





CARINA

A NOVEL

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To
Muriel Press
With
The Author's Love

CARINA

CHAPTER I

THE groves of cypresses lifted their dark points, slender as flames, to the blue dome of an April sky. Campo Verano, that vast burying-place of the Roman dead, lay bathed in brilliant sunshine from end to end. Delicate mists of emerald spread lightly over bushes and shrubs. The pink monthly roses, that blossom so generously in Italy from early spring until the first December frosts come to blight them, scattered rosy drifts upon the tombs. To unaccustomed eyes there was something arresting and sumptuous about many of those tombs. There were chapels, built of gleaming marble, fashioned after the model of Greek temples; mausoleums with a suggestion of the baroque in their domed roofs, their opulent decoration of finely-polished colored marbles, many of them displaying through wrought-iron gates a tomb of sarcophagus shape whereon the Holy Sacrifice could be offered for the silent inmate. There were also immense solid circular tombs, built in miniature imitation of the famous mausoleum of Cecilia Metella on the Appian Way. And everywhere the tall lamps with their colored globes, pink, crimson, blue, yellow and white, lifted their heads like a forest of bright-hued flowers, above the turf, the marble slabs, the clipped circular bushes of box.

Richard Grove paused before an ornate Greek

temple, erected as a last resting-place for the members of a noble Roman family, whose name and coat-of-arms it bore. The touch of arrogance, of conscious importance, seemed to him almost out of place here, in this vast democracy of the dead. He turned with relief to a humbler tomb, decorated with a painting of two children clasping each other. He paused to examine it. The portraits represented a little smiling dark-eyed boy of seven, and a darling little girl of perhaps a couple of years younger. A sudden expression of compassion came into his eyes. They had died in the same month—perhaps of some fatal epidemic. . . . The name printed there was unknown to him, and it was consoling to turn to the date and to learn that the tragedy was more than forty years old. Even to those agonized parents Time must have brought alms for oblivion.

He wandered on in leisurely manner, climbed some steps and followed a broad path shaded by trees. He glanced from time to time at the numbers indicated. Never such a puzzling place as Campo Verano! . . . But he had the address clearly written. Poor child, poor little Mary Ramsden, dying here in Rome with only her patient, wonderful elder sister to tend her. A long illness—it must have practically exhausted their resources. And in War-time too, when life in Rome had been both difficult and expensive. Unless that last book of Carina's? . . . But no, it hadn't done well. Stress of circumstances had been altogether too strong for the plucky little author, struggling gallantly against appalling odds.

He looked up and saw a girl coming down the path toward him. Her figure cast a squat, black blot of shadow on the ground. She was dressed from head to foot in black, and her head and face were closely swathed in the long dim veil that mourning women wear in Italy. It gave her almost the

aspect of a widow. She moved with an easy, boyish grace. As she drew nearer she stopped suddenly and held out her hand. "Richard!"

It was the girl of whom just now his thoughts had been so full—Carina Ramsden.

"I called at your place," he said, "and they told me you were out. They thought I might find you here. And anyhow I intended to come."

She threw back her veil; in that sable frame her face showed a pallid oblong. Her eyes were dark and darkly fringed, in color they were of some mingled grey and green hue, and they looked darker by reason of the heavy shadows that now encircled them. The glimpse of her hair, clipped short and worn thickly over the ears, showed a warm chestnut mingled with gold. She was perfectly controlled, but her mouth had a compressed look that he did not remember having noticed before.

"Were you looking for Mary's grave?" she inquired.

Richard Grove glanced almost awkwardly at the piece of paper he was still holding in his hand.

"Yes. They wrote down the number for me."

"It isn't difficult to find, really. Just this way. . ."

She turned back and he followed her. She walked a little ahead of him, so that now he could not see her face at all. He watched her, half-fascinated. She was strangely full of assurance. She held her head high; there was something of arrogance in her mien. He remembered a saying of his own: "Sorrow invariably turns women to pulp or to stone." Sorrow had evidently encased Carina Ramsden with a new armor.

But it was kind of her, he felt, to present such a calm, immovable front to him. He had, as one of her oldest friends and as a friend of her late father's, dreaded this inevitable meeting that had just been

so simply accomplished. Silence and reserve were natural to him, yet he had felt that some mention of Mary would be unavoidable, and he had been teasing his brain to find some word of sympathy that should not be too inadequate in this comfortless grief of Carina's. But she had spared him the trouble of making any speech of the kind; there had even been, as one might say, a staving off of any formal expression of condolence, just as if she recognized in him too old a friend for convention. He knew what she was suffering—what she had suffered—so well, that to him she need not even make mention of it. And yet he had the feeling that so long as she continued to hold him thus, as it were at arm's length, the gulf between them must remain, unbridged by any attempt at sympathy on his part.

As he followed Carina through the intricate labyrinths of tombs and mausoleums, their bright whiteness softened by the delicate spring green of the trees and bushes that surrounded them, while the cypresses made a sombre background deep and soft as velvet, he was thinking of her father, Alfred Ramsden, one of the few intimate comrades he had ever had. He remembered his last words to him: "Dick, I needn't ask you to keep an eye on my two poor little girls. I know my sister, Nora Murray, will do all she can. . . but they're wonderful children, you know, and perhaps she won't always understand them. . . ."

It was indeed this remembrance that had constrained him, after hearing of Mary's death, to make an almost immediate journey to Rome, to see the surviving sister. It was his first visit to Rome, although he had "used" many of the great cities of Europe in his work as writer and novelist. And since his arrival he had had the sense that the place was slightly unreal. So familiar from photographs, and

yet so unlike any pictured presentment. This blue sky, for instance, those sharp dark cypresses, these paths and alleys of the dead in this new city of theirs, remote, outside the walls of that ancient city to which they had once so proudly belonged; consecrated to those vast hosts of the departed with all its flowers, its trees, its sunshine. A metropolis whose citizens had fallen upon silence.

From the living sister his thoughts turned to the dead one. Mary Ramsden had never seemed to him quite human. She was elfin, eager, a thing of flame. Her very beauty was elusive and impalpable. One of those delicious people for whom one could never prophesy long life. She was made of "spirit, fire and dew;" there was nothing solid about her that could be seized and held. The imprisoning flesh had been altogether too fragile to contain that fine, ardent soul. She had passed out of life at twenty-two years old. He had come here to look at her grave. Carina, cool and composed, was the least moved of the two. Her footsteps falling with a sharp and light precision on the path, displayed no least faltering.

Suddenly she stopped and glanced back, as if to see whether Richard were still following her. He came quickly to her side. They were standing beside a grave with a marble cross erected upon it. To the cross a fine bronze Crucifix had been attached. Below there was a plot of grass planted with rose-trees. Richard Grove read the inscription; it was in English.

Of your charity pray for the soul of Mary Ramsden, daughter of Alfred and Caroline Ramsden, who died in Rome on March 28th, 19— aged twenty-two years. R. I. P.

Richard Grove did not trust himself to speak. He wished that Carina would break the silence. When she knelt down, crossed herself and murmured a prayer, he followed her example. Then quietly she rose and looked at him with those queer dark eyes of hers.

"How she *lives!*" she said.

"Yes," he assented.

The sunlight beating upon his uncovered head, had become almost painful.

"Sometimes I can't believe it," said Carina, her eyes fixed upon the fragile pink of the roses.

"I think—that's often the way at first," said Grove.

His wife had been dead for more than twenty years.

"Yes. And it makes one feel one's shirking. Edging away from pain instead of . . . drinking the cup bravely. But I'm not consciously evading it."

"I'm sure you're not."

"I think it was more perhaps because when she died I was too tired—too utterly worn out—to think of anything but my own body."

"You were splendid," he was glad to assure her. "No one could have been more devoted, more heroic. No wonder you were tired after three years. And you wrote two books, didn't you, during that time?"

"Yes. I had to," she said simply.

They stood now side by side in silence. In the trees above them a blackbird's whistle sounded gaily, followed by a swift flutter of wings.

"I had Mass said for her to-day," said Carina, presently. "She seemed to be there. I could hardly believe she wasn't kneeling beside me in the old way. She was so good, you know. An *âme d'élite*, they called her."

Her eyes, heavy and cold with unshed tears, were fixed upon the inscription.

"She never seemed quite to belong to earth," said Richard.

"Oh, you felt that about her, too? The worst moment for me wasn't when she died, nor even afterward. It was when I had to watch her fading out of life—just as if she were a flame that was being quenched. I couldn't hold her back. I could hardly pray that she might live. She belonged elsewhere—that broke my heart. . . ."

Even in this recital there was no quiver in her voice.

"You did all and more than you could," he said quietly.

She shook her head. "It was so little that I—or anyone—could do for Mary!"

She bent her head a little and kissed the Feet of the Crucifix that hung above her sister's grave. Then she moved slowly away, and this time Richard walked by her side.

"May I ask what your plans are now, Carina? You won't stay on here, I suppose."

"I'm going to London for the present. My aunt, Lady Murray, wants me to stay with her for a little. And then I must start work again. It's difficult, you know, working for oneself."

"I should rest a bit, if I were you, before attempting it. You've been overdoing it all round."

He thought of that last book of hers. It had lacked the strength and decision he had accustomed himself to associate with her work. But, then, under what pitiable, heroic circumstances it had been written! Watching the quenching of that flame-like spirit—the gradual fading out of life of Mary Ramsden. . . . Waiting for an inevitable end.

I couldn't hold her back. . . . The words had given him a pang of almost physical pain.

"Don't you find that if you don't work you get rusty?" inquired Carina. "Some people are afraid of getting stale, but I don't think of that. The more I work, the easier it seems."

"Yes—I'm with you there. But we all need a real rest every now and then. Not too long, but very complete."

Carina, always a creature of precocious development, had published her first novel when she was twenty-one. Their means were slender, and she had worked early and late at those novels, which had followed each other with a celerity that had even astonished him—an old experienced hand at the absorbing game of fiction. He had taught her all that can usefully be taught of the technique of her art, but he soon perceived that she had little need of instruction; she possessed both talent and imagination, a sense of style and form, a rare gift of characterization. . . . All through Mary's illness she had continued to publish those skilful, brilliant books at regular intervals. How she had accomplished her work, he could never tell, for she had been apparently unremitting in her care of her sister. She had spilled her talent royally in Mary's service. To him it had seemed almost tragic—that sustained, heroic effort. And it was only in that last book, *Love among the Ruins*, that any sign of fatigue had manifested itself. She needed rest now, and leisure wherein to absorb new impressions.

They were walking up the broad unshaded path toward the gates of Campo Verano. Above them the immense figure of Our Lord, standing upon a high pedestal, seemed to keep guard over the dead.

The marble plinth bore those words of eternal hope, of everlasting solace :

EGO SUM RESURRECTIO ET VITA

They paused for a moment to look at it and then passed on.

"Shall you be leaving soon?" he asked.

"Yes. The day after to-morrow."

"Then I can look after you on the journey. I'm starting on Thursday, too," said Richard, forming hasty plans for departure.

"Thank you," said Carina, simply. "I've been rather dreading that long journey alone."

They had reached the gates, and turning they gazed for a moment upon the broad sunlit path that dipped down to the city of the dead. On each side of it were twin arcades of tombs, forming a dividing wall, leading to the marble avenues, the Greek temples, the ornate mausoleums beyond. Opposite to them, in the distance, stood the modern chapel. A man, standing near in rough working garb, took off his hat, crossed himself, and murmured a prayer. Richard Grove followed his example, for no one leaves the Campo Santo without saying a prayer for the dead who are lying within its walls. Carina crossed herself, and her eyes were fixed upon the grove of cypress and pine perched upon rising ground beyond the little church, where, lost in that vast perplexing labyrinth, was the grave of Mary Ramsden.

Her lips moved, and now for the first time that day her eyes were bright with tears. She was taking leave of Mary. . . .

CHAPTER II

“**W**HO’S that queer-looking old man who sat next to that very pretty girl with the short hair at dinner?”

Lady Murray’s guests had all assembled in her charming London drawing-room one warm evening in June. She was sitting a little apart, watching them as they redistributed themselves after the manner of people who find themselves among friends. The only two strangers among them were apparently continuing the intimate discussion that had occupied them during dinner. They were sitting at the far end of the double room, where an open window gave upon a tiny garden.

“I mean those two over there,” added Mallory, as Lady Murray’s eyes surveyed her guests as if his first question had puzzled her.

“Oh, you mean Richard Grove, the author, who was sitting next to my little niece, Caroline—or, as we always call her, Carina—Ramsden.”

Jim Mallory gave another swift glance toward the powerful, grizzled head outlined against the grey gloom of the garden, where the dusk was beginning to fall slowly and as if with reluctance.

There was something monumental about Grove, thought Mallory; something of which he himself was probably conscious, since it led him into that careless eccentricity of dress, so often observable in the extremely wealthy or the extremely successful man.

The monumental power, however, did not attract Mallory, whose superficial criticism immediately condemned both the carelessness and the eccentricity.

And it annoyed him, principally because the prettiest girl in the room—also a complete stranger to himself—had seemed so indifferent to the deficiencies of her companion, to whom she was still talking with a charming, animated eagerness.

“I wonder why those writing chaps always try to make themselves look so conspicuous,” continued Mallory.

“The younger ones don’t,” said Lady Murray. “But Richard Grove is a Victorian survival, and he doesn’t think about his clothes. He would be tremendously surprised if anyone told him his dress-suit was utterly antiquated. But when a man’s a classic in his own lifetime these things don’t really matter.” Lady Murray’s charming face broke into a smile.

Richard Grove had most innocently produced an irritating effect upon Jim Mallory, and she wondered why.

She was a handsome woman of sixty, the elder by ten years of her only brother Alfred Ramsden, who died when his two girls were respectively thirteen and six years old. Her gray hair was turning white, and she had dark eyes that looked mysterious, though they were only short-sighted. Much of youth still remained in her upright figure, her perfect hands and feet.

“And your little niece—does she know that he’s a classic?” inquired Mallory, with the slightest edge of satire in his voice.

“Oh, yes—she writes too, you see. I’ll tell you her story another time . . . so sad . . . She’s a wonderful little person. I must introduce you to her, Jim.”

“Yes, please do,” he said. “I want to know her. I think she’s charming. Her head might be a detail from an old Florentine picture. A page—not a girl.”

Lady Murray was very slightly surprised. She had not expected such a speech from Jim Mallory, and it taught her that his interest in Carina was strongly aroused. She rose, and he followed her with some alacrity across the room. Grove and Miss Ramsden immediately rose from their seats, and while the introduction was being effected Richard slipped away into another corner of the great room and remained there alone and in sphinx-like contemplation of the little scene.

"Carina dear, Mr. Mallory," said Lady Murray.

Carina? A pretty name, and it suited her. It had given Mallory a slight shock to hear that she wrote; he was old-fashioned enough to be prejudiced against women who "did" things, except when it was a national necessity that they should, as had unhappily been the case during the War.

"Lady Murray tells me that you write," said Mallory, sitting down in the chair lately vacated by Richard Grove.

He was a man of about forty, tall, powerfully built, with dark eyes and black hair that was growing grey about the temples. His face had the slightly reddened and weather-beaten aspect of one who habitually spends his time in the open-air. Mallory's chief occupations varied according to the season's round of sport. He hunted and shot, and played golf and lawn-tennis, pursuing these pleasures with an abandonment of zeal.

"Yes," said Carina. "At least I have written books, and I hope to begin again soon. But Mr. Grove wants me to rest. Not too long, you know, but just for a time."

An odd, incomprehensible sense of jealousy teased him. What right had this man, shabby, shaggy, unusual, to advise the lovely little creature at his

side? Advise, too, with a certain assurance and intimacy?

"What sort of books do you write?" he inquired, clasping his knee, and looking at her with his shrewd handsome eyes.

"Novels," answered Carina, laconically.

"I hardly ever read novels," said Mallory.

She smiled, and the smile seemed to illuminate her face, that just now had been so pale and grave.

"That's what everyone says, you know. But people do read them, or how should we authors live?"

He felt the mockery of her smile.

"I think perhaps women read them more than men."

"You'll hardly ever get a woman to acknowledge it, then," said Miss Ramsden. "But I hope for your own sake," she added, "that you've read some of Richard Grove's."

"No. I don't think I'd even heard his name until to-night. Are they so wonderful?"

"Yes. He has deserved his great success—one can't say more." Her strange eyes glowed; she glanced across the room at Richard, who still sat there alone, inert, contemplative.

"He's a friend of yours?" he hazarded.

"Yes. And of my father's."

Mallory was silent. He had no experience of literary or artistic people, and his general impression of them was that it would be unsafe to entrust them with a horse or a gun. It rather astonished him, too, to find that Miss Ramsden, a niece of Lady Murray's and a person quite obviously of her world, should belong to the great army of authors. He spent very little time in London, and lived at Linfold—his place in Sussex—for at least eleven months in the year. His annual visit to London invariably

synchronized with the great cricket-matches. His only son was at Eton now, and this fact gave an additional zest that year to the annual outing. Peter Mallory was now fourteen years old, an eager, attractive, sport-loving person. Mallory's wife was dead, and the boy was his only child, of whom he was inordinately proud. He felt a sudden, irrelevant wish that Miss Ramsden should see Peter.

"You must get Lady Murray to bring you to lunch with us at Lord's on the first day of the Eton and Harrow," he said; "my boy will be there. He's at Eton now." All the time he was speaking, he felt astonished at his own eagerness to invite her, his actual fear that she might refuse.

"I shall be delighted to come if Aunt Nora hasn't any other engagement."

"I should like you to see my son," said Mallory. She murmured a commonplace.

"He's my only child. My wife has been dead nearly six years."

As he spoke, Mallory glanced at Carina's dress. It was of that dead black that speaks of bereavement.

"Oh, I'm so sorry for you," she said, aroused to sudden sympathy and feeling that perhaps she had not been hitherto sufficiently attentive. "You see, I know what it means to lose some one—someone you're dreadfully fond of. My sister died in Rome in the spring. And it's so hard at first, isn't it? Such a silence." Her little hands were strained tightly together on her lap.

Mallory had believed himself to be in love with his wife when he married her. But when she had died, his grief, though sincere, was as passionless as his love had by that time become. And then he had Peter. Peter belonged to him utterly. He could mold him as he wished. Peter's mother had

been for some years before her death a highly nervous delicate woman, who had lived in perpetual fear of calamities and accidents. She had wept to see Peter ride forth to the meet with his father. Mallory, on the other hand, was determined that his son should be a hard fearless rider. His iron will had triumphed, and his wife had sickened under the strength of it. While he knew that he was hurting her, he could not or would not desist from what he so clearly felt to be his duty toward his son. He took the boy's upbringing into his own powerful and capable hands. And now he was rewarded by the continual evidence of Peter's daring, even reckless, spirit. Mallory was almost always a kind indulgent father. There were intervals of necessary discipline, of course, but on the whole the boy adored him. Their friendship was deep-rooted in this common love of sport.

Iris Mallory had died when her little son was about eight years old.

Mallory talked a good deal about Peter to Carina that evening. He did not again refer to his wife, but he had a strong wish to arouse her interest where his son was concerned. While she listened, he thought that her face lost something of its look of calm suffering. Presently she spoke to him a little of Mary. Of the last months of her life, spent under the very shadow of the Dome of St. Peter's in Rome. She touched a little on her work, and he dimly guessed that it had been both hard and necessary. This, then, was the sad little story to which Lady Murray had referred.

"Have you always lived abroad?" he asked.

He was always aghast to find there were actually people who voluntarily exiled themselves from their native shores for such paltry and insufficient reasons as climate and ill-health.

"We lived abroad a good deal as children, and we were in Italy when the War broke out. My sister was never well enough to make the journey home after that, so we stayed on. Travelling was so difficult," she explained simply. "And we were very happy there. At least, Mary was happy."

Richard Grove had risen now and had moved across the room to speak to Lady Murray.

"Is that Mallory of Linfold who has been talking to Carina for so long?" he inquired.

"Yes. Do you know him, Richard?"

"No. I've only heard of him, from friends of his wife's."

"Oh, I hardly knew poor Iris," said Lady Murray. "They weren't very well suited, were they? I seem to remember something. But I've always been fond of Jim." It was as if she wished by her very loquacity to stop Grove from saying anything to Jim's detriment.

"No—they were not well suited," he remarked. "How charming Carina looks to-night!" he added irrelevantly.

"Yes, doesn't she? Dear child!"

"She wants rest and fresh air and good food," continued Grove; "she's thoroughly exhausted. And no wonder." He let his eyes rest upon Carina with an almost fatherly solicitude.

"I'm doing all I can," said Lady Murray, "and she looks much better than she did when she first came."

"Don't let her work, don't let her work," he said impatiently. "That last book—it showed a falling off, a fatigue. Her best is so good, she must never be allowed to fall below her own standard."

"You must tell her so, Richard. She listens to you. I'm only a fussy old woman." She laughed.

"I wish Alfred could see her now. Looking just

as she does to-night. He'd be proud of her and of her achievement. Wonderful child!"

He gripped Lady Murray's hand and slipped away without further farewell.

"Something's upset him," Lady Murray thought. "I wonder what it was. I don't think he cares for Mallory—perhaps he's heard something against him, as he says he doesn't know him."

She crossed the room and joined her niece and Mallory by the window.

The blue dusk filled the garden. A white moth fluttered past. Overhead the faint London stars pricked the sky.

Mallory sprang up and repeated his invitation.

"Oh, I'm sure we shall be delighted to come. You've never seen an Eton and Harrow match, have you, Carina? You'd like it, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, very much. It will be a new experience for me," said Miss Ramsden. "Almost everything in London is new to me," she explained, turning to Mallory.

Before he parted from her that evening, Mallory had permitted the thought of marrying her to take definite shape in his mind. He had never before been so swiftly attracted to any woman. He must learn more of her from Lady Murray. For the second time in his life he told himself that he had fallen in love. That unusual beauty of hers enchanted him.

But first she must see Peter. . . .

CHAPTER III

“MY DEAR Carina, you’ve made quite a conquest of Jim Mallory!” Lady Murray’s comfortable pleasant voice was not untouched by irony. Of course there couldn’t really be anything in it. Mallory had merely succumbed momentarily to the fascination Carina so carelessly and even unconsciously exercised. He was at least fifteen years older than she was; he had already a tall young son at Eton. It was commonly held, too, that he had not undertaken a second matrimonial venture on account of Peter. He was wrapped up in his son. Besides, his life and Carina’s were utterly dissimilar. She was without experience of English life in any of its settled forms, and it was scarcely possible that the prospect of spending her days in an English country house, however opulent, would have any attraction for her.

Lady Murray would have been glad to see her niece settled, established, adequately provided for. She had little to leave her, for her own income, though large, was chiefly settled upon her husband’s family, or consisted of a pension that died with her. Mallory was a rich man; his property at Linfold was a large one. But, then, Carina was a Catholic, which was in itself such an obstacle. Alfred Ramsden had in the last decade of his life become a convert to the Church, and had made provision for his two little daughters to be brought up in the Faith.

Carina smiled. “You know, that’s just the sort of thing Mary used to say!”

“Well, my dear, you might do much worse. He’s

a rich man, and Linfold's a most enviable, delightful house."

"It's so dear and old-fashioned of you, Aunt Nora, to build matrimonial castles on such slight provocation." Carina did not permit the thought of Mallory's possible subjugation to disturb her. She had refused several excellent offers of marriage in the past; her reason for not accepting them had always been the same—her inability to leave her sister. It occurred to her now with a pang, that she could never again adduce that particular one.

"But you must marry, one of these days," said Lady Murray.

"I don't think, though, it'll be Mr. Mallory."

"He was so very anxious we should join his luncheon-party at Lord's. Did he talk to you about his son?"

"Yes. A good deal," said Carina. "What sort of a boy is he?"

"Oh, quite a dear. Between ourselves, I think Jim's a trifle too strict with him. Still, they're devoted to each other."

Carina was silent. This morning she did not feel wildly interested in Jim Mallory and his concerns. She felt an irresistible longing to get to work again, but unfortunately she had promised Richard to do nothing for at least a couple of months.

"It won't do you any harm to observe the London pageant for a little while," he had told her dryly last night.

But unlike Lady Murray, he was not in the least anxious that Carina should marry. If love came to her, well and good; but that she should marry for an establishment, would have seemed to him a preposterous solution of the girl's future.

"Did you like him?" inquired Lady Murray, breaking in upon Carina's thoughts.

“Like whom, dear Aunt Nora? Oh, Mr. Mallory! No—not very much. Imagine—he had never even heard of Richard Grove! I’m afraid Linfold must be one of those benighted places where they only read *Surtees!*”

Lady Murray said rather dejectedly: “I don’t suppose Jim ever reads anything except the *Times* and *Field*. He’s a very busy man.”

Carina’s attitude was unsatisfactory, yet last night she had spent an hour talking to Mallory in what might really be termed a quite engrossed manner. It had even disturbed Richard Grove a little—he took such a fatherly interest in Carina. She wondered idly what reason Grove had for disliking Mallory, who as a rule was both liked and respected by other men. Of course it was well-known that his marriage hadn’t been a happy one. Probably, thought Lady Murray, it was the fault of his wife. One of those fretful nervous little creatures, without an ounce of stamina or resistance.

The day of the Eton and Harrow dawned so divinely fair with promise of great heat, that Lady Murray induced her niece to wear a white frock. Carina was reluctant to put off her deep mourning; on the other hand, she was too fond of her aunt not to comply with the suggestion. She suspected no ulterior reason, least of all one that should concern Mallory. Lady Murray knew, however, by experience that Carina looked her loveliest in white, and it was thus she wanted Jim to see her. Mallory had not been near them during the past fortnight; he had merely left a card after the dinner-party, and a little note reminding them of their engagement. But Lady Murray felt that the day might prove a momentous one for her niece, and she wished to follow up and crystallize that brief success of the dinner-party.

When they reached the club tent where Mallory's table was situated, they were greeted by a slender stripling with smooth black hair, brushed till it was sleek and shiny, a pair of dark blue eyes, and a small sun-browned face. Carina thought he was the most beautiful boy she had ever seen.

She did not realize that this was Mallory's son, until she heard Lady Murray say: "Well, Peter, is your father here? This is my niece, Miss Ramsden."

Carina held out her hand, and Peter took it rather ungraciously. He remembered his father's careless injunction to him that morning: "By the way, Lady Murray's bringing her niece, Miss Ramsden, to lunch. I want you to be very nice to her—she's just lost her only sister."

Peter had felt a cold shiver pass down his spine at the words. For years he had dreaded the advent of a stepmother. He had always believed that one day his father would marry again, and from gossip he had heard in the neighborhood of Linfold, he knew that his name had already been associated with that of more than one lady who aspired secretly to the honor of becoming the second Mrs. Mallory.

But Peter had known his father's private opinion of most of those aspirants, and therefore had not feared them. This Miss Ramsden, however, was an unknown quantity. Her very name was new to him. When he held out his hand to Carina, he said in a cold tone: "My father will be here in a minute."

There was an uncomfortable pause, but Carina was serenely unconscious of any tension; she only thought Peter's manner off-hand and wanting in courtesy. Probably his father indulged him. . . . Still he was a wonderful-looking creature. He scarcely resembled Mallory at all, though the color of his hair was more or less the same. The features were far more finely molded, and gave the impression

of strength without brutality. There was a hint of brutality about Mallory's mouth and jaw. . . . Carina began to speculate mentally about the personality of the late Mrs. Mallory. She wondered whether Peter had inherited his rather vivid and arresting beauty from her.

Mallory came into the tent, hearty and a little exuberant. He greeted both ladies warmly and eagerly, and then he glanced at Peter, who stood there aloof and silent.

"Where are your friends, Peter?" he asked.

"They're just coming, Dad," Peter roused himself to say.

Half a dozen Eton boys shortly afterward joined them, accompanied for the most part by their mothers and sisters. The table was thronged with laughing and chattering young people, who made Carina feel a trifle old. They were so young, so intensely happy and interested; their laughter and gaiety were things to be remembered. Not one of them displayed the slightest constraint or shyness.

Mallory looked older by daylight. The grey hairs in his thick black crop were more visibly abundant, and there was a fine network of lines about his eyes. Still he was very good-looking, and his spare, upright, and strong figure still possessed much of the suppleness of youth. There was something almost romantic, Carina thought, in his good-looks. He was an admirable host, easy, attentive, agreeable.

Every now and then he glanced down the long table to where his son was sitting, cold, silent, taking little or no part in the conversation, and never joining in that gay laughter. What was the matter with him? Mallory felt a strange annoyance with him, but he concealed it carefully. He would give Peter a word of reprimand another time. Mallory guessed the reason, of course—it was the presence of Carina

Ramsden that had upset him. Some quick jealous intuition must have warned him of his father's admiration for her. The sullen hostility deepened on Peter's face as the meal proceeded. Mallory had never before felt so furiously angry with him. He was aware of a threatened conflict of wills. Well, of course, if it came to that . . . His hard, handsome mouth was twisted into a grim smile.

Every time he looked at or spoke to Carina, he felt Peter's sick, jealous eyes watching him. He hoped that Lady Murray and Miss Ramsden had noticed nothing.

When luncheon was over, he had a word with Peter.

"Do you want me to send you home?"

Mallory was living in a furnished house in Bryans-ton Square, a huge gloomy barrack he had rented for a few weeks. He had no town house of his own.

"Why—what do you mean, Dad?" Peter's voice trembled a little.

"Just what I say. If you can't behave, you can just jolly well clear out and go 'home.'"

Peter flushed up to the roots of his hair, and made no reply. The other members of the party had walked on, across the smooth, level, green sward. The father and son were alone. Peter could never remember that his father had spoken to him in this way before. Mallory had a fierce expression in his eyes, that alarmed him.

"You will be civil to my guests another time, if you please," continued Mallory. He walked on abruptly and joined Lady Murray and Carina. Peter followed more slowly. His pleasure in the day was completely dead. He felt no interest in the match; he wished the whole hateful thing would come to an end as speedily as possible.

He watched his father. He was completely oc-

cupied with Miss Ramsden. Carina, aware of success, responded to his eager attention. Perhaps like most women she enjoyed this sense of speedy conquest, although she had not the least intention of letting it go any further. Mallory was far too old. Why, it would be absurd to foist that big sulky school-boy upon her as a stepson. She was beginning to feel Peter's hostility, and she was far too sensitive not to divine its reason.

Carina always looked her prettiest when she talked and laughed with animation. And the whole gay scene delighted her—the color, the bright sunshine, the level green turf, the light summer frocks of the women and children, the throngs of young people enjoying their exciting holiday. Lady Murray glanced once or twice at her niece approvingly. Ordinarily her face, although almost perfectly drawn, was too grave and pale to elicit admiration. But to-day she was looking her best, and her best was, as Lady Murray complacently observed, very good indeed. Peter, glancing at her from beneath half-closed eyelids, grudgingly admitted the beauty, nor could he be blind to the effect it was producing upon his father. Mallory was so happy, now his brief outburst of anger was over, that he looked almost like a boy. Peter felt the cold hand of fate laid chillingly upon his heart. He had a terrible conviction that this time it was “all up” with his father. Marriage between him and Miss Ramsden was surely a pre-ordained, inevitable thing. And Peter felt that a woman like Carina, young, lovely, intelligent, must surely hold his father in the hollow of her hand. He would be so afraid of losing her love, her good opinion. He would never dare show himself in one of his rages to her! . . . Peter grew pale, and a sombre look of defeat came into his young unhappy eyes.

Mallory, an old member of the Marylebone

Cricket Club, had reserved seats for his friends. To-day he was, for the first time in Peter's remembrance, entirely indifferent to the cricket. Generally they had sat side by side watching every over with the most breathless attention, for cricket was a real, absorbing joy to them both. But now he strolled about half the afternoon with Carina Ramsden, who was avowedly far more interested in the people than in the game. He was in love—absorbed—perhaps a little timorous. He left Peter with Lady Murray, who had good reasons for not opposing the arrangement.

Carina was following up her success. Everything was progressing perfectly. Mallory was so charming—surely he must produce a good impression. She would even learn to forgive him for never having heard of Richard Grove! . . .

Peter broke a long and miserable silence by saying to Lady Murray: "I suppose he means to marry her. She's only a girl—years too young. She might be his daughter—in that short dress!" The words escaped from him as if he were unable to repress them.

Lady Murray was astonished and secretly annoyed at this precocious perspicacity. Really, there were no children left in these days! She beheld in Peter a possible element of defeat. It was a pity he possessed such discernment.

"Aren't you looking ahead rather too fast? This is only the second time he's seen her," she announced dryly.

"Perhaps she won't have him. . . . Is she badly off?"

"No. She earns a good deal. She writes, you know."

"Writes?" he repeated incredulously. Carina in

her fresh, crisp white garb did not suggest Grub Street.

"Novels," added Lady Murray. She had felt afraid that the thought of the novels might have the effect of "putting Mallory off."

"Dad hates novels," said Peter, brightening a little.

"He need never read them," said Lady Murray, wondering why she encouraged him to pursue the conversation.

"He won't let her write them if he marries her," said Peter.

"My dear child, he's not thinking of marrying her," said Lady Murray crushingly. "Besides, she's at least fifteen years younger than he is, and very independent. . . ."

"He may *make* her fall in love with him," said Peter gloomily.

He had a sort of hero-worship for his father, and believed him to be irresistible. When he chose, Mallory could fascinate people. Peter had himself felt that fascination. Even to-day when he had spoken those angry severe words, a little thrill of mingled admiration and fear had passed through him.

"If she marries Dad, she won't have to work," he said presently. "I daresay she'll think of that. But you're her aunt,"—he looked wistfully at Lady Murray—"you might stop it, mightn't you? Her marrying him, I mean. Couldn't you?"

"Please don't talk nonsense, Peter. Your father would be very angry if he knew!"

"He's angry already," said Peter. He looked miserable, almost as if he were going to cry. Lady Murray felt a certain compassion for the self-tormented youth.

They watched the cricket in silence. Presently Peter rose from his seat.

"It's awfully hot here, isn't it?" he said. "Shall you mind if I leave you alone? Dad's sure to be back soon—he can't fool around all the afternoon, can he? And I simply can't stick it any longer! I'm going home!"

"Won't your father mind?" suggested Lady Murray, feeling somehow that the boy was storing up trouble for himself.

"I don't care if he does! I'm going. You can say what you like to him, Lady Murray. . . . Good-bye—"

He grasped her hand, and then made his way out of the enclosure, the angry resentful tears standing in his eyes. As he passed rapidly toward the gate, he saw his father and Carina in the distance, standing apart from the crowd. They were not thinking about the match at all. They were talking, and she was looking up into his face and laughing, her little head tilted back, and her bright hair showing under her hat.

Peter felt almost faint with jealous emotion. Oh, yes, his father was in love with her right enough! He had guessed it the moment he had heard him utter her name for the first time. There was something in his manner of saying it that had aroused the boy's attention. And now that he had seen her for himself, and seen too how beautiful she was, he felt that there was no room for hope. Mallory wasn't flirting, as Peter had often seen him flirt with quite young girls. He was serious, and on his guard, resentful already of interference.

Peter boarded a passing motor-bus and went home. The Eton and Harrow was a rotten show; he couldn't imagine why he had ever looked forward to it. He never wanted to see another cricket match. . . .

CHAPTER IV

MALLORY'S anger when he discovered that Peter had departed, leaving Lady Murray alone, was concealed but none the less formidable. Anyone who knew him better than Carina did, would have readily interpreted the significance of the darkening eyes, the compression of the hard lips. It was only her presence that rendered him capable of preserving an outward calm. Peter should suffer for this. . . . He wasn't going to be watched and censored and flouted by his own son. In his triumph he felt a little cruel. He wasn't going to have his happiness spoilt! It was true that he hadn't yet asked Carina to marry him—that would have been to ruin prematurely a most hopeful and promising situation—but he had fully made up his mind to invite her to be his wife.

