively, “I believe she was nobody at all, our dear grandmother. (I can just remember her!) She was a surgeon's daughter, from somewhere in Northamptonshire. Her name was Hubbard.”

Mrs. Dorset started. Her own mother had been a Miss Hubbard. After a while the three ladies went again out on to the lawn and sat down, and it was then, after a few moments' conversation, that Dove Cottage changed hands for the months of August and September.

## XLII

**P**OOOR Mr. Bullace, as he stood on the mat waiting for the answer to his knock, was the picture of woe.

He had heard, while at breakfast, of the immediate departure for the sea of his two old friends, and that the-lady-whose-car-broke-down-yesterday had taken the cottage.

And then he had remembered that he had invited the lady to tea, taken her up to the ruins, and then—forgotten all about her and gone home and eaten all the tea-cakes himself as he read “Tristram Shandy.” His soul, as he waited under the portico, was full of shame and misery.

“Will you ever forgive me?” he burst out, as a strange woman opened the door to him.

“These ladies,” said the strange woman, “beg Monsieur to enter.”

Then the Rector remembered that the lady he had deserted on the stone bench had *not* had a guttural voice, a foreign accent, and a mustache.

Quite timidly, as though he had never been there

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

before, the old man laid his stick on the Flemish chest at the foot of the stairs, and went into the drawing-room.

"Me," said the mustachioed one, "I go to tell these ladies."

Mr. Bullace stood still, looking round him. The shabby, pretty room seemed much as usual, although it was for the first time that he saw a long, yellowish glove lying on the sofa.

There was also a large, heavily built, gold-topped crystal smelling-bottle on the table near the Wedgwood rose-jar.

"Dear me, dear me," the old parson said aloud in the voice of helplessness.

But when Miss Saint came in and explained, his ejaculations ceased. She had color in her faded cheeks, and her cap was not so exactly in the middle of her head as was usual.

"She is delightful—delightful, Augustine," she said, in a voice not so reedy as it was when uninspired by adventure. "She is also quite beautiful. We, dear Marietta and I, are sorry to leave her. But for my health——"

The old man rubbed his hands with a dry little sound like that made by crickets. "She charms you, then? I thought she would, Arabella. She charmed me!"

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Miss Saint laughed. "To the extent of your leaving her in the ruins and going home. O Augustine!"

The Rector was crestfallen, chapfallen, his brown eyes full of embarrassment.

"My dear Arabella," he said, "I am dreadfully ashamed, but indeed I went home and told Julia that a lady was coming for tea. I ordered cakes and buns and the heather honey."

His eyes met hers so humbly that she melted.

"And then," she said, "you waited? Waited and waited, and nobody came to tea?"

"Yes, Arabella."

"And—did you finally remember all about it?"

He hung his head. "No. To be truthful, as time passed I forgot. I—I was reading 'Tristram Shandy.' I forgot."

"And when did you remember, Augustine?"

Miss Saint looked very severe, her hands folded over what, to conform to both exactitude and delicacy, we will call her person.

"I remembered this morning, when Mrs. Crump told me that you had let the cottage. And so," he added more briskly, "you really *are* going to Eastbourne?"

"Yes, we shall go to Mrs. Bussell this time, for guess," the old lady exclaimed in triumph, "what she is paying us for the two months?"

**XLIII**

*Dorset, 875 Park Lane, London.*

Plans changed. Please hold letters.

**AMY.**

## XLIV

**A**T four o'clock of the morning after the departure of the Misses Saint, Mrs. Dorset awoke, trembling and weeping. She had had a frightful dream.

And as she lay in her bed the true tragedy of her life came into her mind, excluding the unreal one of her dream.

It seems in some way unfair that to this light-souled, trivial-minded little chatterer should have been allotted the most terrible grief possible to a woman: the grief of loving a man whom she knew to be unworthy and bad.

Men are in the scheme of wisdom so differently planned that many a man has loved a bad woman and yet gone through life fairly profitably and not without some happiness, but women rarely love men they know to be bad—which is a very different thing from loving a bad man!—and when one does, she is in the gravest danger of complete moral and mental shipwreck.

Two days before Amy Dorset had waked at dawn in her pretty room in town, her heart filled with a passion

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

of gratitude to the Heavens above, the earth below, and the water under the earth. Archie Hood loved her, she loved him, and her happiness was like a rising tide that almost threatened to drown her.

Her small cup, to use her husband's metaphor, was not of crystal, not even of gold, but it was not of base metal, and it was full to the brim.

Her husband knew and "he did not care," and he would, she was sure, do everything necessary for her eventual perfect happiness.

She had risen, in her maid-like restlessness, and pulled up the blinds, letting in the early light.

She stood there amazed at herself, her eyes filled with tears. She did not quote Shakespeare for she had never read him, but her heart expressed in her mood that was a prayer "as I truly fight, defend me, Heaven." She would be good, so good, always.

Everything was so good to her that she must be good to everything.

And then, that same day, before the sun, whose coming she had watched, had left the sky, she had been overtaken by nimble, light-footed mischance.

At first her anger at the man's miserable evil had been but enough to stimulate and strengthen her, as fever may; in an odd way she had even enjoyed the scene at Yvonne Cavendish's. It had been horrible, and yet his suffering and shame, even though it was only the

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

useless shame of the found-out, had been a certain balm to her wound.

Then came her fainting-fit, her talk with Pasquier le Breton, her torrent of tears, and a night of exhausted, heavy sleep.

The next day she had decided what to do, and been busy with her preparations.

She would go to Molly Beauchamp's and amuse herself. There would be much noise, horse-play, artificial mirth, roulette and the kind of forgetfulness secured by these things. Also, she would summon to her a man who cherished for her an uncomplimentary sentiment that he tried to disguise under a name that means something absolutely different.

Acton Goodwin was one of the most amusing men in England. His mother had been Irish. His reputation about women was very bad, but—and in her crushing misery Mrs. Dorset recalled this point with a kind of greed—his redeeming quality was truthfulness.

He was no coward and therefore, of course, he could always be believed.

There was about this gentleman an excellent tale.

An infuriated husband, it ran, met Goodwin one day on the steps of one of the Service clubs.

"You damned scoundrel," the husband cried, "I have been looking for you. You have——" And then followed a categorical accusation.



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"It's perfectly true," the culprit replied, "and she doesn't love me and I don't love her and I won't marry her!"

The nonplussed husband, who, indeed, was not thirsty for publicity, forgave his wife, and all went well.

And this man was the one chosen by Mrs. Dorset to amuse and distract her at Long Powsley.

Realizing her own condition of utter recklessness, she compared it despite its frightful sincerity to that of other women of whom she had heard, to that of La Vallière, of Mrs. Rex Poultry (she who finally married a jockey after having been loved by very great gentlemen indeed), of Dido, of Cleopatra, and of poor, lovely Enid Squire, the dancer who shot herself the day of Otto Ross's wedding. They had despaired (she was not *quite* sure about Cleopatra), and she despaired. She would, she decided, for she was furiously angry as well as broken-hearted, perform the deed known in cases of men as going to the dogs.

This resolution had occupied her mind during the three hours' motor run, and but for the mishap she would at that moment have been, so to speak, at, if not in, the kennel.

Poor Amy! The room in which she had now awakened was not adapted to late sleepers; its two windows were unshaded but for their cream-colored blinds; the curtains, which were of faded chintz on which little

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

blue and yellow Chinese folk walked up steep hills to pagodas by the sea, being not only undrawn but undrawable.

She awoke not only to the misery of remembering Archie Hood, but to that exasperating, immediate misery, a glaringly light room.

"Oh, this beastly pig of a house; why did I ever come here!" she wailed, her nose in the pillow. "I'll go on to Molly's this very day." And then, after a few moments, "Oh, Archie, if I could only *see* you. I don't care what you did. Oh, my dear, my sweet, my beautiful love!"

She cried until her eyes look like inflamed gooseberries, could such a horticultural horror exist. To her it meant that at any price she would have the man back, but in reality it was only another turn of the wheel which, in its relentless revolutions, was her life.

She thought of nothing but herself, for Hood was part of herself; she wept for herself; she was her despair, and her despair was Amy Dorset.

And meantime, outside, the lovely downs were waking at the call of day. There were birds in the garden, sheep in the folds, dogs in the door places and cattle in the byres. And as day came all these creatures welcomed it with words in their several tongues, and the result was a beautiful, harmonious, friendly babel.

Mrs. Dorset plugged her ears against this music with

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

exasperated, pointed fingers. She longed for black night, and resented as a personal infliction the growth of the morning. She hated everyone and everything. Archie Hood, whom she adored, was a bad man and a traitor.

## XLV

WHEN Clémentine came in at nine with her lady's breakfast on a tray, she found Mrs. Dorset sitting up in bed, reading. She had a lace cap on, and her wan and pointed face was thickly powdered. There was also, the maid noticed with a pang of pity, water in the hand basin and a crumpled towel beside it.

"Elle s'est lavée la pauvre figure," the grim-faced woman thought, with a fierce pang of rage towards, as the language of inquests hath it, some person or persons unknown.

"Bon jour, madame," she said, blithely. "Madame has slept well?"

"No, Clémentine. J'ai tray mal dormy. I have taken a bad cold and my eyes are inflamed and they ache rather."

Clémentine disposed of the tray to her liking and brought a third pillow from the sofa. "What a misfortune!" she exclaimed. "I will prepare one of the *sachets de fraîcheur* for the eyes of madame. Madame heard the dog who barked, the *canaille*?"

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Amy nodded. "Yes. Un chien tray movay. Is that tea?"

"Oui, madame. It is prepared by the good Mrs. Damson. There are buttered eggs, and—jam! I explain madame, that madame eats not of the jam, but she say to me, 'Ome-grown and 'ome-made, it will do 'er good!' Eh bien, madame, nous allons voir, n'est ce pas?"

She was doing her best to cheer her mistress and Amy saw it. "Thank you, Clémentine," she said suddenly in a thin, high voice, her eyebrows raised.

Then she burst into tears.

Clémentine, as has been said, was, thanks to the matchless discretion of Immenham, completely in the dark regarding the nature of her mistress's affliction. And Mrs. Dorset's way of life had always been a puzzle to the Frenchwoman. She had lived with many French ladies and with several English ones, and her experience was, as she crudely expressed it, *ou un mari, ou un amant*.

Cloudesley Dorset she did not consider a husband; it was quite clear to her that he and madame did not love each other. It was clear that the lovely lady was wholly occupied with the life of society and with her little person. She had no mastering taste, such as music had been for Madame la Marquise, or the breeding of bulldogs for Madame Coventry-Green; children there

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

were not; where, then, was the lover? Clémentine believed this so usual person to be wholly absent in the Dorset ménage.

And, to her circumscribed though acute mind, these many lacks created an unheard of condition of things. Madame was beautiful, rich, of the great world; she was with husband on terms that utterly precluded a domestic tragedy; even, the maid thought, had M. Dorsette had a *béguin* for some lady who was not a lady, it would leave madame perfectly cold. Therefore, as she obviously had no lover, for there were no hours at which only one gentleman was to be admitted, no *sorties de cinq à sept*, none of the indices of visits to a bachelor quarter, what *could*, the faithful creature asked herself, be the matter?

When Mrs. Dorset burst into tears Clémentine said nothing. She removed the tray from the lap of the sufferer and laid a clean handkerchief and a bottle of smelling-salts on the table near the bed.

Then she withdrew, thus achieving great merit.

When she came back, summoned by the bell, she found her mistress seated at the dressing-table, washing her face with a huge pad of cotton wool dripping with Madame de l'Enclos' Eau de Printemps.

“You never came to tea!”

The large old man shook his finger at her in reproach.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

“But—you went and left me without a word. You deserted!”

She had devoted two hours to her toilette and now, in a pink linen coat and skirt, her shoes and stockings silver-gray, her shady hat over her eyes and vernal with flat leaves, she was as lovely as a delicately done pastel.

The old man's eyes beamed at her over his nose, which was in his broad face what a flying buttress is between two bright windows.

“I am,” he said, “an absent-minded old idiot. I deserve the rack or the wheel, but if I had *not* gone away and forgotten you, as I confess I did, you would have drunk your tea in my garden and gone your way, instead of being here! So my idiocy was a blessing in disguise.”

It was exactly eleven o'clock, and the sun rode in a burning blue sky. Under the mulberry tree there was a delightful patch of shade, and in the shade, in two shabby deckchairs, Mr. Bullace and Mrs. Dorset had sat down.

The sounds of a passing flock of sheep filled the immediate air; little feet pattering down the hard road, silly bleating voices babbling, no doubt, of the dust, the distance, the hoped-for cropping of lunch.

Amy, tired from her crying and the subsequent reparations necessitated by it, sat lazily in her chair,

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

her absurd gray feet in their stilt-like heels crossed, her eyes half-closed.

"It's an awful pity she paints her pretty face," the old man observed suddenly.

She started, but before she could speak he went on in a changed voice, "I want you to come and dine with me *today*, this evening, if you will."

There was a pause, during which she realized that his first remark had been quite unconscious, and that she need only answer the second.