Carina would have been exceedingly and disagreeably astonished if she had known what was passing in Jim Mallory's mind. He was a pleasant acquaintance, and she liked him well enough; his good looks were attractive to her, his mentality much less so. If questioned, she would have admitted that she far preferred to spend an afternoon in Grove's company than in Mallory's.

Jim motored Lady Murray and Carina back to South Kensington, and then went home to Bryanston Square. Peter was not in any of the sitting-rooms. Mallory felt for the first time a little anxious. But his anxiety increased his anger, which there was now no further reason to conceal, and it was a very for-

midable looking person that presently marched into the boy's bedroom.

Jim's eyes darkened with fury when he saw Peter lying on the bed, his face swollen and disfigured with weeping. Was he going to become weakly hysterical, like his mother? Mallory resolved to put down any disposition of the sort with a strong hand.

"What's the matter with you, you young fool?" said Mallory.

A sob was the only answer. Peter, worn out with emotion, was now thoroughly exhausted. He was conscious only of a dreadful, rising fear of his father. Their eyes met, and the boy shrank from the contemplation of Mallory's powerful even formidable physique; the iron arms, the wide shoulders, the pitiless strength. . . .

"Why did you leave Lady Murray alone like that? It was very rude of you."

"I . . . I couldn't bear it any longer," said Peter.

"What couldn't you bear, you young ass?" Mallory's tone was impatient, exasperated.

"Seeing you . . . with Miss Ramsden," said Peter.

A dull angry red came into Jim Mallory's face. "How dare you speak to me like that? No—don't move—I haven't nearly done with you! Stay where you are till I come back." He could hardly articulate for rage.

When he had gone out of the room Peter rose trembling from the bed. He was afraid of his father's violence. His temper was thoroughly aroused, and it was years since Peter had seen him really, violently angry. He waited for his father's return in an agony of suspense. He was not a coward, but there was something in Mallory's manner of utter-

ing those last menacing words that would have struck terror into the heart of the most courageous boy.

It didn't, couldn't, mean that he meant to flog him. . . .

Jim Mallory came back into the room, carrying a hunting-crop in his hand. His blood was up, and he had lost control over himself. He wasn't going to be opposed and criticized by a child. He meant to give Peter a lesson he would never forget.

He seized him with an iron grip and flung him back violently upon the bed. Peter was powerless to resist. For years his father had not flogged him, and the shame and humiliation were as great as if he were experiencing it for the first time. But soon even shame was swallowed up in the physical torment. He bit back the cry that rose to his lips, and set himself to the grim task of enduring the pain of those measured, merciless blows. Mallory was quite beside himself, and Peter realized that in his rage he hardly knew what he was doing. If this went on he might kill him. . . . At last the boy gave a horrible cry—a cry of despair. It brought Mallory tardily to his senses. He flung the whip on the floor and went out of the room, slamming the door after him. He hadn't meant to punish the boy like that. All at once Peter's offence seemed small and trivial. His conscience smote him. Through the door he could hear the boy's faint moaning, his half-stifled sobs.

It was horrible. No woman was worth it. . . .

They had arranged to dine with some of Peter's friends at a restaurant that night, and Mallory's first action was to telephone and express his sorrow that they would not, after all, be able to go. He had to face a solitary dinner, and his misery at this termination of what should have been such a happy day was now hardly less than Peter's. He wished

he had not punished him like that. He forgot his own strength, he had been almost mad with rage. Looking back, he felt that he had been even more to blame than Peter. For, after all, it was only the boy's love for him that had prompted him to give way to that passion of jealousy. It had been perhaps more the moment for kindness than for severity. . . . And yet there had been something subtle and morbid too about Peter's offence. All the petty crimes for which Jim had punished him in the past had consisted of acts of disobedience and defiance, a petty falsehood, a rude answer. But to-day Peter had divined with extraordinary intuition his father's intention with regard to Carina Ramsden, and he had pitted his puny force against it. It was this mute antagonism, this suggested disapproval, that had so enraged Mallory. Yes, Peter had deserved a taste of discipline for his precocious interference. Mallory tried to make excuses for himself, knowing all the time that he had beaten his son quite savagely, and that there had been an element of revenge in the sharp rapid retribution he had so pitilessly exacted. It had been quite necessary, however, to teach Peter that his attitude couldn't be tolerated, for Mallory was aware that it might even ultimately imperil his own chance of success, should Carina chance to discern the boy's antagonism.

Mallory knew enough of adolescent psychology to realize that Peter had suffered a great deal during those unfortunate hours at Lord's. Nothing else could have accounted for his abrupt, discourteous departure. He had shown the red flag of rebellion unmistakably to Lady Murray, who would be hardly likely to conceal the fact from her niece. It was horrible to think that Peter had it in his power to frustrate his own happiness in this way, and Mall-

ory felt his wrath beginning to rise again at the thought. If he chose to marry again, Peter must learn to treat his stepmother with courtesy and regard her with affection. He really couldn't put up with this jealous hysteria. It was something that must be severely checked. . . . Peter had richly deserved his flogging. And he would be never likely to forget it. It would certainly have the salutary effect of making him careful. And yet, with the remembrance of that despairing, horrible cry sounding in his ears, Mallory wished he had approached the matter more judiciously and in a more suave temper.

He was scarcely less miserable than Peter, that night. He longed, as the evening hours wore on, to go up to his son's room, and comfort him. If Peter had had a mother, that was no doubt what she would have done. How Iris had trembled and sickened on those rare occasions in her lifetime when he had gone upstairs at Linfold to punish Peter! It had been part of the tragedy of her life that she could not protect her little son from his father's severity. Yes, he would have gone up to see Peter now, but he dreaded to seem too soft. To-morrow would be time enough for forgiveness.

The incident made him envisage the possibility of his second marriage in its immediate effect upon Peter. It would assuredly mean a great change in their mutual relations. It would lead not perhaps to actual estrangement, for he couldn't permit such a thing as that to happen, but at least to a diminution of confidence and intimacy. Peter would no longer hold the first, the only place. Perhaps the episodes of that day had already initiated that future change, that readjustment of relations that must inevitably, he thought, occur. He had flogged Peter grievously because of Carina, and because he had

feared the boy's power to frustrate his own happiness and triumph. But whenever he considered it, as his anger slowly subsided, he regarded his recent action with horror, as a thing even of wanton cruelty. Perhaps Peter would never forgive him. Perhaps the remembrance would make him regard Carina always with a fierce enmity for having been the primary cause of his discomfiture. Mallory was a little aghast to find himself so utterly in the wrong. Conscience arraigned him, and he was far too honest a man not to look at the facts quite squarely. And he feared the consequences, principally because of their effect upon Peter. He loved his son, and he did not wish anything in the world to interfere with their happy relations. Peter was his first-born, his heir. Nothing could change that. Peter would, he felt, always seem more peculiarly his, than any children that might yet be born to him. His very birthright gave him a distinctive position of which nothing could deprive him. He began to feel as if that day he had failed in his duty toward his son.

He sat up very late in his study, a prey to gloomy imaginings. The stir of traffic echoing through the open windows was becoming less, and it seemed to him that with its diminution the whole great city was preparing for slumber. Would there be no sleep for himself and Peter that night? Jim felt as if all the rosy hopes that had been his earlier in the day had been abruptly quenched. He could hardly think of Carina with any pleasure now. The very thought of her had a strangely disturbing effect, as if she might ultimately mar the perfect serenity of his life.

A clock in the hall struck two with deep reverberating note. The household had long since gone to bed. Mallory tried to curb the demon of unrest that had taken possession of his soul. He was aware of a conflict in which his new-born love for Carina

and his long love for Peter were strangely at war. It seemed impossible to reconcile the two.

He heard a slight stir in the hall; someone touched the door-handle, timidly uncertainly. Mallory sprang up. "Who's there?" he shouted sternly. "What are you doing there?" For the moment he actually believed that thieves had broken into his house.

He flung open the door. Peter was standing in front of him, looking very slender and boyish in his suit of blue pajamas. His black hair was ruffled and damp about his brow. His face was flushed and the blue eyes were still swollen and disfigured with tears. Mallory took his hand—it was burning hot and feverish. A pang of remorse pierced his heart, but his next emotion was one of intense relief. Peter had come to him, of his own accord.

He drew him into the room and closed the door. Then he went back to his great armchair and sitting down held out his arms to Peter. The boy came limply, submissively, up to him, and suffered himself to be enfolded in that embrace. He thought at that moment that he could never again feel afraid of his father, of his strength, his powerful arms. Like a little child he leaned his head against his father's breast, and clinging to him broke once more into passionate weeping.

Mallory held him closely and tenderly till the fit of weeping should pass. Repeatedly he bent his head and touched Peter's hair with his lips. He did not speak, but the sense of protection, of ultimate forgiveness, comforted the boy more than any words could have done.

Peter fell asleep in his father's arms, and for a long time Mallory continued to hold him thus, afraid to stir for fear of disturbing him. All traffic had ceased outside, and there was a film of faint, impalpable light in the eastern sky. Soon it would be day.

Mallory rose at last and carried Peter up to his own room, laying him on a couch at the foot of his bed. He covered him with a blanket, and then looked down with a passion of pride upon the slender sleeping form. It was with difficulty that he could cease to watch him thus, and go to bed himself.

He wished he had not said anything about her coming down to Linfold in the summer to Carina Ramsden. He wished he had not accepted Lady Murray's invitation to dine there on the following Sunday. Perhaps even now it wasn't too late. Surely, with a little determination he could resolve never to see Carina again. He even began to doubt the reality of his love for her. A girl he had only seen twice! A girl, too, of calmly independent views, who had been "on her own" for some years, and who had supported her sister and herself by writing novels. Iris had come straight from her father's house to his, never having tasted the sweets of independence. It was surely better and safer for a man to marry a girl of that type, whose every action had been watched over by solicitous and careful parents. You knew where you were, then. And yet, thinking of those sweet hours he had spent with Carina that day, he was obliged to confess that her very independence, her freedom, had had their charm for him. She was wise and experienced and had something of the outlook of a much older woman.

He bent down and looked closely at his son. Peter was very, very dear to him. Dearer surely than this slip of a girl whom he had only seen twice. For Peter's sake had he not better determine never to see her, voluntarily, again? . . .

CHAPTER V

“I DO hope Jim wasn't too severe with Peter for his escapade yesterday,” said Lady Murray, as she walked in the Park on the following morning, accompanied by Carina and a couple of highly-pampered Pekinese. “He's capable of being hard, I believe,” she added.

“Well, Peter was rather savage, wasn't he?” said Carina carelessly.

In a sense, the boy's ill-concealed antagonism had rather amused her than otherwise. She knew, however, nothing of his conversation with her aunt before leaving her alone in the enclosure. Lady Murray had considered it more prudent not to mention that part of it.

Carina reflected that it wouldn't, however, be amusing to encounter much of that kind of antagonism in one's daily life. Of course, she had not the slightest intention of marrying Jim Mallory; he seemed so very much her senior, and, besides, he was a Protestant and probably had only a very slight knowledge of Catholicism and all that it entailed. She was also as yet far from certain that he was seriously considering the project of marrying her. Still, there had been something in his manner yesterday that had spelt danger.

“I suppose he was. He's very devoted to his father, and he may have felt jealous.”

“Jealous?” Carina pretended not to understand.

“Of you, my dear,” said Lady Murray dryly.

Carina flushed. “How absurd!”

“I think you must be prepared to receive an offer of marriage from Mr. Mallory,” pursued Lady Mur-

ray, who had her own reasons for desiring to ascertain her niece's views on the subject.

"If I thought there was any truth in that, I should go back to Rome to-morrow," said Carina decisively. "I don't want to make a marriage like that in any case. It would be too conventional. Just a niche ready to step into. And, as you say, he's capable of being hard—if one didn't keep inside the niche!"

"Did you tell him you were a Catholic?" inquired her aunt.

"No. I didn't see any necessity. If he wants to know anything more about me, he can ask you, dear Aunt Nora. And I should like him to read one of my books—that last one, *Love among the Ruins*."

"It would indeed be a proof of his sincerity and devotion if Jim Mallory were to read a novel!" observed Lady Murray, who could not help feeling that Carina was purposely not being quite frank with her. "Unless, of course, it were a sporting one," she added.

"What was his wife like?" asked Carina.

"Oh, a very pretty charming woman. At least, she was when they were first married. But she became very delicate and nervous after Peter's birth. That must have been a great trial to Jim. She had to live a very quiet life at Linfold; she couldn't entertain at all. Miss Mallory—his sister—went to live there for a bit to look after things, but I don't think that answered very well either."

Carina's face was slightly ironical.

"And does Miss Mallory still live there and look after things?" she asked.

"No. You see, she doesn't hit it off with Peter. She interfered too much—it wasn't a success. Jim bought a little house for her about five miles away."

Carina thought calmly: "Mr. Mallory and I have a great deal to learn about each other still."

Something warned her that Lady Murray was right, and that if she really wished the matter to go no further, her best plan would be not to meet Mallory again. When with him she had felt herself in the presence of some dominating power that made her conscious of weakness and hesitancy. Mallory had produced an unsettling, disturbing effect upon her, even on the first night of their meeting, but more especially yesterday when she had spent such a long time in his company. She had resented the fact, but there it was; she could not get away from it. And no man had ever produced that impression upon her before. Already she felt that it wouldn't be so easy to go away and treat Jim as if he didn't exist. She was angry with herself when she made this discovery. She was angry with Jim too. . . . She almost made her mind then not to go to Linfold in the summer . . . to make some excuse. She would induce her aunt to take her abroad.

Her life had been so utterly different from his. She was aware, too, that her own experience had been probably harsher than that of most of the women who constituted Mallory's restricted little world. She had had to struggle not only for herself but for another person. And she felt that the struggle had left its ugly clawing marks upon her. She had fought poverty single-handed, and she had triumphed and had even won success in the process. But it had taken something of the freshness of youth from her. She looked more than her twenty-five years. She knew that she had all the assurance of the woman who has had to manage her own life and make decisions for herself. And it was possible that few married women of her age had enjoyed such complete independence, such freedom from control as had been hers. It had made her hard, a little fearless; in a sense it had disillusioned her.

These qualities would, she felt, scarcely be likely to appeal to Mallory in the long run. Perhaps he was too old-fashioned to appreciate them. If she married at all, it would be safer to marry a younger man, who in his first youth had lived through the storm and stress to which the present generation had been subjected. In many ways she felt that her outlook would probably approach more nearly to Peter's than to his father's. And then she thought of Mallory's wife, the nervous delicate woman who had been Peter's mother. She wondered if the dead woman had loved her husband. There was something attractive about Mallory, even setting aside his obvious good-looks. His devotion to his son touched her. And then her thoughts turned to Peter. She had not been unaware of his passionate antagonism, born of love and jealousy. Perhaps it would be an element that she would never be able to conquer. . . . She started. . . . Her secret thoughts were leading her back to the actual possibility of marriage with Jim Mallory. The trend of her meditation almost alarmed her. For, of course, she had not the slightest intention of marrying him. A rich, sporting squire who lived on his property in Sussex for eleven months in the year! There was little to attract her in such a life as that. She pictured going to Richard Grove with the announcement on her lips. . . . Mentally she contrasted the two men. And she wondered, not what Mallory would think of Grove, but what Grove would think of Mallory. . . .

Richard, she believed, only regarded her in the light of her talent, a point of view that would probably hardly occur to Mallory. Richard had tried to guard that talent, to cherish it, to watch its development with a kind of stern tenderness. He had been afraid that she would debase it in that past

struggle. He knew how strong the incentive had been to work too hard and too rapidly, in order to heap those little luxuries upon Mary, to try to fan that flickering flame to renewed life. But he would not have hesitated to blame her, even so, if she had ever wilfully fallen short of the high accomplishment of her first books. He had never quite forgiven her for writing *Love among the Ruins*. He had made her promise now to take a rest.

"Jim is coming to dinner on Sunday," said Lady Murray.

"Yes. Would you care to ask Richard to meet him? They don't know each other," said Carina.

"I think this time we'll have Jim alone," said her aunt, mendaciously. She feared Mr. Grove's influence over her niece. And she was quite certain that he didn't like Jim, had heard things against him—from Iris's people, no doubt. Old Mr. Feardon had never forgiven his son-in-law.

But when they returned home that morning they found a little note from Mallory, saying that he was going back to Linfold on Saturday, so would be unable to dine with them on Sunday. Business was calling him home for the week-end. The note was a little abrupt. Lady Murray felt disappointed.

"He's thinking better of it," was her inward comment.

She ascribed the changed plans to Peter's hostile attitude. Undoubtedly it had influenced his father, and perhaps compelled him to give the matter further and more serious consideration. She wished Carina had shown a little disappointment, but her niece's face when she heard the contents of Mallory's letter expressed only a vague relief.

For some little time the situation remained at a complete standstill. This arrested development, just when everything had seemed so promising, perplexed

and disappointed Lady Murray. She was anxious that Carina should marry, now that Mary was dead, and she was so completely without ties. It was what Mallory had, rather than what he was, that had made her so desirous of bringing about the match. Its inherent unsuitability did not strike her at all. If you had a husband, she argued, you had much better have a rich one. Carina had had quite enough of poverty and struggling, and although she was now making a fairly good income it would be far better for her not to have to work at all. Lady Murray was not a great believer in love, having never experienced anything but the most moderate affection for her own husband, with whom she had passed thirty-five years of eventless matrimony. Nevertheless, after her own fashion she had been sincerely attached to him, and had been almost broken-hearted when he died. He had contributed greatly to her comfort, had conscientiously smoothed all the rough places of her path for her, and she was not a woman who liked to fend for herself. She had missed the smoothings. . . . But love, in her opinion, was at best a capricious passion. Possessions, on the other hand, were solid things—things you could take hold of and enjoy. Mallory's possessions were especially solid. And he was just the sort of man who would counteract that slight waywardness Carina sometimes displayed. If she married him, she would have a charming home, a fixed place in the world, certain pleasant duties, plenty of money to spend. There was Peter of course, obviously antagonistic to the affair even in its embryo stages, but Mallory was not weak—it was little likely that he would spoil his son to the detriment of his own wife.

Yet, it was surely Peter's attitude that had driven Jim headlong back to his Sussex fastness, making him pause before he took any irrevocable step. Lady

Murray had always hitherto liked Peter; now she felt thoroughly annoyed with him. He wanted a firm hand over him. Jim would be laying up trouble for himself if he allowed his son to get the upper hand of him now.

Carina seemed perfectly indifferent to the fact that for some weeks after the Eton and Harrow match nothing more was seen of Mallory. He had fled from her, just as once she had for a moment envisaged the necessity of fleeing from him. She was perhaps slightly relieved, despite the flick to her pride. But she refrained from discussing the subject with Lady Murray, and studiously concealed from that lady how frequently her thoughts dwelt upon the Mallorys, father and son. They interested her, intrigued her; she would have liked to see more of them both, if she had been quite certain that nothing further would come of it. She dreaded being dragged into the net of Jim's dominating personality; she had already felt its effect upon her, and it had even made her miss him, a feeling which she disliked very much.

Toward the end of July a letter came from Mallory, addressed to Lady Murray, inviting her and her niece down to Linfold for a few days on the following Friday. Lady Murray was elated at this recrudescence of the Mallory affair, and took the note in triumph to Carina.

London was hot and airless; the season was dragging to its rather wearisome close. It hadn't been at all a gay season; so many people were still in mourning. There was really nothing to be gained by remaining any longer in town. And Lady Murray loved the country. Especially she loved the range of bold bare hills, the green and deliciously-wooded valleys, the glimpses of the blue line of sea, that Sussex could give.

"Jim Mallory wants us to go down to Linfold on Friday," she announced.

"You know it's impossible. I haven't a thing to wear, and I hate visiting."

"Well, if you refuse this time, he'll probably draw his own conclusions!"

"What conclusions?" inquired Carina.

"I mean—this invitation shows that he wishes to see more of you. If you don't go, you may be throwing away a chance you will regret."

"Dear Aunt Nora, I wish I could convince you that he hasn't the remotest thought of marrying me."

"No, Carina, you can't convince me. I am sure he's thinking of it."

"I should never regret having prevented him from proposing to me," said Carina emphatically.

She disliked these conventional preliminaries, the wholly unnecessary and tiresome approach shots. If the man loved her, and wanted her to be his wife, why couldn't he say so? She would give him a straight answer, yes or no. But if he wasted his time in weighing the pros and cons, with too great a show of middle-aged prudence, she was sure she could never wish to marry him.

"Anyhow, you ought to see Linfold," said Lady Murray. "And a few days in the country will do you good. You're looking pale."

"Now, you old darling, that isn't what you mean at all." Carina put her arms affectionately round her aunt's neck and kissed her. "The truth is, I'm such a handful that you want to get rid of me, and you're almost capable of making the *démarches* yourself!"

But in the end Carina gave in. She even submitted to the distasteful necessity of buying new clothes. Lady Murray wanted her to make a good impression upon Sophia Mallory—Jim's sister—if she hap-

pened to be there. Peter would, of course, have now returned home for the holidays. But this invitation seemed to hint that Jim had succeeded in placating Peter.

The day before their departure Richard Grove dropped in during the afternoon to tea. They had not seen him for some weeks; he had been away from London finishing a book in a tiny out-of-the-world cottage, eight miles from a station, in Cornwall. The only place, where, as he always said, he could feel certain of not being interrupted. He emerged from this sylvan retreat only to hear that Carina was to go down to Linfold on a visit with her aunt. He refused to believe it at first, and came round on purpose to hear it denied or confirmed.

"Oh, yes, we're going to-morrow," said Carina listlessly. Aunt Nora positively wouldn't let me refuse."

Richard Grove looked at her intently. They were alone, and he thought Carina was looking pale and languid.

"Do you like this man?" he asked bluntly.

"I don't know," said Carina. "Don't tease me, Richard."

"I'm not teasing you. But if you don't like him, you'd much better not go. Keep out of his way. He might make you like him."

"Where would be the harm?" asked Carina. "I suppose some day I shall have to like somebody. Why shouldn't it be Mr. Mallory?" She leaned her chin on her hand and looked at Richard.

"I could give you a great many reasons. One is that he's too old. Another is that he's a Protestant. A third is that he would probably make you very miserable!"

"I do *love* you, Richard, when you're serious!" said Carina, frivolously.

"I can't think what your aunt's about, to encourage it," he grumbled. "She must see how utterly unsuitable it is."

"Uncle Timothy was a great dear, and she thinks all men are like him," explained Carina.

"Mallory made his first wife miserable," said Richard Grove. "I know her people quite well. He never lets them see anything of Peter. He's a very hard man, Carina, and I warn you that he can never make you happy."

"I don't believe he has the slightest intention of asking me to marry him," said Carina coolly. "We lunched with him one day at Lord's just after Aunt Nora's dinner-party, and since then he's never been near us. Don't you think that looks very prudent and sensible?"

"A man of his age doesn't act impulsively like a boy. No doubt he had to think it over very carefully. But this invitation looks like business, and I do advise you most strongly, Carina, not to go."

"You've come too late, Richard, it's all settled," said Carina. "We've been buying frocks hard in order to dazzle him." She was laughing now, but no smile relieved the gravity and gloom of Richard's face.

He rose and took his leave abruptly.

"Good-bye, my dear child. Don't do anything rash. And don't spoil that beautiful life of yours!"

He hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER VI

THEY arrived at Lintown—a charming seaport situated close to the cliffs and downs of Sussex—at the close of a golden August afternoon. Mallory was on the platform to meet them—an attention which Lady Murray had hardly expected, and which seemed to augur well for his eagerness to see Carina again. He looked younger—almost boyish—in his grey flannel suit and straw hat, and his face, sunburnt and healthy, wore a joyful expression. If he had come to any decision during these weeks of separation it was surely, Lady Murray thought, a favorable one.

“I’m afraid there’s simply nothing to amuse you,” Mallory said, as they drove through the town in his car. “I haven’t asked anyone else, and even Peter’s away—yachting at Cowes with a friend. My sister’s here, and that’s all. You see, I was selfish enough to want all your attention.” He smiled at Carina as he spoke, and he let his eyes rest upon her in a full long glance.

So Sophia Mallory was there. Not a wise move that, on the part of Jim, thought Lady Murray. Miss Mallory was known to have a vigilant eye and a sharp tongue. If there was a weak spot anywhere, she could always unerringly detect it. Would she be likely to approve of Carina?

Carina was looking delicious to-day in a soft white dress, and a large white hat tied with black ribbon. She was perfectly at her ease, calm and friendly.

They soon left the town behind them and climbed a long steep road that cut across the downs. Then

the car dipped into a valley from which they had a divine view of the sea, blue and silver under that wide tranquil sky.

"That's Linfold Glen," said Mallory suddenly, pointing to a great space of woodland that clothed the hill in front of them with a lovely garment of verdure. "We shall see the house in a minute. There—between the trees on that lower spur."

On the breast of the downs they could see a great grey house, long rather than high, with gabled roofs and immense square chimneys that were palely silhouetted against the surrounding trees. Below it, was a wide open space of country flowing away nearly to the sea, filled with cornfields where the wheat was growing golden and bronze in the strong sunshine, and grass meadows where the cattle were lazily browsing. Hills and fields and delicious woods and that heavenly glimpse of sea, made a typically English picture, secure, sheltered, immemorially calm.

As Mallory spoke, he looked at Carina, perhaps to see what effect that picture, so dear to him, would have upon her. She was seeing it for the first time, this beloved spot where almost the whole of his life had been spent. What did she think of it? Was it more or less gracious and beautiful than any mental picture she might have formed of it?

Carina looked at it with shining eyes.

"How beautiful," she said quietly.

Mallory was satisfied.

In the weeks that had intervened since their last meeting, Jim had forced himself to examine the situation from every point of view. During this process he had learned that his wish to marry Carina was far greater than his fear of becoming partially estranged from Peter. For years he had taught himself to believe that all the thoughts and ambi-

tions of his life were centred in his only son, and the knowledge had undoubtedly in the past restrained him from embarking upon a second matrimonial venture. He could only believe now that on those other occasions his heart had not been touched at all; he had been temporarily fascinated perhaps by a pretty face or spurred by the consciousness of his increasing loneliness. In any case, he had escaped without hurt. But this time he had discovered that to separate himself permanently from Carina would involve great and abiding hurt. He found himself continually thinking of her. No mere impulse had finally prompted that invitation to Lady Murray; it had been the result of deep soul-searching. Mallory's was a simple nature, and it had suffered violence from being forced to face a highly complicated psychological problem involving two other lives besides his own. Someone would have to suffer, and to know that this one would certainly be Peter, did not make his path any more smooth. He had already seen Peter writhing under that first inception of mental suffering, and perhaps his own harshly injudicious action had but contributed to crystallize the boy's jealous misery.

It had been the action of a coward to send Peter away without even telling him that he had invited Miss Ramsden to stay at Linfold. Jim had felt like a traitor when Peter's smiling, happy, unconscious face had looked back at him from the train that was to take him to Portsmouth. He had not been frank with his son, and it seemed to him that already their relations had undergone a subtle change. There would never again be that frank friendly intercourse between them, an intercourse that promised to be more equal and intimate as the years went on and Peter grew to be a man. Jim had often looked forward to that time, with its happy exemp-

tion from all parental interference and discipline, when he and Peter would enjoy together the uninterrupted round of sport that Linfold offered during the successive seasons of the year. Something of this would now necessarily be changed. To gain a great gift entails almost always the offering of a sacrifice. And it was Peter who must be in a sense sacrificed—Peter, whose feelings must be disregarded.

Jim hadn't liked these reflections at all. Normally all his actions were simple, and involved no problems. It was hateful to sacrifice Peter's happiness deliberately in this way, and it made him feel both treacherous and selfish. But the afternoon was already bringing its reward. When he had said to Carina, "that's Linfold—" he had suddenly felt a curiously strong conviction that he was showing her her future home. He thought of her in the gracious setting of the grey old Manor House, with its panelled walls, its gables, its surrounding woods with the blue gleam of sea beyond, and he felt glad that he had all this to offer to the beloved woman. How greatly beloved he had not realized until now, when he had seen her again after those weeks of deliberate separation. But the realization of its measure made him suddenly embarrassed, as if it had raised a beautiful, exquisite barrier between them.

He loved her, and she had at least not been unwilling to come and stay at Linfold. Perhaps Lady Murray had given her niece a hint, since so little escaped that astute, experienced though kindly eye. He could not feel to-day that Carina was quite ignorant of his feeling for her; he even thought that it must have been communicated to her by some unexplained process of thought-transference, flowing from his own heart to hers.

More than sixteen years ago he had brought his bride to Linfold. He had believed himself to be happy then, but it was not with this indescribable happiness that seemed to fling showers of golden light over the English countryside. He had been young—scarcely twenty-five—and Iris had been a couple of years older. There was money, for she had inherited a comfortable fortune from her grandmother. That money would be Peter's when he reached the age of twenty-five, in accordance with an absurd suggestion of old Mr. Feardon's, which Iris, an obedient daughter, had duly carried out when making her will. She had been pretty then, in rather a charming colorless way, and was besides very deeply in love with him. She was an only child, accustomed to parental control of a wise, suave kind, and Jim had continued the control less wisely and suavely. There had been clouds. Her continued delicacy after the boy's birth. . . . Her perpetual nervous fears. . . . The disagreements that had arisen over Peter. . . . Old Mr. Feardon's insolent interference. . . . The chapter had been closed for more than six years, but Mallory was too honest a man to attribute all the blame of the past to his wife. He had been harsh and violent when kindness and care and patience had been absolutely essential. But the slow drifting apart had hurt him too, and it was a relief when at last Iris had died of that slow lingering illness of hers. Who could blame him for trying now to start a fresh page, a fresh chapter? He wished that Peter could be brought to view the matter sensibly. But Peter had something of his mother's hidden secret obstinacy. You could break her, but never bend her. What would Peter say if he ever heard that Carina was to be ensconced permanently at Linfold?

"That glimpse of the sea makes it perfect," said

Carina. "I like to feel it near, but not too near."

She was thinking less of the man at her side than of the perfection of Linfold, especially in regard to its suitability as a *décor* for a book. How shocked Mallory would be, could he have divined her thoughts! Well, perhaps not exactly shocked, but bewildered and hurt.

Mallory drove the car himself, with Carina seated beside him. Lady Murray was alone in the tonneau; she had agreed with alacrity to the suggested arrangement. She was quite prepared to take a back seat, and leave Carina to shine in the limelight. It was sufficient for her to see that they were talking together with such happy animation. Carina wasn't being in the least tiresome and stiff, as she had feared she might be.

"I've been reading your last novel," Mallory suddenly informed Miss Ramsden.

"Do you mean *Love among the Ruins*?"

"Yes. It's a queer title for a book—I think that attracted me."

After a little pause he resumed:

"It was very sad. You must have been very sad when you wrote it."

"That doesn't always follow. Some so-called comic writers have had sad lives. Perhaps they wrote like that to get away from their own grief. The tragedy of clowns is proverbial."

She had not asked him if he liked her book, though he had been rather expecting a question of the kind. And he wanted to speak of it. All the way through—and he had read it very carefully—he had longed to find her in it, but the writer had eluded him to a degree that was exasperating. He said:

"I couldn't find you in it all. It wasn't for want of trying."

There was charm, but not her charm. Nowhere

throughout the book had he been able to discern her voice speaking. Had she purposely hidden that side of herself from him, or did she normally keep her work in a separate compartment, as it were, of her life, just as if she had been the possessor of a dual personality? The thought intrigued him. If he married her, he would want to possess her wholly; she mustn't hide that side of her intellect that held her work, from him. And yet the thought that this creative fire burnt and glowed within her, fascinated him.

"But Richard Grove always says I'm so like my books," she protested.

The swift movement of the car exhilarated her. She felt extraordinarily happy and filled with a new gaiety which seemed to have nothing to do with Jim Mallory at all. Yet she felt grateful to him for his share in giving her this recovered sense of happiness.

"Perhaps you may be like some of the others, then. I've only read *Love among the Ruins*," he said, in a slightly mortified tone.

"Richard would tell you it's an indifferent but quite characteristic example."

"You're always quoting Grove," said Mallory, half jealously.

"Well, he's my chief critic—he helped to drill me into shape. And he's very severe—he never spares. But afterward one sees that he was right, though one hates his horrid blue pencil at the time. When I'm reading other people's novels I often think: If Richard had read that passage he'd have stuck his blue pencil through it." She laughed gaily.

"But perhaps he was altogether wrong. How do you know he gave you good advice? How do you know he didn't spoil your book?"

"I suppose because he *is* Richard, and a master of style," she said, very seriously.

"He doesn't look so very wonderful," said Mallory sulkily.

Carina laughed—a gay silvery ripple of sound that enchanted Jim and restored him to good humor.

"Oh, you mustn't judge Richard by his clothes! They're the oddest things in the world!"

The car turned in at the lodge gates, which were opened as they approached by a pretty little fair-haired girl of twelve. She made a curtsy to Mallory.

"What a dear little girl," exclaimed Carina.

"Lucy? Oh, she's pretty enough, but an idle mischievous little wretch. Her mother spoils her."

"I think I like children to be a little spoilt," said Carina. "My father spoilt us and it made us so happy."

"It isn't always practicable," said Jim. "Children have to be trained. I know all about it—I've had to lick Peter into shape."

She was silent, realizing that Mallory was speaking from the parent's point of view. It made him seem older. Whenever she thought of him in connection with his son, he always seemed so very old compared with herself.

Mallory drew up the car in front of the house. He sprang out, and assisted Lady Murray and Carina to alight. All the time he was thinking, "Some day I shall bring her home like this as my bride." All the servants would be gathered there to watch her arrival. It was an ecstatic, wonderful moment to see Carina enter his house for the first time. . . .

Jim led the way into the great drawing-room with its long windows open to the garden, its delicious glimpse of distant sea. It was always used in summer, and it was a noble room with lofty walls cov-

ered with delicate old green silk, and white stucco friezes and panels. Carina had often seen rooms thus decorated in Italian palaces, but she had hardly expected to find one like it in Sussex. It had been first arranged in this way by Jim's grandfather, and the scheme had never been changed. Most of the furniture, too, was antique and beautifully inlaid. It was a very perfect room, made the more beautiful with quantities of flowers both in pots and vases, which were distributed everywhere. Jim, conscious of its perfection, watched its effect upon Carina.

From a distant window-seat a tall figure arose and approached them. Jim introduced them. "Sophia, I forget if you've ever met Lady Murray. My sister—Miss Ramsden."

Miss Mallory was more or less a Jim in petticoats, and the type did not favor feminine charm. She was tall, powerfully-built as was her brother, with long limbs and broad shoulders. Her immense form was clad in grey tweed. Her hair, once dark but now grizzled like Jim's, was abundant and untidy. Her complexion was weather-beaten and inclined to be red. She invariably produced an impression of massive almost granite-like bulk upon newcomers.

Carina felt slightly awed at this imposing lady. She wasn't astonished that Sophia's sojourn at Linfold, during the late Mrs. Mallory's lifetime, had not been crowned with success.

She felt her hand grasped in a firm solid hand of considerable size.

"I've been reading your book, Miss Ramsden," said a bass voice; "although I must confess novels aren't in my line. When I was young I was taught they were waste of time."

Carina looked up into her face and smiled. She had often encountered that attitude, so familiar to

all authors. But her own success was too assured, too secure to be injured by it.

"I'm quite sure it's waste of time to read mine!" she cheerfully announced. Her smile was intended to propitiate, but had Miss Mallory uttered her thoughts aloud she would only have said: "My dear girl, it won't advance your cause in the least to make love to *me!*"

She mistook the nature of Miss Ramsden's cordiality. In her opinion, Carina was only one of a long succession of charming women who had tried to "catch" Jim. This one was, unlike the rest, clever. Very clever indeed, if one were to judge by *Love among the Ruins*. A peculiar book, but interesting and masterful.

Now seeing Carina, she was perfectly well able to understand why Jim had been so swiftly fascinated. This was a new type. A girl who had worked hard and made her own way, and had achieved success before she was twenty-five. Very creditable of course, but Jim must be careful. There was Peter. Peter was like a young archangel standing at the gates of Linfold with a drawn sword. . . .

Miss Mallory did not like Peter, but she admired him. He was, in so many ways, very like Jim, though unfortunately he had inherited his mother's highly-strung temperament.

She suspected Jim of being in deadly earnest where this Miss Ramsden was concerned. She was not at all averse to her brother's re-marriage, if a suitable person could be found. But Carina was eminently unsuitable. She had little money except what she earned. Miss Mallory was old-fashioned enough to prefer a woman with no money at all, rather than one with earned money. She watched Jim, but he was very careful, and assiduous in his attentions to Lady Murray.

Miss Ramsden was far too young for the post. She was a mere scrap of a girl with that clipped bright hair, that slight boyish form. She wasn't old enough to be Peter's stepmother. Jim would have two children to look after instead of one.

Miss Mallory was only partially acquainted with the events that had taken place the day of the Eton and Harrow match. She had a confidential maid, and the servants on their return from Bryanston Square had gossiped. There had been a scene between father and son, and a housemaid had overheard ominous sounds that told of a whipping being administered. . . . Putting two and two together Miss Mallory concluded that the quarrel had had its origin in Jim's too open attentions to Miss Ramsden. Peter's jealousy of his father—an old story—had been stirred, and perhaps with rash imprudence he had uttered a word of protest. Both Jim and Peter were silent on the subject; she had tried unavailingly to sound them both. No doubt, Peter had richly deserved his thrashing, but it seemed to suggest that Jim would brook no interference where Miss Ramsden was concerned.

So when Jim said to her carelessly that evening as he bade her good-night: "What do you think of Miss Ramsden, Sophy?" she only replied warily:

"She is very artistic-looking, Jim. I couldn't get much out of her myself, but I'm sure she must be charming."

She smiled at Jim as she spoke, as much as to say: "Don't you suppose I can see through you, you dear old goose?"

Jim kissed her and said no more.

CHAPTER VII

IT WAS during dinner on the following evening that Carina dropped her bombshell. She had quite put the matter from her mind, always intending to refer to it when occasion offered, if it should indeed ever seem necessary to do so.

Looking toward Jim she said:

“Is there a Catholic church near here?”

“A Catholic church? Why?” He looked, and indeed he felt, frankly puzzled.

There had been allusions—sympathetic allusions—to the Catholic Faith in *Love among the Ruins*, and he had attributed it to the fact of her having lived so long in Rome, and perhaps come into contact with that Church whose fascination is proverbial. But he had never discussed religion with Carina. Their intercourse had been altogether too slight to admit of any sounding of the depths. Jim was not a person to whom spiritual things meant a great deal.

“I don’t think there is. I never heard of one,” he said.

“I know there’s one at Lintown, but that is eight miles away, and I don’t suppose there are any Sunday trains,” said Miss Ramsden.

Lady Murray here thought well to interpose.

“My niece is a Catholic. I thought you knew—” she said.

The faces of both brother and sister betrayed astonishment and even dismay. Lady Murray thought indignantly: “Carina ought to have told him. She takes too much for granted. . . .” She blamed

Carina, who was secretly enjoying the situation she had so inadvertently created. It amused her to watch the effect of her aunt's speech upon Jim. She was still perfectly heart-free, and had not yet reached the stage of fearing to lose what was not quite won. All day Jim had been charming to her, sitting in the garden with her during the hot hours of the morning, and taking her in his car to visit the picturesque spots in the neighborhood in the cool of the evening. They had been alone together nearly all day. Lady Murray had effaced herself.

Carina derived a certain half-malicious pleasure in putting Jim's admiration to the test, proving exactly what it was worth. She did not know that he had already taken some pretty formidable fences, but this one was immeasurably greater than all the rest, and for the moment he felt that his nerve might fail him.

She guessed something of the strain placed upon his growing love for her, and wondered if it would withstand this without suffering disruption. Aware throughout the day of the veiled disapproval and hostility of Miss Mallory, Carina enjoyed no less the effect of the disclosure upon that lady.

Mallory was the first to recover his speech. His faculty for rapidly reviewing an unexpected situation, often observable in the hunting man, stood him in good stead. He saw that he was being sharply tested; whether intentionally or not, it was impossible at present to conjecture. And in any case that was a side issue. To be found wanting now, would be to lose all chance of ultimate success; to yield, would at least win him the move "without prejudice."

"We're much too far from our nearest station for the trains to be of any use to you," he said. "But

of course I'll motor you in to Lintown if you'll tell me what time your service begins."

"High Mass is at half-past ten," said Carina, who had looked up these details in the Catholic Directory before leaving London. It was her invariable practice to do this, before spending a Sunday in the country. In these days of weakening prejudice she had seldom considered it necessary to mention her religion beforehand, and in large houses she could remember provision was always made for any Catholics who happened to be there, to attend Mass on Sundays. But those occasions had been long ago, before she had left England with Mary in pre-War days.

Miss Mallory interposed for the first time.

"You'd better let Miss Ramsden go in alone, Jim. You'll miss the morning service here if you go to Lintown."

Jim reddened slightly. Really, Sophia was too interfering for words. He answered after a moment's pause:

"Oh, they'll manage without me—they'll still have the parson and clerk. And I can easily go to church in Lintown. You'd better be ready at half past nine, Miss Ramsden."

"Thanks so much. I'm dreadfully sorry to give you so much trouble," Carina murmured.

All through the little conversation she had been admiring Jim for his cool resourcefulness. She could see that even if the discovery of her religion had been a disagreeable surprise to him, he wasn't going to let it interfere with their harmonious intercourse. She was quite sure now, that he had invited her to Linfold with the ultimate object of asking her to be his wife. At that moment Linfold Park, with all that was so beautiful and romantic in the house and its setting, did profoundly attract her. Jim seemed

part of it all; one saw him to the best advantage in his own home. Carina was neither ambitious in the worldly sense, nor grasping, but she did feel very strongly the attraction and charm of Linfold—the beautiful part—the old grey house in its adorable setting of dim woods—its divine glimpses of the sea.

She had experienced in the past, financial anxiety; she had worked hard, and lived frugally in order that Mary might have all that she required. She was not afraid of life in its more austere phases; struggle and effort had a certain attraction for her. But she was beginning to feel, on the other hand, that Jim could give her things that she needed very much, things that her art needed. Leisure and tranquillity and that freedom from care which so often aids an author to put forth of his best. She felt that here, perhaps, she would be able to write that beautiful book of which most authors dream. The life that Jim could offer her was of a kind she had never really savored except in occasional glimpses. Her eyes met his across the table, and she realized that tacitly she had invited him that evening to make a sacrifice for her, and that he had responded readily and generously. She liked him better then, than she had ever done.

“It was singularly foolish of you not to mention it before!”

Lady Murray took her niece to task that night after they had retired. The maid had been dismissed, their rooms communicated, and thus a useful opening occurred for administering the rebuke.

“It wasn’t fair to Jim—telling him like that in front of Sophia Mallory!”

“Why, what has Sophia got to do with it?” asked Carina, brushing her clipped hair vigorously back from her forehead.

"Naturally, it must have provoked Jim to feel you hadn't told him sooner."

"I can't see that it matters to him," said Carina wearily.

"Of course it matters very much indeed. Even you must see that he's fallen desperately in love with you. And to have such a complication hurled at one's head in the middle of dinner—!"

"You can't think how I enjoyed watching Sophia's face," said Carina impenitently. "But Mr. Mallory was awfully nice about it, wasn't he?"

Lady Murray felt exasperated. "Well, of course if you *want* to throw away the best chance you're ever likely to have!"

"Don't be cross with me, dear Aunt Nora," said Carina, going up to her and kissing her. "You see, he never asked me about my religion, or I should have told him. It's not a thing one is always talking about, especially to comparative strangers. I hate missing Mass, as you know. . . . And he bore it beautifully, though it really was an acid test."

"I think you are perfectly heartless," said Nora Murray. But her eyes softened as they rested upon the young lovely face.

"You know I'm not heartless," said Carina, taking her aunt's hand and kissing it. "But I don't seem to have much love left for anyone now. I gave it all to Mary, and she doesn't need it any more. Perhaps I've got to grow it again, if such a thing's possible."

Her face was quite bright; there was no hint of sentimentality in the pathetic words. Lady Murray, mollified, bent her head and kissed her.

"I don't think you quite realize what a compliment Jim's paying you. A man who might have

married anyone. Lady Chiltern's been trying for ages to catch him for her eldest daughter."

"I only wish he'd chosen someone else," said Carina. "You see, I don't fit in well, and Mr. Mallory knows it, too. But you mustn't think that I don't like and appreciate him, because I do. I wish that he wasn't so terribly old, and that he hadn't got a son as tall as I am."

"Oh, if that's all—!" said Lady Murray, waving aside such trifles airily. "It's high time you had someone to lean on, my dear. Good-night."

They kissed each other and separated.

Carina was ready punctually on the following morning. She had breakfasted in her own room as usual, a habit which Sophia had privately condemned as "those lazy continental ways of hers," although comforting herself with the reflection that Jim would soon put a stop to all that, if he married her.

She was dressed in white, and Jim coming down a few minutes later glanced at her approvingly.

"I'm going to drive you in myself. I've given the chauffeur a holiday."

"How kind of you," said Carina.

"You'll sit up in front with me, won't you? There's hardly any wind."

They sped off down the long drive with its twin rows of splendid lime trees. Their road lay across the downs, and in the distance they were soon able to discern Lintown lying between them and the sea, bathed in the silver haze of its own smoke. Beyond, the high blue line of the Channel showed vaguely.

Above their heads a lark was singing its pure song of praise.

"I'm coming to Mass, too," said Mallory, suddenly. "I've never been in my life, and I'm afraid

I don't know much about it. But I should like to go with you."

"That's very kind of you," said Carina.

She thought: "He's being terribly nice about it. I do see that he's everything Aunt Nora says."

They drove on in silence. Presently Jim nodded toward a little village tucked away in a fold of the Sussex downs. "That's Middleford, where my sister lives," he said. "I've bought a house for her there. Quite a jolly little place. Shouldn't mind living in it myself."

"But you've always lived at Linfold?" she asked.

"Yes," said Jim. "My father died the year I was married, and the place has been my own ever since. Peter was born there." He paused for a moment and then said with an effort, "If I don't tell you, someone else will; but I didn't always hit it off with my wife. She was ill and nervous. It was my fault—a great deal of it—I wasn't patient. . . ."

Carina said softly: "I think there are always moments when we blame ourselves for not having been kind enough to the ones we loved who have died."

"Kind enough? There were lots of times when I wasn't kind at all!" said Jim, bluntly. His face in repose had a hard set look.

"Oh, I'm so sorry for you—I know just how one feels. One could have done so much, instead of doing nothing at all. But it's really better not to dwell upon it too much. Not to let it poison the present. Priests will tell you that, too. Once a sin has been repented of, and confessed and absolved, it's wiser for the soul not to dwell upon it—except perhaps for the purpose of stimulating contrition."

"I've always thought confession must be a very coddling process for the soul," said Jim.

Carina was silent. It was hardly the moment to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the Sac-

rament of Penance. It was there, it was part of one's faith, it was of obligation to approach it. Carina always took her religion with perfect simplicity, and she regarded Confession as a salutary measure for the soul, besides being the only means by which one could savor the divine bliss of absolution. She never dwelt long upon the shame and humiliation that were incidental to it, as some sensitive souls will do. One paid . . . that was all.

"You think that, because you've never experienced it," she said at last, "but it isn't so easy. It *can* hurt. . . ."

Jim Mallory slowed down the car a little. They were alone, and the white dusty road stretched out emptily before them. On both sides of it the cornfields waved a brilliant golden line against the sky.

"Do you feel—you could marry a Protestant?" asked Jim.

Carina flushed. "I'm not sure that I've ever thought much about it," she confessed.

"Your Church makes it difficult for you to marry a heretic, does it not?" he asked.

"Yes. . . . There are difficulties—conditions."

"I don't quite know what they are, but I believe they're jolly unfair to our side!"

"Well, you're not obliged to marry a Catholic, are you?" said Carina.

Jim stopped the car. No one was in sight on the steep road that ascended the hill in front of them. He took the girl's slim gloved hand in his.

"One can't always help oneself. Love doesn't discriminate. And I loved you before I knew you were a Catholic, Carina." His voice trembled a little as he lingered over the soft syllables of her name as he uttered it for the first time in her presence.

She was so wonderful in her strange beauty. And she had strength and power. Spiritual strength, as he was beginning to discern. . . .

There was a little pause. Then Carina quietly released her hand.

"You'd much better forget me," she said. "You'd be very sorry later on, if you married a Catholic. And there's Peter . . ."

"Why do you say, 'there's Peter'?" he demanded.

"Because I could see—even that day at Lord's—that he'd taken a dislike to me. Almost as if he suspected something."

"Oh, I gave him a jolly good licking for his rudeness," said Jim; "he won't be likely to try that on again."

Carina shuddered. "Oh, how could you be so cruel? You shouldn't have punished him because of me—it'll make him hate the thought of me!"

"Nonsense!" said Mallory. "Boys have to be trained. I've thrashed Peter lots of times. . . ."

Nevertheless, he felt slightly uncomfortable. He wished she had not introduced the subject of Peter. She would think him cruel and harsh in the treatment of his son.

"Hadn't we better go on?" said Carina.

"Yes. But I want your answer first."

"What answer?"

"Whether you'll marry me."

"I can't tell you now. You must give me time to think. . . . You've been telling me horrid things about yourself. . . ."

Jim smiled. "Well, anyhow, you know the worst of me now!" he said, gripping the wheel with his strong hard hands.

Carina looked at those lean powerful brown hands. At that moment she felt a little afraid of Mallory, even of his very love for her, that seemed to be

drawing her as if on a subtle thread toward him. He did not look cruel, but he was a man who was quite obviously accustomed to asserting his will, and knew what means to employ in order to enforce it. But Carina felt she was in her way quite as independent as he was in his. For more than seven years she had been absolutely her own mistress, working for her living, tending her sister, answerable to no one for her actions. She would want—in any new life that was offered to her—that same independence and liberty where temporal things were concerned. For spiritual guidance she looked faithfully to her Church. Mallory could give her a great deal, but he must not deprive her of those present benefits that were so dear to her.

The silence was unbroken between them during the remainder of their journey. Carina was thinking: "He'd much better let me go, and never think of me again. It's hard for him too." She reflected with justice that neither for herself nor for Jim was surrender an easy matter.

But Jim clenched his teeth and thought:

"I don't care how difficult they make it for me!" . . .

CHAPTER VIII

MASS had not yet begun when Mallory and Carina entered the little church of Our Lady Star of the Sea, at Lintown. As if in remembrance of those first Apostles and their humble calling, the fisher-folk in all lands have ever been the readiest converts, the most zealous, the easiest to convince. Aware of the terrific power of wind and wave, their hearts turn with a natural eagerness to Him Who is also Lord of the Storm.

Carina knelt down and prayed. She was a little excited, and it was not easy at first to be recollected. The thing had actually happened, and Jim had asked her to be his wife, despite the fact of her being a Catholic. He attracted her, perhaps more than she was yet aware, but she did not love him. From time to time she glanced at him. His mouth was hard and finely cut, purposeful and obstinate. Under the thick greying dark hair the black brows cut a conspicuous line across his face, nearly meeting above the nose. The eyes were large, deep-set, piercing. It was a powerful face. There was something about him that made her feel afraid. . . .

The priest entered and went up to the Altar, accompanied by a small boy as acolyte. Carina found that Mallory was kneeling beside her. He copied her actions, kneeling when she knelt, rising when she rose.

His own thoughts were a queer medley. He felt rather like a man in a dream. This finding himself with Carina Ramsden in a Catholic church, hearing

Mass for the first time, could have no possible relation to reality. It was all part of this midsummer madness of love. . . . And yet he was conscious of a grim determination to envisage this hard fact of her Catholicism, which had arisen like a bogey to baffle him in his love-quest, just as he had trampled upon or uprooted all the other barriers between them. Familiarity might make it less terrific—might even show him its side of spiritual loveliness. Mallory was one of those men who, brought up in the Established Church, accepted it in all simplicity, untroubled by its problems and increasing dissensions. The living at Linfold was in his hands, and he had himself presented it to the present incumbent, Mr. Humphreys, an old college friend of his own. His relations with the Humphreys and their growing family, had always been of the pleasantest kind. And neither in his father's lifetime nor in his own would it have been possible for the living to pass to any man of extreme views. The weekly services were conducted with simplicity. The rector was musical, and the choir was quite a decent one for a country parish. There were "Early Celebrations" on alternate Sundays at eight o'clock, approached by Mallory at least three times a year. He often read the Lessons in church. Iris had dutifully followed his example in all things connected with religion. As long as her health permitted, her frail slender form had never failed to appear in the front pew on Sundays, with Peter's small black head by her side. Peter. . . . Here Mallory's thoughts came to a full stop, just as if he had run his head against a hard wall.

Peter! . . . He glanced at Carina. She might perhaps, when she had conquered, as she would most surely do, his early hostility, obtain a certain influence over Peter at a highly impression-

able age. This thought was an extremely unpalatable one, but Jim faced it now without shrinking. He shouldn't at all like Peter to be turned into a young Papist! And yet he meant deliberately to introduce this alien exotic element into his house. Mallory fidgeted in his seat. It wasn't going to be easy for him in any case. If Carina refused him, he believed that he would remain desolately alone for the rest of his life, and lately the sense of loneliness had been growing upon him, and he hadn't liked it. He loved her; he could not envisage the possibility of losing her, much less could he bring that loss upon himself by refusing anything that her Church might require of him. But in the event of their marriage millions of difficulties and complications must automatically arise. He would wish her, of course, to be friendly with Peter, but he would wish also to be the one to define the precise limits of that intimacy. There must be no attempt to proselytize.

A bell rang three times, and Carina, who had been sitting, now knelt down again. Mallory followed her example. There was a breathless silence throughout the church, as if a moment of intense expectancy had come. Then a bell rang sharply, almost peremptorily. Mallory watched the Elevation and then bowed his head. He felt the moment to be a solemn one, and he noticed that Carina's face was quite hidden in her hands. He had an odd feeling, too, that Something had descended into the church, slightly changing as if by more profoundly deepening its holy and spiritual atmosphere. It was as if the very skirts of Heaven had been touched. He had never felt this in any church before, and it had an irritating effect upon him rather than a soothing one. He fought against the growing conviction that something had actually happened during that breathless pause. Superstition, of course! Had not the Re-

formation in England unmasked once and for all those priestly deceits? Yet Carina believed, and Mallory felt instinctively that it was a belief so firmly rooted that no power on earth could shake it, or diminish her devotion to her Faith. She was young, but her character was quite formed; she had the poise, the assurance of a much older woman. And this very religion had gone to the forming of her. It was part of her daily life. Marriage could effect no change there. And marriage would bring this thing into his house, in all its power. You could not separate Carina from her religion. He knew now why there had always seemed to him something unusual about her, some touch of the unaccustomed. . . .

A restlessness came over him. . . . He longed to get up and go away. The very atmosphere of the church, surcharged with something he could not understand, disturbed him. He ought not to have come. He was submitting himself without adequate cause to the proverbial "fascination of Rome." He ought to have left Carina at the door and gone to a Protestant church in Lintown. But all through his dealings with Carina Ramsden, he had shown himself a weak fool.

When Mass was over, he followed her out of the church. At the door she paused, dipped her finger in the stoup of holy-water, and crossed herself, genuflecting as she did so toward the Altar.

"Just a turn by the sea. It's quite early, you know," said Mallory, as he helped her into the car. "I must say this for your service, it is short enough." There was a slight constraint in his voice.

Carina acquiesced. He turned down a road that led to the sea. There was a faint haze still on the horizon, but the sea was deeply blue and the little waves scarcely broke as they touched the sands in

silver ripples of light. The tide was nearly at its ebb. The salt fragrance of the air was delicious.

Mallory pulled up the car.

"Isn't this topping? Do you care for the sea? I used to keep a yacht when I was a youngster—I'd start one again if you liked it!"

"No—I like watching the sea, but I'm miserable on it," she said.

Clearly the events of the morning had in no way diminished his desire to marry her.

There was a pause, then he said humbly:

"When do you think you'll be able to give me an answer?"

Carina waited a moment. Then she said: "I'd rather you knew first exactly what marrying a Catholic entails. You could see the priest here some day and ask him. You would have to make sacrifices," she added, "and it's only fair that you should know exactly what they are."

Mallory felt a little chill of dismay. "Sacrifices?" he repeated. The word had for him an ominous, sinister sound.

"Yes. Any priest will tell you what the conditions are. When you know, you can come and ask me to marry you. And if you don't come—"

He turned toward her eagerly. "If I don't come?"

"I shall perfectly understand the reason," answered Carina coldly.

"And supposing I did come, would there be any hope for me?" he asked. His voice was rough and strained with emotion. For of course he would come. Nothing on earth could prevent him. Nothing—nothing. . . . He wasn't certainly going to jib at this last fence.

"I think—perhaps yes," said Carina.

Jim lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it.

"I should like to know exactly how matters stand," said Lady Murray, following her niece into her bedroom after luncheon that day.

She was in no sense Carina's guardian, for Alfred Ramsden had left his girls perfectly independent of any exterior control after they had reached the age of eighteen years. But she was her aunt and her nearest relation, and if she had no authority she still considered that she possessed certain rights. It was under her roof that Carina had first met Mallory, and considering all things the affair had advanced with considerable rapidity. There had been something in Mallory's manner to the girl during luncheon that had certainly suggested a change in their mutual relations. It had been not exactly possessive, but it had held a touch of intimacy, almost of tenderness, just as if she were very dear to him and he didn't care who knew it.

Carina took up a brush and began to smooth back her red-gold crop with decided energy.

"Sit down, dear Aunt Nora," she said coaxingly.

After all, there was no real reason why she shouldn't relate all the happenings of the morning to her aunt.

Lady Murray sat down and waited for Carina to speak again. She felt sure now that Jim had spoken, and she was eager to learn what Carina's reply had been.

"I've told Mr. Mallory he can ask me again to be his wife when he knows exactly what marrying a Catholic entails. If you ask me, I don't believe that he knows much about it, and I haven't the smallest doubt that it'll put him off altogether."

Lady Murray gave a little gasp. "Oh, then he *has* asked you?"

"Yes. But I couldn't take advantage of his igno-

rance. He is perfectly free, and so am I. If he finds things too difficult he won't come back and I shall quite understand."

"My dear, you take it very calmly," said Lady Murray.

"Aunt Nora, I'm not a baby. I see that life is often very complicated, and that we ought to face it quite frankly. It's a mistake to look at marriage only from a sentimental point of view."

Lady Murray regarded her niece with a certain admiration. She was showing considerable wisdom and prudence; she was managing Jim to perfection.

"I'm sure that Jim's devoted to you," she said, remembering with what a strange tenderness his eyes had rested upon Carina during luncheon.

"Yes. I think he is. Did you know his first wife well, Aunt Nora?"

"No—not well. I think I only saw her twice. She was such an invalid, you know. I wonder it didn't wear him to a shadow, poor fellow."

"I feel sorry for her," said Carina thoughtfully; "he told me that he hadn't always been kind to her. He seemed to feel remorse about it. Do you think he's very hard?"

"No. But he's self-willed and determined, and rather despotic. I like those qualities in a man," said Lady Murray, who had, however, taken good care that her own husband should not possess them.

"It depends," said Carina, who was less certain of her own admiration for them. They might bruise you, she felt, if encountered at close quarters. And Jim had the physical strength which, combined with an iron will, can easily degenerate into brutality. Carina had felt his power; it had given her an uncomfortable little thrill from time to time. Especially when he had spoken with such calm complacency of having thrashed Peter for his rudeness.

If she had been less indifferent to him, she might even have feared him. Love for Jim Mallory was bound to be touched strongly by fear. That soft, yielding humble attitude of his wasn't likely to last.

"He said that he'd punished Peter severely for being so rude that day. When he told me, he gave me the impression that he could be—cruel." Carina paused before using the word.

"Nonsense, my dear. From what I saw of Peter, I'm sure it was most necessary. And they're devoted to each other—everyone says so."

Carina went on brushing her hair vigorously and in silence. She was looking at the matter this way and that, wishing that she knew her own mind more surely. She could see the good in Jim and the bad, and felt perplexed by the clearness of her own vision. She said at last:

"I've always felt if I ever married, it would be someone more of my own age—of my own tastes. We should be companions, both doing our work, and then enjoying our leisure together. Perhaps we shouldn't be very well off, but we should be happy, travelling about. I'm afraid, though I love Linfold, that I should feel cooped up here."

Lady Murray secretly considered that it would be the very best thing in the world for Carina to be cooped up. She had had quite enough of that restless, unsettled, roving life.

"You mustn't think I don't like Mr. Mallory, because I do," continued Carina. "I like him better than any man I've ever seen. His possessions don't really attract me—I've never wanted to be fixed always in one place. But I do like him," she repeated, "and I should be sorry if he found the conditions too difficult, and didn't come back." She made the confession with a perfect simplicity.

"Oh, he'll come back—you needn't be in the least

afraid," Lady Murray reassured her. "He's desperately in love with you. It seems an absurd thing to say of a man of his age, but he really seemed to fall in love with you at first sight. I'm very glad, Carina. I want you to be happy."

"That's very sweet of you, Aunt Nora. But I'm not sure that even if I do marry him it will bring me happiness."

"Oh, you mustn't let yourself have such gloomy doubts," said Lady Murray. "Often, the way wants a little smoothing at first. And there are obstacles, though not very insuperable ones. Your being so much younger—his having that great son—and then your religion. . . . But Jim evidently means to make the best of it, and you must help him to do so."

Carina laid down the brush.

"Richard Grove told me not to spoil my beautiful life. He was thinking of Mr. Mallory when he said it, I'm quite sure. What do you think he meant?"

"Oh, Richard's the most unpractical old dear in the world. And I don't believe he'd think anyone good enough for you, Carina. I shouldn't listen to Richard Grove if I were you, except when he gives you advice about your books."

It was very tactless of Richard to talk like that. Lady Murray felt seriously annoyed with him.

CHAPTER IX

MALLORY was nowhere to be seen on the following morning, nor had he overnight made any plans for amusing his guests, who were invited to remain at least until Wednesday at Linfold. Whether they did so or not must depend, Lady Murray felt, upon the result of Jim's inquiries into the conditions exacted to obtain the necessary dispensation for a mixed marriage. Should there be any hitch, it would certainly be impossible to remain at Linfold, and the situation was already, in her opinion, quite awkward and embarrassing enough. Here were Jim and Carina not yet engaged but still seriously thinking of marrying each other, and she a guest in his house.

Seeing her niece sitting in the garden under the shade of the great cedars on the lawn, she went out to join her.

"Where's Jim?" she asked.

Carina looked up from her book.

"I really don't know. I haven't seen him to-day. He went off quite early, but Sophia says he often goes into Lintown on Monday morning."

"Is he expected back to luncheon?"

"He said nothing about what time he would be back. If you want to know anything more, you must ask Sophia!"

"I really think we'd better decide to go back to town to-morrow, and not see Jim again while the whole thing is in abeyance."

"Very well, Aunt Nora. I'm sure I don't want to stay here."

"That is nonsense. It's delightful here, and we shall be simply baked in London." Lady Murray looked regretfully at the distant blue line of sea, glimmering between the trees. "Of course, I know it's a very trying position for you, my dear—this not knowing whether a man means to marry you or not."

"Thank you, darling Aunt Nora—I'm not worrying about it. It's really, if you come to think of it, much more awkward for Mr. Mallory than for me. I shan't break my heart if it comes to nothing, though I did give a sort of half promise yesterday."

Perhaps it had been a relief to her to have these few hours for further consideration of a matter of such enormous importance. She wanted solitude just then, much more than she wanted Jim. His presence would have been almost an intrusion.

He did not return to luncheon, and they sat down to that meal without him. Lady Murray was perplexed at his continued absence, but Carina accepted it with a kind of indolent indifference. Her aunt, always a reliable and fluent conversationalist, discoursed pleasantly upon neutral topics to Sophia Mallory. Carina was *distracte*, and ate little. She felt tolerably certain now, that Jim had gone to Lintown to see a priest and perhaps to consult his lawyer. She wondered why her aunt and Sophia had failed to place this obvious interpretation upon his absence. The thought that even now he might be weighing the matter in the scales of prudence and love, made her feel restless. She had declared that her heart would not be broken if it came to nothing, but on the other hand she felt that if Jim went quite away out of her life, things would never seem exactly the same again.

She was thankful when the meal was over and she could escape up to her room. She disliked the

feeling that Sophia was observing her narrowly, closely, with hard vigilant eyes. She felt like a child, when Sophia looked at her thus. She knew she was wondering what Jim could possibly see in her.

A sort of anguish of impatience came over her, a desire at any rate to know the worst. No, his decision was no longer a matter of complete indifference to her. If he came to the conclusion that his only course was to stifle this love of his and take leave of her permanently, aghast at the barriers he must necessarily overpass in order to win her, she made up her mind that she would return to Rome. She had friends there, and it was an atmosphere peculiarly adapted to her work. There was a suggestion of exile about the life in Italy that bestowed a certain leisure, a certain freedom, too, in forming and arranging existence on pleasant lines. The thought was not without attraction. But would freedom ever seem quite so sweet a thing again? Something of its rare savor would surely have departed. . . .

She shook herself free from those thoughts; they threatened to sap that high courage of hers. She sat by the window and gazed at the beautiful summer landscape outspread before her—the waving cornfields, the dark shadows of the woods, the far blue line of sea. Northward the Downs lifting their bold outlines.

Presently she saw a fine cloud of dust drifting along the road that ran to Lintown. In a few minutes Jim's car turned in at the gates and came swiftly along the avenue toward the house. He was driving very rapidly, almost as if he had been a messenger bringing important news. It was too far off, however, for her to catch a glimpse of his face.

Carina trembled a little with excitement. Doubts

assailed her. She told herself that she was not the right wife for him, that she didn't love him enough, that she could never make him happy. And yet the thought of losing him altogether, pierced her heart with something like sorrow. Perhaps half-unconsciously she was beginning to care for him, was suffering herself to be captured by those powerful hands, that dominating personality. She resisted the thought. She was so free, that the prospect of any kind of captivity was distasteful to her.

A servant knocked at the door. "If you please, miss, her ladyship would like to speak to you in the library."

"Tell her I'm coming."

Carina rose, glanced at herself in the mirror, and went downstairs. It was unlike Lady Murray not to come and seek her in her room. Probably, however, Jim was there too, and wished her aunt to be present at this—perhaps the final—interview. But when she opened the door of the library, she saw that Jim was alone. He was standing near the window, holding some letters in his hand.

"Isn't Aunt Nora here? She sent a message that she wanted to speak to me."

"She's gone out in the garden with Sophia. . . ."

"I must go and find her," said Carina.

Jim took her hand and held it. "No—it was I who wanted you," he said. "She sent up that message because I asked her to." He looked down at Carina's white troubled face under its shining mass of clipped red-gold hair.

She was beautiful and bewildering. She had made a slave of him. For her sake he was going to do mad things that would have a dreadful permanence. But he could not let her go, spurred as he was to do so by the vision of his own imprudence, his own folly. Even now, he only feared to lose her.

While he held her hand thus, he felt that he could face all possibilities for her sake.

"Carina, I've been into Lintown to-day and I've seen the priest."

"Yes?"

"He told me exactly what I should have to promise before you could obtain a dispensation for making a mixed marriage."

She was silent. Mallory had emerged from that interview with a passionate and bitter resentment against the priest who had told him in perfectly plain language what would be expected of him, as well as against the Catholic Church, the Vatican, the whole world of Papal influence. He had the feeling too that he had come into contact with something of immovable, adamant quality. Something stronger, more powerful than himself. Something that would engulf the very children that might be born to him. Something that was not of a day nor of an hour, but could stretch its rights into the far future, influencing perhaps countless lives that were as yet unborn. He had been forced to envisage this tremendous power for the first time. And knowing nothing of its holiness, its divinely appointed prerogatives, its spiritual beauty, its irrefragable Truth carried white and unstained through the ages, through nearly two thousand years of triumphant changelessness, its secure means to lead men to future salvation and eternal happiness—knowing nothing of all these things, Jim Mallory saw in it only something cruel and violent in its sway, that forced even an outsider like himself to yield to its mandates.

When he left the Presbytery he told himself that to make such sacrifices, to agree to such conditions, were for him morally impossible actions. He had no right to make such promises on behalf of innocent unborn children. It was his clear duty to banish the

thought of this marriage from his mind, and never willingly to see Carina again when once she had left Linfold. She had been right and wise to leave him perfectly free. She had foreseen his difficulties, perhaps she had even realized that she couldn't expect him to make such sacrifices for her. And then, suddenly, as he had walked away down the street toward the garage where he had left his car, he seemed to see Carina's face uplifted toward his own. He loved her, he couldn't let her go. He would promise . . . anything . . . He was only afraid that she might even now refuse to marry him.

When she came into the room, looking very calm and tranquil, as if unconscious of the fierce struggle that was only now ceasing to be waged within him, all desire to continue the conflict left him. He held out his arms.

"I'm ready to promise everything," he said. "Will you be my wife, Carina?"

His arms were round her now; he drew her close to his breast.

"Yes," said Carina.

The engagement was announced without delay, to Lady Murray and Sophia. The one was genuinely delighted, congratulating herself upon having so successfully engineered the whole business from start to finish. The other was much less enthusiastic, and while coldly polite to the aunt and niece, allowed herself to tell Jim curtly in private, that "she hoped he knew what he was doing." Jim, who knew it only too well, was annoyed at being thus reminded of his imprudence by Sophia. Her words gave his already sore conscience a hard stab. The bitter little struggle had left its mark upon him; his gaiety had vanished; he was very serious indeed.

"I wonder what Peter will say," pursued Sophia.

The brother and sister were sitting alone in the drawing-room before dinner. It was the first opportunity Sophia had had of speaking to him alone.

"I'm not in the habit of asking Peter's permission," said Jim, frowning.

"No, I suppose not. But you've always encouraged him to give his opinion much too freely. I always thought it was very injudicious! When do you intend to be married, Jim?"

"That rests with Miss Ramsden. We haven't discussed dates yet. But I hope it will be as soon as possible—in a few weeks. There's nothing to wait for."

His heavy black brows almost met across his face.

"You know each other so little, that I don't think it would do either of you any harm to wait," said Sophia.

She was three years older than Jim, and was the only person in the world who dared to advise him or remonstrate with him.

Jim had never shrunk so from her frankness as he did that evening. He felt that she was going to tell him it was very wrong of him to marry a Roman Catholic, and promise that his children—if there were any—should be brought up in their mother's Faith.

It seemed to him that he was doomed to tread a path of sharp swords to gain Carina, and he was already being wounded sorely enough in the process without any remonstrance from Sophia.

But it was worth it, he told himself now, when he thought of that moment when he had held out his arms to Carina, and she had come close to him and he had kissed her.

Sophia rose and went to the window.

"It's all been so very precipitate," she said, in her pleasant bass voice, "that I hope the proverb won't be fulfilled in your case. Miss Ramsden may look like a child, but she's a spoilt child and a wilful child, or I never saw one. And you won't find her nearly so easy to manage as poor little Iris!"

Jim was fortunately spared the trouble of uttering the angry reply that rose to his lips, for at that moment Lady Murray and Carina came into the room.