"I—I should love to come," she said, rather inarticulate in her amazement on this rustic old priest having perceived her make-up, "only—I fear I must get on to Long Powsley this afternoon."

"But—the house?"

She laughed. "I know. I—it's all right, of course, about the house—I mean to say, it *is* mine for the two months. Only—I must go to Mrs. Beauchamp——"

The old man looked as openly disappointed as a child. "And I had hoped," he plained, his lips protruding with distress, "for such delightful hours with you." After a moment he added, "And poor Jargonelle will be *so* unhappy!"

"It is very sweet of you," she returned, flattered and pleased as she always was by such tributes, "to be sorry. And who is Jargonelle?"

"She is my only daughter's daughter. She lives with



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

me—naturally.” His brown eyes had taken on the odd silvered look, habitual to him, Amy was beginning to see, in his absent moments.

“Why—naturally?” she asked kindly, as she would have spoken to a cobra if it had shown signs of liking her.

The old man blew his nose. “Where else could she live,” he said, “with her parents both dead?”

“Oh, I see.”

After a moment's silence, the quiet was disturbed by the loud slam of the lower garden gate, and over the grass there came flying a young being in pink; a young being between kitten and cat, between child and woman; a tall, thin, leggy, angular, awkward, graceful girl of sixteen or seventeen.

“Grandfather, grandfather,” she gasped, in her strenuous advance, waving her arms like a windmill, “you've forgotten the wedding!”

The Rector rose, squeezing his mouth into a bunch with his left hand, as if it had committed the crime and was ashamed of it.

“They're all at the church! They've been waiting half an hour, and the bride thinks she ought to faint.”

The old man stared at her, the picture of guilt, and then, in their excitement, they both utterly forgot their hostess, and, grasping each other's hands, they went tearing down the slope towards the church. A few mo-

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

ments after they had disappeared Mrs. Dorset saw the girl flying back.

“Grandfather’s in the vestry—Jacob has got him and it’s all right, and—” she held out her hand in an unabashed, friendly invitation to another race—“you must come to the wedding.”

## XLVI

THE church, which, in the great thickness of its walls and the smallness of its interior, seemed rather to have been hollowed out of a solid block of stone than built round a space, was nearly full. Amy was escorted down the aisle and ensconced in the Rectory pew by her companion, who, on their rush through the churchyard, had put on her hat, which she had left on a flat tombstone, and who, on reaching her seat, plumped so suddenly to her knees that their impact with the stone floor was plainly audible.

One of Mrs. Dorset's secrets was that in her childhood, since which period she had not been anything, she had been a Dissenter. Her father had been a deacon in a large parish chapel in a Northamptonshire town, and to this abode of prayer the child had been taken regularly until she was fifteen and had been sent to a boarding-school.

During the three years of her second-rate education she had, partly through indifference, partly through snobbishness, participated in the worship of St. James's on the Front, and since her marriage at the age of nine-

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

teen she had given up both chapel and church, not because of any conviction, but out of the old indifference, a new and agreeable feeling that Sunday was an excellent day for late rising, and a conviction based on her circumscribed and superficial observation that only the aged and the frumpish went to church.

However, even in London people went to weddings, so it was the marriage service with which she was the most familiar of all.

When she rose from her knees, Amy Dorset opened the book handed to her by Jargonelle, and, not without pride, turned to page 161.

Then, while the organ boomed out a very reminiscent voluntary, she surveyed the people round her.

The women, she noticed, were remarkably broad between the waist and the knees, and their elaborate and vivid hats were, as the slang phrase of that season went, absolutely too good to be true.

The men, as always holds good in country gatherings, were, while less good-looking than at least the younger of the women, more dignified-looking and less grotesque. A man's hat cannot be so ridiculous as a woman's.

Suddenly, after a prolonged study of a Ricketts' blue straw, trimmed with yards of cotton lace and a bunch of maize-colored roses, Amy became aware that the Rector stood at the altar steps.

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She stared at him. What had happened, she thought in amazement, why did he look so different? She was too ignorant, too unimaginative, to know that whereas she had hitherto seen only the man, she now saw the priest.

The organ burst into the wedding march, and the bride, a big, healthy girl with a brick-colored neck and hands like hams in white gloves, came pounding up the aisle with her father, and the bridegroom, whose sheepish demeanor really *was* very funny, stood waiting for her.

Mrs. Dorset, whose was the elementary sense of humor that consists largely of the trick of seeing as absurdities afflictions that look piteous to wiser people, bit her lip. The bridegroom's scarlet face and nervously working hands were ridiculous to her.

“—Which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence—” The Rector's voice was very firm as he went on, and the little church was hushed and still.

“—Or else hereafter forever hold his peace.”

Amy's eyes swam with sudden, bitter tears. Word for word this was the service, the reading of which, for her and Archie Hood, forty-eight hours before, had been the wish of her heart. And now——

To force back the tears she shut her eyes tight, and in the darkness the old, beautiful voice went on. Sup-

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

pose it had been for her and Archie. Suppose it was all a dream, that about those dreadful letters, and her visit to that poor girl—suppose Archie *was* a good man, the man for her not only to love, but of whom she might or ought to be proud.

“Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor, and keep her, in sickness and in health”—if it were *she* standing there in the yellow frock and, by her side, Archie—how beautiful he would look, his firm face white with emotion and love!—“and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?”

It was as if someone had rudely and vilely laughed at something sacred to her, the realization of the absurdity of what these words would have meant to a man like Archie Hood.

It was ridiculous, scurrilously funny, the idea of his untruthful lips uttering them. She could see him, hear him say them, blandly, reverently, with dignity.

A wave of fury swept over her; she would have liked to strike the man who so injured her by being what he was. She would have loved to tear his face, to hurt, to insult him.

The strength of her passion of anger seemed to be destroying her, and then the misery that was so much worse than the anger, reduced her to trembling weakness.

“Are you faint?”

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

The girl's voice seemed miles away. Amy could not answer; she leaned back in her corner.

"Shall I run and fetch salts or something?"

The young girl grew nearer, her pretty dark eyes full of anxiety, her warm hand on Amy's.

"No, no—thanks, I'll be all right——"

"—And in all quietness, sobriety, and peace; be a follower of holy and godly matrons——"

The bride and groom, now safely married, were looking at each other, and, unconscious of observation, their homely, sunburnt faces were beautiful.

Amy Dorset watched them, an odd idea dawning in her mind. "Why—they *love* each other," she thought, in innocent because involuntary amazement, "the poor things love each other!"

## XLVII

*The Blue Cottage,  
Wakelands, Wilts, Aug. 4.*

DEAR M. PASQUIER LE BRETON,

It is all right! I have just learned all about her, and I hasten to keep my promise and let you know.

It suddenly occurred to me yesterday that Mrs. Patterson, the chauffeur's wife, would be bound to know where they were, as her baby was expected at any time.

And when I got there I found not only the baby but Donald himself! He had been forbidden to tell anyone, but of course the poor man had sent his wife the address, and as she was pretty bad last night, her mother wired for him!

Oh, I *was* so glad to see him.

He wasn't at all glad to see me though—all the servants, you know, are devoted to Amy!—and I had an awful time persuading him to tell me about her. It seems she made him promise not to. He had told Cloudesley that she was well and that he could say no more, and Cloudesley asked nothing further. I, however, did, and finally, on my swearing I would not go, or even write to her, he told me the whole thing, and bad as it is it is a great deal better than the poor little darling's being with the Beauchamp lot. . . .

So when the car finally was all right and he had found her, she coolly told him she had taken the house for two months.



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

He said she looked all right that evening, and that the old ladies were charming. He says the clergyman is mad. *Really* mad, you know, but of course he isn't, or they'd take his cure away from him!

The day after they got there he, Donald, motored the two old ladies down to Eastbourne. The next day there was a rustic wedding, and he took the bride and groom to Brighton.

And yesterday he came to see his wife.

While I was there—at the chauffeur's house—a wire came for him from Amy. She said that he need not come back to her, and that if he kept his word and told nobody anything about her, she would give him fifty pounds when she returned! . . .

So that is all, but thank God she is safe and *not* with those horrid people.

I dined with Cloudesley last night. He had just had a note from her, saying just that she was well and resting and would write again soon. An odd, stiff little letter it was, so unlike her. I should like to see that man torn to bits by wild horses. You'll be glad, I know, to hear that he looks ill and seems to be suffering as I had no idea such things could suffer.

I met him this morning in the Park, on my way to lunch.

*He:* "Oh, Miss Croxley——"

*I:* "Good morning." And I only hope I looked as contemptuous as I felt.

*He:* "Miss Croxley, please excuse me, but for Heaven's sake, where *is* she?"

*I:* "Where is who?"

He was very pale and very handsome, the brute! *You* know, more Spanish than ever, and *Oh*, so dignified!

*He:* "Mrs. Dorset. Tell me at least that she is well."

*I:* Alas for dignity or even common decency! "I can

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

tell you nothing, but does that matter? Go and be consoled by your Yvonne, and your Alys—and the others.”

I am bitterly ashamed of having been such a vulgar cad, but—I said it. And he, of course, being what he is, looked at me with the eyes of a wounded doe, bowed like an angel, and left me planted there, an evil-tongued, inexcusable old meddler!

I am glad he is unhappy! I honestly believe he is, although his pallor may have been only the result of an indigestible supper—however, I've told you my news, and mustn't wamble on like this.

If I hear anything more I'll let you know and I daresay it will be soon. My poor butterfly Amy can't possibly stay in a little village. She'll either go mad or cut her throat. And Clémentine has promised to let Donald know if anything happens, he has promised to tell me and I in my turn promise to tell you!

It is good to be in the country. If only Amy were here with me. It hurts me a little that she should prefer to be with perfect strangers, but the relief of knowing that she's all right is too tremendous for me to be ungrateful.

Cloudesley has gone to Maiden Aqualate. He says very little, but I know that he is intensely sorry for his wife. I, of course, told him nothing about Captain Hood. You will, I hope, have a delightful rest, and I shall be glad to see you in the autumn.

Yours very sincerely,

LAWRENCE CROXLEY.

## XLVIII

**E**PICURUS said," Mrs. Dorset announced with patent pride, "that God would like to prevent evil and cannot; or He could prevent evil and will not; or He neither would nor could!"

Mr. Bullace, who was busy pruning a pear-tree, turned and looked at her through his eyebrows as his granddaughter called that particular upward gaze.

"Quoting," he remarked, returning to his work, "is always a crime; but it's a sin when it's done incorrectly."

Mrs. Dorset gave a little, wan smile. "Back to the post," she exclaimed, using the young girl's formula for making him realize that he had been uttering his thoughts instead of, as he believed, merely thinking!

"Bless me, did I say that aloud? That about quoting? I'm sorry, Mrs. Dorset, but it's true."

"No, it isn't. Epicurus *did* say it," she persisted, her vanity hurt.

"He did. You're right so far as you go, my dear. Only—you forget the best of it! 'Or He would like to *and can.*'"

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"Then," she flashed, illuminated by a ready pang of her own pain, "why doesn't He?"

It was a beautiful morning, the sky agog with great blustery, restless clouds, the downs blotted with their moving shadows, the smell of the sea in the air, together with the smell of boiling raspberry jam, warm roses, and tar, from a newly mended bit of the road.

Behind the hedge at the end of the Rectory garden hung, in what, if the wind had behaved itself, would have been decent seclusion, the week's washing. But the wind did not behave itself so every now and then a shirt of the Rector's or a petticoat or even a chemise of Jargonelle's or the cook's ballooned gayly and indecorously against the background of sky and trees.

The old clergyman rose from the chair on which he had been kneeling, and, turning round towards his caller, glanced down the garden and up to the downs.

"Well," he answered in triumph, "doesn't He?"

Amy shrugged her shoulders. If he was going to be a parson she had, obviously, no more to say.

She liked the old man in an odd way and it was as much because of this liking as it was because of the immense fatigue that had come over her, that she was still at Bird's Fountain at the end of a week. Every day she had intended to be her last one there; twice she had sent Clémentine to the post office with a telegram recalling Donald, each time to fly down the hill and

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

retrieve the message at the crossroads. When she went, she was going to the ever hospitable Molly Beauchamp and send for the equally obliging Acton Goodwin. But, possibly just because she could go at any moment, she still lingered in the dull little village, her sole companions an old parson and a long-legged colt of a girl.

Mr. Bullace moved his chair and, planting it firmly on the hard ground, set to work on year-old peach-trees, his lips pursed absurdly, his odd hair sticking up in little bunches all over his head. "This little maid's ancestors," he observed after a pause, "were Chinese. One of them migrated to Persia about 2000 B. C., and one of her descendants was brought to Italy thence by Claudius."

"Indeed," Amy murmured politely, wondering why Mrs. Keel, otherwise Miss Cavendish, had not answered her letter.

Mr. Bullace nodded, perfectly satisfied with her reception of his bit of lore. "Yes, I've forgotten the exact date of the first peach in England, but old Gerard says he had 'em all in his garden, and I *believe* it was Wolf who brought 'em. That would mean about the fifteenth—wouldn't it?"

"Who was Wolf?" (She *must* have had my letter. And *surely* she'll mention him when she answers it?)

"The King's gardener."

Amy, meeting his gaze, the clear, unsilvered gaze of

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

one not woolgathering, pulled herself together. "At Buckingham Palace?"

The old man's eyes changed; they now bore a distinct glare of irritation. "Wolf, as I have told you before," he said stiffly, "was the gardener of Henry VIII."

She was incomparable at an apology, so the glare soon departed from that sweet old brown eye, and the soft snip of the pruning-knife was again heard.

"Please tell me about pears, Mr. Bullace," she urged gently to please him. He shook his head obdurately, adding, after a while, "She means it kindly, but it only bores the poor thing."

*"Back to the post!"*

The girl Jargonelle had come over the lawn silently in her shabby old tennis-shoes and stood laughing at him, her teeth glistening like a dog's.

"Don't tease him," admonished Amy.

"I will tease him. As to pears, they are native to England—flourished here in the thirteenth century, and Edward I loved 'em. He made me learn that when I was small—and miles and miles about apples. *And* plums. The plum is a Syrian. That's why he's purple—Syre and Tydon, you know!" She roared with laughter and hugged her grandfather. "Have you told her about quinces, Gromp——"

"I *won't* be called Gromp!" protested the old man passionately. "I hate to be called Gromp!"

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

“The quince,” the girl went on, rejoicing in her nonsense, and expressing in her face more mirth than Amy Dorset had ever seen in anyone’s, “was the Golden Apple of the Hesp——”

Her grandfather stretched forth a sly hand and gave her muscular arm a pinch that hurt.

They both roared with laughter now, and Mrs. Crump came out to tell them that lunch was ready.

Amy would not stay, and made her way back to her temporary home, as Annie Elizabeth Dawson had once called it to her.

## XLIX

*Whelkington-on-Sea,  
Friday.*

DEAR MRS. DORSET,

Thanks for your kind letters. I am glad you are in the country, for it was very close in town. It was very dusty.

I am very well, and everything is all right. You know what I mean. Archie said I wasn't to write to you but I could not disregard your kind letter. I did not show it to him.

At first he was very angry with me for telling you, but gradually he got all right, and he's very kind now. I quite understand that you were vexed. I know he's bad, but that doesn't so much matter to me and somehow I can't help caring for him. I know I'm a fool, but I can't help it. He's fond of me, too, in his way and now that you've gone he seems to miss me and sort of cling to me.

It was very kind of you to offer to help me but I don't need it now. Poor fellow, he hadn't really realized how worried I was, or he'd have come long ago—he's very kind when you know him, really. I hope you won't think it very wrong of me to go on seeing him. I simply couldn't say no when he wants me, and besides he doesn't have to spend lots of money on me like he does on some of the others. You can trust me never to tell about you and him, and I am with kindest regards,

Very truly,

Your friend,

YVONNE CAVENDISH.

My real name is Jessie Keel.



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

This letter, which arrived a day or two later, threw Amy back into a slough of frenzied woe from which she made no effort to escape.

She lay in bed all the morning, pretending, even to Clémentine, that she had a blinding headache.

Over and over she read the letter, too miserable herself to pity the writer, and a prey to violent jealousy.

This Jessie Keel, this half-educated little thing whom he had ill-treated and cast off, was seeing him, hearing him. She was by the sea, miles from his father's house, where he was supposed to be spending the month, yet she was seeing him. He cared enough for her to go to the trouble of taking frequent journeys to reach her.

He could buy a ticket for Whelkington, thinking, "I am going to see Yvonne"—he would sit two hours in a hot, dusty train thinking of Yvonne, he would reach Whelkington and endure the horrors of some old station fly and crawl along to—Yvonne. Yvonne, indeed!

To Jessie Keel. Mrs. Jessie Keel. *What* a name! And she herself, Amy Dorset, would give all she owned in the world to see him for one single hour. She would walk barefoot to Canterbury to see him.

And he was seeing Jessie Keel.

In her misery Mrs. Dorset finally rose, and, dressing herself alone, a thing she had not done since her marriage, put on her hat. She would go for a walk. She could not see even Clémentine.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

If that tiresome old parson or that giggling girl came near her she should scream and go mad.

As she was leaving the room, Clémentine met her, a telegram on a little salver.

"Madame is dressed!" The good soul's ejaculation met with no response.

Her mistress was staring at the telegram, her face flooded with a blush that transfigured it.

For a moment she looked twenty.

"I—I am going over to the Rectory," she said, in a voice with a lovely quiver in it. "I didn't see that cher vieil Monsieur yesterday. I shall lunch there—it will please him—and I shall be back at about three. Good-bye."

And away she ran, her little figure as light as a feather and as buoyant as a wave.

The maid went to the bed and, after staring at it for a moment, laid her hand on one of the pillows, rubbing it gently.

"I knew it," she muttered. "I knew it. And now——"

## L

**M**R. BULLACE was delighted to see his self-invited guest, and greeted her with a compliment.

“Your cheeks are embalmèd like a mellow costard,” he cried, lumbering towards her from the library table where he had been writing a sermon. At the sound of her laughter he stared afresh.

“I have,” she said, “never been told that my face was like a custard!”

“Ho, ho—a custard, indeed! A costard is an apple, Madame Butterfly, and that’s where the word costermonger comes from! But sit down, sit down. Yesterday was a dull day, for I did not see you.”

Never had he so liked her. Out of her happiness flowed a stream of kindness, of sympathy, even almost tenderness.

“You have had good news?” he asked.

“Yes.”

The old man had, on first meeting her, asked her one or two perfectly natural questions, her evasive answers to which had told him they were not welcome.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

He hesitated for a moment. "I am glad, my dear," he said gently. "It is good to see you happy. Happy people," he added, more to himself than to her, "are always so good."

He sat down at his table, staring with absent eyes at his half-finished sermon. Finally he took up his pen and resumed his work as if he were quite alone.

Amy rose and went out by the window.

Filbasket—"young Filbasket" as he was still called, though his antick parent had been in the churchyard for over ten years—a short burly man of fifty-odd years, was working in the garden, and, because she was so happy, she went to him.

"Good morning, miss—ma'am."

"What are you doing?"

She had never smiled at him before and, humble old fellow that he was, he liked it.

"Turning the yearth over for the autumn flowers, ma'am," he answered, gazing at her. His mind and soul were full of romantic admiration, for inwardly he was comparing her to a Madonna lily, but his manners were not equal to romantic expression, so when he had spoken he spat on his hands.

She gave him another smile and walked away.

"I must," she thought, "give that man Donald a present for his baby. How clever he was to know that I shouldn't mind him telling Archie!"

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Her lack of logic, her absent inconsistency, her folly, her weakness, all these things were, in the immensity of her happiness, invisible to her.

She who had been a fool, she thought, was now wise. She had taken a leaf out of the despised Jessie Keel's book. He was not perfect, her poor love, but he *was* her love, and that "was" should be enough.

"It is a beautiful thing to forgive, Mr. Bullace," she said suddenly at lunch, "isn't it?"

The old man, who had been smiling, turned to her, his face grave.

"Yes," he said, "forgiveness is beautiful—when it is justified."

Jargonelle, who had spilt mint sauce on her frock and was scraping it off with a knife, stared. "Why, Gromp," she began, but stopped short.

Mrs. Dorset did not understand him, either. It was odd that he, the kindest, most unresentful old fellow alive, whose whole life was made up of love and friendliness, should speak of the possible unjustifiability of forgiveness.

"How do you mean?" she asked.

He was silent, his eyes fixed absently on the wall, and gathering their strange silvery and frosty look.

"Back to the post, dear Mr. Bullace," Amy said, dimpling and gentle.

He started, pushing back a lump of hair.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"Yes, yes—I was forgetting. Do you know, my dears, I am convinced," he answered gayly, "that my brain is going?"

After lunch Mrs. Dorset went back to the question.

"What *did* you mean?" she asked him. "I want to know for a particular reason."

"Then I'll tell you. I mean that unconsidered, merely emotional forgiveness does more harm than the infinitely rarer sin of hardness."

"Merely emotional forgiveness?" she faltered.

"Yes."

"But—'seventy times seven'?"

"Christ's words have been more misunderstood and misrepresented than the words of any man who ever lived, my dear. He was not only always good: He was also always sensible. And you may be quite sure," the old man went on, wagging his big head with a cheerful smile, "that He never meant a lazy or a selfish tolerance when He said 'forgiveness'."

She walked slowly home, and, going into the drawing-room, sat down opposite the little fernery that in the winter was a fireplace.

She was disturbed in an odd, indefinable way; she felt uneasy; her happiness had gone.

Something had been stirred in her mind, and she did not know what it was.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

The room was very quiet, and smelled of roses. The soft gray walls, with their array of valueless, priceless old pictures, seemed to shut her away from the world which she understood.

She felt a stranger and lonely. She would have liked to cry, but must, she felt, not risk reddening her eyes.

The clock under the portrait of Sir James Pinsent struck one. It was half-past three, and she must go and dress. She would wear—odd old man, to say such things—tolerance wasn't forgiveness, justifiable forgiveness——

The afternoon sun came in through the open window and lay like a shallow pool on the old, polished floor. A pool! She would take *him* up to see the fountain. She would wear white—all white, and this little hat with harebells. She must hurry. Justifiable forgiveness——

## LI

**W**HEN Hood, directed by the discreet Clémentine, had climbed up the path, he found Mrs. Dorset by the fountain.

Kneeling by her, he took her hands in his and raised them to his lips, the simple act seeming, through his way of accomplishing it, a kind of rite.

“You forgive me?” he said.

And even in the undoubted rapture of the moment she wished that he hadn't made use of that particular word.

“Yes.”

With a sigh of relief and happiness he sat down by her and laid his head for a moment against her shoulder. “I have been horribly unhappy,” he declared, and she knew by his face that it was the truth.

Perhaps she was nearer the truth than she knew when she thought, half-defiant of another thought, “Poor darling, he couldn't help it.”

The fatigue natural in one who has made a long journey on a very hot day by cross-country trains stood the penitent in good stead. He had a headache and



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

was pale and a little haggard, and Amy, of course, attributed these ravages exclusively to his feeling for her.

They sat in the pleasant shade by the fountain very quiet for several minutes.

At last Hood broke the silence.

“Are you glad to see me?”

“Yes.” The very baldness of her answer gave it a value that the experienced Hood fully appreciated, and her eyes were of an intenser blue than usual.

“You have missed me?”

“Yes. Archie—how could you?”

He frowned uneasily and his eyes swept the horizon.

“Darling—I have begged your pardon—need we discuss the horrid business any more? I have been bad, but you will help me to be good; I have been weak, but you will help me to be strong.” The hairs of his little black mustache were, she saw, tipped with gold; there were three white hairs near the middle of his satiny head; the lines in his forehead were deeper than she had realized.

It gave her an odd feeling of intimacy to know these things, and, bending towards him, she kissed him with extreme tenderness.

“All right, dear,” she murmured, “we won’t talk about it. Only”—remembering with a pang the letter she had forgotten—“have you seen—Miss Cavendish since I left?”

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

To her immense relief he, after a short pause, told the truth. "Yes, I have seen her."

"When—dearest?"

"She is at the sea; she hasn't been well, and is at the sea near where I have been staying with my father's sister. She, my aunt, broke her leg ten days ago, so my mother and I went down to see her."

"Oh!"

There was a long pause, during which the only thing that broke the palpitant summer silence was the thick, slow bubble of the fountain.

"Amy," the man's dark eyes were full of pleading, "*don't* think about—that girl—any longer. I was a beast, but I hadn't met you, and—Oh, well, I can't explain. All men do these things, only most of 'em don't get found out."

"Justifiable forgiveness," the old parson's phrase, came into her mind almost with a little clash. Was this forgiveness of hers a justifiable one?

"But, Archie," she said, laying her hand on his, and looking away from him, "you went on seeing her—after you and I loved each other."

He drew a deep, audible breath. "Amy," he answered, "don't you trust me at all?"

The absurdity of the question did not appear to either of them; Hood himself believed that he ought to be trusted, and Mrs. Dorset was horror-stricken by the

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

reproach in his voice. Thus people innocently deceive themselves, unconsciously rejoicing in their deception.

"I can't explain," he went on, a minute later, seeking refuge in the well-worn cover; "you wouldn't understand. I never loved her at all, the poor thing. And, mind you, in her way she's a very nice woman."

"I am sure of it. And she loves you."

Hood was not at all a fatuous man, nor was he even vain in the usual way of lady-killers. Indeed, he might be better described as a lady-trap.

He was as dangerous to women as honey is to flies; he was more the pursued than the pursuer; he was an unregistered menace to the peace of fools; the trap does not chase the mice, but it catches them. Thus Archie Hood, with his unoccupied mind, his kind heart, his mediocre brain, his inflammable emotions. He stirred uneasily at Mrs. Dorset's last remark.

"She does, dear, and I think you oughtn't to see her—for her sake."

"All right, I won't. Now tell me, my loveliest," he caught her to him and kissed her, "how long are you going to stay in this awful place?"