"We are going back to town to-morrow," Lady Murray announced, "so you'll let us have the car early, won't you, Jim?"

His face fell. "Oh, I hoped you'd stay on," he said, looking at Carina.

Peter would be away for at least another week, and he did not relish the idea of a *tête-à-tête* with Sophia under the circumstances. She would never let him forget the folly and imprudence he was about to commit. And it would be hateful without Carina! . . .

He must have a talk with Lady Murray alone and see if he could not induce her to change her mind and postpone their departure for a few days.

CHAPTER X

LADY MURRAY was obdurate upon the matter of their immediate departure from Linfold. Jim could come up and stay with them in a few days if he liked. But they had to make plans for the summer, and there was no time to be lost.

Jim remonstrated. Why couldn't they spend the summer at Linfold? Why must Carina go away at all? He wanted to be married as soon as possible—the first week in September. There was simply nothing to wait for. . . .

Lady Murray was unmoved by these appeals.

"You can't possibly be married until after Peter's holidays," she reminded him. "Why don't you take him to Norway as you thought of doing? If Carina is to be married as soon as October, she will have a great deal to do."

"As soon as October?" he repeated gloomily. "Why, that is simply ages! I wanted to have it in September."

In the rapid survey of his plans he had set his son ruthlessly on one side. Peter could stay at Linfold with Sophia. Or he could pay visits—he often went to Scotland with one of his friends. Mallory had never kept him tied to his side all through the summer holidays. There was no reason why this year—

"Well, in any case Carina couldn't be ready by September," said Lady Murray.

There was nothing left but to approach Carina herself, which he did early the next morning, follow-

ing her into the garden directly she appeared after breakfast.

September. . . . It must really be in September. He couldn't wait a day longer than the first week in September. . . .

Carina was slightly astonished at his impetuosity. She herself would have been quite content to wait a year before marrying Jim. When she had promised to be his wife, the thought that he would wish the marriage to take place almost immediately had never occurred to her.

"Your aunt says it's impossible—that you'll have so much to do. You had much better make up your mind to do it after we're married. You can get all the frocks and hats you want afterward. . . ."

His face wore a tormented look.

"Aunt Nora is quite right," said Carina, who had discussed the whole question with her aunt before retiring to bed on the preceding night. "It can't possibly take place before October, if then. I'd rather wait till next spring myself."

"Next spring!" His tone suggested both incredulity and dismay.

"And then you said you were going to take Peter to Norway this summer!"

"But that's all off. I shouldn't dream of going there now!"

"Won't Peter be disappointed?"

"You mustn't expect me to consult Peter's feelings now."

"But don't you see," said Carina very quietly, "that you ought to consult them more than ever, because things will never be quite the same for him again? You must make his last holidays alone with you very, very happy ones."

"Must I?" But the sombre look passed, and he was able to smile.

"I shouldn't give up Norway if I were you. I'm going to make Aunt Nora come with me to a very quiet little place in Cornwall. So you wouldn't see me in any case. . . ."

"Not see you? All the summer?" he demanded.

"Well, probably not all through this month and September. In October we shall be back in London."

"Do you mean that I shan't see you for two months?" asked Mallory. He stared at her in reproachful astonishment.

"But afterward, Jim, you'll see me for such ages and ages!"

"Carina, I don't believe you care a hang about me!"

"But I've promised to marry you. Isn't that a proof?"

"But your banishing me like this!"

"I think I want to be alone—quite alone. Aunt Nora doesn't count—we're so accustomed to each other. I want to think things over. It's all been so sudden."

"But surely you'll let me run down and see you when you're in Cornwall? Cornwall isn't the end of the world!"

"I'd rather you didn't. Go to Norway with Peter. . . . And, Jim—"

"Yes, Carina?"

She put out her hand and touched his.

"Be very kind to Peter," she said softly. "This is going to hurt him, you know."

Jim was silent. She was right, and he knew it, but she should not wish or expect him to be unselfish just now. It argued such a lack of enthusiasm on her part to go and bury herself in Cornwall in this way, endeavoring at the same time to banish him to Norway. They could have spent the summer so happily at Linfold together, with Lady Murray.

He had hoped for some assistance from Carina, but alas, she was just as decisive as her aunt upon the subject.

He went with them to Lintown, saw them off in the train, and promised to come up for a few days on the following Friday.

Fortunately for his peace of mind, he never guessed that the Cornwall plan had emanated entirely from Carina's brain. She must snatch these last few weeks of liberty and leisure to finish a book begun last winter. Richard must release her from her promise to rest for a couple of months; he would certainly be reasonable when he learned of the change in her prospects.

Carina said nothing of this intention to Mallory. She rightly divined that he didn't care about her work, and with keen intuition she had discerned the fact that he preferred not to hear too much about the novels.

"Don't mention it to Jim," said Carina to her aunt after the train had started. "But I do so want these two months to myself so that I may finish my book. You know, I haven't touched it since last winter. But if I work hard I can easily finish it in two months. As long," and she smiled, "as Jim doesn't take it into his head to come down. That's partly why I urged him so to go to Norway."

"You are singularly free from sentiment," said Lady Murray, with a touch of asperity. "Most women at such a time wouldn't have thought about their work."

"I wish I could forget it!" said Carina impulsively. "You know, it's my master now, not my servant. I believe I should be ill if anything prevented me from writing when I wanted to!"

"In the future I hope you will realize you will only have one master," said Lady Murray.

Carina flushed a little. She was somewhat afraid of envisaging that fact too closely. She knew this humble, pleading phase of Jim's couldn't possibly last. There would come a time when his iron will would assert itself. She thought it unkind of Lady Murray to remind her of that just now.

Lady Murray looked at her niece. Such a strange, brilliant, gifted creature, yet how unlike the normal woman who had just become engaged to be married! She ought to be thinking of Jim now to the exclusion of almost everything else, and yet she was deliberately putting him and his concerns on one side for at least two months. Sending him off to Norway with Peter in this high-handed fashion. It was enough to complete the disillusionment of a sensitive man! She wondered a little that Jim had submitted so tamely. But there it was—he wasn't sure of Carina. Where was the iron will which had ground down his first wife into hysterical submission according to the approved legend? There was no trace of it in this meek yielding man. He must be desperately in love, and desperately afraid of losing Carina! And the little minx was perfectly conscious of her own power. . . .

They took a furnished cottage in Cornwall, near the sea. It stood in a retired situation in its own garden, where palms and subtropical plants flourished with unusual success. From the south windows they could see the great island shape of St. Michael's Mount, and the low shore stretching away beyond Penzance to Newlyn. There was a little summer-house in the garden, and Carina's first work was to furnish it as a study, and here she wrote diligently from morning to night. She went to Mass early in Penzance almost every day, though Lady Murray considered the walk too long for her, especially as

she was fasting at that hour. But Carina clung to the practice of her religion in those days, as perhaps she had never done before. It may have been that she wished to strengthen herself for those coming days when it would be far more difficult for her to practice it at all. There was no Catholic church within easy reach of Linfold. Lintown was eight miles away, and she would have to go in the car. Perhaps some day she would be able to persuade Jim to let her have a chapel in the house. She had often thought how beautiful it would be to start a Mission somewhere in England, to light a lamp before a new Tabernacle where since the days of the Reformation none had ever burned before! There was something entrancing to Carina about this idea; she let her mind dwell upon it. Jim, loving her, would learn also to love what was so dear to her. He would not deny her anything that was necessary for her happiness. The fact that he was so ready to make the promises exacted from him seemed to indicate a lack of prejudice on his part that augured well for the future. Linfold would be perfect when it had a chapel. . . .

Carina was a very industrious worker when the fit was on her; the spells of intervening idleness—never so very long in her case—seemed to prepare her for an outburst of fierce, concentrated energy. Lady Murray, who had never before seen her niece at work, was often astonished at the tireless industry she displayed. But this new knowledge served to diminish her hopeful view of the marriage. Jim would certainly dislike to see his wife periodically immersed in oceans of ink! Didn't Stevenson say that authors should never marry, adducing excellent reasons in support of this theory? Didn't Mrs. Carlyle complain of her spouse that he was "gey ill to live wi'?" This unrestrained and passionate absorption seemed to augur less than well for the future

conjugal peace of Linfold. Lady Murray had her moments of feeling an excessive compassion for Jim Mallory. And he wouldn't be likely to put his foot down. He was weak with Carina. He wasn't sure of her. . . . Poor Jim! . . .

Jim was in Norway with Peter. They were fishing, and enjoying themselves—at least Peter was—immensely. He wrote regularly. Carina's answers were necessarily brief. From Mallory's point of view her letters were decidedly unsatisfactory. They showed signs of haste, of preoccupation. He returned to England just before the close of Peter's holidays, and as soon as possible travelled down to Cornwall without saying a word to Carina of his advent. He felt that he must see her. He didn't care if he were welcome or not. Anything was better than to risk being told categorically not to come.

Lady Murray had made plans for leaving Cornwall on the last day of September. She and Carina were to proceed to Paris almost at once to buy clothes. Most of the trousseau had been ordered before they left for the country. Only the actual dresses were to be left to the last, as by that time the autumn fashions would have declared themselves.

Lady Murray was giving Carina her trousseau, so that her wishes in the matter had to be consulted.

The day of Jim's unexpected appearance was very wet. Carina had carried her work up to her bedroom, and was engaged in correcting side by side the typed copies of her new novel,—a process that she always found particularly arduous and trying. It was nearly finished, but she was feeling exhausted and slightly irritable, from the strenuous effort involved.

The truth was, that she had been working against time, cramming the work of six months into less than

two. The strain had told upon her, and sleepless nights had washed all the color from her cheeks and painted bluish shadows under her eyes. Lady Murray had just been congratulating herself that Jim couldn't see her niece in that state, when he was announced.

Carina went reluctantly downstairs. She had forgotten to brush her hair, and it was slightly dishevelled. There were little stains of ink on her fingers. She looked worn out, yet with the visible contentment of accomplishment upon her.

It came into her mind then with a sort of dismay that Jim, standing there large and powerful before her, didn't seem half so real to her as the imaginary persons of the little drama she had just completed.

His attitude was reproachful. She saw that she would have to confess how the two months had been spent.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming?"

They were alone, Lady Murray having judged it better to depart when her niece appeared.

"Because I was afraid you'd tell me not to," said Jim.

"I certainly should have. I'm still tremendously busy."

"Busy? What on earth can you find to do in this dead-alive hole? And in such a muggy climate too!"

There was a hint of jealous suspicion in his manner. Carina perceiving it hastened to allay it.

"I've been finishing my book."

His relief was quite comically apparent. "You've been writing, then, all this time? No wonder your letters were so short! But why didn't you tell me?"

"I had an idea you didn't care about it," said Carina frankly, "but I'm too much of a business woman not to finish what I've begun. And, besides, I'd promised my publishers this book before the end

of the year. I wasn't sure I should have time to do it after we were married."

"I shall hope not, indeed," said Mallory. "And my darling, do remember there's no earthly need for you to work now. You look like a ghost—I'm sure it's very bad for you."

"Oh, I'm always like this when I've just about finished. You shouldn't have come for another week, Jim. I've been rather rushed, and Richard hasn't been through it yet. I wrote to him yesterday to say it would be finished soon."

"Do you mean you're going to let him read it?"

"Oh, yes—I thought you knew. He always goes through my books with a blue pencil!" She made a little grimace.

Mallory was ignorant of the strain involved by imaginative effort of a prolonged and sustained kind. He could only see its present effects upon Carina, and he resented the fact that she should have reduced herself to this white and exhausted condition.

"I hope to goodness your contract is fulfilled and that I shan't have you looking like this again." His tone was very possessive, as if he already had the right to exercise authority over her.

"Yes—this contract for three books is finished. I expect Swaine will want to make another if this is a success."

Mallory was silent for a moment. But he was wise enough to see that Carina was just then absorbed in her work and career as a novelist. When once she was his wife it would be easier to eliminate that restless ambition of hers from her life. She would have other duties, he reflected, such as inevitably fall to the lot of a woman whose husband is the possessor of large estates. Linfold Park was to be restored to its ancient brilliancy and splendor.

Carina would have little time and, he hoped, little inclination for the production of novels.

"Well, don't be in a hurry to undertake fresh obligations," he said. "You want a long rest, Carina. And I shouldn't like it, you know, if you were to shut yourself up for weeks at a time to finish a book after we're married."

"I thought that perhaps at first you mightn't like it," she admitted.

She wondered if Jim would make very heavy demands upon her time. Yet, surely, many married women had written novels, without neglecting or estranging their husbands. There was Mrs. Gaskell, for instance. . . . But then there was also Charlotte Brontë, who in the nine months of her married life had found leisure only in which to accomplish a few pages. Arthur Nicholls hadn't liked his wife to write. . . . It was as a woman, not as a novelist, that he had loved her. . . . When, however, she remembered the episode of his standing, shaking and crying at the gate of Haworth Parsonage one night, because he wasn't allowed to marry Charlotte, Carina was inclined to think that Mrs. Nicholls might have exercised her undoubted influence to better effect.

"How is Peter?" she asked suddenly.

"Oh, Peter's very fit, thanks. He went back to Eton yesterday."

"He knows, of course?"

"Yes. I told him directly we got back from Norway." He had kept silence on the subject until then, not wishing to spoil the boy's holidays by a premature disclosure of matrimonial plans.

"Does he mind very much, Jim?" she asked anxiously.

Jim frowned so that his heavy black brows met across his face.

"If he does, the sooner he learns not to, the better for his own sake," he observed.

"I hope you were—kind to him?"

"Yes—if you really wish to know—I was very kind."

"I'm glad of that. For you see, Jim, I've been thinking about it a great deal, and I've made up my mind to try and win Peter's affection. I don't want him to feel less dear because of me, but more dear."

I've made up my mind to try and win Peter's affection. . . . Jim could not imagine why those words of Carina's, uttered with all her unconscious sweetness, should yet strike so ominously upon his ear. She was aware perhaps of her power to subdue, and she was going to use this power deliberately to bring Peter to her feet. And then? . . . All his old fears concerning Peter rushed back to him. What if she used that very power to influence and proselytize? He himself had come under Carina's spell, had learned what it could mean, a subtle potent thing against which he had struggled in vain. Peter, for all his manliness, his proficiency in games, his inherited sporting proclivities, was a sensitive boy of ardent and susceptible temperament. His hatred of Carina—for it amounted at present to actual hatred—might change into the dogged devotion, the sentimental hero-worship of the adolescent. He might yield himself up to the spell as completely as his father had done, and follow whithersoever Carina beckoned. That was not what Jim wished to bring about. He desired no intimacy between these two; he feared Carina's spiritual ascendancy far too much for that. He only asked of Peter perfect courtesy and friendliness where his young stepmother was concerned. And he was prepared, if that courtesy were not soon forthcoming, to en-

force it by sharp physical measures. But he did not want Carina to win Peter's affection, Peter's love. There was a tinge of jealousy as well as of anxiety in Jim's attitude. The boy was wholly his; he could permit no interference where his training of him was concerned. Peter's devotion must continue to be concentrated upon himself, a devotion mixed with wholesome fear. He was averse to the thought that any part of it should be deflected by Carina. These two persons must occupy, so to speak, separate compartments in his own life. Intimacy between them was not desirable.

But Jim's great fear was that Carina might attempt to convert Peter to her own religion. That was the worst contingency of all; it seemed to Mallory that there was something truly unbearable in the thought. . . .

Coming back to her after two months' absence, he felt that her hold over him was ten times stronger, her appeal ten times more irresistible, than these had been when they parted. He realized their effect with a kind of dismay. She influenced him to such an extent that his love triumphed over his judgment at every turn. To win her, he was prepared to give those safeguards demanded by her Church for the benefit of children yet unborn. He was exposing Peter at a highly susceptible age to a dangerous, powerful, spiritual influence. Already he was forming plans to counteract that influence, to watch his son lest he should show signs of succumbing to it, just as he was planning to restrain Carina from literary work after her marriage. Yet there was a quality in her love for him which, he felt, would militate against all his efforts to restrain or mold her. She loved him, he truly believed, but it was love of a very sober kind. It had nothing of the trembling worship of Iris's love during the first years

of their married life. And because of that something lacking in Carina's love, Jim felt she would always contrive to get her own way, and that he would inevitably show a weak soft side to her. It was only when he thought of Peter that his will, in imagination, asserted itself. . . .

He was certainly not going to have any nonsense with Peter. He was prepared to be kind and just, but he would treat any disposition to run after strange gods with the maximum of severity. Carina would surely desist when she saw that it meant trouble for Peter. . . .

"I'm sure Peter will be all right directly he knows you, Carina," he said, dismissing these uncomfortable reflections from his mind, "but you mustn't expect me to stand too much from him. I suppose he's getting to a troublesome age."

"I feel," said Carina, "that one can't be kind and loving enough to children. They're so inexperienced, so bewildered, so easily hurt."

"Yes, my dear, that's all very well, but Peter isn't a child. He's nearly fifteen, and in some ways he's old for his age."

"Most only sons would feel having a stepmother at first."

"Yes. I realize that. You mustn't think I'm a brute to Peter. Most people think I spoil him. Let's go out, Carina. It isn't raining, and I want to look at your view. It's years since I was down in this part of the world."

They stepped out into the moist garden where the great hydrangea bushes still showed a profusion of blossom, white, pink, and delphinium-blue. There were hedges of fuchsia and veronica, tall palms, masses of scarlet geranium, bushes of camellia and myrtle, and great clumps of Michælmass daisies.

Between the trees Mount's Bay showed its line of gleaming silver.

Carina wore no hat, and the light wind from the sea ruffled her thick, short, heavy hair. She was dressed very simply in a grey cotton frock that hung loosely about her figure.

"You're much too pale. You shouldn't work so hard. And it isn't as if there were any real necessity," said Jim.

"But I don't work only for the money, though once that was very useful. I work because I love it." Her grey-green eyes shone. "And then I simply had to finish. A few days in bed will set me up completely."

"Oh, I was hoping to persuade you to come back with me to Linfold for a bit. I do miss you so much, Carina."

"It wouldn't be possible now, Jim. You see, perhaps Richard may come over on Saturday to run through the book. I'm expecting an answer from him. And then I positively must rest for a few days. I couldn't always manage it in Mary's lifetime, though I felt the need of it terribly, and that's why the strain was so great." She paused. "And then we're going over to Paris to buy things. You wouldn't like a dowdy wife, would you, Jim?"

"You look topping as you are. I've never seen you in grey before. You ought always to wear it. . . . Shall you be ready by the middle of October, Carina?"

"Oh, not nearly. Wouldn't November do, Jim?"

"No, it wouldn't," he said; "I'm not going to wait a day longer than October. About a month from now. . . ."

"Very well," she said. "Isn't St. Michael's Mount looking lovely to-day?"

"Very lovely. . . . Have you thought about a church yet?"

"Oh, the Oratory, of course. I always go there."

Jim fixed his eyes upon the bay. It was silver in the sunlight, flat and shining, like a polished shield. Its surface was scarcely wrinkled. The sails of some fishing-boats hung there quite motionlessly. The Mount rose grim, abrupt, massive from the water.

The Oratory. . . . Ah, there it was again, like a knife leaping up to strike him. Peter would of course want to be there.

"Do you like this place? Have you been happy here?" he asked.

"Very happy. I'm always happy when I'm working," she answered.

"But soon—you'll have other kinds of happiness."

"Yes," she assented.

He took her hand and held it. She had never seemed so far away—so little his. Even this touch of her brought her no nearer. She was like a delicious elfin thing, strayed out of another sphere, who had captured him against all the suggestions of reason, experience, and prudence.

It was hateful—this subtle mistrust of her, coupled with an adoration that possessed him utterly. Something of his very fear seemed to communicate itself to her, for she said suddenly:

"Jim—you've had time to think it all well over. Are you sure you're not making a mistake? I'm so unlike the woman you must have imagined you would one day marry."

"Yes, you are different. Perhaps that's why I love you so much."

"You might want to change me . . . and it wouldn't be easy, Jim."

"No—I shall never want to change you." He spoke with a strange emotion. To-day's visit had

sealed forever his love for her. She was more beautiful, more lovable, than she had been in all his dreams of her. For better or for worse, he was going through with this marriage.

"I'm sure tea must be ready. Shall we go in, Jim?"

He followed her into the house.

CHAPTER XI

CARINA led the way back into the small panclled drawing-room where they found Lady Murray.

"I've just had a telegram from Richard. He wants to come for the week-end."

She handed the orange-colored envelope to her niece, who glanced at its contents.

"How perfect!" she said; "I did so want to see him. I've felt more uncertain about this book than any I've ever written."

Mallory, seated with his back to the light, stirred restlessly. His brow was black as thunder. So she wanted Grove to come, and she had never expressed the slightest wish that he himself should visit her. She had never invited him to come, but she had invited Grove. She wanted his advice. He was to be permitted to look at her work. To judge it good or bad or merely indifferent. In this matter of her work Richard obviously enjoyed her complete confidence. Mallory could hardly conceal his jealous resentment of this intellectual intimacy.

Carina gave him a cup of tea.

"Milk and sugar? But of course I know! Lots of both. . . ." She smiled at him.

Mallory said curtly: "Thanks." He took the cup from her hand.

His face was rigid. He had the feeling, as he had often had before, that he was seeing Carina for the first time, and under a new aspect that fascinated him even while it made him furious. How her face had brightened as she read that telegram! She was

overjoyed at the prospect of seeing Grove. But it was surely ridiculous of him to feel so violently, savagely jealous of Grove! An absurd person who wore impossible collars and ties, and seemed serenely unaware of the fact. It had annoyed Mallory, even on the night of that now historic dinner-party, to observe the complacency of Grove, his perfect ease, his swift intelligent answers, his calm consciousness of fame. A classic in his own lifetime! But who read him now? Only the literary and the curious. And he was coming here for the week-end to go through Carina's book! . . .

The telephone bell rang. Carina rose and went out of the room. Lady Murray turned to Jim and said:

"It's a most fortunate thing that Richard could spare the time to come just now—he's always so busy! You know, he thinks all the world of Carina's work—he believes she has a great future. He trained her himself when she was quite young."

Mallory stirred restlessly in his chair.

"I'm hoping that Carina as my wife won't have much time for writing novels. There'll be no need for her to work now, thank heaven!"

"Oh, but she loves it, and she's such an industrious little person, she's sure to find time somehow," said Lady Murray, pleasantly. She was quite unaware of Jim's attitude toward the matter. "And when there's a gift—a creative gift—money becomes a secondary consideration. I don't deny that in Mary's lifetime it was a very important one for Carina. That last book did show signs of stress and fatigue—it would have been a wonder if it hadn't, considering the poor child could snatch so little sleep at night. All the same, Richard was very angry with her."

"What right had he to be angry?" demanded

Jim, with ill-suppressed passion.

Lady Murray was slightly startled.

"Oh, only the right of a master who sees his favorite pupil fall below her own high standard," she said, in unconscious imitation of Grove's own words.

"Well, this master and pupil business will have to stop when Carina's married." Jim's voice was sullen but determined. "I shan't care to have elderly mentors hanging about Linfold scolding her!"

"Oh, but you mustn't forget that he was a very old friend of her father's. My brother Alfred, you know—such a delightful whimsical creature!—was devoted to him."

This parenthetical description of Carina's father left Mallory cold. His mind was desperately and disquietingly occupied with Grove. Carina's half filial and wholly admiring attitude toward this grotesque elderly person annoyed him unspeakably. They could meet, too, on ground where he perceived it would be almost impossible for himself and Carina to meet without danger of quarrelling.

"But I'm sure you'll always find Carina ready to do exactly as you wish, Jim," said Lady Murray. "Of course you mustn't forget—especially at first—how free from control she's been for many years. But when she's fond of anyone, she'll do simply anything for them."

Jim smiled; he was slightly mollified by this aspect of the case. Lady Murray seemed so comfortingly assured that Carina *was* fond of him.

"There are several things I shall want her to do for me," he said, "but I'll try not to spring them all upon her at first. I'm afraid she may feel having less freedom with me than she had before. But I'll do my best to make her happy. I want her to be very happy," he added almost passionately.

"Oh, I'm sure you'll make her happy, Jim. It's

just what I've always wanted for her—that she should be happily married to someone she really cared for.”

Carina came back into the room, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shining.

“It was Richard,” she said; “he’s at Falmouth, staying with Norman Malcolmson—they’re collaborating over a play. And he’ll be here in time for lunch on Saturday.”

“I wish he would bring Mr. Malcolmson too. Such a witty creature!” observed Lady Murray.

“Oh, well, he could hardly do that. Our time’s so short as it is—we shall have to work hard.” She turned to Jim, unconscious of his slowly returning anger. “You know, I have to be very careful after *Love among the Ruins*. Richard told me I’d taken some of the oldest and most worn-out puppets out of the most banal of boxes, and peopled my book with them. I cried at the time!”

“I daresay he was quite wrong!” said Mallory, in a loud, violent tone. “I don’t suppose he’s any judge of modern work. He’s quite a Victorian. I wonder anyone can listen to a man who makes himself such a grotesque object!”

Both women were startled. Carina, who had had no inkling of his jealous resentment of Grove’s influence, flushed up to the roots of her hair. She felt almost as if Jim had struck her. . . . But the flush died away, leaving her paler than before. She did not answer, and the uncomfortable little pause that followed, produced an almost sinister impression upon her.

“Carina’s been brought up on Richard’s writings,” said Lady Murray, who was the first to recover her self-possession. “And we—who know him so well, Jim, and are aware of his greatness, his nobility, his kindness—well, we don’t think about his appearance

or his strange clothes.”

“You see, we are all hero-worshippers,” said Carina, in a low tone.

She had never seen Jim Mallory angry before, and all that she had heard of his treatment of Iris, combined with what he had himself told her of that treatment as well as of his severity toward Peter, rose up to her mind now in fierce testimony against him. She had felt afraid of him at that moment—an unpleasant experience, and one she did not wish to repeat. Her pleasure in Grove’s coming was smirched and soiled. She had been suddenly made aware of the fact that Richard’s promised visit was wholly unacceptable to Jim. Perhaps he was jealous of this old family friend. Perhaps he was angry because Richard encouraged her in her work. She felt that it would be more than ever necessary to keep that work in the background, never permitting it to obtrude. And then perhaps later on Jim wouldn’t mind it so much. . . .

Jim stayed to dinner, and then announced that he was going on to St. Ives to stay with a friend. He had come in the car, and St. Ives was but a short distance away. He hadn’t intended, he explained, to trespass upon Lady Murray’s hospitality, and to invite himself for the night.

It was at once a relief and a disappointment to Carina to learn that he was to leave them so soon. When her first astonishment at his unexpected arrival had subsided, she had felt pleasure in his company, was even very glad to see him again. But his outburst of temper had alarmed her. It had made her for the moment sharply regret her engagement. It seemed to blight and wither her affection for him. Perhaps her first instinct had been the right one. She ought never to have promised to marry him—she didn’t care for him enough. *Aimer c’est tout par-*

donner—and she hadn't found it easy to forgive those furious, contemptuous words of his when he had spoken of Grove. He had seemed to her then both jealous and petty.

Mallory was moodily absent-minded. He had recovered from his anger, and now felt miserably ashamed of the outburst. He was afraid too of its effect upon Carina. The day had been ruined by this prospective intrusion of Grove. . . .

It was soon after nine o'clock when he sent for the car to come round. There was a bright moon, and St. Michæl's Mount looked like a massive shadow dividing two pools of luminous silver. It was low tide, and from the gate they could see the moonlight gleaming upon the stone causeway that joined it to the mainland.

To Carina there was something mysterious about this ancient monastic fastness where once the Archangel Michæl had appeared to human eyes.

She and Jim stood side by side near the gate, looking out on to the Bay. Below in the road they could hear the throbbing of the engines. But now it had come to the point Jim seemed reluctant to leave her. In her white dress, silvered over by the moonlight, she seemed to form part of the intangible loveliness of the September night.

Suddenly he caught her by the arm and pulled her toward him. She was aware of his irresistible strength.

"You hurt me, Jim," she said, quietly disengaging herself.

"I'm sorry. . . . And I'm sorry that I've been so mad to-day. It must make you hate me. But I was jealous. . . . Jealous of Grove. I can't have him interfering!"

"He'll never dream of interfering—you needn't be afraid," said Carina, her indignation slightly

touched with scorn. "And as for being jealous of him, that would be absurd. He was my father's friend and he was older than my father. He was very, very kind to Mary and myself, and I can't forget that, Jim." There was a tinge of reproach in her voice now.

Again he said: "I'm sorry, Carina." The scorn and reproach in her tone had alike scourged him. "It was because you'd asked him to come here—and you'd never said a word about my coming. I had to take you by surprise to get a glimpse of you at all. Of course I know it would be absurd to be jealous, but I think I had every right to feel deeply hurt."

"I only asked Richard to come on account of my book. I thought I'd made that quite clear to you."

"I suppose I hate the thought of your being occupied with a book at such a time. So occupied that you could scarcely scribble me half a dozen lines!"

Carina sighed. She could not see that her actions had been unreasonable. She wished to fulfill her contract, and she had simply made use of these last few weeks of freedom to finish her book. All the rest of her life was to belong to Jim. She wondered now if he were going to prove jealous, petty, exacting.

"I hate leaving you like this. I feel you can't care for me any more. I know I lost my temper and said things I didn't mean to. But won't you forgive me before I go, Carina?"

He came up quite humbly to where she was standing, a little apart from him. Carina lifted her face to his.

"Of course I forgive you, Jim. Don't let's think any more about it."

He drew her to him very gently and kissed her. Carina submitted to the embrace, but she was cold

and unresponsive. Still, she couldn't let him go away feeling miserable and unforgiven.

"It's all because I love you so much. . . ." he whispered.

Carina did not speak. She looked at him with something of pity. He had that self-tormenting nature which is always such a misery to its possessor. Carina was herself quite without jealousy, nor did she ever suspect that affronts were intended when they most clearly were not.

"If I'd thought you wanted to come so very much, Jim, I should have written to ask you," she said, by way of comfort.

"But you *ought* to have known. Even if you hadn't wanted to see me, you ought to have realized I was waiting day after day for word to say that I might come."

"I'm so sorry, Jim. I ought to have thought of it," she said,

"You don't seem to realize—anything!" he declared.

She was patient, aware that her love had in his eyes been found wanting. Perhaps it was her way to take things too much for granted. She had accepted their new relation quite tranquilly, as if it had hardly touched her heart at all. And she had seemed to expect a like composure and indifference from him.

"Good-night, Jim. You must come and see us in London next week before we leave for Paris."

"May I, really?" he said.

"But of course. . . . And I'm so sorry about to-day. We won't think of it any more."

Jim kissed her again, and then went down the steep path to the road. Once he looked back, and she saw that he was smiling quite happily.

"Good-night, Carina!" he called out in a cheery tone.

"Good-night, Jim."

She waited there until the humming of the car had faded into silence as it sped rapidly along the road. Then she went slowly, thoughtfully, back to the house. In the veranda she saw Lady Murray evidently waiting for her.

"Your last words took a long time," she observed dryly.

"Yes," said Carina. "Did you see that I did anything to-day to offend Jim so desperately?"

"No. I'd no idea—till it was too late to give you a hint—that he was inclined to be jealous of Richard. Such an idea would never have entered my head—"

"I suppose it was only jealousy," said Carina. She was relieved to find that her aunt did not think she had been to blame.

"Well, you'll know that it's necessary to be careful in future," said Lady Murray, briskly.

She had felt half afraid that even now Carina might change her mind about marrying Jim. If ever a man had tried to ruin his own cause it was Mallory. She wished she had given him a few words of elderly advice; it was possible then that the little scene might have been averted.

Carina turned suddenly and flung her arms impetuously about her aunt's neck.

"Dear Aunt Nora, I simply hate being engaged," she said. "People always tell you it's such a happy time. And it isn't a bit!"

Having made this astounding confession she disappeared into the house, leaving Lady Murray to meditate upon the general perversity of men when in love. . . .

CHAPTER XII

“YOU’VE changed,” said Richard Grove.

He was looking at Carina through his enormous blue-tinged glasses.

Under this examination she moved a little restlessly. “It’s only because I’ve been writing against time. And I’m tired.”

“Why did you work against time, then? I’ve always warned you against doing that! It wouldn’t have killed either of you to postpone your marriage for a few months.” He glanced at the square heap of typewritten sheets in front of him.

“Jim didn’t want to wait. Why, he suggested September!”

“Do you always mean to do what Jim wants?” inquired Grove.

“I shall try,” said Carina hopefully.

“Does he know your books? Does he like them?”

“Oh, he doesn’t care for novels. I think he hopes that when I’m Mrs. James Mallory I shan’t have any time or wish to write!”

Grove heaved a sigh. “Oh, then he means to smother you?”

“Don’t let’s discuss it, Richard. You’d better go on with the book.”

“I think you are going to do a fool thing, Carina,” said Grove imperturbably. “You’re going to make a highly conventional marriage with a rich Philistine. Probably he’s thoroughly ashamed of your work. He’ll do his best to stop your ever writing again. He’ll make you bury your beautiful little talent in a napkin.”

"You're very gloomy to-day," said Carina, with an assumption of carelessness. She tried not to feel uneasy, but his words seemed to confirm the impressions she had received during Jim's brief, unsatisfactory visit.

"I shouldn't like to think your career was at an end at twenty-five," he said, still scrutinizing her. He felt anxious about her. She was looking neither well nor happy. And if she wasn't happy in this engagement of hers, why didn't she put an end to it?

"People do drop out," said Carina. She mentioned a few names of people who had written one or two brilliant novels and then had been heard of no more. "And I feel I am starting a new career—with Jim. I'm going to try and make it a success."

Grove said abruptly: "Child, do you love this man?"

Carina hesitated. Then she said quite simply, "Yes."

"He's not a half-god?"

"He's not a god at all."

"You've got him to make the promises?"

"Yes—he went to see a priest at once, to learn just where he stood. I thought perhaps he'd give up the idea of marrying me when he knew."

The same thought—or hope—had also occurred to Grove.

"Instead of which it only seemed to show him—" She paused.

"Yes?" He leaned forward a little, eager, attentive.

"Just how much he cared," concluded Carina. "For of course it was a sacrifice. He's patron of the living at Linfold, you know. And he never knew I was a Catholic till we went to Linfold."

"Ah, it was too late then," said Grove, cryptically.

"It's curious that a man of that type should want to marry me," she said, reflectively.

"Look in the glass!" advised Grove.

"We care for such different things. He only likes outdoor things—games and sports. And I like books and solitude."

"And you don't see any risk in that?"

"There's risk in all marriages."

"And this is 'mixed' into the bargain. What would dear old Alfred have said to that?"

"I'm quite sure he would have liked Jim," said Carina confidently.

"He would have counselled you to wait. Why, you hadn't seen him more than three times when you got engaged."

"Richard, are you trying to make me break it off at the eleventh hour? For let me tell you it's quite useless. I'm going to marry Jim. I've thought it all over very carefully, and I know the pros and cons as well as you do. But I do care for him, and I feel that we need each other." She spoke with unusual spirit and determination. Not often had she answered Grove thus. It was as if in this instance she did not recognize his right to interfere. "And, after all, Aunt Nora approves," she added.

"I imagine she does. She's engineered the whole business. Solitary niece—rather a handful—a rich widower wanting a wife. How do you like that cub of a boy—Mallory's son?"

"I've only seen him once," said Carina guardedly.

"He may make things very unpleasant for you!"

"You're determinedly pessimistic to-day," laughed Carina, "but I don't feel at all afraid of Peter. I'm sure I can make him like me. Jim's too severe with him."

"My dear, your Jim is a very hard man, and he broke his first wife's heart."

"Well, I'm not going to let him break mine!" she said.

"A charming girl," remarked Richard, thoughtfully, "they called her Iris, I remember. A pretty name—it suited her."