"It isn't awful!"

Amused by her vehemence, he kissed her again. "Tell me how you happened to come here."

She told him.

"Well, I'm jolly glad you didn't go to Molly Beau-

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

champ's," he commended, virtuously. "She's a beastly woman."

"O Archie!"

"Yes, 'O Archie'—a horrid woman."

Oh, ginger, cold to the tongue!

The afternoon crept westward, leaving shadows stretching behind it like footprints. And by the Bird's Fountain sat the very happy lovers, forgetting everything but their two selves. Peace after pain is a delight that everybody has experienced, so poor little Amy Dorset's state of mind will be understood. Finally they rose and stood at the edge of the terrace watching the sunset.

"You will come, then?" Hood said.

"Yes. To the Crossroads Inn at Welling at four tomorrow."

"Yes. There are no houses there, not a soul will see us, and at Clatton there is only the old caretaker and her husband, and they don't matter."

She nodded, a little absently. "Archie, I'd so much rather go to Maiden Aqualate and have you come there. You see, it would *really* be better, for Cloudesley will be there, and——"

Hood burst out laughing. "Oh, you darling, you sweet little angel-geese! *Do* you think I want to see Cloudesley?"

"He would be very nice. You know he wanted to

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

see you in town; he's going to do everything for us——”

Hood's face darkened. He loved Mrs. Dorset, sincerely and far more than he had ever loved anyone else, and he was not ungrateful to Dorset for his incomprehensible acquiescence, but at the same time, he did not wish to be the man's guest; he had no desire to discuss things with him, and least of all did he like the idea of giving up his runaway honeymoon.

He had made up his mind to take Amy to Clatton, a little old house of his on the edge of Dartmoor, and to Clatton he meant to take her.

“Darling,” he pleaded, “I should die at Maiden Aqualate, and I want to be all alone with you at Clatton. I used to go there for my holidays when I was a child; I'll show you the pool where I learned to swim and the apple-tree in which I wrote my first poem——”

“I'm sure it was a love-poem,” she flashed.

“It wasn't, then! It was an Ode to War, and it began ‘O War Soul with thy fingers dripping red.’ It was a beauty, I can tell you!”

Slowly they walked down the hill, and where the roads branched he left her, going to the inn where he had housed his car.

And she went on to the left, and in at the white-barred gate by the columbarium.

## LII

**I**T so happened that a pouring rain that night intervened between Mrs. Dorset and the outer world.

The Rector and Jargonelle the leggy, who had intended to "come in after dinner," as the phrase went in Bird's Fountain, did not come in, and Amy was alone.

At first it did not matter. She was very happy, and wandered about from room to room humming to herself in an odd little way that she regarded as singing.

Her conscience was absolutely at rest; from the moment when she had told her husband about Hood, she had had no further qualms. Clow did not mind, so all was well.

And, Hood's charm strong on her still, her mind was in a kind of haze of weary bliss.

The rain came down hard, clattering against the windows of the drawing-room and on the roof. Mrs. Dorset was one of the happy people to whom rain is a pleasure, almost a luxury when heard from a warm room: it gave her an odd feeling for extra intimacy with herself; she felt, sitting by the fire under the

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

portrait, as if a charming Amy had come to visit her. And this other Amy knew and loved Archie Hood, so that they were very cozy together in the firelight, the two shaded lamps glowing softly in distant corners of the room.

Sir James Pinsent gazed down with benevolence from his black frame, flanked by William Henry Saint and his old wife, whose profiles stood out with singular distinctness in the firelight. In spite of the rain the night was warm, and towards ten Mrs. Dorset rose from her reverie and, drawing back the faded curtains, opened the French window opening on to Alastair Bowen's Venetian balcony.

A rush of scented air met her as she stepped out. The rose-garden was only a few feet below—this side of the house was high, owing to the fact that the house was built on a little hill—and in the wet dusk pale clusters and stars and streaks showed, that were rain-soaked roses.

The moon, routed by the wet, had yet not withdrawn far, and from behind a cloud sent through a faint glow, an "I could an I would" effect full of romance.

Under this pale clarity the square tower rose from the bulky mass that was the tree-embowered church, and two windows in the Rectory were bright.

Suddenly there came to the watching woman a sound of music. Someone was singing.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"Jargonelle," she said softly, aloud. "How pretty!"

The young girl had an odd, deep voice of the greatest softness and mellowness. The Rector said that this was because she ate so many peaches and pears, Amy remembered, smiling.

And now, in the quiet night the voice was very beautiful. The song was a hymn, and she was obviously practicing for Sunday; some phrases she did over and over again.

It was a melody that Mrs. Dorset knew, but she could not remember the words.

"What is it? What *are* the words?" she thought. Then she remembered that it was an old hymn sung in her childhood by her mother's cook, a motherly person generous in the matter of little cakes and tarts, sufficiently fat in front to be a comfortable refuge in times of tears.

Yes, it was old Minnie who had bellowed that air among her pots and pans, and little Amy had sung it too.

Jargonelle, now satisfied with her details, embarked on a finished performance, and evidently another window had been opened, for the young voice, so delightfully free from the shrillness of many youthful ones, poured out more freely.

It was one of the simpler hymns and it was a quiet one. It sang of peace and humble happiness.



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

“What *are* the words? Dear old Minnie—how lovely her voice is——”

Then suddenly a line of the verses came into the listener's memory, and she sang, too, her queer little voice sounding almost like a bleat.

The rain was lightening now, and no longer splashed as it fell, and the moon grew stronger.

Jargonelle sang on and the church clock struck ten, its voice softened by the dampness.

And in the dampness, disregarding for once its effect on her hair or her delicate frock, Amy Dorset still stood alone.

“I wonder,” she thought, “how Clow is? And poor old Lawrence. I must write Clow—about Archie——” She broke off, frowning a little. The thought had seemed an intrusion.

A moment later she realized with a start that the song had ceased. She wished that it had not, that it had gone on and would go on, and that she could stand there still, listening to it, and wrapt in the odd feeling of aloofness that is not loneliness that she had experienced for the first time in her life.

She went slowly back to the fire after closing the window for the night and drawing the curtains.

Old Sir James' body had disappeared in an encroaching shadow, but by some trick of the lamplight, his eyes shone with a live light, looking straight at her.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

She gave a little start as she sat down. She had an absurd feeling that he was waiting with some amusement for her answer to a remark he had just made.

The fire had crumbled into a glowing heap of ashes, the clock ticked loudly, and Clémentine entered with a glass of milk and a siphon on a tray.

"Il est dix heures, madame," she said, her plain face full of the curious pride that characterized her devotion to her mistress.

"Murcy, Clémentine. Put it down, please. I—I'll come up in a few minutes. Il me fo écrire oune lettre."

The woman withdrew, and after a pause Mrs. Dorset rose and went to the beautiful little Chippendale writing-table on which were arranged the thousand and one little objects necessary to her correspondence. There were a gold-topped inkstand of pink quartz, a jade pen-tray, two quill pens, their quills bedewed with little diamonds, a large, very important-looking despatch-box of green leather, an emblazoned vellum blotting-book, a big ring with, cut in its emerald, the motto of a great ducal house, the motto innocently adopted by Mrs. Dorset for her own use because she liked it, and paper and little cards of all sizes and thicknesses, inscribed A. D. in the smart simplicity of dull gold block letters. A lavish, comprehensive, rather business-like writing-table it was.

Its owner selected a sheet of paper and took from a

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

drawer the plain silver pen-holder with a J pen with which, despite the quills, she did the greater part of her writing.

“Dear Clow,” she wrote, in her large, spidery hand, “I hope you are well? Captain Hood was here today and explained things and I see that I was too hasty——”

After a long pause she tore this into minute bits and began again.

“Dear Clow, I was wrong about Archie.” She paused again, her little chin on her left fist, her eyes fixed on the fire.

“Dear Cloudesley, I am sorry I was so silly about Captain Hood. He was here yesterday and I am *very happy*——”

It was too warm in the room.

She opened the hall door, thus admitting to her confused counsels the implacable voice of the great clock.

“Dear Clow, I have seen Archie, and I am going with him to Clatton tomorrow. No one will know, but I want *you* to. We are very happy and I hope you will soon——”

“Mrs. Dorset!”

Amy jumped, dropping her pen and blotting her letter, for the voice had been accompanied by a hard bang on the window behind her.

“Mrs. Dorset!”

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"Yes, yes, I'm coming——"

She opened the window on the high side of the garden, and the Rector entered, hatless and wet.

"It's come on again," he said with a shake, blowing out, with a vast displacement of his cheeks, the flame in what she knew he always called his lanthorn. "Just as I got to your gate, down it pelted."

He thrust a big stick into the fire and, sitting down by it, lit his pipe and settled his old back comfortably on his chair.

"Jargonelle was singing," he said, "and I stood by the window and listened. So I came to see."

"You came to see what, dear Mr. Bullace?"

As she spoke she smiled at his unconscious deletion, and he beamed back at her, his mouth twisting and wrinkling round the pipe-stem.

"Whether you really *were* lonely, as I felt you were. Were you?"

She hesitated. "Not exactly lonely, but I am glad to see you."

"M-m-m. Lonely or not, you were alone. And I think that must be dreadful."

The firelight, by accentuating all his wrinkles and the deep caverns of his eyes, made him look his full age. "I should hate to be alone," he added.

She laughed. "But you so often *are!* What about the winter when Jargonelle is away?"

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

The old man took his pipe from his mouth and leaned forward in his chair.

"My dear," he said slowly, "I haven't been alone for years."

"How—how do you mean?"

He shook his big head. "I—I couldn't explain. Loneliness is not a concrete condition. It is mental."

"But—you mean—do you mean," she persisted with a new kind of shyness subduing her voice, "that—Mrs. Bullace is—always with you?"

"No. In fact, Mrs. Bullace and I, though we both did our best, weren't much of a success, matrimonially." He spoke with the utmost serenity, with a smile of grave sweetness on his old lips.

Amy, unused to such frankness, did not know how to meet it. She said, "Oh," and relapsed into silence.

The pause grew longer and longer, enveloping them like a creeping shadow out of which something seemed to be preventing their emergence.

The new stick in the fire blazed up cheerily, so that old Sir James appeared to wink at the other ancient.

Amy Dorset, sitting with her small hands folded, waited, rapt in the odd silence. The strange restfulness of the room held her as if in warm arms.

Finally the Rector spoke. "I don't like your husband," he said, emptying his pipe by knocking it under the mantel shelf.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Amy flushed. "Why not?" she asked with indignation. "And besides, you don't know him."

"No. But I don't like him for behaving in such a way as to justify—that good-looking rampallion who was here today."

He rose, holding out his hand. "You are so pretty, prettier than ever tonight, when you are wistly. *Why*," he thundered suddenly, "isn't he here to look after you? The man must be an absolute fool!"

At the last phrase his voice changed, and she knew that he was thinking aloud. This conviction was made doubly sure the next moment by his adding in an undertone, "And she, the pretty bird, with no brain at all to help her."

Now Mrs. Dorset, as I have said, honestly believed herself to be a rather intellectual woman. Did she not read Plato and Dostoiwsky and could she not talk about Selma Lagerlöf?

Her next observation, even as she made it, surprised herself. For instead of resenting the old man's disparaging pity, she cried with a little edge in her voice. "He is *not* a fool. He is a very clever man, and a very good one."

Mr. Bullace smiled suddenly, his face seeming to crack all over as he did so.

"Good. I am glad! For in that case I shall soon have the pleasure of seeing him here."

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Lighting his lantern, he shook hands with her and plodded out into the rain, while she, going to the writing-table, stood by it looking at the various beginnings of letters that strewed it.

After a long pause she gathered them into a sheaf and stuffed them with the poker deep down into the embers.

LIII

CAPTAIN A. HOOD,  
*Cross-Roads Inn,*  
*Welling, Sussex.*

Not very well unable come today. Writing. Love.  
AMY.



LIV

MRS. DORSET, Dove Cottage,  
*Bird's Fountain,*  
*Sussex.*

Frightfully worried and disappointed. All my heart's  
love.

A.

LV

*The Blue Cottage, Wokelands,  
Wilts,  
Friday.*

DEAREST AMY,

I am so glad to know from Clow that you are well, and that you apparently are having a good time.

He hasn't told me your address, so I send this to him to be re-posted.

Isn't the weather lovely? I feel amazingly rested, and if I could drink milk, feel sure that I should become plump and pink and pretty.

Alas, to me milk tastes of cow and undisguised eggs taste of hen (a very different thing from tasting of chicken, mark you!) and to my vitiated taste these things are odious.

All this pleasant chit-chat, dear, is only my nervous way of skirting round the danger signal on the ice that is you. As I wrote that masterly phrase about cows and chickens, my mind took a great leap ahead, and determined that I should be bold and hazardous. So here goes.

Amy darling, I know. I know why he is not worth it, and that that is why you went away.

There!

Won't you write to me and tell me that you don't mind my knowing? I promise never to refer to it to you, if you don't wish me to, but I am so fond of you that I *couldn't not* tell you. If you want me to, I'll tell you *how* I know.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

One thing on my word of honor. I know that that nice little Frenchman, P. le B., knows, but it was not he who told me. You must believe this, for he values your friendship.

I have seen Clow, but I have not told him. I was sure that you would, when the time came.

He is splendid, Clow. It is my honest belief that his only thought is your welfare.

God bless you, dearest Tannie. Please write to me.

Your affectionate

LAWRENCE.

*Saturday*

DEAR LAWRENCE,

Your letter has rather upset me. I have only time for a note, but I must tell you that I was quite wrong about A. H. I have seen him, and everything is all right. I'm writing Clow in a day or two. I like being here, it's a lovely little place, and I am having a really good rest. Glad you're at the Blue Cottage, it always does you good.

Your aff.,

AMY.

*The Blue Cottage, Monday*

DEAREST AMY,

Your letter was no letter at all. It's a babble, a shadow. And I don't like it. If you have made up with Captain Hood you are a fool. He is a bad man, not out of wickedness but out of his very fiber.

I don't for a moment blame him, or suppose that he can help it—pears that are all brown and nasty at the core can't help it, either, but no one tries to live on such pears! (You

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

know the kind I mean, not exactly rotten, but *bléte*—in French.)

You won't trust me, but I will trust you. You think I love Clow. Well, I do. With all my heart. And if you were idiotic enough to marry Archie Hood, I am sure that Clow would marry me. And if he did I should be the happiest woman on this earth. But—with my whole heart I hope that you won't be such a fool.

In the first place Captain Hood's no good, and in the second place Clow *is*. What's more—for in return for your niggardly lack of confidence I insist on deluging you with mine—Clow doesn't care a brass button for me. So there you are. I dare say you will be furious over this letter, but I don't care a d-a-m-n if you are. Your affectionate

LAWRENCE.

MY DEAR LAWRENCE,

I am most unwilling to break my promise to you, but unless you yourself can go down to Bird's Fountain and look after Amy, I shall be obliged to go.

It is not safe for her to be alone, and whether she likes it or not, someone must take care of her.

It seems incredible that she should ever even speak to Hood again, but women are very odd and the fellow certainly has great charm.

I was quite willing to do all I could for her happiness, poor little thing, but I cannot tolerate any further intercourse with him.

Go and see her, Lawrence—never mind her letter.

Can't you see the pathos of it?

My dear, I don't often ask favors of anyone, but I do ask this of you. Yours,

C. D.

# BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

*Houlgate, Monday*

DEAR MADAME,

You having honored me with your confidence, I venture to send you from the villa of a lady whom for years I have known to be the best woman in the world, my homages and best wishes, together with a prayer for two words to relieve my anxiety on your behalf.

Is all well with you? It hurts my heart to remember tears in your beautiful eyes.

Were it possible I would ask you to meet Madame Samain. There is in her a power of healing that I would have you know.

But you are there, so far away—England is much farther from France than France is from England—and for many years this dear lady has not been able even to walk.

Therefore, once more, I beg you to write to me, if only two words.

I kiss your hands and lay at your feet the expression of my most profound homage.

J. PASQUIER LE BRETON.

*Tuesday*

MRS. DORSET, *Dove Cottage, Bird's Fountain, Sussex.*

My mother seriously ill. Please write to me immediately has anything happened. All my love.

ARCHIE.

DORSET, *Maiden Aqualate, Malcome.*

For Heaven's sake do not go to her. Am writing you. Don't worry.

LAWRENCE.

**M**R. DORSET wrote to Hood, explaining that she had really not felt well enough to meet him at Welling and that she had not written before because she had not known quite where she could do so. Her letter, short and constrained, had made him uneasy, and he was on the point of going down to see her when his mother, eating cherries at luncheon, put her hand to her head, muttered something and lost consciousness as suddenly as a candle loses its flame in a sudden draught.

One of Hood's good qualities was, not his love for his mother, for that was a gift rather than an achievement, but his devotion to her.

Many men really love mothers from whom they are pretty constantly absent, but this man, despite the multifarious engagements incidental to his career of *roué*, was never too busy to see her whom he called by her Christian name of Adelaide, nearly every day of his life.

So when poor Adelaide was taken ill his grief was singularly sincere and unselfish.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

He sat by her, her hand in his for hours at a time, and as she grew better he hardly ever left her.

"I'm going to get over this, Dino," she said one gay morning when the curtains were blowing about in a fine high wind.

"Of course you are, dearest," he answered, kissing her cheek.

"Remarkably little of course about it there was for some days," she retorted. "I knew. A stroke's a stroke, when all's said and done. However," she added, patting his hand with her little gnarled one, "I am extremely glad to live on a while longer. Do you know, Dino, I never before realized that I was an old woman? No, Nurse, I will *not* eat my arrow-root, I will not, and you may take it away. Or shall we make her eat it herself, my son?"

The nurse, a very pretty woman in a blue-and-white striped uniform, went out after a last look at the Captain, as the servants called him.

She was a fully certificated nurse, but she was human, and Archie's black eyes had not failed to observe her charms. His eyes *could* not fail to observe feminine charms, even then, at his beloved Adelaide's bedside.

"No," the invalid went on, as the door closed, "I know of course that other women of sixty are old, but I never thought that *I* was!"

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"You *aren't*, dear. You are young, and always will be."

"Thanks, son. Well, however that may be, I am not growing any more youthful, and I want you to marry before my next stroke."

"Mother! Don't talk about strokes." His eyes were full of the tears that were such an asset to him in his various and variegated love affairs.

She laughed. "All right. But I may talk about your marrying. You are thirty-five."

"I am."

"Well, you were seven when your poor father was your age. He was really very fond of you, you know——"

A gardener passed under the window whistling. The old lady listened for a moment and then drew a deep breath.

"I am disgustingly weak still," she said. "I must rest or that woman will be telling tales to the doctor. Dear, *why* don't you marry?"

As he rose to go she took his hand in hers. "Have you never," she added a little shyly, "seen anyone you fancied?"

Hood went out into the garden as ashamed of himself as he ought to have been and never was after certain of his interviews with other women.

His mother had always believed him to be not only



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

the best of sons, which he was, but the best of men.

He had not much sense of humor, but he had enough to know that this pathetic belief would have been hugely laughable to anyone but himself.

Had he, Archie Hood, never seen anyone he fancied!

## LVII

O H, yes," Jargonelle said, her mouth full of pins, "I shall marry. I mean to have many children."

They were sitting in the Rectory garden in the open space beside the house, trying to catch all the sun there was, for the day was dark and rather chilly.

It was ten days since Hood's visit, and in her pocket Amy had an unread letter from him. His letters were very frequent, and they were beautiful because, despite their dread glibness, they were the expression of a perfectly sincere feeling.

There was in the same pocket with this last one a note from Yvonne Cavendish.

You are [the girl wrote] keeping him from me, and it is wicked of you. You thought he wasn't good enough for you because of me, but I'd think him good enough for me if there were dozens like you.

As Jargonelle declared in her fruity voice her young intentions, Mrs. Dorset's mind was beset by memories of this letter.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Another fragment ran:

There's a girl named Vincent who lives at Putney—8 Wellington Crescent—that you ought to know about. She's a manicurist.

And did you ever hear of Mrs. Keniston? Or of Miss Ellaline de Courcy? She's only a chorus girl, but very pretty. He took her to supper at the Salisbury Grill just before I left town. A gentleman friend of mine saw them, and said he seemed awfully keen.

Later the letter went on:

I know you will despise me for writing this, but I can't help it. I don't so much mind about Mrs. Keniston (she's an old one— I mean an old affair) or this De Courcy girl. They are more like me. But you are different and sometimes I feel like I hated you. Only at the same time I *don't*, for you were kind to me, and not many ladies are kind to girls much younger than themselves. Besides, he doesn't care for you and I in the same way. Please don't be angry, and I'd love to have the coat and skirt. I'm sure it would be nice because it's yours. Yours sincerely,

YVONNE CAVENDISH.

The sun had come out for a moment and to it the young Jargonelle turned up her face.

"Isn't it lovely?" she murmured, her needlework lying disregarded on her knees.

"What? Oh, yes, the sun." But Amy reflected as she spoke that her own skin must not be put to the test under which the girl's was so beautiful; she wore

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

a shady hat with a delicate little frill of tulle hanging from the edge of the brim.

"What a pity it was," Jargonelle went on, after a while, "that your dear little girl died. What was her name?"

Amy started. It was years since she had given a thought to the dead child.

"Her name was Anne," she answered, her voice sounding odd to her own ears, "Anne Rose."

Jargonelle looked up from her work, a very sweet expression in her eyes. "For—your mother and Mr. Dorset's."

"Yes, dear."

The sun, swallowed by a hungry cloud, had disappeared, and the leaves of the copper-beech gave a little shiver as if it felt the change.

"Tell me about her. About little Anne Rose."

"There is not much to tell. She was only six months old when she died——"

"Oh, poor you!"

Amy wondered at the motherliness in the girl's voice; it was as if she were the elder and Amy the younger.

"I think I am sorrier for women when their babies die before anyone else has ever taken care of them,—while they are still helpless, and belong absolutely to the mother, you know."

"Y-yes." Mrs. Dorset's voice was doubtful, but

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Jargonelle, who was again sewing busily, went on without noticing it.

"And yet, dreadful as it must have been, you weren't so badly off as a friend of mine at Scarborough."

"No? Why not, dear?"

"Well, you see, her husband—*such* a dear he was—died a month before Barbara was born, so when Barbara died poor Lil was quite alone."

"Poor thing."

"Yes. You of course had Mr. Dorset."

Filbasket, passing with a wheelbarrow, stopped at this juncture to air his opinion—a very mean one—of the weather, and when he had gone Jargonelle asked suddenly: "*Will* you show me their pictures?" She bore a rather breathless aspect as though she were asking for admission into a Holy of Holies.

Amy Dorset bent over and picked up a little green apple. Her face was red, and she wished to hide its flush.

"I—I'm afraid I can't," she said, awkwardly. "You see, the baby was never photographed,—I was ill for months after she was born, and—Mr. Dorset hates being taken."

Jargonelle's eyes opened very wide.

"You haven't got any?"

"No, dear. I—I am very sorry——" she spoke with a queer feeling of humility, and rose.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"I think I must go now," she said, "I have letters to write——"

"I'll come with you to the gate then." Pitching her needlework onto the grass, the girl laid her arm across Amy's shoulders, in an affectionate rather uncomfortable way she had, and they made their way across the now sunny garden.

"*Tell* me about him, Mrs. Dorset darling, do!"

"About whom?"

"About Mr. Dorset, of course. Is he handsome?"

"No—no, he's not handsome. He's tall, and—and very *nice*-looking."

The girl bent down and kissed her, deranging her hat.

"*How* he must adore you," she murmured.

Amy laughed a little shrilly. "Why?"

"Why, because you are so beautiful, and such an angel."

"And you are a goose of a girl! I am not an angel at all——"

At the white gate they parted, and Amy walked on slowly. She was not happy, and although the letter from the Cavendish girl had not exactly convinced her of any fresh misconduct on Hood's part, yet the very fact that he was a man of whom such things could be said was disturbing. She knew that decent men could no more be accused of such indiscriminate

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

wantonness than of robbing every bank they passed.

Mrs. Jessie Keel was underbred and jealous and spiteful; she had no doubt made the most out of comparatively innocent facts.

"As if a man couldn't be manicured without—flirting with the girl," she told herself. But at the same time she knew that Hood's manicurist was more than likely to be one of those with whom their clients *do* flirt.

As to the other women mentioned, she reflected bitterly, even he must know a few women to whom he did not make love!

She passed her own gate, and though the sun had now escaped from the belly of the whale that had swallowed him and was blazing fiercely down on the dusty road, her little figure went on over the bridge and off to the left up the path towards the fountain.

## LVIII

**T**HE fountain at that hour of the morning lay in the shadow of a gnarled and half-ruined oak that grew at the edge of the little terrace.

Amy sat down by it and taking off her hat dabbed gingerly at her face with her handkerchief.

The walk up had been very hot, and she was tired. Jargonelle's ridiculous chatter had disturbed her, and she wished she had not let the girl talk.

Probably, of the losses that women in growing older inevitably experience, none is sadder than that of ignorance, the beautiful ignorance of youth; and Amy Dorset now realized this for the first time.

She wished that she still believed in the comfort of husbands, in the holy grief for dead children.

Her baby, so long dead, had for years been as unreal to her as the child of one of the Pharaohs. For thousands of days she had never given the little creature a thought.

And now in the cool shadow, the sound of the gentle fountain sweet in her ears, she remembered it.

She remembered the reddish down on its head; the



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

milky blue of its eyes; the first whinnying, nickering cry of it, when it was born. And she remembered Clow's face as he had looked when he first saw it.

One of the tag-ends of poetry with which she buttressed her funny little conception of herself as a literary woman, was a scrap from Browning.

God be praised, the meanest of his creatures  
Boasts two soul-sides; one to face the world with,  
One to show a woman when he loves her.