"You're trying to frighten me now," said Carina. "It's no *good*, Richard. You know I've never been at all anxious to marry, and Jim is the first man I've ever cared in the least for. I'm not a nervous delicate woman like poor Iris Mallory. I can hold my own. And I do feel it'll be a success."

"Well, we'd better attend to this stuff now," said Grove, drawing the pile of typewritten sheets toward him. He looked very businesslike indeed, sitting before the big writing table, his immense blue-tinged glasses on his nose, and a blue pencil in his hand.

She thought involuntarily: "If Jim could see him now!" His country clothes were many degrees shabbier and more out-of-date than his town ones. His collar was too large and his tie badly arranged. On the forehead the hair receded to a great depth like an ebbing tide, but it hung, long, grizzled, curly over his neck.

"'Dree your own weird,' child, and don't come crying to me if things go wrong," he said presently, looking up from the book.

"When have I ever come crying to you, Richard?" said Carina, indignantly.

He did not answer, for he was already absorbed in the book. Presently she saw his hand move, and the blue pencil approached the paper. She put out her hand to restrain him.

"I'm sure you can't want it yet. Those first pages are really all right."

Grove laid down the pencil reproachfully. "Do

you want my advice or not? It was exceedingly inconvenient for me to come here at all. Malcolmson made no end of a fuss."

"I want your advice, but you might ask me before defacing my manuscript."

"Well, I want to put my pencil through all those adjectives."

"No—I want them all. Every one of them."

Richard Grove was astonished. He was impressed, nevertheless, by Carina's novel attitude. "Where's my obedient little pupil? Is she to be lost too?" His old kind eyes twinkled behind the glasses.

"Jim's made me realize things about myself," she said.

"You mustn't believe all Mallory says. When a man's in love—"

He watched her narrowly as he spoke, his thoughts temporarily diverted from the book. To-day Carina interested him far more profoundly than her work. He enjoyed studying her under this new aspect. He had often speculated and wondered about the man who should one day win Carina's love, and he had so hoped that he would be understanding and sympathetic, able to encourage and stimulate her talent. And in his opinion Jim Mallory was the last man to be or to do any of these things. Report dubbed him a bit of a bully. That poor little first wife of his! And a great boy of Peter's age, handsome, arrogant, indulged. It was impossible that Carina, after her life spent in the shadows, should be happy in such a milieu.

But she was oddly determined, even obstinate in her decision to marry Mallory. She was in love perhaps—odious phrase—with this man. Probably the sense of being subjugated appealed to her as it does sometimes to women of independent character. Jim had been wise enough perhaps not to show her

too much of his dominating will. But later on, alas, she would no doubt realize its significance. Her religion and her work would both suffer and even inevitably weaken by the contact with that strong despotic personality. There would be no sympathy for her there. She would have to learn to repress the two most important things in her life.

"I don't like it!" he said aloud.

"Why? What's the matter with it? I did hope to please you this time, Richard! I remembered all your pet prejudices."

"I wasn't thinking of the book," he answered.

Impulsively he stretched out his hand and touched Carina's.

"Child, am I to be shut out? I'm to have no place in Mrs. Jim Mallory's life?"

Carina stooped over his hand and touched it with her lips. The little graceful action was full of a charming significance. It seemed to imply that if the door were to be shut she would have no part in the shutting of it.

"If you have no place it won't be my fault," she said, a little tremulously. "And you'll be patient, won't you? Jim will want me all to himself at first—even Peter isn't to be there." She looked at Grove with something of appeal in her eyes, as if entreating him not to make the position in any way harder for her. "I shall miss you—I shall miss even the blue pencil running through all my pet adjectives!"

"Thank you, Carina," said Grove. He looked suddenly an old tired man. So it meant he was going to lose Carina. "If you're happy it won't signify if I'm there or not."

"I think it will always matter to me," she said quietly, "but Jim's making sacrifices—big ones too—and I mustn't take all and give nothing. He gave in so splendidly about the religious part, and I know

it wasn't easy. He had a struggle—a spiritual struggle. I think it was knowing this that made me really begin to care for him very much. Up till then, I'd only felt amused and flattered, although of course I'd liked him from the first."

"Oh, I understand that," Grove conceded grudgingly.

But even now he was dissatisfied. Mallory would keep his promises; his sense of honor was too keen and fastidious a thing to permit him to fail in this respect. But he was not at all the man to tolerate the strange concentration upon her art which characterized Carina in her working hours. Grove felt that the girl's career was in jeopardy. The talent he had cherished and tended would be left to perish. Suavely, diligently, he had watched over it, and for that reason Carina was almost like a child of his own. He had been proud of her quick success, of the rapid recognition that had come to her. And now perhaps it was all at an end. Mallory would want her all to himself, would resent interference of any description. He had a jealous, possessive temperament, and Grove felt that Carina would be docile and yielding in his hands.

In another month she would be this man's wife. The thought was distasteful to Richard, especially when he remembered the failure of Mallory's first marriage. But he must never be allowed to treat Carina as report said he had treated Iris!

"We aren't going to settle at Linfold till Christmas," said Carina suddenly, breaking in upon his thoughts. "We shall be in Italy most of the time."

"Shall you take him to Rome?"

"Oh, yes. Of course I must go to Rome."

"Won't it hurt you to go back?"

"You know I never shirk anything like that. Don't you remember what Dad used to say about people

who edged away from suffering, instead of going up to it boldly?"

He smiled. One of Alfred's queer wise sayings, yet it sounded odd, too, on the lips of his young daughter.

He rose from his seat.

"I'll take this up to my room and read it alone. No, I won't touch it without your permission, you little tyrant. But you disturb me to-day, child. I'm not used to the change in you."

"But to you I shall never change," she whispered.

He touched her forehead with his lips.

"God bless you, my dear child."

She followed him to the door. "Richard!" she said.

He turned.

"I didn't mean that about the blue pencil. Please knock it about as much as you like. Do! It may be the last, you know."

"Very well, Carina."

He went out of the room, clasping the pile of typewritten sheets under his arm.

He could only hope that Mallory realized what a highly gifted, individual woman he was going to marry. But Jim was perhaps the last person to appreciate those qualities. Grove felt that he would only want to change all that was lovely and unusual in Carina.

He sat up till the small hours to finish Carina's book. There was a subtle change in it which he attributed to the altered conditions of her life, to Mallory's influence, perhaps. But it was very good, of that he felt no doubt. It might win for Mrs. Mallory a fame and success that Carina Ramsden had never known. Success that would surely be very distasteful to Jim Mallory. . . .

"Mallory will hate it," he said to himself.

When he gave it back to her on the following morning, he uttered a few words of finely-tempered praise. Carina flushed delightedly, for Richard was much more given to admonishing than to praising. It meant a great deal from him, and she was both touched and pleased, and showed it. "If you think well of it, Richard, I don't care about anyone else's opinion."

"Not even Jim's?" he asked, a little cruelly.

"I've made up my mind not even to *expect* Jim to care about my work," she said.

Richard looked at her strangely, but he said nothing. She was evidently so aware of Mallory's limitations that it was useless and even cruel to dwell upon them to her. She had no illusions about him. She was marrying him with her eyes wide open to all that he so conspicuously lacked of sympathy and understanding. That did not make Grove feel any happier about her when Monday morning came and he took leave of her, and returned to Falmouth.

Carina had cried a little, a thing which he could never remember seeing her do before. It was absurd of course, but she couldn't bear to think that some day she might want to see Richard and talk to him about her work, and ask his advice in just the old way, and that he wouldn't be allowed to come to her. Mallory had made it so very clear that he wouldn't tolerate any interference from Grove after their marriage.

She wished the two men had made an effort to like each other. It would have made things so much easier for her. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

CARINA was abroad on her honeymoon when her new novel was published. She had asked Lady Murray to send her one only of her presentation copies, and to forward the reviews in her letters. She thus hoped to keep the matter from Jim, until he began to show a greater indifference to it.

She had corrected the proofs rather hurriedly during a wet and stormy week in Switzerland. Mallory was unaware of the nature of his wife's occupation, for he was taking exercise in the pouring rain while she remained indoors and availed herself of his absence to complete her task. The wet weather was a godsend, for she had a cold and it was at Mallory's own suggestion that she should stay indoors, while he tramped along rivers or climbed mountain paths, and watched the cloud helmets drifting over Alpine summits, submerging them in seas of grey vapor.

Mallory was like a boy, with a boy's zest for enjoyment. The mountain air invigorated him, and the presence of Carina seemed to illuminate his life and thoughts to a degree which astonished him. She was so wonderful . . . and she was his. Since their marriage he had assiduously refrained from contemplating all the complications which had seemed to shadow the days of their engagement. He felt that he had never loved before. Carina was perfect. They were alone together in this splendid Alpine world. Even when it rained, as it so often did that autumn, relentlessly, violently, persistently,

he did not feel in the least depressed by the inclement weather. He tramped for miles, remembering joyously that when he returned to the hotel, Carina would be there, waiting to give him his tea. He would picture the fire-lit sitting-room, which she always contrived to make so homey and charming while they were on their travels, with Carina coming toward him, more like a spirit than a woman. Carina, slender and exquisite, with her red-gold hair, her grey shining eyes, her pale sensitive face. . . . The wide brow, the pointed chin. . . .

They intended shortly to move on to Italy. It was really too late in the year for Lucerne, and the season was a particularly wet one. Carina had told him that November was often a beautiful month in Rome, still possessing something of the radiance and warmth of the departed summer. She was much more anxious to go there than he was; she spoke sometimes of old friends she wished to visit. Mallory was not in the mood for either Carina's friends or his own, but he offered no objection. He was amenable to her least wish. Never in all his life had he been so neglectful, so oblivious even of self. Indeed, he was only prolonging their sojourn abroad because she so evidently wished it. She was reluctant—though he never guessed this—to return to Linfold. She had the feeling that life there would be different. She dreaded taking up the new duties, and perhaps disappointing Jim in her inadequate accomplishment of them.

They went to Italy toward the end of November, travelling by slow stages southward. Her delight in the artistic treasures of the great Italian cities was eager and enthusiastic. Mallory was a man whose early education in such things had been neglected; consequently they meant little or nothing to him. But he followed his wife through churches and gal-

leries and dim frescoed cloisters like a great devoted dog.

And then sometimes the question teased him: Would Carina ever be as happy at Linfold as she was in Italy, her second home, by her so dearly and passionately beloved? He realized for the first time her intimate knowledge of the country, her facile mastery of its language. At Linfold she would be arbitrarily cut off from these things. He saw, too, that her happiness didn't depend upon people; she had resources of enjoyment and interest within herself. He followed her wistfully into the wonderful cathedrals of Milan, Venice, and Florence, where she was so at home and he such a desperate ignorant stranger. It was in Italy that he began to be perplexed by something elusive in Carina herself. She was beautiful and tender, but she did not concentrate her attention wholly upon him. Whereas for him it seemed in those days that there existed only Carina. Everything else was remote, obscure, negligible, . . . shadows in a world of shadows. . . .

Some day they would return to Linfold, and come into contact once more with the pleasant English country life that had always so completely satisfied him. But now he had the sense that he and Carina were wandering in a beautiful dream, almost apart and divorced from reality.

They reached Rome early in December. The hand of autumn was still visible in the exquisite showers of gold that garmented the trees, though winter menaced in the faint snow line that touched the summit of Monte Gennaro. The skies were brilliant and cloudless, and of a delicious blue. The sunshine illuminated the ancient honey-colored palaces, the grey domes, and flashed amid the spray of innumerable fountains, turning their waters to gold and silver. The climate was invigorating, warm enough

in the sunshine, but with a touch of mountain air to temper it, as if some cool draught had escaped from the sea and the Apennines and found its way into the city.

Mallory felt much more at home in Rome. Its cosmopolitan life suited him. He had taken his degree in history, and he knew something of its great imperial past. Its ruins and ancient monuments appealed to him. He was conscious, too, of a wider freer atmosphere. Carina found many friends among both Italians and English; they lunched and dined out frequently.

All went well until one morning when walking in the Corso they perceived a familiar figure approaching them. It was Richard Grove.

He looked more than usually eccentric in Rome. His ill-cut clothes, large substantial boots, his unfashionable collar and weird loose tie, to say nothing of his ancient hat, made him sufficiently conspicuous to attract the derision of the Roman street-boy in a land where a wide divergence of costume is tolerated. But Grove heeded neither gibe nor sneer; probably he was unaware of them, for his preoccupation was, as a rule, complete.

Carina was the first to see and recognize him; she left her husband's side and darted toward Richard with both hands outstretched and her face aglow with joy. She completely forgot Mallory's jealous dislike of Grove, and even if she had remembered it she would have told herself that Jim was now far too devoted to her to feel any further rancor on the subject.

Prominent in her thoughts was her eagerness to show Richard how happy she was—how devoted Mallory was to her. She was proud of that devotion. No cloud had arisen to mar the perfect happiness of their wedding journey.

Jim watched the meeting with slowly-darkening brow. Really, Carina must learn not to behave like an irresponsible baby! . . .

His old jealous dislike of Grove returned with a sharper intensity. He felt at that moment as if he actively hated him. He was a sinister shadow that had obtruded itself upon the noonday brightness of their happiness.

Carina was perfectly oblivious of her husband's disapproval. She was hardly thinking of him in her joy at seeing Richard's familiar friendly face. She stood there, talking and laughing, while Grove looked at her with his twinkling eyes. Absurd creature—with his long unkempt hair; his slouching aspect. . . .

Mallory approached them without a smile on his hard face.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Grove? Carina, we must be moving on. It's late—"

It was not late, but in his anger he hardly knew what he was saying.

Carina's face fell as she heard the cold words. She knew by Jim's voice, that he was very angry, just as he had been on that day in Cornwall when he had heard of Richard's approaching visit. Angry . . . yes . . . but why? With her? With Grove? Such a supposition seemed wholly unreasonable. But, then, he had always shown himself utterly unreasonable where Richard was concerned. Their meeting was both unexpected and unpremeditated; why should it annoy him?

"Richard's been telling me what a success my new book is!" Carina turned to him with shining eyes. He would surely forgive Grove when he heard the good news. "Isn't it splendid, Jim? Three editions in a few days. It's caught on, he says!"

"Your new book? What new book? You did not tell me it was published."

"I didn't know it myself until now. We haven't seen the papers lately," she answered, growing suddenly grave.

Grove stood there in silence. He had seen the disappointment, the sadness even, clouding Carina's bright face, diminishing its very youth. She had not known her book was actually published, but she must have corrected the proofs and was therefore aware that it was in the press and that its appearance was only a matter of weeks.

"But you know—you must have forgotten, Jim—it's the book I finished in Cornwall."

"Do you mean it's out already? Why didn't you tell me?" His voice was harsh and disapproving.

Grove wondered indeed why she had never told him anything about it. Surely in that delicate new intimacy of husband and wife they must have spoken of her work. Carina had always been so frank about it, with her few intimates. With himself and Mary, for instance. He glanced uneasily at Mallory, who was holding himself stiff and upright, and seemed to be regarding them both from his superior height as if they were very little people indeed. He looked tall, splendid, imposing. Grove had not hitherto quite envisaged the fact of Jim's superb physique, his handsome powerful face. It helped him now to understand Carina's hitherto inexplicable devotion, as well as poor little Iris's disastrous infatuation.

"You would hardly believe, Mr. Mallory, how our publishers often keep us in the dark with regard to these details," he said, in his pleasant smooth voice.

"But you no doubt know the secret of acquiring such information," dropped from Mallory's lips.

"I read my *Literary Supplement*," said Grove dryly.

"Carina, we must not detain Mr. Grove any longer," said Jim. He bowed abruptly to Grove and strode away along the narrow pavements, not once turning his head to ascertain whether Carina were following him. Carina hardly gave herself time to touch Richard's outstretched hand, so eager was she to pursue Mallory's retreating form. She came up to him a little breathlessly. She had the sense of having been bruised, yes and beaten, by his harsh unsympathetic words. What had happened? Why was Jim angry? And why did the fact of his being angry seem now such a terrible, such an unbearable thing? In Cornwall it had stirred only a faint ironical amusement within her, coupled certainly with a slight resentment.

Owing to the crowd which always throngs the Corso in the morning, she could not see Jim's face. She walked slightly behind him.

All the past few weeks seemed to have been abruptly blotted out, with all that they had held of tranquillity and happiness. She was face to face with Jim—the real Jim of whom she had had that one disquieting glimpse in Cornwall. The Jim that had made poor Iris so miserable. . . .

He did not utter a word until they reached the hotel. Generally they drove back, as it was some distance to walk. Carina felt tired and exhausted by the time the revolving plate-glass doors had closed upon them and they were standing in the big luxurious lounge. The gilt chairs, the cushioned settees, the waving palms and small tables were all set out upon a rose-colored carpet. Electric lights burning in glittering Venetian chandeliers illuminated the scene.

"We'll have lunch at once," said Jim.

She followed him into the restaurant. It was still early, and there were not many people there. A

waiter brought them *hors-d'oeuvres* and a wine-list. Carina refused the former; the thought of the highly flavored food sickened her. All the time she was thinking: "Why is he so angry? What have I done? Why, it's seemed simply impossible all these weeks that he should ever be angry again!"

The unwonted exercise had flushed her face a little, and her eyes were suspiciously bright.

Presently Jim said:

"Did you tell Grove when we were coming here?"

"No. He's taken an apartment for the whole winter with Mr. Malcolmson—they're still collaborating over a play."

The answer did little to appease Jim's anger.

"Why on earth didn't you tell me your book was to be published so soon? I have a right to know these things!"

"But Jim—you knew I'd written it—that was why I went to Cornwall."

"You must have had the proofs," he said.

"Yes."

"When?"

"Just after we were married—the first week. We were at Lucerne."

"And you said nothing about it!" said Jim. "Why were you so sly and secretive about it? I dislike intensely learning anything of your private affairs from Grove. I dislike your attitude toward him more than I can say." He did not raise his voice, but uttered the sentences in rapid, icy tones.

"I'm . . . I'm very sorry, Jim," said Carina. "Richard was so pleased about it—that made him anxious to tell me—to congratulate me. I think I'd rather forgotten about it—it didn't seem to matter, at least not so much." She was trying to tell him that his devotion had driven lesser matters from her mind.

But Jim was wilfully obtuse. He was determined to believe that Carina had kept her knowledge from him for reasons of her own.

"It seems extraordinary that Lady Murray shouldn't have told you!"

"She hardly ever writes," answered Carina.

"Have you received money for this book?" he asked.

"Not yet. But I shall get my advance royalties at the end of the month."

"How much will that be?"

"About two hundred pounds," she answered.

He was astonished. Two hundred pounds—an adequate income for any married woman, living as his wife would live at Linfold. And it wasn't as if Carina needed the money. He had settled a certain sum on her at the time of their marriage, and had promised her a quarterly allowance as well. Jim was not naturally generous about money; he preferred to keep it in his own hands. Peter only received a very moderate amount of pocket-money, and if he wanted more he had to apply for it, and show where his lack of economy had lain. Jim hadn't particularly wished to give Carina that allowance, but Lady Murray backed by her lawyer had insisted.

"What's it about?" he asked.

"The scene is laid in Italy." Carina was no longer agitated; she had recovered from the first onslaught, and her tone was as icy as his own.

He said firmly: "I hope this will be the last, Carina. You've no need to earn money now."

"But it isn't only the money, Jim," she said. "Of course, that was necessary when I had Mary. But I write because I love it—because I must. It's part of me."

"Part of you? Nonsense!" he said. "And in any

case you'll have no time for it now. You'll have lots to do at Linfold. Social things . . . I hope I've made that quite clear, Carina?"

His tone of authority pricked her to a slight rebellion.

"But it's my work—my life—" she said. Her eyes were very bright.

"Please don't argue, Carina. You have chosen a different life, a new set of duties."

Dessert was on the table. Carina sipped her wine; it had a sharp acid taste. Jim was peeling a pear. There was dead silence between them.

He had evoked within her a perfectly novel set of emotions of whose very existence she had not hitherto been aware. Mingled with her pain was resentment at his attitude; she was conscious, too, of a touch of anger. He hated this work of hers, just as she instinctively felt that he hated her religion. He had never been at his ease when they had visited churches and cathedrals together, and she had felt it was because they reminded him too strongly of the weakness of his own surrender. Yet her religion and her work had both till now seemed absolutely inseparable not only from her life, but from her very being, her personality. Stripped of them, what was she? How could he love her, hating these things that had gone to the forming of her? He could love her outward aspect, her voice, face, and gestures; these could stir his senses, arouse his affection, but the soul, the brain were undiscovered spheres to him. He hated—as she now knew—that she should have points of contact with things that were outside his own life.

The whole episode had startled her into a very vivid consciousness of apparently irreparable disaster. They should never have married. The very irrevocability of that marriage appalled her. . . .

She must go through life by Jim's side, bearing his children, yielding to his wishes, yet aware always of their eternal separation. By that hard indomitable look in his face he made her feel that he meant to enforce his will in this matter of her writing. She would have to obey. There was, however, always the one point upon which his will could never affect her. When she thought of this it seemed to her the more necessary that in all matters of lesser importance she should give way. She must make the surrender, aware that he too had had to offer sacrifices.

Mallory rose from his seat.

"That's quite settled, isn't it, Carina? We need never refer to it again. I'm afraid it's brought us rather near to our first quarrel—since we married." He touched her hand.

Carina did not respond to his touch. She held her head very high as she went out of the great garish restaurant with its gilded walls, its brilliant lights. How could he, professing to love and understand her, show such utter ignorance of, such contempt for, the cherished creative gift? Settled? The first quarrel? These words seemed to have no meaning at all for her. They could not explain the dim shadows that had crept down over her life, dimming its beauty. But her motionless pale face gave no hint of the fierce interior mutiny that was convulsing her soul.

She had the feeling that she was Jim's prisoner.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN they went upstairs to their sitting room, Carina saw lying on the table a heap of newspapers that had just arrived from England. There was also a parcel for her—obviously a book—addressed in Lady Murray's writing. She felt convinced that it was the copy of her new novel which she had asked might be forwarded to her. It could not have arrived at a more inopportune moment. She had a wild idea of taking it away and hiding it from Jim. But with one of his unexpected flashes of intuition he looked at her and said:

"Is that your new book? You haven't told me its name."

"I think it must be my book, but I haven't opened it yet. It is called—" she paused—"it is called *The Conversion of Claude*."

"Do you mean by conversion that he was converted to Catholicism?" inquired Jim, his black brows frowning heavily.

"Yes," said Carina.

"Your last book had the same kind of tendency. Perhaps your aim is to proselytize?"

She was silent, thinking: "Yes, he hates that too. More than the other." She felt as if the solid ground were giving way beneath her feet. In the deep things of the soul she was utterly severed from Mallory. They seemed to be speaking to each other across cold seas of suspicion and doubt.

"I simply can't let you—as my wife—write Catholic novels!" said Jim. "You must see it wouldn't

do at all. You must be as quiet about your religion as possible. You'll find yourself so much in the minority at Linfold, it would never do for you to be —noisy!"

He was using the word Mr. Humphreys had made use of when he first informed him that he was going to marry a Roman Catholic. The rector had looked perturbed, had murmured something about Mallory's knowing his own business best, and then had added:

"But I hope you'll see that she isn't too noisy about it!"

Noisy! He had resented the word at the time, and had received the rector's hopes in cold silence. Now as he watched the effect of the word upon Carina, he noticed that she flinched a little as if it had wounded her.

"I can only hope that your friend Mr. Grove was exaggerating its success. No doubt he has some influence with the press. But such publicity is very distasteful to me."

Carina listened, motionless, silent. All her pleasure in her book was gone. She wished that she had never written it. Othello with the pillow, smothering the thing that aroused his jealousy, slaying the talent he abhorred. . . . Yes, Jim was jealous of this work of hers that had so permeated her life for the past six years. Grove's words of warning came back to her: "He'll make you bury your beautiful talent in a napkin."

Mallory had sunk into his chair and was beginning to open the papers. Suddenly she heard him exclaim: "It's incredible you should have been so kept in the dark about it!" He flung the paper across to her. Her eye caught a large advertisement among the publishers' announcements. Her own name was printed at the top of the page in big

letters—Carina Ramsden. . . . Excerpts from several reviews were printed below the title of her novel, *The Conversion of Claude*. She glanced at them trembling. “The Success of the Year,” “Miss Ramsden has never done anything better,” “A delicate piece of work, the best thing she has done,” “Miss Ramsden is a marvel,” “We take off our hats to Miss Ramsden. . . .” “A clever psychological study. We do not remember to have reviewed a novel of such distinction for many years. . . .” How she and Mary would have laughed and rejoiced over such an advertisement as that! The words *Fourth Edition in the Press* seemed too wonderful to be true. If only Jim could have been glad for her sake. . . . She was too new to success not to find its sweetness delicious. But when she looked across at Jim and encountered his dark angry face, all her pleasure was turned to bitterness. She was even sorry that the book was attracting so much attention. She let the paper drop from her hand.

“I’d no idea I was marrying such a celebrity,” he said.

“Oh, Jim. . . .”

“It’s quite repulsive to me—all this notoriety.”

Carina was silent. She still had ambition, the ambition of youth that hardly concerns itself with financial aspects.

“Do you really want me to sacrifice it?” she asked.

“Certainly I do. Haven’t I made sacrifices for you? I want to take you quite away from Grub Street with its Richard Groves. The man flatters you—makes you believe that your work is wonderful—fans your ambition—”

Carina said breathlessly: “Oh, then he’s to be sacrificed too?”

“Yes. I don’t care to have him hanging about.”

There was a long pause. At last Mallory rose from his seat, and came over to where she was sitting. He laid his hand on her shoulders.

"Carina!"

She did not stir.

"Carina—dear child—don't let's quarrel about it any more. When we were married I hoped you would be content to lead the life I was able to offer you. After all, I had something to give, and I gave more than you knew when I made those promises."

"Yes," she acquiesced, wearily.

Soon she would be too exhausted from the hurtful strain of enduring Jim's displeasure, to wish even to resist any more.

"You're making me feel that you've never cared for me in the least!" he continued. "You want to go back to that old life of effort and restless ambition—things that were wearing you to the bone. I saw the effect it all had upon you when I went down to Cornwall. You looked feverish, unnatural. It's just this that I want to take you away from, Carina. I want you to learn to care for simpler things. I know you're thinking me hard and unsympathetic and a brute, but I'm not, really. I'm thinking of your health, your well-being."

"I am sure you are, Jim," she answered.

"You've listened to Grove and obeyed him so long about your writing, that I quite see it's difficult for you at first to realize that you have turned your back on that chapter of your life. You've begun a fresh page, with me, Carina." He made the appeal almost wistfully. All the time he was aware that his outburst of temper had predestined his cause to failure. He dimly guessed that his sledge-hammer methods must compare less than favorably with Grove's suave, scholarly intercourse, his sympathy and subtle flattery. Carina had always been spoiled, had had her

own way in a measure that must be hurtful to any very young woman. Success had made her confident, had given her poise and assurance. He had been attracted by those very qualities in her, but that did not mean that they must be allowed to run to seed.

After all, he had tried to make it clear to her before their marriage that he couldn't have a scribbling wife. A less brilliant woman would have accepted the hint more submissively. Of course, he had been jealous and hasty, but Carina seemed unaccountably far more offended than grieved at his attitude. Obviously she resented any interference with her life. But she must see—she must be made to see—how impossible it was for Mrs. Mallory of Linfold to write novels of a definitely Catholic tendency. She must keep quiet about her religion—she mustn't be, as Humphreys would say, "noisy." And then the difficulty of keeping such books from Peter's hands! He would want to read them out of sheer curiosity. The vision of Peter seemed to rise up in judgment against him. He felt that he had made a false move, and that however fruitful in consequences it might prove to be, he would only have himself to blame.

He took up his hat. "I'm going for a walk, Carina."

"Oh, I thought you meant to go to St. Paul's this afternoon?"

"No. I don't feel inclined for any more churches to-day."

He went out of the room. Carina quietly unfolded the paper and took out *The Conversion of Claude*. It was bound in blue, and was also encased in a brilliant, colored "jacket." For a little while she examined its exterior, then she began to read.

The autumn afternoon wore on, and Jim did not return. He hoped that Carina would mind his thus absenting himself for a whole afternoon; he even

hoped that she might miss him. He would not have been exactly flattered could he have seen how completely absorbed she was in her book—so deeply absorbed that his absence, if she had ever thought about it, would have been regarded as a relief, giving her the requisite leisure to read through her new novel. But though she read on with her normal critical interest in the final and complete form of her work, there was always a shadow glancing at the back of her thoughts. A shadow, vague and amorphous, that yet deprived her enjoyment of its usual zest. Jim had left her, still in anger; he had gone out leaving her alone. At the time his anger had only produced within her a sense of sheer physical exhaustion. She had considered him despotic, jealous, and exacting. He hated her work, and he was going to try to put it down with a strong hand. But now the thought of him diverted her attention from *Claude*. She must try to prevent him from reading the book. He wouldn't like it. He would wish with all his heart that she had never written it. . . .

Yet, it was evidently going to be an outstanding success. She couldn't expect Jim to feel any pride in that fact. He resented the notoriety, the success, things he didn't in the least wish to associate with his wife.

Carina put down the book. Dusk was closing over the city, enveloping it in a blue mantle to be studded presently with stars. She opened the window and a breeze stole into the room—the nightly sea-breeze that refreshes and cools Rome at all seasons of the year. Carina leaned her chin on her hand and looked out over the city.

Of course, the thing she had to do now was to make Jim happy. It wasn't easy, and it meant making sacrifices. It was a dreadful prospect, this having to put aside all ambition at twenty-five years old,

just when success was beginning to come to her with liberal gifts, and in a measure that at one time would have seemed quite fantastic. Jim meant to tear those gifts out of her hands, and trample upon them. He had made sacrifices himself, and he seemed to think it only fair that she should make them, too. Carina began slowly to see that perhaps if not exactly right, he had at least some show of reason on his side. She was sorry that he had left her now, offended, unreconciled. Was there to be no pleasure for her in the future unless Jim was ready and able to share it? She couldn't treat his likes and dislikes as if they didn't exist. He had rights, within certain well-defined limits, and as his wife she ought to recognize them. Jim would never consent to be a negligible nonentity in any woman's life. He would always be striving for the mastery. And because she knew that she could never give in, in the greater things, the things that concerned the soul, she felt that it would be absolutely incumbent upon her to bend to his will in other less important matters. Her work must be set aside. He had made that quite clear. And Richard—for a time at least—it would be better for her not to have any communication with her old friend. Jim was jealous of the part that Grove had played in her life, as teacher, mentor, counsellor. Unreasonable, perhaps, but there the fact remained.

Carina went into her bedroom and locked the novel away in one of her boxes. Its gaudy, colored jacket shouldn't be visible to annoy Jim when he returned.

She wanted him to come in and make peace. Carina hated to feel at variance with anyone. She and Mary had hardly ever quarrelled. The process seemed to be almost degrading, and she had always hated to be present when a husband and wife wrangled. In her short life she had met with little

opposition; it was an unpleasing novelty, and she had not yet learned to meet it tranquilly. Her spirit was inclined to rebel against dominance of any kind. She saw in a flash that if she wished for peace she would have to yield to Jim, as far as was morally speaking possible.

It was nearly dinner-time and she was already dressed when she heard his step in the sitting-room. She opened the door and came toward him. He looked very tired, almost spent with exhaustion, as if during those four hours of absence he had tramped and tramped till he was worn out with fatigue and suppressed emotion.

“Carina!” he said.

She went up to him and he took her in his arms. Carina submitted to the embrace. She was able to assure herself now that she loved him—that little else mattered. People proverbially found the first year of marriage a difficult time; there must necessarily be adjustment to new conditions, surrender, sacrifice. She and Jim both possessed strong characters and wills, and there were bound to be collisions and misunderstandings until they had both learned to be adaptable and conciliating in that new life of theirs.

“What a long time you’ve been gone, Jim. I thought you were never coming back,” she said softly.

He looked at her with haggard, miserable eyes. Her gentleness touched him: he had believed that she must hate him. He had made himself hateful to her.

“Carina, darling. . . .”

She put her arms round his neck and kissed him. He was very dear to her in a curious illogical way that she did not yet quite understand. His love was of an exacting, jealous, possessive kind that would

often perhaps make him wretched without any adequate cause. He could not brook even an impersonal rival.

"Oh, Jim, don't let's ever quarrel again," she said; "it hurts us both too much!"

CHAPTER XV

THE Mallorys arrived at Linfold a few days before Christmas. They had been detained for a couple of days at Boulogne owing to a storm in the Channel. Carina had altogether refused to face the crossing until the weather became more temperate, and it was a question whether they or Peter would reach Linfold first.

The storm had completely passed, leaving as it so often does a dead calm, as if the sea had wearied of its own violence and was thankful to sink upon peace. Bleak cold airs clung tenaciously to England. A film of grey hung over the distant prospect; the sky was curtained with a low pall of unbroken cloud, impenetrable, persistent. They reached Linfold in the afternoon, just as the early winter dusk was beginning to fall. But it was still light enough for Carina to observe the opal spaces of sky and sea, the dim grey-green of the downs, with the darker patches of gorse upon their slopes; the trees etched like some delicate-patterned lace in tones of purple and umber.

As they drew near the house, standing old and grey in its setting of garden and woods, she saw there were lights in some of the windows. The thought that she was coming back to Jim's home which was now her own, for the first time, thrilled her. Hitherto her eagerness to begin that new life of hers in their own home had been largely tempered with fear lest she should not make a success of it. But she had learnt a good deal about Jim in the two months of their marriage, and she felt now she had

no real cause for fear. Caution and prudence were necessary, but she had already acquired some knowledge of those qualities. It was good now to see the lights in the old house shining as if in welcome.

Jim had suggested that Peter should spend a couple of days with his aunt, so that he could join them after their arrival, but the delay caused by the storm might have frustrated this plan. Sophia Mallory was to come to Linfold for Christmas, according to immemorial custom. Carina was eagerly determined to do her duty by the three Mallorys. At present she felt a little outside the group, almost as if she did not belong to their intimate circle. She was such a stranger to Peter and Sophia, and they had neither of them tried to show her that she was a welcome addition to the family. Perhaps it would be uphill work at first, but in this matter she could count on Jim's support.

"We must be very happy here, Carina," he said, as the car turned swiftly up the avenue and approached the house.

"I'm sure we shall be," she answered confidently.

It came into her mind then to wonder whether his thoughts were with Iris—that delicate beautiful woman who had loved him with such an absorbing passion. Perhaps he was even thinking of his first return to Linfold with his bride, sixteen years ago. "Why—I wasn't ten then," thought Carina. The knowledge gave her a little shock—it seemed to put such a great gulf of years between them She could see herself and Mary at that immature age. Wearing white frocks and with their long hair brushed off their foreheads. Mary three years younger but nearly as tall—they had always looked almost of an age. . . . Their father was alive then, and they had lived a delightful, rambling, nomadic existence with him, chiefly in Italy. It

wasn't the way to bring up children, he used to say, and he knew they ought to go to school and be properly educated, but he couldn't bear to part with them. . . .

"I want Peter to be very specially happy these holidays," she said, remembering her own happy care-free childhood.

"Yes. But he must learn to accustom himself to the change," answered Mallory.

"I'll do all I can to reconcile him to it," said Carina. "Of course, I can't expect him to like me just at first. It'll be difficult—a stepmother only ten years older than himself."

"Eleven," corrected Mallory, "he isn't fifteen yet. . . ."

But she was nearer to Peter's age than to his own. And this afternoon with that soft color in her cheeks, she looked younger than her twenty-five years.