This occurred to her now, and she found herself wondering whether her husband had ever loved her.

He had always been kind and good and trustworthy, but—she decided with a little angry toss of the head—trustworthiness was easily compatible with dullness. Clow had no temptations such as beset, for instance, poor Archie. No, surely Clow had never loved her. He had never even said that he could not live without her.

He had cried once, she remembered, but the tears hadn't been for her. It was on that dull October day when the little Anne Rose was buried.

She remembered the churchyard at Ambles, the sound of the parson's voice—he had adenoids—and the chill rain that fell.

And Clow had cried. . . .

A bird, sitting on the mossy brim of the fountain,

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

looked at her with his head on one side, almost as if it winked. A nasty, little, common brown bird! Then he dipped across the pool, skimming the surface, and returning to dry land, shook his wet feathers and rearranged them.

From the little velvet bag that never left her except when exchanged for a more beautiful one, Mrs. Dorset took a folding glass and looked at herself. Her face was red and damp and worn-out looking. She dabbed it with powder, but the powder made things worse and she wiped it off.

With it came souvenirs of black eyebrows, rose-colored cheeks, and cherry lips.

“Oh, how beastly!”

The bird, thoroughly refreshed, flew to a broken branch of the ancient oak, and being of an inquisitive nature, sat and watched his companion.

This is what he saw.

First she drew her hair back from her brow; then she unbuttoned her sleeves and rolled them up to her elbows; then she unfastened the low collar of her gown and tucked in the frill.

Then, with a stealthy look all round her as if, the bird thought, she suspected the neighborhood of a cat, she moved to the fountain and knelt, both hands on the brink of it.

After staring at herself in the brown mirror, she

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

gave an odd little laugh, and leaning over, dipped her face in the water.

She spluttered, snorted, tossed her head and dipped again. Then she plunged her arms into the cool depths and rubbed her screwed-up face with her little hands on which were things that glittered . . .

“Amy!”

“Lawrence!”

“My darling little child, what on earth are you doing?” Miss Croxley, dusty and travel worn, yellow and grimy with the yellowness and griminess of women who never flush, stared down.

Mrs. Dorset, her face mottled and damp, a lock of dank hair on one shoulder, stared up.

“Did you never,” Amy asked finally, with a touch of asperity, “see anyone wash her face before?”

At this, Miss Croxley burst into a cheer of laughter, and coming round, knelt, and kissed the wet face in question.

“O you *darling*,” she cried. “What a duck you are! I always said you were a duck, and here I find you at your secret aquatics!”

“Idiot. But—I’m *so* glad to see you, Lawrence. Lend me your hank, will you, mine is a wreck.”

Lawrence produced hers, and when Mrs. Dorset’s little face was dry, the conversation went on.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"Who told you where I was?"

"Clow. He said I must come—or he would."

"O Lawrence, why should he?"

"Because, dear, he is your husband."

"Pooh! As if that mattered, nowadays"

Miss Croxley laughed. "You *are* a gump, Tannie! However, here I am. I am to find out all about you and report to him tonight."

"Tonight? Where? At Maiden Aqualate?"

"No, dear, at 875."

Amy stared. "But why—in mid-August?"

Lawrence Croxley paused for a moment, her eyes fixed on the beautiful panorama stretched before them. It was a pause, not a hesitation.

Finally, she spoke. "I could not go to Maiden Aqualate, where he is living alone," she said, "so he is coming up to town to see me and learn about you."

"Oh!"

"Yes." She took her old-fashioned gold watch from her belt, and looked at it. "Amy, it's twelve. My train goes at two. You'll give me some lunch, I know, and before lunch, will you tell me what I am to tell—your husband?"

The sun had crept past the oak-tree, and Amy's little face was deluged with its light.

Lashless, eyebrowless, pink, instead of crimson-

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

lipped, she sat there, her hands clasped round her raised knees.

And she was silent.

After a time Miss Croxley spoke again.

“Amy, what about Captain Hood? Have you seen him?”

“Yes.”

“Well, dearest, won't you tell me?”

“Tell you what?”

“Have you—are you—do you still—care for him?”

“Yes!” Mrs. Dorset's answer rang out, harsh and defiant. “Of course I do!”

A little sunny silence fell, and in it the burbling of the fountain seemed only a further, more velvety stillness.

“I am sorry, Amy.”

“Why?”

“Because—I wrote you, dear, that I knew.”

Amy took from her bag the golden pencil, and licking its red tip with a tongue nearly as red, passed it over her pretty lips with the nonchalance of long practice.

“Well, *what* do you know?” she asked, defiantly.

“About—those women.”

There was a short silence, during which a spot of blue seemed to drop from the sky into the now quite unshaded pool.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Mrs. Dorset shut her bag with a snap.

"Listen, Lawrence," she said, putting on her hat, "you mustn't say a word against Archie. He has been here and—and—explained. I was very hard on him before, and very silly to be so upset. Men like him," she added, "*can't* be like men like—my husband."

She rose, and Miss Croxley did the same.

Lawrence's hollow eyes were full of tears, but they were angry tears, and her voice shook with tension as she answered. "No, Amy, you are quite right. Men like Captain Hood *cannot* be like Cloudesley Dorset."

Amy turned, her unshaded eyes a light gray, slightly pink at the edges. "Don't be cross, dear," she murmured.

"I am not cross." There was no artificial sweetness about the woman who loved Cloudesley Dorset. "And I will not stay for lunch. What am I to tell—*your husband?*"

"You really won't stay?"

"No, thank you."

"Very well. There is a train at one-five. You can just catch it. As to Clow—O Lawrence, remember, you *told* me you cared. Be good to him. He—he is really such a dear!—And I believe you can make him happy. I am going to marry—the—the man I love. If Clow ever asks you to marry him"—her voice was very sweet, her eyes kind,—“do it, dear. He's—the best man in

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

the world, and will make you happy. If he ever asks you, remember——”

Lawrence Croxley drew her deerskin gloves taut at the wrists.

“He *has* asked me,” she said proudly.

Then she walked down the hill without looking back.

## LIX

**T**HINGS that happen only in novels are too frequent in real life to need any explanation. When, on the rustic bridge over the thread of brown water just at the edge of the village, the Rector met a remarkably handsome man who looked as if he were a beautiful dream of Velasquez, it was of course Archie Hood.

“A fine day,” said Mr. Bullace.

“Delightful.”

“I take it that you are going up to the ruins?”

“I am.”

There was a pause and then the old man remarked with a fine air of casualness, “Would you like a Bishop’s Thumb?”

“‘A Bishop’s’——”

“Thumb. Exactly. As you see, it’s a pear.”

Hood stared helplessly at the fine specimen held out to him. “An odd name,” he murmured; “no, thanks, I don’t care for fruit——”

The Rector, his large person completely filling the space between the two handrails, smiled at him.



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"You are wrong. Fruit is good. You of course remember Tusser?"

"No, I don't remember Tusser, sir, and—as I am rather in a hurry——"

Hood had no doubt as to the old man's insanity, and his voice was persuasive, but vainly so.

"Tusser," Mr. Bullace thundered, one hand on either rail, "was remarkably fond of strawberries. 'Wife, into the garden, and set me a plot with strawberry-roots, of the best to be got. Such, growing abroad amongst thorns in the wood, well-chosen and picked, form excellent food!' What do you think of that?"

Hood laughed. "Delightful, sir," he answered with the high courtesy that distinguished him, "but I fear I must go on——"

Then Augustine Clement Bullace lied.

"You will not find Mrs. Dorset in the ruins," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because she is not there."

"I think you are mistaken. Her maid told me——"

The old man wagged a big forefinger at him. "Her maid," he declared with untruthful truth, "did not see her start off to Brighton in a motor-car with some friends——"

Hood looked up the sunny dusty road, and then into the old man's candid eyes.

"I am very sorry to have missed her, but—it can't

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

be helped. Brighton lies in my way, perhaps I may be fortunate enough to meet her——”

They shook hands and the younger man left the old one on the little bridge.

And the old man, despite his holy office, was filled with glee and something like pride over his successful lie.

LX

CHER MONSIEUR,

*Wed.*

Je vous remercie pour votre charmante lettre. Je suis très bien, et je m'amuse assez. J'aimerais beaucoup connaître votre amie Madame Samain, mais je crains que c'est impossible pour le présent. Quant à M. H.—je l'ai vu et je crois que je lui ai fait tort. Je l'aime beaucoup, et j'étais très injuste. Mon mari est très, très bon, et tout ira bien, je suis sûre. Vous étiez si bon avec moi, je n'oublierai jamais. Je suis sûre que vous serez heureux de savoir que je suis très heureuse.

Miss Croxley était ici hier et j'ai dit à elle combien je suis heureuse.

Agréez, cher Monsieur, les assurances de ma parfaite considération.

AMY DORSET.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

*Friday, Vittel.*

I found my poor brother so much better that I feel rewarded for my sacrifice in leaving you. I enclose my dear little *Undine's* letter. She thinks it is written in French. Can you read it? Isn't it odd? However, in case you *can't* read it, it means simply that she's well and happy (which is not true). Dearest, I shall be back with you and our dear Henri in three days' time. Until then, my happiness lies, as always, in your thin, exquisite hands.

Thy

JULES.

## LXI

**T**HEN happened four days of the most perfect weather. Days golden and warm with blue distances and a turquoise bowl for a sky.

Time seemed to stand still.

Amy Dorset could never remember any one thing she had done during those mellow hours. She ate and slept and was in the sun—that was all.

At the end of this period, in which she seemed to be like a ripening seed, there were two happenings.

The first was a letter from Dorset to his wife.

DEAR AMY [it ran],

Lawrence has told me of seeing you, and that you had seen H. As I told you, I am quite willing to do anything for your happiness, and I know the folly of speaking against a man to a woman who cares for him. Only—be quite sure, not only of yourself, but of him. I have just met a very nice man who has known him for years, and who likes him immensely. I should say that Hood is a very decent chap with men. But I have grave doubts of his ever being a good husband. Think it over well, my dear. And then send him to see me. He and I must have a talk. I hope you will soon come to Maiden Aqualate.

Believe me to be yours affectionately,

CLOUDESLEY DORSET.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

This note reached Dove Cottage one evening when Amy was finishing her dinner on the Venetian balcony. The pleasant, fading light fell full on her face as she read, and rested on it while she sat, her hands on the table edge, reflecting. She looked odd and unlike herself, because she was completely and undisguisedly herself.

There was no black stuff on her eyelashes, no paint on her cheeks, and her little nose even had a faint gleam, because of its lack of powder.

The letter was, she thought, very like Clow, grave and kind, and—nice.

Tomorrow she would answer it. In the meantime, she would walk down to the post office and wire Archie to go and see her husband. Archie had written of his abortive visit to Bird's Fountain, and she had wished to ask the Rector why he had sent her guest away. She had been very angry with the Rector, but—somehow she had not dared to question him.

She had grown very fond of the old man, but she was in an odd way afraid of him. There were, she felt, things in his mind which could not come out of his mouth without hurting her.

So when he first met her after the episode of the meeting on the bridge and looked at her sharply as if waiting for something, she had only asked him with innocent eyes, if she didn't look funny with fair lashes.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

His answer was to cup her little face in his huge hands and give her a loud kiss. "*That's* what I think," he said.

As she walked down the road to send the wire she saw Mr. Bullace climbing the steep bit of ground just beyond the bridge.

She did not wish to meet him for some reason which she did not even try to define, so she drew aside just within an open gate to let him pass.

The west was behind him and his white hair seemed to have caught a little of its rosy light. He ambled along, flinging his great limbs about, waving his stick, turning his face up to the sky and then from side to side in the way habitual to him. She remembered his once having said to her that he never ceased trying to see all he could of the world and that he had been allowed to see a great deal. This from an octogenarian whose travels consisted of a journey to Switzerland and another half a century before to Rome and Florence, had struck Amy's developing sense of understanding as very remarkable.

Yet now, as she stood behind the hedge and watched a sudden pounce of his to the grass on the other side of the road, she saw what he meant.

The small dusty flower that he picked, and looked at in triumph, would have been passed unseen by ninety-nine people out of every hundred.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

Mr. Bullace *had* been allowed to see a great deal of the world he so splendidly enjoyed. When he had disappeared, Mrs. Dorset went her way to the cottage telegraph office.

The pen like a pin had been replaced by a new one that blotted and blurred as it wrote, so two forms had to be torn up before a decently legible message was achieved.

It was addressed to London, for Hood was, she knew, there on business, and it ran:

Delightful letter from Cloudesley. He wishes see you  
Maiden Aqualate. AMY.

She wished to put in her love but dared not, seized by the miniature prudence of some very daring women.

She was signing her name when Jargonelle came tearing in. "O Mrs. Dorset, *do* come. Veales' hay-rick is on fire! Hurry, you must see it. Oh—you're sending a telegram. How splendid. I love telegrams."

Amy folded the form and handed it to the old post mistress. She wished the girl had not come. Hood and Jargonelle belonged to two such different phases of her life that she did not wish them to meet, even on a telegraph form, until she was married.

Into the deepening dusk Jargonelle rushed her, up the cobbled street, past the church, and down a long lane.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

“Poor Veale—isn’t it a pity? Such a perfectly gorgeous rick too, worth thirty pounds, Julia says. Oh, there goes the engine. *Do* look at Weddle, isn’t he too funny?”

The old-fashioned fire-engine roared past them, Weddle, the butcher, driving, his jaws set, his staring blue eyes blazing with pride. In his own imagination he was for the moment not a butcher; he was a hero, a man who took his life in his hands, not altogether, possibly, guiltless of piracy—rather confused, Weddle, but gloriously proud of himself.

Jargonelle broke into a run and raced down the steep lane, in clamorous company of half the village.

A rick fire was beyond a doubt catastrophic, but it was also a social event. On reaching the hollow where the little farm was situated, a hush fell on those who had come to see.

It was night down here, though day still lingered on the downs, and the blazing mound was a wonderful sight. For, in truth, dry hay or straw burns more beautifully than almost anything else; it goes with a rustle, a sparkiness, a lack of smoke that makes it almost a firework display. Against the darkness the separate strands and twists turned like worms of fire, and sprays of sparks flecked the gathering blackness.

The engine had arrived too late, the fire had too good a hold, and the spectators, including Weddle himself,



## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

stood fatalistically watching the picturesque destruction of thirty pounds. Veale, who was a poor man with a large family, stood leaning on the rick-yard gate. He was a plain man with a broken nose. Amy was near him, and in the midst of her fastidious thought "Oh, what a hideous old thing," came another. He had tears in his eyes and she saw them. "Oh, how dreadful it is," she thought.

She also saw that his wife stood by him, her long nose red and shining with tears.

"Poor man," Jargonelle said softly, "it will make them poor the whole winter."

After a moment Amy went quietly up to Mrs. Veale, and laid her hand on her arm.

"I am so sorry," she said, a new timidity veiling her voice.

The woman turned. "Thank you," she answered, drearily, "it's hard on 'im."

That was all, but her very lack of emphasis was striking. She thought, this plain mother of a swarm of plain children, only of *him*; the world held for her only one "him."

When the Rector's figure suddenly appeared on the brow of the downs just above the little group of neighbors, a murmur of pleasure went round.

Everyone was glad to see the old man whose gigantic shadow danced down behind him. Amy knew that he

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

could be of very little material use to the unfortunate farmer, but she felt the illimitable comfort he was nevertheless bringing.

When he had shaken hands with the Veales, and talked to them, Amy slipped her hand into his arm. "Rector!"

"Bless my soul," he rumbled in his deepest voice. "So this is where you were. I went up to see you but you were out——"

For a wild second she had to bite her lips to keep from telling him that she had hidden behind the hedge to avoid him. It seemed all of a sudden to be almost a crime to have let him take the walk for nothing, to have met his kindly intent of seeing her, with evasion.

"Rector," she said, drawing him aside a little, "I want—to give that poor man thirty pounds."

"Whom?"

"The farmer—Veale. Someone said he loses thirty pounds by this fire and—I am rich, you know."

He smiled. "It is kind of you, my dear, and—you shall, only don't say anything about it now. They are proud people——"

Night had come at last, and the fire had died down to a smoldering heap. The villagers were talking again, as people do after a funeral.

A star stood, apparently, on the topmost bough of an elm in the lane, and a cow lowed in the byre.

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

“You two girls,” the Rector said, “had better go home and I’ll come after I’ve told Veale. Go to the Rectory, Amy, will you? There’s some excellent cold beef for supper——”

He had never called her Amy before, and she felt that his so doing meant, despite his patent unconsciousness of it, a great deal.

The peace of the untrammelled evening dropped gently into her heart. She was very happy.

## LXII

MY DARLING,

No, I can't go to Maiden Aqualate. It would be a ridiculous thing to do. Your husband can't really wish to see me. You are so sweet that you want everybody to be friends, but he and I never could. What do you mean, that he will do everything for us?

Beloved, let the unborn future bring forth what it will, as that poet chap said. I want you. I adore you. I worship you. You must keep your promise and come with me to my little house on Dartmoor. Husbands don't exist, nor friends. Just you and me together up there. Trust me to make my little sweetheart happy. . . . Later your husband will see that nobody but I *can* make you happy. If he chooses to let you divorce him, then—I shall be the happiest man on earth. But in any case come with me on Saturday. I'll meet you at Paddington whenever you say— . . . You have been odd with me of late, your letters are short, your wires so stiff. I am frightened. Surely you haven't ceased loving me? O my darling, you are the only woman on earth for me. I think of you by day, and dream of you by night. You are mine, and I am yours. Send me a wire about Saturday. Just the hour when I am to meet you at Paddington. I'll reserve compartment. O, my love. . . .

Archie Hood was perfectly sincere in writing this letter. He loved Amy and longed for her, but he loved

and longed more than he would have done had her loving and longing for him showed no signs of waning.

He was well used to signs of waning, but they were always on his side, and this new juxtaposition amazed him.

He grew fretful and worried, and his mother asked him why.

"Nothing, Adelaide dearest," he said, with the charming gayety he always had for her.

"But—something distresses you."

"No. I've rather a bad head—that's all."

And the wise old woman pretended to believe him.

He waited two days for Amy's answer to his letter, and when it came he took it to his own room to read.

It was very short.

Dearest, of course I love you. And I'll come on Saturday, although I'd rather have gone to Maiden Aqualate. He *will* let me divorce him, beloved, he's so good and kind. I fear I haven't been a very good wife to him, but then, he doesn't care, so I needn't worry about it. I reach town at twelve-one and shall be at Paddington at two. Oh, I shall be so glad to see you. I have not been very happy here. It's the wrong place for me. I don't seem to belong here. I ought never to have stayed. I think I must be awfully bored. All my love to you, my love. Your own

AMY.

That afternoon Hood rode over to a neighboring house to tea. His hostess, a very pretty woman with

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

two half-grown girls and a vacant heart, flirted with him over the tea-table, which stood in a yew arbor.

She admired him immensely, and showed it; she knew his record as a polo-player and rhapsodized over it; she remembered his steeplechasing days.

In a word she was what he called, to himself, a sensible, appreciative woman.

When she told him how tiresome her husband was, and that she was lonely, he kissed her.

This, to do him justice, seemed to him the only possible thing under the circumstances, and when she clung to him, murmuring that she had always cared for him, he too, murmured, by no means repudiating her inference that he had cherished a certain feeling for her.

Autumnal ardors had always rather appealed to him.

And yet his telegraphic reply to Amy Dorset was couched in words so fiery that she, passing the old post mistress an hour after receipt, felt her face burn. And Saturday was only three days off.

### LXIII

OLD Mrs. Hood died "as happy as a bird" on the Friday. It was at tea-time that she died, and toast and cakes and jam were on the table. Soft rain blurred the windows, a little fire sputtered pleasantly on the hearth, and the old lady and her son had been quite alone until the quiet entrance of the unbidden guest.

They had had a very happy day. Archie had told his dear Adelaide of his departure on Saturday for a few days, and she had rallied him about some not impossible young maid whom he might be going to see.

"I believe," she said, "that your hard heart is touched at last."

"Come, come, Adelaide!"

"But I *do*. You are different since yesterday. Happier—more like my old little boy."

He felt a pang of remorse.

"Am I, dear?"

"Yes. Some more tea, dearest?"

They were her last words, and they were very characteristic. All her life she had been trying to make people

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

comfortable, and now she died with the homely invitation on her lips.

When he finally saw that no remedies could avail to stir her stilled heart, her son gathered her to his breast and carried her up to her bed.

“Leave us alone,” he said, and the frightened servants obeyed.

They closed the door on the kind, loving, lying, selfish, generous, untrustworthy man and the woman whom, in spite of the evidence of his life, he had loved the best of all.



## LXIV

SOME days after receiving the news of Mrs. Hood's death, Amy Dorset awoke to a new fact. Summer had gone.

Technically it was still in Sussex, but in reality autumn had dragged it too soon away.

Rains fell. Heavy, dull, soaking rains that beat down the grass, destroyed the roses and made a torrent of the road to the village.

And Dove Cottage, isolated by the downpour, became a little bit of eternity. The days did not seem to go; a week seemed one gray, cozy space of undivided hours.

For the first time in her life Amy Dorset was alone for a week. Even the Rector did not come, for he was in bed with a bronchial cold, and Jargonelle's nursing duties kept her away.

Solitude seemed to fall about the little house with the rain, to wrap it round like the mists that, although it was only early in September, had slowly begun to veil the downs at dawn and dusk.

Summer had gone.

Mrs. Dorset sat by herself in the pretty drawing-

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

room, growing intimate with all its treasures. One day, in a delightful rosewood cabinet of no earthly period, she came across a thing that gave to her the faëric feeling that is the basis of children's loves for sea-shells, caves, drum music, and chimneysweeps.

It was a contraption, as Uncle Remus would have said, of cardboard. It was a little like a stereoscope, but more like those fascinating Easter eggs made of glittering sugar that one licked on the sly, in which small paper shepherds, shepherdesses, sheep and angels stood about on arsenic-green grass.

In a word, it was a thing that unfolded like a concertina and in which, when one peeped through a variety of little eyeholes, one perceived in all its wicked glory the gallery of the Palais Royal. Infinitesimal ladies and gentlemen strutted in the shady arcades; a poodle sat up and begged; soldiers marched.

It was one of those enchanting toys to be enjoyed only by grown-ups, and Amy Dorset had just arrived in her tardy maturity at the age of appreciation of it.

It amused her for hours, and she even showed it to Clémentine.

“N'est ce pas, Clémentine, c'est joli?”

“Mais oui, madame—un petit machin ravissant——”

Amy at that moment made the adorable discovery that one's own society is better than the society of the average other person. Clémentine was bored, so Clémentine

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

tine bored her, and when the door closed behind the excellent woman, Amy gave a little shudder of pleasure in the rain and the fog outside, the fire and the Palais Royal inside.

It was during these rainy days, too, that she faced the fact that she did not really like books. "I think," she said to the Rector the first time she saw him after his illness, "that my favorite author is really ——."

Old Bullace chuckled. "And a very good author," he commended.

Amy shook her head. "I don't suppose," she amended candidly, "that she really *is* a very good author—everyone says she's awful—but—well, I enjoy her, Mr. Bullace."

"Then read her."

It seemed so simple to him that it suddenly seemed simple to Amy.

"I suppose," she returned, "that I *have* a right to admire her, haven't I?"

The Rector no longer smiled. His face, white with the pallor of the very old who are ill, was grave.

"Any honest admiration, for no matter how humble an object," he answered, "is respectable, whereas a feigned admiration even for St. Paul or Shakespeare is —contemptible."

Then he asked for his beef-juice and changed the subject.

## LXV

*Sept. 9, Maiden Aqualate.*

MY DEAR AMY,

I've heard from Lawrence, and it is by her advice that I again write to you. I was sorry to read of the death of Hood's mother. I believe that he was a most devoted son.

And it is my earnest hope that he may prove to be as good a husband.

I have written asking him to come to see me, and on Wednesday we meet at 875. I've just heard from him.

I will do whatever seems best for your happiness.

His letter is very nice—it has impressed me, and I will do my best to help the good in him. I have never liked him, but I must confess that I believe now that he really loves you.

If, as I think will be the case, he convinces me of the durability of both your feelings, I shall, to further the speed of the inevitable unpleasant proceedings, go abroad at once—to Paris.

Burnaby will then tell you what to do.

I mean to settle seven thousand pounds a year on you and any possible children of yours.

I will write you when I have seen Hood.

You could not, I think, do better than to stay at Bird's Fountain until you have filed your petition.

And now, my poor little Amy, good-bye. I have been a

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

miserable failure as a husband, but I did love you once. I was, no doubt, too old for you, and too dull.

If our baby had lived things might have been different. Do you ever remember her?

God bless you and make you happy.

CLOUDESLEY DORSET.

## LXVI

**I**T had been a blazing hot day, and the air was heavy and exhausted.

Bayswater was at its worst.

In the shabby street where Miss Croxley lived, all the curtains looked grimier than usual, the doorsteps more neglected, and in the hot wind dust blew about, and scraps of paper.

Miss Croxley came wearily up the street. Her large feet ached, and her eyes and temper were full of dust.

In a paper bag she had some buns, and she loathed buns.

As she took her latchkey from her bag a round-eyed telegraph boy ran up the steps. "Croxley?"

"Yes. Wait a minute till I see——"

Her flagging face brightened as she read the telegram, and she smiled at the boy.

"No answer, thanks."

Then she went to the dairy round the corner and called up a telephone number.

"Hullo, is—Oh, it's you!"

"Yes. Did you get my wire?"

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"I did. And I'll come with pleasure. How—how are you?"

After a moment's further talk she went back to her rooms. The dust no longer blew into her eyes, and the red-haired cornetist, an unlovely phenomenon whom she usually detested, was enriched by her to the extent of a penny.

She was to dine with Dorset.

They dined at a quiet restaurant near an open window, and the dinner was excellent.