They had reached the house, and now she could see that the door was open, and through it a shaft of light made an oblong-ray on the gravel drive. Some servants, including Saunders, the white-haired butler who had been in the service of Jim's father, were gathered on the doorstep, in attitudes of respectful if subdued welcome. Mallory was smiling and affable as he led Carina into the house. She was smiling too, but she felt nervous. They passed into the hall, and she felt that the old house had opened its arms to receive her. The great door was shut. In another moment she was alone with Jim in the library.

He kissed her, not trusting himself to speak. It was so wonderful to see her there, so almost unbelievable. And he passionately wanted her to be happy. To be contented with all that he could so abundantly offer her. To forget the past with its effort, its restless ambition—all the things he so

hated for her. . . . He never reflected that these were the views of the older generation to which he belonged and to which Carina did not. In his generation women had not worked for their living unless they belonged to the professional classes. They had lived in cultured idleness if rich, and starved genteelly if poor. Only a few emancipated spirits had found their way out of the net, and were generally condemned by right-thinking persons for their advanced even revolutionary views. He did not perceive that that past effort, that achieved independence, had given force and strength and value to Carina's character. She was not a child; she had looked life in the face, had seen some of its harsher aspects of poverty, and she was not afraid of realities. Nor did he ever dream that she had loved her task, had found pleasure in the ecstatic absorption of the artist in the thing of his own creation.

Mallory rang the bell.

"We'll have tea," he said.

When the servant appeared in answer, Carina looked toward the door. Beyond, in the shadows of the hall, she discerned a young figure, standing there irresolutely.

"Why, there's Peter!" she exclaimed.

"Peter, what are you doing there? Come in—" Mallory's voice was sharp and decisive. He was angry with himself for not having inquired if his son had returned. The truth was that amid the varied and poignant emotions of their home-coming he had temporarily forgotten him.

Peter entered the room.

"Dad, I came back the day before yesterday. Aunt Sophia is ill in London, and couldn't have me."

"Peter—" said Mallory, "this is my wife."

The boy held out his hand. He greeted Carina, but in doing so his young face became strangely hard.

He had no smile to give her.

He was taller than she was, slenderly built, with as yet little hint of Mallory's great physical strength.

He was thinking: "What on earth made her marry Dad? She looks twenty years younger than he does. It can only have been for his money—he must be blind not to see it!"

Carina took the proffered hand.

"But how nice to find you here, Peter!" she said, and her voice was very soft. Soft too was the look she gave him. He was dear to her because he was Jim's son. Peter was deliberately obtuse to both voice and look. He hardened his heart against her. Why did she want to come here—spoiling things? . . .

There was an awkward, constrained silence. At last he said:

"I told them to put tea in the drawing-room. Did you want it in here?" His eyes met his father's squarely.

"No—we'll have it there," said Jim. "Come, Carina—you must be cold." He linked his arm in his wife's and led her across the hall into the drawing-room, with its three great windows looking over the Park to the distant sea.

Flowers bloomed in every corner, and the conservatory beyond was a blaze of color. A great fire burned upon the ample hearth. The room though immense was cosily warm, for the whole house was heated with radiators. That innovation had been introduced in Iris's lifetime—she had felt the cold terribly. . . .

"How pretty!" said Carina. A sense of warmth and comfort and well-being seemed to envelop her. She had never possessed that kind of luxury before. She was a little tired and excited after her journey, her homecoming as a bride, and the warmth soothed

her. She realized now, that she had dreaded the moment of arrival. She had feared too that some subtle interior conflict, as it were between the present and the past, might disturb her. But she knew now that this was the life which she had deliberately chosen and preferred. She could not reject it—the time for that was past. She belonged to Jim and to Linfold, and she felt a strange new pride at the thought. The past seemed to slip away; it had no power now to hold her. The present was strange; it had still a remote unreal aspect, but familiarity would alter that. In that first hour at Linfold she seemed to free herself from the old life of effort and strain, ambition and success.

Jim, still touching her arm, led her to the sofa near the fire. She sank down amid its great cushions. Peter had followed them into the room, his hands in his pockets, his face expressing a bright indifference. But when he saw that gesture of his father's—proud, proprietary and imbued with a tenderness of which he had hardly imagined him capable, a little stab of sharp pain was driven into his heart. A sense of deadly chill descended upon him, despite the almost enervating warmth of the room with its heavy fragrance of hot-house flowers. He glanced at Carina. How beautiful she was, all swathed in the dim dark richness of her furs. Such costly furs . . . she had loosened them a little, and he could see the pearls lying along the base of her throat. Her face under the close dark travelling hat was small and pale and colorless, but so finely, exquisitely drawn. The dark eyes under the thinly-pencilled long eyebrows . . . the curve of her mouth when she smiled . . . the delicious sounds in her voice . . . the glimpse of her bright hair. . . . No wonder his father loved her. She looked much more beautiful than she had done

last summer. She looked happier . . . yes, and younger. Young enough almost to be the daughter of the man who watched her with such adoring eyes. *She walks in beauty like the night.* . . . The words of the poem came back to Peter's mind. There was something starry about her eyes; something of moonlight pallor in her skin.

"Peter! You're day-dreaming! Where are your manners?" Mallory's voice, harsh and peremptory, cut the silence like a knife. "Here—give my wife something to eat! Hot scone or cake, Carina?"

"Scone, please," said Mrs. Mallory, a trifle startled by the abrupt change in her husband's voice.

Peter brought the plate of scones and handed them to her. He did not say a word. As he went back to replace the plate on the table Jim said: "Don't encourage people to think you're a young barbarian."

"Jim, you're not to scold Peter to-day," said Carina.

She smiled up at the boy, but he would not meet her glance. His face was now quite stony; all its bright nonchalance was gone; it seemed to have become petrified under the harsh rebuke. It was no good, so his thoughts now ran, no good her trying to make things better, since it was all her fault that they had become so impossibly horrible. She oughtn't to be here at all, smiling at him, making fools of them both, with that sweetness of hers. . . .

"Well, then he must take care not to deserve it," said Mallory, in a slightly mollified tone. But he glanced sharply at his son as he spoke. He hoped that he wasn't going to prove irreconcilable. There was, as he knew, a fundamental and rocky obstinacy about Peter that was difficult to check without resort to harsh measures. It was a pity Sophy hadn't been

able to take him for a couple of days. His presence lent a touch of awkwardness, of constraint, to their home-coming.

After tea the boy escaped from the room. He put on a coat, and went out into the winter darkness, unlit by moon or stars. There was a wind blowing in roughly now from the sea, making ceaseless music among the pines. He paced up and down the long avenue in the teeth of that strong wind, convulsed with the hot, terrible mutiny of youth. He hated Linfold, he hated his father's wife, almost he hated his father, whose cold mercilessness he so dreaded, just as he dreaded the humiliating repetition of his brutality. There was no gleam of light anywhere. The dark starless winter night penetrated to his very soul. Tears poured down his cheeks and he did not attempt to restrain them. He felt like a wan restless phantom, driven out from an abode of security, light, and joy that once had been so confidently his. . . .

It seemed to Peter that he had been walking up and down that pale spectral road for hours, his body light and tireless and imbued with a fierce energy; his soul heavy and tormented and exhausted with suffering. He adored his father; for years he had been all in all to him, and now he was to know only his harsh stern side, the side he feared. He was deposed from his ancient, honorable place. There was no room for him at Linfold now. He was merely an obstacle in the way of his father's perfect happiness with Carina. Peter sobbed with an unrestrained violence that had something childish in it. He was ashamed of his tears, yet wholly unable to check them.

It began to rain. The wind shrieked in the trees. The calm had been of brief duration, and the storm had arisen again and was increasing along the coast.

Far off he could hear above the wind the distant thunder of the sea. Rain fell in torrents, and his uncovered hair was dripping with water that poured down his face in little streams, mingling with the tears. Suddenly, as he approached the house, he saw a side door open, and in the square of light thus produced, a figure detached itself in sharply-defined silhouette from the surrounding shadows. So they had missed him, and were coming out to look for him, were they? It must be getting late—nearly dinner-time perhaps. . . . His father would be little likely to overlook any lack of punctuality to-night. Or it might be that his prolonged absence had made them nervous. . . . Sobered by the thought and perhaps a little ashamed of his own want of control, Peter drew nearer, and as he came quite close he saw that it was Carina who was standing there. She was alone, her head was uncovered, and the wind was blowing the short bright hair about her brow. She had flung a fur cloak over her shoulders.

“Peter. . .” she said.

She spoke low, so low that what he heard seemed to him the mere echo of a sound.

He came up to her hesitatingly. She could see his young face all ravaged and distorted with weeping; the wan cheeks, the sunken eyes.

He still lingered there, the light from the passage within illuminating his slender upright form.

“Peter—” she said again.

There was something in her voice that drew him still reluctant to her side. She came out to meet him heedless of the wind and rain. She put out her hand and touched his.

“Dear Peter,” she said, “I can’t bear to think you’re so unhappy, and to feel that my being here is making you miserable.”

The boy stood like a frozen statue in front of her, watching her with tortured eyes.

"You'd better tell my father, then, if you can't bear it. He'll beat me again," said Peter hoarsely.

Carina took his hand and held it in her soft warm fingers.

"He shall never beat you again if I can prevent it," she said.

"You can't prevent it. It's because you're here—and he thinks only of you!"

"No—no—we shall both think of you. You mustn't be left out. Peter—I want to be your friend. Won't you believe it? I can't bear to think you should look upon me as an enemy. I've never had enemies—"

There was the least possible tremor in her voice. "Let us be friends and try to be happy together. It's too late, you know," and her voice broke into a little laugh that yet held something of sadness in it—"for me to go away!"

He suffered her now to draw him toward the house. He did not try to resist. They stood facing each other in the long, brightly-lit passage. Carina closed the outer door, and to Peter there was something subtly significant in the action, as if she were shutting away from him the menacing crushing darkness and storm of that wild winter night.

"Peter, you're fourteen, aren't you? And I'm twenty-five. Let me be your elder sister. Don't think of me as a stepmother. And will you call me Carina? I should like that. . . ."

"Yes," he said. His voice was toneless. She meant to conquer him; she *was* conquering him with that invincible charm of hers.

"Will you promise me to try to be happy?"

"Yes—Carina." He caught her hand suddenly and dragged it to his lips. She felt his tears falling thick and warm upon it.

Carina pulled him to her and kissed his forehead lightly. Since his mother's death no woman had kissed him except Miss Mallory, whose hard embraces he regarded in the light of a penance that could not be foregone. But Carina's kiss was a light butterfly thing—he wanted her to repeat it.

She made a movement as if to leave him. He was quiet now and submissive; the danger was averted.

“I'm going up to dress for dinner. It's late, you know. And you're drenched to the skin! Run up and change—your father doesn't like to be kept waiting.”

Peter was not proof against the definitely maternal solicitude of her manner.

“You'll be good, won't you?” she whispered, and then she ran lightly along the passage and turned up the staircase that led to her room. He watched her till she was out of sight, half-ashamed of his own easy yielding, yet aware that it was complete and perhaps permanent. You couldn't go hating anyone who spoke to you in the kind of voice that made you think of velvet, and who kissed you in that tender fashion, and urged you to “be good.” Yes, in a few minutes his jealous hatred had turned to a queer ardent devotion. He would have died for Carina then.

She had quite convinced him that it did matter very much to her whether he were happy or the reverse, and she wanted passionately that he should share in her happiness, and that he shouldn't be left out in the cold.

Peter went up to his room and began to dress. All the time that he was engaged in taking off his wet things and exchanging them for dry ones, he was fighting against this growing sense of devotion. She was weaving spells for him, just as she had woven them for his father. He understood now why his

father had fallen so swiftly, so irrevocably in love with her. He thought of that day at Lord's when he hadn't been able to take his eyes off her. Carina had seemed cold and indifferent enough then, as if she cared little for the thing she had so easily won. But she had made a determined effort to win Peter's affection. She had come out to him, hatless, in the storm and rain, like some beautiful benignant spirit. She had spoken tender words to heal his bruised rebellious heart. She had quelled his fierce mutiny. She had kissed his forehead, changing him from an enemy to a friend, with one touch, so to speak, of her wand. She had summoned him to her side out of the windy darkness, the beating rain. He had felt so cold and alone and broken-hearted, and she had surrounded him suddenly with warmth and joy and light.

"I'd do simply anything on earth for her now," he confessed to himself. "She was topping to me. She really seemed to care. She was unhappy too. . . ."

Yes, it would be bad luck if he were to continue to spoil the perfection of their home-coming with his jealous temper. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

THERE were no traces of tears on his face when he went downstairs into the drawing-room before dinner. During that meal a bright smiling Peter sat between his father and Carina. Carina was very gentle and attentive to him, drawing him out, making him talk. Jim, who knew nothing of what had passed between them, was secretly astonished at Peter's swift capitulation. He breathed a sigh of relief. He wanted above all things to have peace in his house. And the boy's surrender appeared to be quite genuine; there was no sign of constraint in his manner, no suggestion of accomplishing a difficult task. His face brightened visibly when Carina spoke to him.

Jim was delighted. He did not even reflect upon any possibly objectionable consequences of such an alliance. He was proud of both his possessions that first evening at Linfold. Carina was perfect in her manner of so tactfully managing Peter. And Peter was admirable—just what he wished his son to be, charming, intelligent, courteous. It struck him, too, that Carina was looking almost happier than he had ever seen her look before. She had entered upon her little kingdom, and that she appreciated it was plainly visible. No doubt she was conscious, too, of the harmony that surrounded them. And she had come into their intimate family life only to perfect it, to beautify it. Even Peter had had the sense to see this.

“Do you ride?” Peter asked her. “I'll lend you

my horse—he's a beauty and he's often carried a lady. Dad'll lend me something."

"Oh, but I haven't ridden for ages," said Carina, smiling.

"I'll see you don't come to grief. And Dan—that's my horse—is as quiet as a lamb!"

Jim beamed upon them both. He was glad the suggestion had come so spontaneously from Peter. And in time, of course, if Carina really cared about it, she should have her own horse. They could ride together and have many a good gallop over the Downs. He wanted her to like the country, and the simple wholesome pleasures it offered.

Carina was tired; she went up early to her room. When she bade them good-night she kissed Peter.

"Good-night, Peter."

"Good-night, Carina," he said shyly.

"Peter!" remonstrated Jim, half in anger.

"She said I might," explained Peter. "You see, there's nothing else I *can* call her."

"Please let him, Jim. I'd so much rather," said Mrs. Mallory. The father and son stood facing her, and the sharp electric light illuminated the two faces. Peter, a slender stripling, already reached his father's chin. He promised to surpass Jim in height; at present he gave one the impression that he had outgrown his strength. His black hair was brushed to a smooth sleek polish, while Jim's was plentifully sprinkled with grey, but Carina thought that once it must have been just like his son's. There was a likeness too in the shape of the eyes set deeply under black brows, and something too of resemblance in the modelling of the nose. But Peter's mouth and chin were weaker than his father's, and much more delicately fashioned. Perhaps in those features he resembled his dead mother, just as he must have inherited his blue eyes from her. One

missed in him the hint of iron will, the dominating personality of his father, that made approach to Jim such a difficult precarious thing.

"Very well," said Jim, half reluctantly. "I think it's cheek—but if you really wish it—Carina—"

But later when he went up to his room he knocked at Carina's door. She was alone, sitting by the fire, wrapped in a loose gown of pale green crêpe.

"May I come in, Carina?"

"Yes. Come in." She made room for him beside her on the sofa, and he slipped his arm about her.

"You're going to be happy here at Linfold?" he said.

"So very happy, Jim."

"I'm so glad that Peter's behaving decently. I thought I should have trouble with him when we first arrived."

Carina was silent. It seemed to him that the pressure of her body against his arm relaxed a little.

"Poor Peter—" she said at last.

"Oh, you mustn't spoil him, darling. Don't be too soft with him. He wants firm handling."

"Oh, I shan't spoil him. But I want to make a friend of him."

"Yes. That's all very well, but you must keep him at a distance. He's inclined to be cheeky. Don't let him be too familiar. I'd almost rather you'd waited a little before asking him to call you Carina."

"I didn't wait," she said, "because I wanted to try to make friends with him at once. I felt that he was sore and hurt—he's sensitive, you know—one can see that in his face. You must let me manage him in my own way, and you—" she looked up at him and smiled—"you can do all the firm-handling part, though I hope it won't be necessary."

Jim kissed her. The firelight glancing on her hair

turned its warmth to living gold. She was very beautiful.

"Very well, darling. Manage him in your own way. I'm sure you'll do it beautifully, and anyhow I shall be there to see he doesn't take advantage of your kindness!"

"But, Jim—you must be very kind to him too—just to show him that nothing's really altered between you. He hasn't got a mother to take his part. I know what that means, because I missed all that tenderness in my own life. My mother died when we were very little, and yet I can remember crying for her. So you mustn't be too stern—too harsh. . . ."

Mallory would have promised her anything at that moment.

"I'll try not to be. We've always been tremendous friends—Peter and I. Even when he was quite small he was such a game little chap! I'm proud of my son—but I want to make a man of him."

"He's such a dear boy, Jim. And I'm sure he'll be a splendid man," she said.

"Ah, don't spoil him, Carina," he entreated. "You mustn't make things too soft for either of us, you know!"

"I must win his affection first. And then I'll try to be a stern stepmother!"

Christmas was at hand, and when she thought of the approaching Feast, Carina felt a sense of dismayed anxiety. She wished, of course, to go to Lintown for Midnight Mass, but Jim would probably—and even reasonably—object to keeping the car out half the night. She could have arranged to sleep at a convent in the town, but this was also a proposal that would hardly be likely to meet with his approval. She therefore deferred the question, which

rather preoccupied her, until the morning of Christmas Eve when it became pressingly necessary to settle it.

She did not even know if Peter were yet aware that she was a Catholic. He had not, after all, been present at their wedding, which had been celebrated very quietly, and in the announcement of the event Jim had sent to the newspapers, all mention of the church had been purposely omitted. She divined therefore, rather than knew, that Mallory intended to keep his son in ignorance as long as possible.

Carina went down to her husband's study directly she was dressed that morning. She found him alone immersed in letters and newspapers.

"Are you very busy, Jim? May I come and disturb you?"

"You may!" He sprang up and drew her nearer to the fire. "It's cold to-day. Ten degrees of frost last night! I shouldn't be surprised if we had snow before the day's out."

"Shouldn't you? I hope not. You see, Jim, I want to go in to Lintown to-night for Midnight Mass. . . ."

"Midnight Mass!" he repeated.

"Yes. Would it be very inconvenient? I could hire something, you know, to take me in, if you don't want the car to be out so late."

"But why not go to Mass at eleven on Christmas morning? That would be much easier. . . ."

"No—that wouldn't do at all. I want to go to Holy Communion, Jim. God has been so good to us, I want to thank Him."

God has been so good to us. . . . The simple words impressed him more than he liked to think. "Oh, my dear—when you put it like that!—" he exclaimed.

"I couldn't put it in any other way," she answered,

touching his hand with her own. He drew his hand away quickly, as if just then he wished to avoid the contact. He knew that her touch weakened him.

There was a little pause, and then he said:

“You’ve asked me for something that isn’t quite easy. . . .”

“Yes,” she acquiesced, “that was why I was a coward and put it off till now. . . .”

She sat there, gazing into the fire. The day was cold, and she had draped a shawl of golden-colored Venetian silk about her shoulders. It made a bright patch of color in the sober room.

“You see—in my position—” He stopped. “It’s awkward, you know. And there’s Peter—”

“Peter has nothing to do with it.”

“He’ll ask all sorts of questions. Boys of that age are horribly inquisitive.”

“Well, he must know the truth sooner or later. I shouldn’t be surprised if he knew it already. You can’t go on keeping him in the dark.”

Carina’s voice was decisive. The situation was really so simple, so clearly defined, that she wondered why Jim should voluntarily invest it with ambiguous complications and unnecessary secrecy.

“I was thinking perhaps it would be easier if I were to stay at the convent at Lintown just for the night. I should be back here on Christmas Day in time for luncheon.”

“Oh, I can’t have you racing off to convents,” he assured her.

He was aware that whatever was done, it must be done openly, with his consent and approval. People must see that he took her religion for granted, and made adequate provision for her to practise it. He owed this to Carina. It was the first step that was so disagreeable and difficult.

Above all, the question must be discussed tem-

perately between them. Ever since their quarrel in Rome, with its subsequent reconciliation, his wife had been assiduous in avoiding any mention of topics likely to lead to angry or acrimonious discussion. She had been faultlessly tactful, and he was aware that only the extreme urgency of the moment had forced her to come to him now with this petition on her lips. And ultimately, of course, he knew that he wasn't in a position to refuse. His promises forbade him to put any obstacle in the way of her practising her religion. Jim's attitude toward his promises was at once fastidiously honorable and passionately resentful. They were there; he had made them; he intended scrupulously to abide by them, but in doing so he realized enviously that he had to deal with problems which didn't enter into the lives and calculations of normal Englishmen. He wished to be perfectly fair and just, and yet to do nothing that was exaggerated or not strictly entailed by the letter of his bond.

"Jim, won't you let me settle it myself? I mean—I can hire a car and be quite independent. I should be back about three, and I could lie in bed late on Christmas morning."

"No. If you go at all you must have my car. I can't trust you to a hireling. Carina . . . you couldn't give up this idea just for once, could you?"

"The only alternative would be my going in for the eight o'clock Mass on Christmas day. You know, Jim—I've always been accustomed to go to Mass every morning—it's the one thing I do miss so terribly here."

"Do you?" he said. He had been aware of her slipping out every morning before he was up, during their sojourn abroad. And knowing that she must have gone to church, he had forborne to question her.

She kept it out of sight as much as possible—he

was obliged in justice to acknowledge that. She wasn't, to use Mr. Humphrey's odious word, "noisy." But she had rights, and he had vowed to protect them. He said presently:

"I can't decide it offhand, Carina. You must give me time to think it over. But I'll settle something." Bending he kissed the top of her head where the red-gold hair grew thick and crisp like a boy's. "I'll let you know as soon as possible. Of course, Peter'll have to be told one of these days, and it had better come about quite naturally."

Carina felt herself dismissed. She rose and went out of the room, relieved to think that the interview was over, the petition made. And Jim had received it without the slightest manifestation of anger or impatience. His temperate conduct had astonished her. It showed her that he was prepared to be reasonable, to make concessions.

It was an hour later when he came up to her sitting-room, which was next to her bedroom on the first floor, and had a charming view over the Park with blue glimpses of the sea between the trees. The recent storms had driven some sea-gulls inland, and she could see the white patches they made in the brown ploughed fields beyond the sunk fence to the east.

"I'll run you in myself, Carina," he said. "Peter will be in bed at that hour. And, anyhow, I couldn't have you going in alone. Will that do?"

She had risen and come toward him with shining eyes.

"Do? Why, it's the most beautiful plan in the world. I never dreamed of your coming, Jim! How dear of you to think of it."

Jim's face twitched with a kind of wry pleasure. This was the sugar at the bottom of the cup. Still, it was very sweet to watch her eager delight. To

have her coming up close to him with her face uplifted. He kissed her and said:

"When you come to me like that, it's difficult to refuse you anything."

Yes, she weakened him. . . . Sooner or later Peter would have to know the full extent of his weakness where Carina was concerned. Peter was of an inquiring mind; he would naturally wish to discover all that marrying a Catholic entailed. Jim felt that when that day came, he would inevitably lose prestige in his son's estimation.

"What time shall you want to start?"

"A little before eleven—if you could manage that, Jim."

"Of course I can manage it. I shan't take Jones."

"Thank you, Jim."

Her eyes were very bright. Of all the solutions of the little problem, this one the best and most beautiful of all, had never occurred to her, even remotely. It was wonderful. When Jim gave he certainly gave royally, without stint or measure.

Nothing was said during dinner about the proposed expedition to Lintown, and it was obviously a relief to Jim when Peter, soon after the termination of the meal, began to yawn, and declared that a long day's golf had made him sleepy. Jim advised him to go to bed, and he readily complied.

"Shall you mind walking down to the garage?" Jim inquired, when Peter had left the room.

"Not in the least. It's quite a fine night," she answered.

The garage was a couple of hundred yards away from the house.

"I . . . I don't want to wake Peter," said Mallory.

Carina waited a moment. Then she said:

"But you'll tell him soon? I do so hate secrets."

"So do I," agreed Jim. "I've never known what a coward I was till lately. I never used to care twopence what people said or thought!"

"And must you care now? she asked him.

"Yes. I can't help caring now. I suppose it's because I know I'm in the wrong. . . ." His face clouded over; he looked almost sad.

"Some day perhaps you'll come to see that you were right," she said softly.

"I don't think that time will ever come," he answered.

It was a very dark night, and Jim carried a lantern down to the garage. Once he glanced back at the house, but Peter's window showed nothing but darkness. The boy was evidently in bed and asleep. But Carina was right. He must be told, and told soon. Jim dreaded the effect it would have upon him, especially now that Carina had so completely won his heart. She had only been in the house four days, yet already they seemed like intimate comrades, and Jim feared that to reveal Carina's religion to Peter would awaken an immediate interest in it in his mind. He would probably ask Carina innumerable questions; he might even wish to study the subject. But he would realize, too, the accurate measure of his father's surrender where Carina was concerned. It would inevitably strengthen his own position should he ever develop "leanings." Jim's thoughts were very far from being agreeable or pleasant ones during that dark journey into Lintown that night. The only thing that consoled him lay in the knowledge that he was giving Carina something she wished for very much indeed. It would have been churlish to refuse her anything this first Christmas she was to spend as his wife. He had a lovely diamond ring to give

her on the morrow, but he knew she wouldn't value it half as much as the thing he was doing for her now.

Carina, wrapped in dark furs that almost hid her face, sat beside him on their long silent journey to Lintown. The great lamps of the car illuminated the spectral-looking road in front of them, in swift flashes. Brown hedges reared their dark shapes on either side, and in the far distance they could see across a gulf of impenetrable gloom the massed lights of Lintown burning steadily if a little dimly. The crisp wash of the surf sounded like a dim rhythmic accompaniment, growing more emphatic as they neared the coast and felt the cold buffet of the sea-wind against their faces.

The hour was a wonderful one for Carina. She had envisaged for the first time that day the possibility of her husband's conversion. Up till now, it had seemed impossible to break through those great barriers of ancient, inherited prejudice. But his, "When you come to me like that, it's difficult to refuse you anything—" had taught her in some measure the extent of her own hold over him. But he would have difficult days of fighting and resistance to live through first, and she was not sure that he would have strength for the bitter little struggle that all converts have to face.

They entered the church together. He knelt or stood by her side throughout the three Masses, following each other without interval and in rapid succession, which every priest is permitted to offer on Christmas Day. Jim read the respective Epistles and Gospels in a little book Carina lent him. Once he caught sight of the priest's face and recognized him as Father Pemberton, whom he had consulted last summer, and from whom he had learned the exact conditions he would have to fulfil before Car-

ina could obtain the necessary dispensation for their marriage. That surrender had required courage, but looking down upon his wife now as she knelt so near him in all the wonder of her beauty, he told himself that had they been ten thousand times as hard he would still have made those promises in order to win her for his wife. He recovered something of the thrilling happiness he had savored on the Sunday that had preceded their engagement.

But when he saw Carina rise and move slowly toward the altar with bent head and folded hands, he had his first complete and vivid realization of the gulf that divided them. She could never cross it to reach him, and any movement toward their spiritual union which could be effected must necessarily come from his side. In his weakness then, in his love which seemed daily to become a deeper and more vital emotion so that he could no longer conceive of a life in which she had no share, he could almost have believed this solution of the problem to come within the range of possibilities. . . .

He roused himself. He had gone as far as he dared already in the matter of capitulation. There were hours when he could still tell himself that he had gone beyond what he considered right. But at that hour, in that place, when he felt himself to be wandering like a forlorn uneasy ghost on the outskirts of wonderful and transcendental happenings, he felt that he had it within him to do this thing and break down the spiritual barrier that divided them.

All his life he was to remember that night at Lintown, when he stood or knelt beside Carina at Midnight Mass. He listened to her voice when she joined in the singing of the *Adeste Fideles*, and thought it held a marvellous sweetness. He felt no impatience to go away, but permitted himself to yield

to the emotional appeal the ceremony was making to him.

Afterward the remembrance of that moment of diminished resistance made him resolve anew that never while he could help it should Peter be exposed to that appeal, that influence which the Catholic Church was able to extend, even to outsiders, to strangers, like himself. . . .

CHAPTER XVII

CARINA had not yet appeared on Christmas morning when Jim and Peter met in the hall, ready to start forth on their walk to Linfold Church.

"Come along," said Jim.

Peter looked startled. "Aren't you going to wait for Carina?"

"No," said Mallory, "she isn't coming. . . ."

They went out into the garden. There was a short cut across the Park to the little village of Linfold, where the church was situated. Peter's face had fallen a little; he was frankly disappointed. He had been thinking how jolly it would be to have Carina there, sitting perhaps with his father on one side and himself on the other.

"Is she ill?" he inquired.

"No. She's tired this morning, but that isn't the reason. The fact is, Peter, your stepmother is a Roman Catholic. When she goes to church she goes to Lintown."

"Oh, I see," said Peter. "I never thought of that. We've got one or two Catholics at Eton. One of them's rather a pal of mine."

He swung along by his father's side. Mallory's black brows were knitted across his face. It had been an effort to him to make the little confession, and he was grateful to Peter for accepting it so simply.

"It would have been jolly if she could have come with us. I'd been looking forward to it," said the boy presently.

"Yes," said Mallory, "we should both have liked to have her." He kept his eyes fixed straight in front of him.

But the service that day in Linfold Church had lost its savor for him. He couldn't recapture that touch of glowing faith which at midnight and for an hour afterward had been so surely his, bringing him so close to Carina even while it exposed before his eyes the immense gulf that divided them. Mr. Humphreys' scholarly address lacked the precision of dogma, the touch of authority, that had emphasized Father Pemberton's brief discourse to his flock in Lintown. The choir sang admirably, but he preferred to listen to Carina's sweet voice joining in the *Adeste Fideles*. There was something lacking, and hitherto Linfold had amply satisfied his spiritual needs. Once or twice he moved restlessly in his seat. It was getting late. Really, Humphreys ought to know when to stop. . . .

Civility imposed the necessity of remaining behind for a few minutes after the service was over, and greeting the rector and his family. Jim expressed the conventional good wishes of the season, spoke to the two elder boys who were rather younger than Peter, and inquired after the health of Mrs. Humphreys, who had not yet recovered from the birth of her sixth child.

"I suppose," said Mr. Humphreys, "that your wife hardly felt she could worship with us to-day?"

It was an ill-judged remark, and Jim answered rather brusquely:

"No. Catholics never do worship anywhere except in their own churches."

"Ah, Rome, Rome!" said the rector, shaking his head. "But she'll have to come into line one of these days, Mallory. It's her attitude that prevents reunion, and we're all crying out for that, you know."

Vox populi Rome will have to give way."

Jim was silent. He especially disliked to discuss the matter in front of Peter, who was listening with a breathless attention.

"And one knows that their dissensions are far worse than ours. They're not allowed to come to the surface, and with us, of course, our right of private judgment enables us to express our divergencies with a wholesome frankness. That's much better than keeping one's dissensions seething at the bottom of the cauldron. They won't admit it, but one knows. Onlookers see most of the game, you know, Mallory!"

Mallory maintained a cold silence. Carina had not yet been introduced to the Humphreys family, partly on account of the temporary indisposition of the rector's wife. Now he resolved to defer the introduction as long as possible.

Mr. Humphreys, perceiving his unwillingness to discuss the question, said in a more genial tone:

"Well, Peter, you'll be a candidate for confirmation soon, I suppose? Why, you're older than Jack, and he was confirmed last year. Don't put it off, my dear boy—and if you want any help—"

"Oh, they'll see to that at Eton when the time comes. There's no hurry," interposed Mallory.

The rector tried again. He had known Jim for many years, and had had experience of his queer temper, his fits of moodiness. No doubt something had gone a little wrong at the Park this morning—he must expect that with a Catholic wife.

"Isn't Miss Mallory with you this year?"

"No—she's in London. I hoped she would be here, but she's had a touch of influenza. . . ."

"Ah, she's wise to avoid the country, then, at this season. A cold night, last night, Mallory. I don't

know if you looked out, but it was as dark as pitch, and there were five degrees of frost."

"Oh, I didn't think it was as cold as that," said Mallory, uncomfortably. To tell the truth, he had not been conscious of cold during the drive to and from Lintown. His thoughts had been far too deeply occupied with Carina and her religion, to permit him to realize physical conditions.

"Well, Peter, we must push off," he said, turning to his son.

They walked home almost in silence. But as they drew near to the house Mallory said in a slightly constrained tone:

"I think Mr. Humphreys was right. You ought to be thinking of your confirmation. You'll be fifteen in the spring. I must write about it."

"Oh, lots of boys much younger than I am have been confirmed," said Peter, cheerfully. "I say, Dad, where does Carina go to church?"

"Lintown," answered Mallory curtly.

"I'd like to go with her one of these days. I've never been to a Catholic service."

"No—I'd rather you didn't do anything of the kind. You must remember your obligations, and not trifle with such a serious subject. This living is in my gift, and one of these days it'll be in yours. Your mother and I were both Protestants. . . ." He paused and then added, "Religious controversies are very dangerous things, and you must keep clear of them." There was a hint of reproof in his tone.

"Oh, I only meant I should like to go with Carina," said Peter, somewhat abashed. He had had no intention of calling down such heavy artillery to demolish the position, and it struck him that his father was somewhat exaggerating the significance of his speech. "Because, you see, she can't come with us," he added.

"No—she can't come with us," acquiesced Jim. It seemed to him, since he had heard Midnight Mass at Lintown, that Carina was calling to him from the opposite bank of a wide river. It needed all his strength to resist that appeal, and he was resolved that Peter should never hear it.

It had given him a shock to realize, while the rector was speaking, that he himself was viewing the question, even if ever so reluctantly, from the other side. He must learn to stiffen his defences, to make them absolutely secure against the almost irresistible appeal of Carina. She was so young—a mere girl—it was absurd. . . . But when he thought of her going up to the Communion rails with folded hands and bent head, he felt a renewal of anguish at their ultimate spiritual separation.

She was waiting for them on the doorstep as they came up to the house.

"I saw you from the window," she said; "what ages you've been. A happy Christmas, Peter." She kissed him—it was the first time she had done so since the night of her arrival.

Jim watched them, but his pleasure in their friendship was touched with a little fear. Peter was so young—so impressionable. He had his mother's sensitive temperament. It would be so easy for Carina to influence him. . . .

"Dad's been telling me you're a Roman Catholic," said Peter; "I was awfully disappointed at first to find that you weren't coming with us this morning, till he explained it to me. We had quite a lecture from old Humphreys on the subject of Rome's attitude toward reunion. He thinks you're all wrong, you know," and he laughed gaily.

Jim judged it better to say nothing. But his own fears were adumbrated anew in his son's words. He followed Carina into the house.

"Don't talk to him about it more than you can help, Carina," Jim said to her when they were alone together just before luncheon. "He said something about wanting to go with you to church one day, but I couldn't have that, you know. I didn't tell him that I went with you last night—I thought it better not. I couldn't explain all my reasons to him. So if he ever says anything to you about going, you must refuse to allow it."

A slight shadow fell over her face. Last night she had cherished such hopes of winning Jim. Now his thoughts were obviously preoccupied with fears for his son.

"Of course, Peter must obey you," she answered.

"Yes. I shouldn't like him to be exposed to—temptation, at his age!"

"Temptation . . ." she repeated.

"Well, you know what I mean, Carina."

Peter came into the room.

"If the frost holds, we shall be skating on the lake in a couple of days," he said cheerfully. "Can you skate, Carina?"

"No," said Mrs. Mallory.

"Oh, you must learn. It's simply ripping. And Dad and I will hold you up—we wouldn't let you come to grief, would we, Dad?" He appealed to his father.

"You mustn't bother your stepmother," said Jim. He invariably called Carina "your stepmother" when speaking of her to Peter. It sounded so much less familiar than Carina. He still rather disliked to hear her name on Peter's lips. It seemed to put them on such a level, and encouraged Peter to forget the difference in their respective ages. Carina, however, had seemed to wish it and he had given in. He couldn't always be objecting and forbidding—the rôle

was such a thankless one. He must only put his foot down when serious matters were involved.

The letters were brought in, and Jim, after extracting two from among the heap for his wife, proceeded to glance at his own correspondence. Presently he gave a slight groan.

"What's the matter?" inquired Carina, looking up from the perusal of Lady Murray's letter.

"Sophia's written to say that she's much better, and would like to come down early in the New Year."

He looked quite crestfallen. They were so happy together, just the three of them, and Sophia's advent foretold tempest, like the sudden irruption of a stormy petrel. She almost always upset Peter

"Oh, well, we must have her, then," said Carina. "She mustn't feel that anything's altered. Besides, we ought to get to know each other better. I haven't seen her since we were married."

"She always stops a jolly long time," said Jim. "And it seems she's let her house, so she'll probably stay longer than usual." He flung down the letter with an irritable gesture. It was a comfort, however, to feel that Sophia hadn't been a witness of his tame surrender of last night. She would certainly have had a few words to say on the subject, might even have given a hint to Humphreys. . . .

"Peter, your aunt's coming next week," he said, as his son came into the room.

"Oh, help!" said Peter irreverently. "Does Carina know her?"

"Yes—they met in the summer, before we were engaged," said Jim.

"We must make the most of the next few days," said Peter, sagaciously. "When's she coming?"

"On the second."

"How long for?"

"She doesn't say."

"Catch her going before the end of the holidays, then," said Peter, in a more dejected tone. Then he added: "But I shan't be in such a funk of her, now I've got Carina to take my part!"

The smile he bestowed upon Carina then was full of a frank, confident friendship. Jim intercepted it. He thought: "I must make it quite clear to Carina that there's always one way in which she mustn't influence him."

He had perceived the possible danger, and of course it would be quite easy to avert it. He had only to tell her quite frankly. He would show her that he wasn't in any sense against her religion, but that Peter would inherit certain duties and obligations, and he couldn't permit anything to interfere with his proper observance of them.

Humphreys had probably also foreseen the same danger, else why should he have spoken to Peter this morning on the subject of his confirmation? The rector had always considered it a great risk for Mallory to marry a young Roman Catholic wife. It was like gratuitously introducing a dangerous element into his house, he had frankly informed him. He was afraid that Jim would regret it bitterly in the years to come.

Carina, who knew nothing of her husband's perplexing thoughts, always considered her first Christmas Day at Linfold as the very happiest she had ever spent.

CHAPTER XVIII

BETWEEN Christmas and the New Year there was a fall of snow, and Carina took advantage of the inclement weather to unpack her books which had been sent down from London. With the help of Peter, who had volunteered to assist her, she was busily arranging them on the shelves which ran round two sides of the wall of her sitting room to the height of about four feet.

Peter took the books out of the great packing cases, released them from their wrappings, and handed them to Carina.

"I say, what a lot of books! It's awfully queer to think of your being so fond of them. Dad always thinks he's wasting his time if he stays indoors, and as for slacking over a book, I believe he'd say it was wrong."

"I've always been fond of them," said Carina. "Is that poetry? I want all the poetry on this side."

Her books were daintily bound, many of them in white vellum decorated with gold tooling, that on that grey day seemed to offer a kind of dim illumination.

"Yes—those big ones now, please. These large shelves will take them all comfortably. Don't they look *nice*, Peter? I've never had so much room for my books before!"

She took an almost childish pleasure in recovering them after so long a separation.

Presently the boy held out a volume, rather shyly.

"This is yours, Carina, *Love among the Ruins*

. . . . I'd like most awfully to read it, if you'll lend it to me."

"Hadn't you better ask your father?" said Carina, hesitatingly.

"I'm not a girl!" Peter reddened indignantly up to the roots of his smooth black hair. "He never interferes with my reading—never asks me about it even. Besides, what does he know about it? He never opens a book himself unless it's a Badminton or a sporting novel."

There was just a tinge of contempt in his voice. Peter had successfully concealed from his father his own passion for reading. Biography, poetry, travel—his range had included all these, but as yet he had no particular liking for fiction beyond Captain Marryat and some translations of Dumas.

"Well—I really don't know. I suppose you may have it," said Carina, still doubtfully.

The book undoubtedly had a religious tendency, but it was not a definitely Catholic novel like *The Conversion of Claude*, which was now in its fifth edition. She could keep that out of his sight, but she considered it best to satisfy his curiosity by letting him read *Love among the Ruins*.

An hour passed, and then Carina flung herself, flushed and exhausted, upon the sofa.

"I can't do any more now," she declared. "Thank you very much for all your help."

"We might finish this afternoon," said Peter.

"Yes. If your father doesn't want to go anywhere."

"Oh, it won't be fit for motoring," said Peter.

He went up to his room, taking Carina's book with him. Before his return home he had fully made up his mind never to read any of "that woman's tosh." He was a little ashamed when he remembered that resolve, especially in the light of

his new devotion to her. He had an immense curiosity to learn more of her, to see what kind of book she would write. She was so sweet to him, and he could never forget her coming out to him in the wind and storm of that winter's night. Ever since then, she had been like a charming elder sister to him, and then his father had never been so decent to him before. Her coming to Linfold had made for peace; it was ripping, having her there. The house never seemed dull now. He rode with her, walked with her, and was even half inclined to resent it when his father claimed her.

Peter curled himself up in an armchair, wrapped in a travelling rug, for he had no fire in his room. He settled down to enjoy Carina's book. Perhaps it wouldn't prove to be "much in his line," but he was loyally prepared to make allowances. He became rapidly absorbed, and the luncheon gong sounded upon unheeding ears. Presently he heard a knock at the door, and a servant appeared to tell him that luncheon was ready, and his father had sent for him.

He gave a hasty dab to his hair, and then ran down the stairs, leaping like a young chamois. Mallory was strict about such matters as order and punctuality, but perhaps he wouldn't say much to-day with Carina there.

When he entered the dining-room, they were already sitting at table. Jim addressed him sharply.

"You're ten minutes late! Where are your manners? What have you been doing? If this happens again, you shall go without your lunch. And you haven't washed your hands."

Unpacking had indeed left its evil traces upon Peter's unwashed fingers. He regarded them ruefully.

"I'm awfully sorry, Dad." He took his seat at the table. "I didn't hear the gong."

"You must have been engaged in a most engrossing occupation," said Mallory, sarcastically. "May I inquire the nature of it?"

"I was reading one of Carina's books," said Peter, sulkily.

He was old enough to dislike being taken to task before the servants, and Carina's presence lent an additional sting to the proceedings.

Jim looked slightly startled. He glanced at his wife, but Carina was looking at Peter.

"Oh, you're altogether too young to read novels, Peter. And it's great waste of time at your age."

"Too young? Why, I've read simply hundreds!"

"I hope that is an exaggeration. And you should have asked my permission about reading any novel that you may find in this house."

Carina felt her husband's annoyance in every nerve.

"Carina lent it to me," said Peter, "and it's a ripping book—I remember now, a fellow at Eton told me about it, and said Carina was famous!" He looked across the table at Carina with a frank, engaging smile. "He was awfully interested, Dad, when he heard you were going to marry her."

Jim's silence was slightly menacing. Fortunately the servants had all left the room, or he would have found means to check Peter's speech. The impertinence of discussing his marriage in this way! And that Carina should be called *famous*—offensive word! And why should she lend one of her novels to Peter? Was she going to try to effect his conversion by this means? Again he looked at her.

Carina sat there, pale and controlled, as if she had no interest in the acrimonious discussion that had arisen between father and son. She had not spoken

once since Peter's entrance. It was evident she intended to take no part in the matter. She watched them coolly.

"Which book was it?" asked Jim.

"*Love among the Ruins*," answered Peter.

"I forbid you to read it. You are to bring it to me directly after lunch," said Jim.

The words startled his two hearers. Carina flushed and then turned pale. She felt her limbs trembling a little. But her lips were compressed, and she showed little sign of the anger and agitation that so fiercely possessed her. Jim's speech had both insulted and wounded her.

"Do you hear me, Peter?"

"Yes, Dad."

That his father was really far more angry than he cared to show, was apparent to Peter, who knew his every mood by heart. But he did not quite understand why his action had aroused that anger. He had really done nothing. He couldn't quite see why his father should not be glad and proud to let him read Carina's books. For it was certainly not his unpunctuality that was now eliciting this outburst of wrath—that had only been the first slight origin of the storm, which would have normally subsided after the first reprimand. And he hadn't broken any rule by reading the book. There was no rule against "novel-reading," nor indeed against reading in any form, principally because Jim believed his boy to be as indifferent to books as he was himself. Disobedience always aroused his father's anger, but in this instance Peter could not see that he had been disobedient.

In his heart the boy felt a little revolt against his father's tyranny. He was no longer able to accept it with a child's simplicity in its recognition of authority. He was getting too old, he told himself, to be

scolded and knocked about; he was beginning to resent the discipline to which he was subjected. But the episode in London last summer had revived his fear of his father's physical violence, and he was careful to give no outward manifestation of rebellion.

He was convinced, too, that his father's words had wounded Carina. She had not said a word, but he felt that her silence was an admission of pain.

Some minutes of acute tension passed, and then Mallory with an effort began to speak of other things. He wondered if the weather would permit of their motoring. He was anxious to go with Carina and return Lady Chiltern's call. They had not as yet met, for Carina had been out on the occasion of Lady Chiltern's visit. The Chilterns were among his oldest friends in the neighborhood—there had been a time when gossip had coupled his name with that of Blanche Chiltern, the eldest and only unmarried daughter. Such a suitable match, for she was a little past her first youth

Carina answered when he addressed her, but her voice was constrained and cold. She had felt keenly that her husband's anger had been directed not only against Peter but against herself. Any allusion to her writing aroused his wrath. But surely he would have warned her if he had not wished Peter to read her books. Meeting an author almost always creates a temporary curiosity to read what he or she has written. And she could so easily have hidden her novels from Peter had he expressed any wish on the subject. She might have said, too, in self-exculpation, that she had advised him to ask his father's permission before reading *Love among the Ruins*. But that would have been perhaps to invite him to concentrate the whole of his anger upon Peter, and as it was she felt sorry for the boy.

She was in the library with Jim as usual after luncheon when Peter came in with flushed face and shining eyes.

He held the book in his hand, and laid it on the table near his father.

"I'm sorry, Dad. I'd no idea you wouldn't like me to read it. Carina said I'd better ask your permission first. But you've never interfered with my reading."

Carina's presence gave him courage. He felt much less afraid of his father when she was there.

"In future you will kindly ask me," said Jim. "And next time your stepmother is good enough to give you advice you will please follow it."

"Very well, Dad." Peter went out of the room. He had not looked at Carina—she was sitting apart near the window, contemplating the softly falling snow. But he had at least exonerated her from blame, and he hoped that this had won her approval. He had an idea that she liked people to be frank, fearless and courageous. She would hate mean little despicable actions. And it would have been mean to hide that detail from his father.

When he had gone out, shutting the door, Carina came quietly up to her husband.

"You mustn't be angry with him, Jim. After all, I let him take it. I didn't think my books could hurt anyone!"

"I don't suppose they would strike you in that light. But there are points on which we must agree to differ. Yours are propaganda novels, aren't they? It's for that reason I don't choose that Peter should read them."

She had the sense of being struck at—wildly, violently. Her heart sank, and it seemed that strength had gone out of her. Yes—while his visible anger was all directed against Peter, she knew that in real-

ity it was wholly concentrated upon herself and her religion. Until now, he had said no actual word to include her in the blame meted out to his son. But she had mistaken his silence. He had only not wished to condemn her action in front of Peter; thus far, he had consideration for her.

"Sophia has read all your books," he said. "She told me she considered this one almost the most dangerous of them all because it was so insidious." As he spoke, he tapped the book with his long brown fingers. "I'm not much hand at reading novels, as you know—they seem to have no connection at all with real life. But I've read this one, and I was particularly anxious to keep it from Peter." He fixed his eyes steadily on her face. "Carina, when I brought you here as my wife I gave you no authority to pervert my son. Boys of that age are highly impressionable—very susceptible to new influences and unfamiliar points of view. I hoped not to have to say this to you, but now I must do so. I wish you to leave Peter alone. Do you understand me?"

"I perfectly understand you, Jim." She met his glance quite squarely. "But I think you should have been more frank with me." Her indignation overflowed a little, and an angry light shone in her eyes. "I'm sorry you discussed my books with Sophia!"

"I wished to have a perfectly impartial judgment."

"You can't call Sophia impartial. She dislikes the Catholic religion very much indeed."

"And for that reason she would be more on the alert to detect anything that could possibly corrupt Peter!"

"Corrupt?"

"Well, you know what I mean. Pervert his young mind. I must tell you, Carina, that I'm prepared to put down any tendency of the kind in Peter with

all the severity I'm capable of."

"I quite understand."

"For instance, if I heard that he'd been sneaking off to church with you, I should give him the soundest thrashing he's ever had in his life."

Carina gave an involuntary shiver.

"Do you—do you hate it so much?" she asked piteously.

Something in her voice softened him.

"Not for you—that's different. You—you can make it even very attractive. But Peter has the duties and obligations of his state of life. The living here is in our gift. He must be loyal to the traditions of our house."

He tried to draw her to him, but she stiffened a little.

"No. Don't kiss me now, Jim. You've hurt me."

"You have no right to say that. You forced me to speak plainly. I was determined not to say anything about it unless you made it absolutely necessary. In my position here, I have to be very careful."

"Yes, I see that. And I suppose everyone's been telling you that you oughtn't to have married a Catholic wife."

"No—I don't let people say those things to me. At least never since our marriage. I know I can trust you to be quiet and tactful. I've been glad to see that Peter's so fond of you. But you must be careful not to influence him. . . . I shouldn't like to have to send him away from home. . . ."

"Away from home?" she echoed incredulously.

"Yes. If I've put danger in his path it's for me to see that he isn't injured by it. He is Mr. Fear-don's heir as well as mine, and his grandfather is very narrow-minded, very intolerant. Peter mustn't

be allowed to take any step now in his ignorance, that he would regret very bitterly in after life when he came to realize its consequences."

"Ah, but that's just it," she said softly; "he wouldn't regret it. He'd have something better than wealth. The pearl of great price—"

Her eyes were bright with emotion. He felt her Faith then, like a thing of flame, burning her, almost consuming her. It was something inseparable from her, something he did not wish to destroy, even if it had been possible to destroy it. He stood near her and clasped her hands in his.

"Oh, my dear," he said, "you mustn't forget that it was because I had Peter, I was able more easily to make those promises about your children being brought up in your own Faith. If it hadn't been for him, I should have hesitated . . . there was very strong pressure being brought to bear on me as it was. So all I ask you now, is to help me to keep Peter away from the influence of your religion."

"I don't know if I'm wrong or right," she said, touched by his appeal, "but, Jim—as long as he's so young—so susceptible, as you say—I can at least promise you not to talk about it to him, unless he asks me questions I'm simply obliged to answer."

Jim was immensely relieved. He drew her to him, and this time she made no effort to avoid his embrace. Indeed, she clung to him a little as if she felt that some actual danger had been averted—a danger involving both them and their new happiness.

"You must never be angry with me, Jim," she whispered. "It makes me so miserable. . . ."

She went out of the room. Jim watched her retreating figure with humid eyes. "So she *does* care," he said to himself. "I've made her care."

The thought illuminated the grey January day with a wonderful radiance. It was as if he had looked

into Carina's heart for the first time, and seen his own image enthroned therein.

He looked up, and across the room from a dark corner the portrait of his first wife seemed to be gazing at him from among the surrounding shadows. The eyes followed him with a kind of piteous entreaty. He had had it placed there on purpose after her death so that it would be less visible to him. It was indeed as a rule half concealed by a curtain. To-day, however, it seemed to be regarding him with a new persistency of gaze, closely, intently, yet with an unalterable sadness.

By a strange impulse he found himself addressing the portrait, a thing he had never in his life felt any desire to do before.

"It's all right, Iris," he said, "she loves your boy. But I won't let her hurt him. She's all sweetness. . . ."

He stopped abruptly, a little ashamed of the fantastic impulse that had urged him to speak. . . .

CHAPTER XIX

“WE’RE all dying to see your wife, Jim. I hear she’s the liveliest creature!”

Lady Chiltern’s voice was thin and enthusiastic. She had known Mallory for many years, and after his first wife’s death she had certainly hoped that he would marry her daughter Blanche, a plain intelligent woman not much younger than himself, who would, she felt, have suited him admirably. For this reason she had often invited Peter to stay with them for a few days during his holidays, in their huge substantial Georgian mansion on the Sussex downs about twelve miles from Linfold. During his visits Blanche looked after the boy, indulged him, petted him, gave him more sweets than could possibly be good for him, and taught him to call her Blanche. In fact, she wooed the father through the son, a manoeuvre not infrequently successful. Peter accepted the devotion as a tribute to his own charms, with the easy egotism of youth. To do Mallory himself justice, he had never given Blanche a thought, and he would have considered her treatment of his son unwise and injudicious to the last degree, had it ever come to his ears.

Jim smiled.

“Well, I hope you’re going to see her in a few minutes.”

Calls had been exchanged fruitlessly, and then Lady Chiltern had announced her intention of coming over one afternoon to tea. She could count on her welcome.

Mallory certainly looked younger, she considered, since this odd, sudden, second marriage of his. His air of prosperity and success had even given a slight touch of complacency to his manner. But he looked also if possible more resolute and obstinate than of yore. She had never considered these traits in him unattractive, possibly because she belonged to the older generation that quite simply accepted the man as master of the house, capable of imposing his will upon wife and children. If he could not do this, he must indeed be a poor creature.

"Carina's been out with Peter, having a lesson in golf. She will be down in a moment," he said.

"Blanche tells me that she's read all her books," said Lady Chiltern, trespassing quite unconsciously upon dangerous territory. "She says they're very clever. By the way, she has a friend who was converted by reading them. I'd no idea that people could be so influenced by novels!" She laughed. "I tell Blanche I sincerely trust they won't have that effect upon her. She's come to that sort of age when it seems women must take up something."

Blanche lived at home on fairly amicable and intimate terms with her mother. Lord Chiltern, many years older than his wife, was now a paralyzed invalid. He had not spoken for three years. Blanche was devoted to him. She hadn't forgotten the many kind things he had said to her when he could speak. She had always been his favorite, whereas she knew that in her mother's eyes she was the one failure among five daughters, of whom the others were all handsome, and had made excellent marriages.

During this unfortunate speech Mallory stirred uncomfortably in his chair. He could not quite tell Lady Chiltern how greatly he disliked hearing his wife's gift alluded to or praised. And then the report that someone had been converted. . . . All

his fears for Peter rushed back to his mind like a flock of evil preying birds.

"I should be sorry to think she'd written anything that could possibly upset Blanche," he returned, as lightly as he could.

"But it shows, doesn't it, that she must be pretty good at it," said Lady Chiltern enthusiastically. She had always wondered why Jim had married a Catholic, and it was really almost as astonishing that he should have married a novelist. It was so unlike him; he was conventional, liked his own sphere, and had never shown any disposition to explore any other. Of course, the present Mrs. Mallory was quite well-connected. She was a niece of Lady Murray's, had been staying with her when Jim stumbled across her path with such immediately fatal results to himself. But both her religion and her profession would make her somewhat of an alien in Jim's rather narrow little world.

"Yes, Carina's had a good deal of success," he admitted.

Something in the angularity of his manner, its total lack of enthusiasm, convinced Lady Chiltern that he disliked the discussion and was only continuing it from motives of politeness.

"You must bring her to lunch one day. We should be so glad if you would all come. Blanche is so devoted to Peter. And she wants to meet your wife very much."

"I'm sure we shall be delighted."

"But you might give her a hint—that I'd rather Blanche didn't. . . ." She stopped.

"Didn't?" Mallory had not the slightest intention of helping her out.

"Didn't, well, talk too much to her about the Roman Catholic religion. She's very High Church, but so many people have been going over to Rome

lately, you know—clergymen too—and women in Anglican convents. Quite a wave. . . . People you'd never think. . . . They say it's since the War. . . .”

She paused, for at that moment the door opened and Carina Mallory came into the room. Lady Chiltern was surprised to find her at once so youthful and so delightfully dressed. She was slim and lissom, with the grace of a boy, and her slender clothes hung on her to perfection. Lady Chiltern noted rapidly the red-gold hair, thick and wavy and clipped like that of a Florentine figure in a Renaissance picture; the grey-green eyes shining like jewels under the black lashes; the small, pale, pointed oval of the face. She was beautiful—and she was strange. There was nothing conventional even about her beauty. She looked artistic, temperamental, everything in fact that one wouldn't expect Jim's wife to be. Lady Chiltern involuntarily thought of Blanche, and suppressed a sigh even while she took Carina's hand and smiled at her. Men so seldom played for safety, she reflected almost with bitterness.

“Well, my dear, I must kiss you because you're Jim's wife, and he's such an old dear friend.” She kissed Carina's forehead.

“Yes. Everyone else seems to have known him such ages. Except myself—and it makes me feel a stranger.” She laughed.

“Oh, you mustn't feel like that,” said Lady Chiltern. “It's because we know Jim so well that we want you to come into our little intimate circle as soon as possible.”

Carina glanced at her gratefully. She liked Lady Chiltern's kind manner, and it was nice to feel that Jim had old friends who loved and appreciated him. People who had known him all through that unhappy

first marriage of his, and didn't attribute the whole blame of its failure to him.

Tea was brought in—a welcome interlude, for even in the intimate circle to which she was to be immediately admitted, conversation hung fire. Carina decided that something must have been said to annoy Jim before she came into the room. He was obviously perturbed, wandering restlessly about the room, handing cups of tea in abstracted fashion.

“I've just been asking Jim to bring you and Peter over to lunch. I want you to meet my daughter Blanche—she's a great admirer of your books, Mrs. Mallory.”

“I'm so glad she likes them.” Carina's voice was cool and indifferent. She could now divine the cause of her husband's annoyance. She wished people wouldn't talk about her books in front of Jim.

She began to talk about other things in her low clear voice, guiding the conversation into less stormy channels.

Jim watched her with something of admiration. She was absolutely at her ease with his old friend; he felt for the first time that she had the indefinable look of the person who has succeeded through her own efforts. It wasn't the fact of her marriage that had given her significance, even in Lady Chiltern's eyes. She had gained significance by virtue of her talent before she had ever seen him.

“Would Tuesday suit you?” Lady Chiltern continued.

Carina looked at Jim, and he said quickly:

“Tuesday will suit us perfectly. Are we really to bring Peter?”

“Of course. Blanche will be so disappointed if you don't. And the week after, we're giving a boy and girl dance. I hope Peter will stay with us for it.” Lady Chiltern looked at Jim.

His face cleared. "That's very kind of you. I can answer for him that he'll be delighted."

He was quite eager in his acceptance of the invitation. Carina thought: "He wants Peter to go. He's afraid. . . ." She did not pursue this thought to its logical conclusion. But hadn't he shown her the true nature of his fears only the other day, even beseeching her assistance in his endeavor to combat the danger?

"Peter wants young society. It's bad for him to be always with us," Mallory added.

"I've just been to see Mrs. Humphreys," continued Lady Chiltern. "The baby's a dear little thing. She seems quite glad it's a girl—girls are less trouble, she says, and don't wear out their clothes so quickly. You haven't met her yet, I suppose?"

"No—the baby was born just before we arrived," Carina answered.

"They're charming people," said Lady Chiltern. "Mr. Humphreys is quite an exceptional man. You're lucky to have him here—such a good preacher. But of course I was forgetting—that doesn't affect you."

"No," said Carina.

She had only once seen Mr. Humphreys, but she had felt his ill-defined hostility keenly. For him she represented a dangerous element that it was far better not to introduce into quiet country parishes. Carina was too sensitive not to discern this attitude. Jim had once alluded to the "pressure that had been brought to bear" upon him. She divined that it had probably emanated from the rector.

"I hear you have lived a great deal abroad," said Lady Chiltern.

"Yes—I was in Rome for five years with my sister. I came back to England after her death last May."

"And then you met Jim! How delightful—one likes to hear of these sudden romances."

Carina smiled. "Yes—it was very sudden."

They talked on till nearly six o'clock, and then Lady Chiltern rose to go. On the whole she felt the visit had been a success. Jim's wife was a charming young creature, but really he looked almost old enough to be her father. Well, he knew his own business best, but there was a certain amount of risk about the whole thing. The girl looked like an alien exotic thing, planted there in the conventional English countryside. And she could never quite form part of it. Jim must find it awkward, too, going to church without her. . . .

All the way home she was thinking how much better it would have been if he'd married Blanche. She would have gone to church with him on Sundays, mothered Peter, and made a perfect hostess. But Jim had evidently fallen in love with this Miss Ramsden. Report—always unkind in country villages—had suggested that Carina had been by no means keen about it, but that Lady Murray had cleverly managed to bring the affair to a triumphant conclusion. Yes, it was evident that he was desperately in love with this slip of a girl, with her artistic, poetical, sensitive face.

Her conversation, too, with Mr. Humphreys at the rectory that afternoon had been slightly disquieting. He had shaken his head over "this unfortunate marriage poor old Mallory has just made." Peter—yes, she was rapidly gaining a hold over Peter; she was always about with him. Peter in her hands was docility itself, and Jim had never found it quite easy to deal with him.

"But as long as Jim recognizes the danger—" Mr. Humphreys had concluded.

"Oh, well, you must point it out to him," said

Lady Chiltern, with the curious simplicity she sometimes displayed.

"Not so easy, now she's there," Mr. Humphreys had admitted. "I did speak some very plain home truths to him before his marriage, when I discovered what it would involve."

"I'm sure things will settle down quite comfortably in the end; they generally do," she thought, as the car bore her swiftly homeward. Still, she reflected that a man who makes a mistake in his first marriage, generally chooses even less wisely the second time.

Carina had probably more character than Iris, and would "stand up to Jim" better. It dawned upon Lady Chiltern on her swift journey through the frost-bitten winter lanes, that Jim didn't care much for his wife's books. He had even looked perturbed and annoyed when the subject was introduced.

"Well, he can always stop her writing them," was her last reflection, as the car stopped before the door of Linfold Towers.

CHAPTER XX

IT WAS the day following Lady Chiltern's visit. A thaw had set in, and the snow was nearly all gone, only a thin line of it remaining on the north side of walls and hedges. The day was bright and sunny, and very mild for January, with a pale blue sky overhead patterned with floating islands of cloud.

"Like a walk this morning, Carina?" said Jim.

Peter had ridden off to the meet at an early hour, exhilarated by the prospect of a long day's hunting. Jim's hunter was lame, and he considered the distance too far for the young horse he had lately purchased. But a day at home no longer offered the disagreeable and boring prospect it had been wont to do before his marriage. Lately he had even begun to look forward to the time when he and Carina should be alone again. Sophia's visit loomed ahead, but had not as yet materialized; she was expected on the morrow.

"Of course I should like it," Carina answered, looking up from her letters.

"Can you be ready to start at half past ten? I want to go up to those new cottages beyond Linfold—one of my men's ill there. A man called Carter—I'm afraid they're a bit put to it. He made a foolish marriage last year—girl from Lintown, quite unused to country life—and now there's a baby."

"Oh, let's take them something."

"Well, I daresay they'd be glad of something for him. I'm afraid he's got pneumonia, from what my agent says."

Jim was always consistently kind to his tenants, both in sickness and health. He disapproved of "coddling" as he called it, but he made it a point of honor that every tenant on his estate should be properly housed and adequately paid. There was not a single cottage out of repair on his property, and he was always accessible if need demanded, to listen to complaints or petitions.

Carina had not so far made the acquaintance of any of her husband's tenants, though she had always supposed this would be demanded of her. But Jim hadn't suggested that she should occupy herself with them, for the simple reason that Mr. Humphreys had informed him before his marriage that it would be better not. However, there could be no harm in her coming with him to-day.

When they arrived at the cottage, which was one of a row, and had to be approached by a steep footpath from a muddy lane, Jim greeted the wife—a plaintive-looking girl of nineteen with a baby in her arms—and then went upstairs to see Carter.

Carina, left alone with the woman, asked to be allowed to look at the baby. As babies went, it did not appear to be a very thriving specimen.

"She's delicate, madam. The cold don't suit her," said the girl.

"How old is she?"

"Three months, madam. Carter and I have been married just over the year."

"What is her name?" inquired Carina.

"We call her Mary, madam."

Suddenly the girl's eyes filled with tears. She was pretty in her delicate town-bred fashion, very unlike the fair-haired strapping girls of the Sussex countryside. Carina began to wonder if she were unhappy in her novel, unaccustomed surroundings.

"Is anything the matter? Can I help you?" she asked.

She felt uneasy, as if she had suddenly found herself in the presence of some obscure and pitiful soul-tragedy.

"Is your husband worse?" she asked.

Mrs. Carter sank down in a chair and clasped the baby tightly to her thin breast.

"No, madam, it isn't that," she said at last, between her sobs. "But I've been wanting you to come. Praying for it . . . and when I saw you come in just now with Mr. Mallory—why it seemed to give me quite a turn!"

Carina was genuinely puzzled.

"But I don't understand . . ." she began.

"You're the first Catholic I've seen since I came here," said Mrs. Carter; "I've not spoken to one since I was married. And with the baby—and her not being baptized . . ." She choked back her sobs, and her wild dark eyes gazed at Carina with something of supplication in them.

Carina sat down near her and slipped an arm about her. "Tell me what I can do." Her voice was very gentle.

"Someone told me you was a Catholic, madam. Carter he wouldn't believe it at first—Mr. Mallory don't care to have them on his property—Carter told me to lie low about being one, for fear of giving offence. But I was baptized a Catholic, madam, and went to my duties regular till I was married. I was a Child of Mary . . . But my husband don't hold with the religion at all—and I want to have my baby baptized proper. I thought you'd help me. Carter thinks a lot of Mr. Mallory—so maybe if there was any trouble you'd speak to him."

"Why, of course I'll speak to him," said Carina.

"The baby ought to have been baptized long ago."

"Yes, madam, but what was I to do? What with Carter being against it—and spoke to the rector, too, he did—and my being so far from Lintown. . . ."

"Didn't your husband make the promises?"

The girl shook her head, and began to cry afresh. "You see, it was this way, madam; my father didn't want me to marry a Protestant, and he wouldn't have anything to say to Carter. So we was married in the church here."

"That was very wrong," said Carina.

"Yes, madam—I know it was. But Carter persuaded me—and I was very fond of him. But when the baby came and I was very ill, I got frightened. I asked him to send for Father Pemberton—but he wouldn't. He was afraid of its getting round to Mr. Mallory. We hadn't heard then that you was a Catholic, madam. I don't believe Carter would be afraid of having the baby baptized by Father Pemberton now."

"Well, we must see about it, and have it done as soon as possible, Mrs. Carter," said Carina.

The woman looked at her with heavy grateful eyes.

"You and Mr. Mallory were married in a Catholic church, madam?"

"Yes. In London."

"And he made all the promises?"

"Yes," said Carina.

Mrs. Carter looked immensely relieved. "Oh, then he'll understand about the baby," she said confidently.

For the first time an ugly little doubt crept into Carina's heart. Would he understand? Would he help her? Perhaps it would annoy him to know that Mrs. Carter had consulted her. . . .

She said quietly: "And I must see about taking you in to Lintown on Sunday to hear Mass. Do you think there are any other Catholics living round here who don't practice their religion?"

The woman shook her head. "I've never heard tell of any," she said. "It's the feeling I was the only one, that made me so lonesome like. And as I said just now, I'd been praying that you might come, madam. I felt if I could speak to you—"

There were sounds of movement overhead, and in another moment Jim Mallory came into the spotless little parlor.

"Well, Mrs. Carter, your husband's better this morning. I'll tell the doctor to look in again later, and leave word at the Park what he's to have in the way of food."

"Thank you, sir," said the woman.

"How's the baby getting on?"

"Pretty fair, sir. But she isn't putting on weight as she ought."

"And you're losing weight, too, by the look of you, Mrs. Carter," said Mallory. "Nothing else worrying you, I hope?" His voice if a little rough was kind. The woman was so obviously out of her sphere in a laborer's cottage. She ought to be serving in a shop, displaying ribbons across the counter. Hers was the genuine town-type, refined from contact with town ways, but she was not a suitable wife for a big rough son of the soil like Carter. Just as he was not good enough for her, she was not good enough for him. Village gossip affirmed that they were not happy—that Carter had "lifted his hand" to her more than once. He was a fine upstanding giant, fair, powerful, elemental. It was no doubt his good-looks, his strength, that had appealed to little Nancy Burton.

"Thank you, sir. There was something worry-

ing me, but I feel better about it, now I've had a talk with Mrs. Mallory."

Jim glanced half puzzled at Carina. Then he said: "I'm very glad to hear that. Anything my wife can do . . ."

"Thank you, sir. Mrs. Mallory said she'd try and help me."

"Well, you must take great care of that man of yours. These big strong chaps always take illness badly. However, I'm sure he's on the mend. Keep your spirits up, Mrs. Carter."

He shook hands with her. Carina followed his example, and then stooping over the baby, kissed it. She joined Jim on the doorstep.

"I'm glad I've seen the man for myself," said Mallory. "He'll want a bit of care after this—perhaps a week or so at the sea. That poor little woman isn't much use, I'm afraid. Can't think what induced him to marry her."

They climbed down the steep footpath into the muddy lane below. There was a fragrance of moist earth, of rotting leaves, and the wind that touched their faces was slightly brackish in quality. As they walked homeward through Linfold village they encountered Mr. Humphreys with his eldest little girl, a pretty child of about ten.

"I've just been up to see Carter," said Mallory; "he's had a sharpish attack."

"Yes, indeed he has," said the rector genially. "But that wife of his"—He broke off, and seemed slightly embarrassed. "Can't get her to bring the baby down to be baptized. She won't give me any reason . . . but she's as obstinate as a little mule. Still, I fancy she has a roughish time."

"Oh, it was a foolish marriage," said Jim, "but it's done now, and they must both try and make the best of it. I shall get him away to the sea, as soon

as he's fit to be moved, and it won't hurt her either to get away for a bit. Doesn't drink, does he?"

"No—from what I hear, he's a sober steady fellow," said the rector. "A bit bad-tempered perhaps—something of a bully. And she's not used to rough ways."

"The baby doesn't seem to be thriving," said Jim. "Well, we must push on, Carina. My boy's out hunting to-day," he added, as he took Mr. Humphreys' outstretched hand. "Good day for scent."

"And, Mrs. Mallory—I hope you're quite settling down among us?" said the rector, genially.

"Yes, thank you," said Carina, simply.

She was aware of the fixed stare of the little girl, Joyce; it almost embarrassed her. She was too little vain to accept it as a token of fervent admiration.

"I'm hoping to come and see your wife soon," she added.

"Yes, do. Any day after four you'll find her downstairs."

"We've got a new baby," said Joyce, "such a funny ugly one with no hair at all. And doesn't it yell!"

"Joyce, dear, you mustn't talk like that about your baby sister!" There was a hint of irritation in the rector's tone.

"Why mustn't I say it, Daddy? My doll's ever so much prettier. I don't think it's a very nice baby," she added, despondently.

"Wait till she grows a little and then she'll be as nice as possible," laughed Carina, stooping down and kissing Joyce under her big velvet bonnet.