Dorset looked pale, and the deep lines in his cheeks were more definitely lines and not dimples than she had ever seen them.

However, he said nothing of any importance until the dinner was nearly over, and they were eating fruit.

"I've seen him, Lawrence," he began quietly.

"Oh!"

"Yes. He came to 875."

"Did he suggest it, Clow—or you?"

"I—I wrote him just before his mother died, and had his letter the other day."

There was a long pause, Lawrence Croxley's eloquent eyes fixed on Dorset's face. "Well?"

"I think we've both been too hard on him, my dear. I can see nothing fine in him, but his attitude regarding Amy was perfect——"

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

"Oh, yes, his attitude *would* be perfect. His manner is magnificent!"

"I don't mean his manner. You see, I asked him outright whether he wished to marry her. For some reason I've rather doubted it."

"So have I."

"And we were wrong. He was quite frank with me—told me that at first he had not thought of marriage—it never occurred to him, but that, of late, the hope had been growing stronger and stronger. He assured me that he really loves her, and that he will do his best to make her happy."

Lawrence laughed sharply. "His mother is only just dead—he's being a good boy. However, she is bent on having him, so we can only hope that his virtue will last!"

Dorset nodded. "He certainly means it to, now. Lawrence—I am sorry she and you quarreled. Poor little soul, she is going to need her friends."

"When she needs me she'll know where to find me." Her long mouth was a little grim as she spoke.

Then she waited, wondering what he would say next. Since the evening that now seemed centuries ago, when he had suggested their marrying, he had made no reference to the matter. Sometimes she almost wondered if she had dreamt it or even misunderstood him.



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And now, her thin hands crossed under her chin, she waited.

"I met a man last week who knows him," he went on, thoughtfully, "and he liked him immensely. A first-rate sportsman, a good officer, a hater of gossip—all sorts of good things he said about him, but—I gathered that he is most untrustworthy where women are concerned."

She nodded. "You mean he doesn't really love them!"

"No! He seems to love 'em all—and that is a deucedly complicating gift. However, as I told you, I almost liked the fellow today."

"You're a goose, Clow! A man takes your wife away from you and you endow him with money and—like him!"

The little restaurant was nearly empty now, and it was much cooler.

After a while Dorset answered her.

"He didn't take my wife away from me, Lawrence," he said slowly. "She—had gone away from me—and I from her—long before he came along. I was the last man on earth for poor little Amy. Heavens, how I must have bored her."

In its perfect sincerity and lack of all demand for sympathy, the speech was an amazing one. It silenced his companion.

"This chap—Hood—talks her language, they like the

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same things, the same people. God bless her," he ended, "I do hope she'll be happy."

"So do I, Clow. But—she's a little changed of late. That day she had washed her face in the fountain—all the eyebrow stuff and the powder, and—she looked different, somehow. I think she would have reminded you of her as she was years ago, before she—before—you know."

He nodded. "Yes. Why, Lawrence, do you know that even now Amy is as simple as a child? I wish you could have heard her that night when she told me about Hood."

"She's a baby."

Lawrence Croxley was longing for a personal note in their talk; she had reached the point, feeling that for the moment she had had enough of Amy, but her face softened and her mouth curved uncontrollably at the thought of Amy in her sweet phase. "O Clow," she added generously, "if he *isn't* good to her what shall we do to him?"

Dorset smiled at her. "Tar and feather him, you fierce woman. Well, Lawrence, when she is safely married will you marry me?"

She bent her head low over the plate as if she had discovered a pearl under the pear-peeling. Her eyes were full of tears and she feared that he would see.

"Why on earth," she said with an uneven laugh, "do

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you want to marry me? I'm as old as Methuselah and as ugly as sin, and as irritable and short-tempered as a nervous horse——”

“Then I like age and ugliness and bad temper. Will you, my dear?”

She raised her head. “Of course I will, Clow.” And at that minute something happened of which she was to be ashamed to the end of her days. It so happened that, from where he sat, Dorset could not see the door of the restaurant, or the curtained stairway leading to the upper room.

And as she accepted Dorset's offer of marriage, an offer made possible, she knew, only by the comparative good behavior of Archie Hood, Archie Hood came in with a rather well-known lady of the half-world.

When he saw Miss Croxley he turned perfectly white. Then, into his handsome face he threw such an expression of concentrated pleading that she gave way to it. She hated him, but—their interests were identical.

She let him go his way upstairs unchallenged, and—she was engaged to Cloudesley Dorset.

## LXVII

DEAR MISS CROXLEY,

May I thank you? And will you allow me to explain? I have known that lady for many years. A friend of mine who is now dead, really loved her. She and I have always been friends, and last night she telephoned me and asked me to dine with her. She is in trouble and needed a friend.

You may not know that I am far more grieved and unhappy over my mother's death than many a better man might be. I was not amusing myself last night. All this on my word of honor. Dorset has been splendid with me, and I am going to do my best to make Amy happy.

Once more, thanks for doing what you did last night.

Yours sincerely,

A. Hood.

LXVIII

**M**R. BULLACE, I am very wicked.”

“Are you, my dear?”

“Yes. I—I am a dog in the manger.”

The old man smiled and laid his hand on her head.

“A nasty animal, that.”

“Yes. But I am.”

The rain beat hard on the windows, and a big fire roared in the fireplace. The clock in the church tower had struck ten, and the night was black.

Amy sat on a creepie by the Rector—they had sent Jargonelle to bed.

“Why are you a dog in the manger, dear?”

Amy looked up, heedless of red eyes and swollen nose.

“You don’t *know* me——” she began with a recrudescence of tragedy in her voice.

The old man laughed.

“Don’t I? The pretty wife, the adoring lover and—the neglectful husband. That group, at least, is not new, my dear!”

“Cloudesley,” she said with dignity, “is *not* neglectful.”

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"Oh, isn't he?"

"No. O Rector, dear Rector, read his letter."

All crumpled and warm, she squeezed it into his hand. Then she waited while he read it.

"Well?"

And with the guile of the serpent he answered her.

"A very decent letter—poor man."

She blazed. "Why 'poor man'?"

And who knows what inward chuckle stirred the Rector's aged frame as he held his huge, transparent hands to the fire.

"I call him a poor man because he has not had—the wits—to keep you. And now, my child, tell me about—the other man. *My* one, to whom I lied."

"Oh, Mr. Bullace!"

"Yes. I lied to him. Yes—and very well. I am," he added, daringly, with pride, "a good liar."

"Mr. Bullace!"

She caught his hand and held it in hers, on which the diamonds blazed.

"Rector—dear—I am not being *bad* to him, you know."

"Of course not. I quite see that he never deserved you——"

A long pause followed and then she returned bravely, "It isn't *that*. He was always awfully good——"

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"I see. But tell me about the one I saw. He is a very beautiful man."

Amy sighed. "Yes. Isn't he? And—he—he does love me. *Really*, I mean."

"I know. And he is, of course, a really good man."

"Y-yes. Or, no——" She sat up, and, whirling round, faced him.

"Of course I love Archie. He is—wonderful. But I don't think he is so very *good*. Although I love him and shall, of course, be perfectly happy with him, I must tell you that I don't think he is so good—from *your* point of view—as Clow."

"'Clow'?"

"Cloudesley—my husband."

The clock struck and a door somewhere at the back of the Rectory slammed. The house was being closed for the night.

The old man was very tired; his head stirred wearily against the back of his chair.

"Well, my pet, if your husband is the better man, why not—stick to him?"

Her light eyes filled with tears. "Oh," she said, carelessly, "Archie is quite good enough for *me*."

Then she rose and put on her cloak.

"Julia is going to walk back with me. I will go now. Good night, dear Mr. Bullace."

He kissed her. "Good night, my love—but before

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you go, do tell me why you are a dog in the manger."

She hesitated, folding the letter and putting it into her bag. "Did you ever want to get rid of—something—and then not want anyone else to have it?"

The old man laughed. "Often."

With an effort he rose, a grotesque figure in his purple dressing-gown.

"Amy—I am very glad you are going to be happy with your Archie. But—will your husband be happy too?"

She drew herself up. "Oh, yes. I have tried to tell you before, but—it was difficult, somehow. Clow will be far happier without me."

"Why?"

They had reached the door, and could hear, on the gravel, the creaking footsteps of Mrs. Crump, the light of whose lantern streamed across the wet garden.

The rain came down in torrents, and the wind had risen. "*What* a night! Oh, well—you see—my husband doesn't—love me, either, Mr. Bullace. And—he will, I believe, marry a very dear friend of ours—a Miss Croxley."

"Oh?"

"Yes. (I'm coming, Mrs. Crump.) She is nearly as old as he, and—she is very fond of him——"

The Rector gazed at her thoughtfully for a moment. "I see. Then he, too, cares for someone else?"



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"Yes."

Mrs. Crump blew her nose loudly and unfurled her umbrella. Amy held out her hand.

"Good night, Mr. Bullace."

"Good night, my dear. I—I am very glad about your husband."

"Thank you; so am I. Good night."

"Good night. One thing I should like you to do, my love. I am a sentimental old fellow in purple flannel, but I should like you to do me one favor."

"All right," she answered firmly, "I will."

"Your little girl, Anne Rose. Where did you bury her little body?"

"At Ambles."

"That is only two hours from here, across country. The trains are not too bad. Well, dear—you have promised—I want you, before you marry Captain Hood, to go and say one prayer at her grave, will you?"

Amy started. "How odd that you should ask me that today!"

"Why odd?"

"Because the day after tomorrow, it will be fifteen years since she died."

"Very well, then, go and say good-bye to her grave before you give up all right to it."

"Before I give up all right——"

"Yes. When you are married to the other man you

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will, of course, have no further right to it. Your baby was *his* child—Dorset's—as well as yours——”

After a pause she gave a shrill laugh.

“Very well,” she said, “I'll go. It's a mad idea, but because it's *you* who asks me, I'll go—good night.”

## LXIX

**A**MBLES is a small town with one long, cobbled street and a tiny square.

It was four o'clock when Mrs. Dorset got out of the train at the little station, and it was raining.

To the solitary flyman she waved an impatient, denying hand.

She was desperately tired, but she would walk.

Up the long street she plodded under an umbrella belonging to Mrs. Damson.

She was amazed to find that she remembered the place so well; Borden, the grocer—his sign was the same—and the gilded crosskeys of the old inn still swung with a creak over the door.

A drunken man lurched by, and she recollected her old fear of the champion village drunkard of sixteen years ago.

The clock struck one, and its voice held the old, familiar crack.

The very rain seemed the same.

Up the steep street she toiled, and then a light burst

## BIRD'S FOUNTAIN

out from the big Georgian windows across the way, and the little pilgrim came to a halt.

There it was, the old house to which she had been brought as a bride. In the rainy dusk it looked older and dingier, yet very much the same, and the trees hung their wet branches over the wall in quite the old way.

Through the unshaded windows the sitting-room was plainly visible. A fire burnt on the hearth at which, so long ago, she had waited for her husband.

A woman sat there now, a child by her side. And then, with a clatter of eager feet, a man came up the street and mounted the steps.

The child was now alone by the fire.

A moment later they were all there; the father, the mother, and the bonny fat baby.

Amy stood in the rain, breathless, watching. And when the happy-faced wife drew down the blinds the poor little watcher felt as if she had been struck in the face.

Two men passed her, talking hard; a cart passed; the rain came down harder; she smelt the brewery; it was too dark to see. She hated it all. Suddenly she was bitterly unhappy.

“Oh, why did I come, why did I come? It was cruel of the Rector!”

She felt an outcast, a pariah, the loneliest of ill-treated women.

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She would *not* go to the churchyard. The Rector was a cruel old man to ask her to. She would go to the Cross Keys and get a motor—surely they would have a motor!—and go straight to Archie. She wanted Archie. The old life was over and done with. It was Archie she loved, it was he whom she missed.

Then she went on to the church.

The gravel was very wet, but the grass, as she struck off towards the tower, was wetter. Her feet sank in, and came out with a sucking noise.

With a physical twinge of horror she realized that her baby had lain there for fifteen years. She hated the Rector.

Clutching the flowers she had brought, she plodded on, and in a sudden gust of wind reached the corner where her husband had cried—that only time—on the day of the child's funeral.

And there, at the grave, a bunch of white roses in his hand, stood her husband.

“You must be patient with me, Amy, dear,” he said, ten minutes later; “I am a dull dog.”

“You must be patient with me, Clow, for I am a fool,”

He kissed her. “Your poor, sweet little feet will be so wet. May I dry them for you at the inn?”

She gave a little gasp. “O Clow.”

At last, after a moment's silence, the child's grave

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between them, they turned to leave the quiet place. Hood's name had not been mentioned.

"Clow, it is very wonderful that you should have thought of coming here today, too."

Cloudesley Dorset picked his little wife up in his arms, and, as he did so, a bit of paper in an orange-colored envelope crackled in his breast pocket.

"I didn't, dearest," he said. "I have often been here before without telling you, but—this time it was—not chance."

She laid her cheek to his. "I don't understand," she said, "for nobody knew except the Rector, but—nothing matters now."













**A** 000 121 387 5