She had a captivating way with children, Jim thought watching her. She had the ready understanding and sympathy, that are so necessary to touch the child's imagination.

"What's your name, dear," she asked.

"Joyce Agnes Humphreys."

"Well, Joyce, I hope you'll come to tea with me one of these days."

Before the child could answer, Mr. Humphreys interposed.

"That's very kind of you, Mrs. Mallory—very kind indeed. But we can't spare our little girl—she's the eldest of the three girls, you know, and she has her little duties. We look to Joyce to keep the children quiet when Mamma's resting, don't we, Joyce?"

Joyce's face fell.

"Oh, I'd much rather go to tea with Mrs. Mallory, Daddy," she said. "I hate looking after the others. It's horrid being the eldest," she added, turning to Carina; "you have to set an example and see that the others aren't naughty. And then if they are naughty you get punished for it. Were you ever the eldest?"

"Yes. But I only had one sister," said Carina.

"No brothers?" inquired Joyce.

"No—I never had any brothers."

"Good luck for you. It's simply awful trying to keep boys quiet, and they're so cheeky," said Joyce.

"That's enough, Joyce. You're talking too much," said her father sternly. "Mrs. Mallory doesn't want to hear your opinion. Good-bye, Mrs. Mallory." He shook hands with them both. "Joyce and I must be toddling home or Mamma will be wondering what's become of us."

He took his little girl by the hand and led her away.

Jim and Carina walked on in silence. Presently, as if he had just recollected the matter, Mallory turned to her and said:

"You were just going to tell me, weren't you, what Mrs. Carter wanted you to do for her? I hope it

was nothing very impracticable? I'm afraid she's rather a nervous hysterical woman."

"I think she's nervous," Carina agreed, "and then she's got something on her conscience, and she's evidently fretting about it."

"On her conscience!" repeated Jim.

"Yes. Mr. Humphreys almost hinted something about it just now. You see—she's a Catholic!"

"A Catholic? Oh, you must be mistaken, darling. I've got no Catholics among my people here. I've always tried to avoid it, you know. Partly on account of Humphreys. He's awfully broad-minded about Dissenters, but—" He stopped short. He couldn't quite tell her that Humphreys' prejudices against the Roman Catholic Church were very strong indeed. It was up to Carina with her good sense, her great tact, to show him that her coming among them would cause no stir of any sort.

"Well, she is one. They didn't like to say anything about it, and I'm sorry to say they were married in Linfold church. But now it's making her unhappy—she wants Father Pemberton to baptize her baby—and Carter won't allow it. So she asked me to appeal to you, Jim!"

Carina slipped her hand in Jim's arm with a gesture of confidence that touched him.

"I'm to ask you to plead for her with Carter," she added.

"But—she must know that naturally I should urge Carter to have the baby christened here by Humphreys. He's made no promises, as they were married here, so he's got the whip hand . . ."

All of a sudden he felt to the full the awkwardness of the situation. Mrs. Carter had appealed to Carina because she was a Catholic, married to a Protestant who had made the requisite promises on behalf of his own unborn children. The fact seemed

to hit him in the face; it had all the violence of a well-directed blow.

"You must see for yourself that it's absolutely impossible for me to interfere, Carina," he said. "Humphreys would make a personal matter of it. I've never had quarrels with my neighbors—I've lived here on the best of terms with everyone. I can't begin to have rows with Humphreys now. He's rather on the alert as it is."

Carina was silent. Then she said:

"Well, Jim, suppose you leave it to me? I think I can talk to Carter. And anyhow I'll take poor Mrs. Carter to Lintown on Sundays so that she may hear Mass. There's heaps of room in the car, and she could get a neighbor to look after the baby."

"Carina, darling, I do beg you'll do nothing of the kind. It would get round to Humphreys at once—"

"But I'm sure he must know she's a Catholic and ought to practise her own religion."

"I expect he'd say it was her duty to obey her husband. Not but what I think Carter's quite capable of enforcing obedience. He's a pretty tough customer when he's well."

"Do you mean that he beats her?" said Carina, with a slight shiver.

"Well, I shouldn't go so far as to say that, perhaps. But I think, from all accounts, she's felt the weight of his fist once or twice. It's said that these women don't like their husbands any the less if they give them a touch of the stick from time to time." He grinned. "Perhaps they even expect it," he added complacently.

"But Jim—never mind about that. You really *must* help me. She wouldn't have asked me—if I hadn't been your wife—and a Catholic. . . ."

"But, my dear, I do hope you didn't give her to

understand there was any prospect of my being able to help her in the matter? I wouldn't interfere for the world."

"Of course I said I'd speak to you about it, Jim."

"Well, it's very awkward—you mustn't say anything another time without consulting me. But you needn't go and see her again. I'll send Sophia up to explain—that'll save you the awkwardness of going yourself."

"But Jim—I can't—I simply can't let it end there. The woman is a lapsed Catholic, and it's my duty to help her and try to induce the man to have the child baptized. You needn't have anything to do with it, though she seemed to think it would be enough for you to speak to Carter. He's always been afraid of offending you—it was more than anything. I must help her." Carina's face was flushed and excited.

"Carina, I must really forbid you to take any steps in the matter."

Jim's voice had a touch of unwonted sternness.

She was silent.

"You must see that it would annoy Humphreys excessively to think you were interfering about the baptism of one of his parishioners."

But even as the words were uttered, he felt a faint sense of dismay. There would come a time perhaps . . . He simply dared not pursue the thought—the accruing complications would surely temper his joy at such a possibility to an almost cruel extent. He looked suddenly at the slight, light girlish figure at his side. The wind had disarranged her brilliant hair a little under the close fur cap she was wearing, and her cheeks were flushed with exercise. She looked beautiful to-day, and had she come to him with any other request on her lips he must surely have given way. But the meeting with Mr. Humph-

reys had not been altogether smooth, and the rector's manner seemed in the light of later events to have sounded a note of warning, with respect to the baptism of Carter's child. Perhaps he had even imagined that the visit had been paid with an ulterior motive quite unconnected with the man's health.

Mallory realized that a conflict between two opposing loyalties had arisen to confront him. He had a kind of uncomfortable conviction that, given her faith, his wife had right on her side. But, then, Carter had made no promises; he wasn't bound . . . as he himself for instance would be bound under similar circumstances. There was a sharp little sting in the thought. Carter had won his wife on pretty easy terms. . . .

"Don't let us talk any more about it, Car darling," he said, and they walked back almost to the house in dead silence. As they neared the gate he said:

"Darling—if it were anything I *could* give you, you know that you should have it at once!"

But Carina looked straight in front of her and said nothing.

CHAPTER XXI

CARINA decided in her own mind that whatever steps she might take in the matter must be taken before Sophia arrived. She dreaded that event, realizing that her sister-in-law was very intimate at the rectory and would in all things support Mr. Humphreys' view of the case. It would make things harder for her to have Sophia there, keeping Jim up to a proper sense of his duty both as landlord and as patron of the living.

Jim wasn't wholly against her, she could see that, and she felt grateful to him for it. But he was deeply concerned at the thought of annoying his old friend in any way. She mustn't look to him, therefore, for any practical assistance. She must manage alone.

After lunch she went up to her room and wrote a little note to Father Pemberton, telling him all the facts of the case, and putting the matter into his hands. Perhaps he could go over to Linfold and see Carter and talk to him. She would defray any expenses, for he would have to hire a motor; there was no other means of getting there. She hoped that he would succeed in obtaining the man's permission to have the baby baptized.

She longed to go up to the cottage and hear further news, but she received no answer to her letter until the evening of Sophia's arrival. That lady was indeed sitting with her in the drawing-room when the post arrived, and with it Father Pemberton's reply.

She must wait until she was alone to read it. And

Sophia showed no disposition to hurry over her tea. She had had a cold journey from London, and the warmth of the room was very comforting. Also, Carina had welcomed her in the most charming manner.

Jim and Peter had been out golfing all the afternoon, playing in a competition on the Lintown links, a good many miles away. Still, they ought to have been back by now. She glanced at the clock. It was unusual for them to be as late as this. . . .

Peter came in soon afterward alone. He greeted his aunt, and Carina rang for some hot tea.

"Where's your father, Peter?" she asked. "Didn't he come back with you?"

"Yes, but old Humphreys stopped us as we came through the village and said he had something important to tell him. Dad wanted to put it off till to-morrow, said he was tired, and you'd be waiting for him. But it was no go. He positively insisted."

Carina's heart sank. She was afraid that the news of Father Pemberton's visit to the cottage must have reached the rector's ears. He was a very active visitor in his own parish, and kept himself well-informed as to all its happenings, great and small.

"If you ask me, he seemed to be in a jolly good rage about something or other, Carina. And you could see, Dad didn't want to go a little bit!"

These words were not at all calculated to allay Carina's misgivings. She was aroused from the contemplation of them by hearing Miss Mallory say:

"That's not a respectful way to address your step-mother, Peter. I'm sure your father wouldn't approve of it."

Peter flushed. "He knows I call her Carina," he said. "What would you have me call her? Not Mrs. Mallory, I suppose?"

"Don't be impertinent, Peter."

"Sorry, Aunt Sophy. I didn't mean to be."

If only Sophia would go up to her room before Jim's return. . . . With Carina the wish had become almost a prayer. She longed to know the contents of Father Pemberton's letter. Something must have happened, or why should the rector detain Jim in this fashion?

The wish or prayer might have affected Sophia Mallory subconsciously, for she rose saying:

"I think I'll go up to my room and take my things off before Jim comes in."

Carina rose as if to accompany her.

"Oh, I know the way!"

"Yes, but I'd like to come. Peter, you must look after yourself."

"Right-O!"

Carina accompanied her sister-in-law into the room that was always set apart for her when she came to Linfold. But she did not remain with her very long. She went down a long passage into her own sitting-room and switched on the electric light.

There was a bright fire, and she sat down near it, for she felt deadly cold, and almost sick with apprehension. Then she opened the priest's letter. It was short and to the point. He had motored out to the cottage immediately on receipt of her letter, and had discussed the matter with the sick man, whose only objection to having the child baptized a Catholic had lain in his fear of offending Mr. Mallory. But now that he understood Mr. Mallory had married a Catholic himself, and had made the promises on behalf of his own children should there be any, Carter had permitted his fears to be allayed and given the required permission. He couldn't bear, he said, to see his wife fretting about it, but on the other hand he didn't want to risk losing his place. Father Pemberton added that he had baptized the

child, and had heard the woman's confession. He had had a very long talk with them both, and had found the man quite amenable. There was even some hope that he would become a Catholic.

Carina had scarcely finished reading the letter, when the door opened and Jim came into the room. She saw at a glance that he was both perturbed and angry. His eyes were blazing, and the black brows met in a straight ominous line across his face.

Carina rose. "Have you had your tea, Jim? It was all ready—"

"No," he said, "I've come straight up here. Peter said you'd gone upstairs. I've seen Humphreys—he's in a simply towering rage over this Carter business. Says you sent the priest up there. But it wasn't your doing, surely, Carina? After what I said?"

Their eyes met. He seemed to be demanding the truth from her, but Carina had never had the slightest intention of withholding it from him.

"Please don't frighten me, Jim. Of course I wrote and told Father Pemberton. There was nothing else for me to do."

Her voice was steady. But Jim's anger always inspired her with a measure of physical fear. Never having experienced that sensation before in her life, it seemed to her a degrading one.

"You wrote to Father Pemberton?" he repeated, as if he could hardly bring himself to believe her. "Didn't I tell you not to interfere? I said I would send Sophy up there to explain."

"I know you did, Jim. But I felt I couldn't let you do that. I had to help Mrs. Carter. I didn't know until just now, what had been done. But I've just had this letter from Father Pemberton—you can read it if you like."

Jim took the letter and went nearer to the lamp

to read it. The light was full on his face, and she could see the veins like knotted cords on his forehead. When he had finished reading it he threw the letter down on the table with a gesture of disgust.

"Well, they've made a mistake, that's all I can say," he remarked, more temperately than Carina could have hoped. "I'm certainly not going to let them stay on. I owe that to Humphreys. He can't have any Roman interference here, and I quite agree with him. Carter'll have to clear out, the moment he's well enough."

Carina was horrified. "Oh, you can't mean that, Jim!" she cried.

"But I do mean it," said Mallory, "there's row enough about it as it is. Carter ought never to have married the girl. And it wasn't fair her dragging you into it like this. I've got a man who's very anxious to have the cottage—a very respectable young chap who wants to get married as soon as he can find a place to live in."

"But . . . they'll starve, Jim. Carter won't be able to work again for ages. And then where are they to go?"

"My dear Carina, you must leave me to settle my own affairs. I never allow anyone to interfere. You went against me—you've only got yourself to blame. But I hope it'll teach you a lesson." He looked down at her. He found it more and more difficult to be angry with Carina. She wove spells about him, and he knew that if it hadn't been for that hectic talk with the rector he would have passed the whole matter over in silence. But Humphreys was very angry—justifiably angry—had even threatened to throw up the living. It was all very unpleasant, especially for a man who only desired peace in his private life.

Carina's face had assumed a certain rocky expres-

sion that he was accustomed now to associate with an unspoken opposition to his own views.

"The only thing that's left for me to do in order to pacify Humphreys, is to get rid of the Carters. Especially, as Father Pemberton thinks there's a chance of converting the man. He's too ill and weak now to resist. And as for their thinking they'd get any support from me because I'd married a Roman Catholic, they'll soon learn that for that very reason I shall put my foot down more than ever on anything of the sort. I really thought you had too much tact to try to influence the poor people. It seems I was mistaken. You haven't been here more than a few weeks, and you've already contrived to put me into a jolly unpleasant position."

"I'm sorry, Jim. But I only did what I knew to be right, and I can't be sorry for *that*. And of course it's only reasonable for people round here to think you can't be so very prejudiced since you married a Catholic."

"Then I must show them they're mistaken," said Jim. "Humphreys has got his back up, I can tell you. Said he realized that things were changed. . . ."

"Jim, why do you listen to him? Why don't you judge for yourself?"

"I am judging for myself. And I see that things can't go on like this, or I shall have the whole neighborhood about my ears. And it's very unfortunate, too, that Sophy should have come just now. She's very thick with Mrs. Humphreys—spends half her time there."

Carina was silent. Left to herself, she felt that she could have managed Jim without difficulty, but outside interference was too strong for him. The Humphreys-Sophia combination threatened to prove a strong one. She sighed.

"Carina—I didn't want to be hard on you—" he said, wistfully.

She looked up. "You make me feel it was a mistake—my ever coming here."

He came up to her and took her hand. "No—you mustn't think that, Carina darling. You've given me the only true happiness I've ever had. You've made me think better even of your religion. But you're not used to English country life, and of course you're bound to make mistakes at first."

"Jim, promise me you won't be too hard on the Carters. She looks such a frail little woman. And there's the baby. . . . At least, let me help them if they do go away. I've plenty of money of my own—I should like to spend some of it on them. You—you give me everything I can possibly want—I've hardly used any of my own money since we were married."

"I'll think about it," said Jim. "And in any case I won't be hard on them. I'll send the man off to the sea, and try to find a job for him later on when he's better. Will that do, Car darling?"

"Thank you, Jim."

They were at peace again. She lifted her face to his and he kissed her. She felt that she could never forget his words spoken that evening: "*You've given me the only true happiness I've ever had.*"

So he hadn't regretted it. And just then she had needed the assurance. . . .

CHAPTER XXII

JIM was anxious to keep the Carter affair from Peter's knowledge, and he feared that during the next few days there would be frequent and perhaps heated interviews with the rector, which might render this secrecy difficult. It was therefore rather a relief to him when at dinner that night a prettily worded note from Blanche Chiltern arrived, inviting Peter to stay at the Towers for the dance and to remain with them after it for a few days. Some of her nephews and nieces were also coming to stay there, and there were, besides, several dances in prospect in the neighborhood, to which Peter of course could go.

Peter loved dancing, like all the youth of his particular generation; he was very popular among the young people of the neighborhood, and at one time there is no doubt the prospect would have filled him with delight. Now, however, when Jim informed him of the contents of the note which Carina had just handed across the table, his face fell.

"Oh, can't I just have the car and go over for the dance? I don't want to stay there a little bit. It's much jollier here!"

He looked at Carina as if hoping to elicit some support from her. But her face was very still and tranquil, and she remained silent.

"Nonsense, Peter! It's very kind of Lady Chiltern to ask you. Of course you must go, and stay there as long as they want you to."

Peter relapsed into silence. If it hadn't been for

Aunt Sophy's presence he would have imagined that they wished to be alone for a bit, his father and Carina. But with Aunt Sophy at Linfold it couldn't be for that reason. He didn't in the least want to go. Blanche was fussy and sentimental . . . She wasn't just young and ripping, like Carina. His face wore a look of intense, dismayed annoyance.

Miss Mallory struck in: "Why, Peter, I can remember the time when you were only too delighted to stay there. What's changed you?"

She fixed her dark hard eyes upon him.

He paused a little. "I like being here best, Aunt Sophy," he finally returned.

"Yes, I quite understand that. But why?" inquired his aunt, blandly.

"I can't explain. It's jollier here—" he said, wriggling a little uncomfortably in his chair. He knew that Sophia had guessed the reason for his not wishing to leave home.

"You should always have a reason, Peter. Otherwise likes and dislikes are such childish, unintelligible things!"

Sophia watched her victim. Yes, it was as she thought. Carina had already made the boy her devoted slave. Her influence was far too strong. Given all the circumstances, it was dangerously strong. And one knew where it would lead to.

Her three hearers, all perceiving her meaning, were made uncomfortable by this persistence. What she was really saying was so obviously: "You don't want to go away because Carina's here—you've taken a foolish fancy to her, and she will use it to her own ends."

Mallory was perhaps the most miserably uncomfortable of the three. Always a little afraid of his sister's tongue, and of her acute observant eyes, they made him feel to-night a little guilty. To-morrow

she would no doubt call at the rectory at an early hour, and learn the full details of the Carter case.

He hoped that Carina didn't guess anything of his secret motive for wishing Peter to stay at the Towers as long as possible. Sophia had certainly divined it. She was on the alert to discover how far Carina's influence had already spread at Linfold. Jim foresaw how completely she would support Mr. Humphreys against Carina about the Carter affair.

It soothed him to see his wife sitting there opposite to him, serene and unconscious. *Au fond* she wasn't in the least upset by the consequences of her impulsive action; she seemed entirely possessed by the steady conviction that in sending for Father Pemberton she had only done her duty. . . .

Peter went off to the Towers on the following afternoon. Parkinson, who had been his old nurse, undertook the packing of his things. She still saw to everything that concerned him, the care, the mending, and replenishing of his wardrobe. Carina gave him her hand in farewell, when he came to bid her good-bye. Her voice was very kind as she said: "Good-bye, Peter. Enjoy yourself. . . . I shall miss you." She stood on the steps, beside Jim, waving to him as the car bore him away.

Jim linked his arm in his wife's, and they entered the house together.

"Come into my study, Car darling—I want to have a talk."

"Yes, Jim."

Since the preceding evening he had said nothing more about the Carters. But he had spent a considerable time shut up with Mr. Humphreys in his study that morning, and no doubt the subject had been discussed with considerable vehemence. Perhaps now she was to learn the upshot of it all.

"I'm glad Peter's gone," said Jim. "He's better

out of the way for a few days, till all this has blown over. I'd rather he didn't know anything about it. It would only excite his curiosity, and he's such a loyal young partisan of yours, Carina. I should despair of getting him to see things from the right angle."

"I think, too, it's better he should be away. I'm sure Sophy irritates him," said Carina.

"Oh, she always has. That doesn't matter. You know, Humphreys was here to-day, Car."

"Yes, I heard his voice," said Carina, with unconscious irony.

"He wants me to dismiss Carter at once."

"Well, if you do, Jim, I'll see that they don't want for anything. You needn't know—"

Carina smiled at him. She had been making plans for removing Carter to the hospital at Lintown, and to effect a reconciliation between Mrs. Carter and her father. The woman could then go home for a little till her husband was better and another place could be found for him.

She related the scheme to Jim.

"Well, I should think that would do as well as anything," he said. "I wish there hadn't been all this fuss just now. Sophy's down there this afternoon and she's bound to hear all about it."

"Oh, don't mind about Sophy, Jim. We're not responsible to her."

"But Sophy will take Humphreys' views of the matter—and she'll only be in the right if she does. You see, he looks upon it as a deliberate attempt on your part to proselytize one of his parishioners. He went up there quite late last night—after I'd seen him—to talk to Carter, and he couldn't get the man to say a word except that he was going to look to Father Pemberton to show him how to save his soul."

“Well, dear Jim, it’ll be a very happy thing for poor little Mrs. Carter if her husband does become a Catholic.”

Jim looked at her strangely. He had felt certain at times that Carina was praying for him and for his conversion; the process had made him restless and unsettled, as if her prayers had imbued him with a spiritual malaise. It was useless to hope that things could go on at Linfold just as if he had never introduced this novel, alien element into his house. Carina’s influence was too strong, too profound for that. And it wasn’t something that you could take hold of and destroy. It was elusive, like light, like flame. It was something that seemed to emanate from the burning energy of her own faith.

But she wasn’t “noisy” about it, whatever Humphreys might affirm to the contrary. And, after all, Mrs. Carter had appealed to her, and Carina had felt herself in duty bound to respond to that appeal.

“I wish Sophy wasn’t here,” he confessed; “I should like to have had these few days alone with you.”

His voice held a touch of wistfulness.

“Married people can’t always expect to be alone,” she said, “and we have been married nearly three months. Quite long enough for you to be very tired of me!”

“Does that mean that you’re tired of it already?” he demanded.

“You know it doesn’t . . . I’m so happy, Jim—or rather I should be if we could eliminate Mr. Humphreys when he’s on the warpath!” She looked up into his face and smiled. “Tell me you’re not against me!”

“But I *am* against you—I must be against you. That doesn’t make any difference to our love, Carina!”

"Doesn't it? But I'm always afraid it may." She felt that the moment had come, now he was in this softened, subdued mood. "Jim!"

"What is it, Car darling?"

"Soon we shan't be alone together even when Sophy and Peter aren't here!"

For a moment he was puzzled, then he grasped the significance of her words. "Darling—do you really mean it?"

She looked up smiling. "Do you think Peter will mind much?"

"Mind? What's it got to do with him? Why should he mind?"

"He's been your only son—your only child—for so long. It isn't as if he'd ever had brothers and sisters."

"We really can't consider Peter's feelings!"

"I may tell him—before he goes back to Eton?"

"I'll think about it. There's no hurry."

"Mr. Humphreys can't make you banish us—as he wants you to banish the Carters!"

Jim's hold of her relaxed. He remembered his promise, his rash unwise promise. It seemed to dim his great joy a little.

Carina said slowly: "I hope it will be a little girl. I feel I shan't miss Mary so much when I have a daughter of my own."

"Yes . . . a little girl. That would be perfect. I hope it'll be a girl," he said, and his face cleared a little.

"You *are* glad, Jim?"

"Very, very glad."

They sat there together for a long time, saying very little. His arms were about her, and once or twice he pressed his face to hers. She felt his love like a warm atmosphere. It was one of the happiest moments she had ever known. And he was sharing

her joy to the full. Whatever bitterness the future might hold, he was giving himself up then to the perfect happiness of the present.

Of course it must be a girl. He had always wished for a little daughter. It would be so much less complicated than a son, who would perhaps have had to go to a Catholic school instead of to Eton. He told himself again that the mere fact of Peter's existence had made it easier for him to marry a Catholic and assent to the required conditions. Peter stood between Linfold and the fear of its passing into Catholic hands. Carina might convert the whole parish if she chose, but she must leave his son alone. And, in a very few years he would be going to Woolwich; he would pass quite out of the range of his stepmother's influence. Just for those few years he must be watched, and guarded, and if need be, controlled. . . .

At last Mallory said:

"And if you ever feel you want to write, Car darling . . . you mustn't let anything I've said stand in your way." He had the feeling that with this ordeal awaiting her, life must be smoothed for her. She must have, in reason, all that she wished for. "It might amuse you on the days when you don't feel up to going out."

She shook her head. Of course it was a great concession for Jim to make. But it had come to her at a moment when she did not need it any more.

"I'm sure I shan't want to, thank you, Jim. My mind's so full of other things, and I shall have heaps to do, you know."

"It's what I always hoped would be the case, darling."

Yes, this was what he had most earnestly desired, that Carina would some day lose the celebrity in the mother. She would have other and deeper interests,

more normal occupations. Life was rapidly molding her, and she offered no resistance to its wise shaping.

She had never seemed so truly his. He knew now that he had made her happy, that he had won her love. At first he had doubted, and suffered, and struggled, and the conflict had embittered him. But now she had taken all his doubts away. Children's voices were to be heard once more in the old house; children's feet pattering down the corridors and stairs. Linfold would awaken to a new life.

Carina was very quiet, and when he looked at her again, he saw that she was gently sleeping, her head against his shoulder. Jim did not dare move for fear of awakening her.

He gazed almost with awe at the slumbering exquisite face. The bright short hair made a vivid patch against her pale cheek.

Yes, he must make it easy for her to carry out her plan for the disposal of the Carters. It would be quite simple. And Mrs. Carter had never settled down in Linfold, couldn't accustom herself to country ways. She would be glad if a job could be found for her husband in Lintown.

He would go up to the cottage this very afternoon and see the man, and afterward he would call at the rectory and tell Humphreys what had been settled. . . .

CHAPTER XXIII

PETER came into Carina's sitting-room one morning soon after his return from the Towers. Jim had gone into Lintown; Sophia was at the rectory; the field was quite clear. Ever since his return he had been watching for an opportunity to talk to Carina.

It was Blanche Chiltern's doing. She had asked him many questions about his young stepmother, including several that concerned her religion. Blanche confessed that she longed to talk to her about it—it was so very seldom that one came across Catholics in Linfold—but young Mrs. Mallory seemed to be unusually reserved on the subject.

These conversations had stimulated Peter's interest. Carina, it is true, never spoke to him about her religion, and he had accepted without question the fact that she did not accompany himself and his father to church on Sundays. She had the car and went to Lintown. He told Blanche that he rather thought he should like to go with her once, just to see what it was like. But he had an idea that his father wouldn't approve: he had snubbed him once for suggesting it. Perhaps he was afraid old Humphreys might make a fuss. . . .

"Her books tell you quite a lot about it," Blanche had said.

"Do they? I began one of them once, but Dad told me I wasn't to read it. Perhaps that was the reason."

Jim had not suspected danger from that quarter.

But he had reckoned without Blanche, who had secret "leanings." Her words did undoubtedly stimulate Peter's curiosity, and he determined to question Carina the first time he found himself alone with her.

It was no easy matter to secure an interview with her. To begin with, when he came back home he found that his father was more constantly with Carina than ever before. He hardly let her out of his sight, and when Peter suggested she should come and have another lesson in golf, he told him rather abruptly not to worry her, adding that she wasn't going to play any more because it tired her. Peter suspected nothing, but his father's possessive attitude was more pronounced than it had ever been. He could never remember that Mallory had hung about the house nearly all day in this manner before. Sometimes he took Carina out for a short run in the car or for a little walk. They were almost always together. . . .

At last the moment had arrived and Peter went up to her sitting-room, and knocked at the door. She was writing letters, but when he came in she laid down her pen.

"Good-morning, Peter."

"Am I disturbing you, Carina?"

"Not at all. Do sit down. I shall have finished this letter in a moment."

She folded the paper, enclosed it in an envelope and sealed it down.

"Blanche Chiltern wants to talk to you about your religion," he said without further preliminary. "She said you seemed very reserved about it. Don't you like talking about it, Carina?"

She hesitated, and then said:

"But one isn't necessarily always talking about it, Peter."

"One of my chums at Eton, Robin Winfield, is a

Catholic. He's tried to tell me about it sometimes—but he saw it bored me. However, it won't bore me now. I feel I shall want to hear everything he can tell me. It's a mysterious kind of religion, isn't it Carina?"

"Yes," said Carina, "but very simple too. However, I don't think we'll talk about it, Peter. Your father wouldn't like it."

"Catholics seem so different from other people," he said wistfully.

Carina's heart sank a little. Yes, it was her presence at Linfold, and the fact that she was herself a Catholic, that had stimulated the boy's interest and curiosity. Then she remembered Jim's words—that he was prepared to suppress any manifestation of the sort in his son with the utmost severity of which he was capable. They were no idle words. However much he might now give in to her, displaying an increase of love and sympathy that could not but touch her, she knew that on this point he would prove inexorable.

"Directly I'm old enough—directly I leave school—I mean to read up all I can about it. I shall ask Robin to give me the names of some books. His mother's a very keen Catholic. Carina, I've an idea that I shall be one myself, one of these days. Would you like that?"

What had Blanche said? "She'll try to convert you, of course." But it wasn't true. Carina had never willingly spoken to him on the subject.

He stood in front of her, waiting for her answer. Her eyes filled with tears.

"Don't ask me, dear. Your father wouldn't like it—wouldn't allow it for a moment. If you were to say anything, it might make him very angry. Perhaps angrier than you have ever seen him. . . ."

The boy sat down near her, and taking her hand in his began to play with her rings.

"Robin's mother is one, and his father isn't. If I'd been *your* son should I have been a Catholic?"

"Yes," she answered, and as she spoke, she let her eyes rest upon his eager young face with a half-maternal longing.

"Then if you ever have children they'll be Catholics?"

The question startled her a little. "Yes, Peter."

"But if Dad hates it so much?" He was frankly puzzled.

"He made that promise, you see, before we were married."

"Did he? I wonder why—"

"He had to. We couldn't have been married otherwise. I had to obtain a dispensation in order to marry him—and that was one of the conditions he was obliged to agree to."

"Dad must have loved you most awfully to make such a promise as that. It must have gone against his conscience. . . ."

Carina was silent. Perhaps she alone knew how heavily Jim had paid in order to make her his wife. And the moment of actual payment would come to him before the year was out. What effect would it have upon this man of proud, wilful, and obstinate temper? At present his kindness and solicitude were beyond all words; it was almost as if he feared something might step in and destroy their happiness. Of Jim's love she had never felt so assured, but always she knew there were things between them that required the most delicate and discreet handling. Peter that morning was trespassing very close to those forbidden boundaries. He was a thoughtful boy, and he had arrived at an age when religion normally begins to interest the young. He seemed determined

to learn more, to know more, about his stepmother's Faith. It was Carina who had herself aroused that interest, nor could she possibly wish that it should be ultimately quenched. Perhaps the path would be made easier for Peter when there were other children to be brought up, if not with Jim's approbation, at least with his consent, in the Catholic Faith. The years must inevitably, she thought, soften something of the harshness of his prejudices.

If only the baby proved to be a little girl! A daughter to look at her perhaps with Mary's turquoise blue eyes, whose head would be crowned with that hair of delicious silvery fairness. She said suddenly: "Peter—I want to tell you a secret. . . ."

"Yes?" he said.

"Some day I hope you will have a little sister. She'll be a Catholic because I am one. And you must love her for my sake."

"Yes—yes—I promise—," he stammered eagerly. "When, Carina?"

"Perhaps next August." Her voice was very soft, and there was a suspicious brightness in her eyes.

"I shall envy her, having you for a mother," the boy said simply. "You see, I can scarcely remember mine—I was such a little chap when she died, and I hardly ever saw her—she was always ill."

"But I shall always love you, Peter, as if you were my own son," she told him. She put her arms round him and kissed him. It made him think of that first night of her coming to Linfold, when she had called him in from the winter storm and darkness.

It had been, he felt, the beginning of a new life for him. Her very presence checked his father's temper; except that once over the book, there had not been a single scene between them all the holidays.

She made of Linfold a different place, with the sweetness and brightness of her presence.

"You've been most awfully good to me, Carina," he said awkwardly, "and I'm very grateful. And I—I hated the thought of your coming."

"Oh, but that was very natural," she told him, laughing. "Stepmothers are always supposed to be horrible to their stepchildren!"

"You see, I'd been everything to Dad for so many years, and I thought you'd cut me out completely—" he confessed.

"You were very silly," she told him. "You'd seen me—you might have known I wasn't a conspiring kind of person."

"I thought anyone so beautiful was bound to do whatever they liked with Dad," remarked Peter, with boyish sagacity. "You mustn't mind my telling you all this, Carina. It's been different, you know, ever since that day you came home. When you called me in—"

"It was making me very unhappy," she said.

In the little silence that followed this mutual confession, Jim suddenly walked into the room. His face was slightly reddened from exposure to the keen air of the January day, and his ungloved hands were swollen and purple with cold.

"Hullo, Peter! What are you doing, slacking in-doors? Why aren't you riding this morning? I won't keep a horse for you if you let it eat its head off!" His tone was irritable. "I hope he hasn't been bothering you long, Car darling?"

"He hasn't been bothering me at all, Jim," she answered. "And you mustn't scold him, please. We've been having a talk." She laid her hand lightly on the boy's shoulder, and looked up smiling at Jim.

He relented a little. "You spoil him, darling . . .

Get along, Peter, it's nearly luncheon time—sharp now!”

Peter went out of the room, a little chilled. He resented his father's peremptory tone, but still he had had a wonderful half-hour with Carina, and it was well worth a brief scolding. He loved her now with a boy's trembling hero-worship. Far, far better than he could remember loving his own mother, who now across the years had become an increasingly shadowy figure. More, even, he told himself, than he had ever loved his father with his capricious treatment of him, now fond, now severe. Her words, "*I shall always love you, Peter, as if you were my own son,*" rang like music in his ears. She would love him more and not less, because of the child that was to be born to her. Carina's heart was large enough to hold them both. . . .

"What did he want?" inquired Jim, when his son had gone out of the room.

Carina said softly: "I've been telling him, Jim. I thought I should like him to hear it first from me. He's bound to hear gossip in the village, or while he's at school."

"What did he say?" asked Jim curiously.

"Not very much. But I think on the whole he was pleased. He said he should envy it having me for a mother."

Jim smiled at her. "You'll make a delicious mother, darling."

"I'm practising on Peter," she assured him gaily.

"I can't have you spoiling my son!"

"Boys need tenderness—they get so much knocking about."

"Peter's never had half enough knocking about, as you call it."

"He's had quite as much as is good for him," she said seriously.

Jim scowled a little, fancying a reproach. "He's none the worse for it anyhow, is he? He's going to make a fine man. But he'll need lots of watching these next few years."

Carina was thankful that he was so completely ignorant of what was passing in the boy's mind. Blanche Chiltern had stepped in where she herself—for Jim's sake—would have feared to tread. But she knew, too, it was this very disposition in Peter that her husband intended to watch and if need be to check. The fear had from the first obsessed him. It had been present to his mind when he had made those promises before his marriage. Fortunately, he reflected, by the time Carina's child was old enough to go to church, Peter would be grown-up and perhaps in the Army, spending much of his time away from Linfold. Surely in these few intervening years it would be easy to prevent him from acquiring too much knowledge of the Catholic religion.

"By the way, it's all right about Carter," he said suddenly. "I have been to Lintown this morning and made arrangements for him to go to the hospital. They'll send a motor-ambulance for him—we shall have to pay for that, of course. And I've seen Father Pemberton, and asked him to go and speak to Burton, the woman's father, about her returning home for the present."

"May I go up to the cottage this afternoon and tell them what we've done?" she asked.

"Oh, there's no necessity for you to go, and it's too far for you to walk."

"I'd like to go and see them again," she said; "you might run me up in the car, Jim."

"Very well," said Jim submissively. "There's the gong, Carina. Come along. I'm simply ravenous!"

In the dining-room they found Peter waiting for

them; his sleek black hair brushed to a fine polish. As he stood there, tall, erect, slim, Jim felt a renewed pride in his son. He would be a credit to him always. Some day he would worthily fulfil those duties to which he must ultimately succeed. And there was no doubt that even in these few weeks Carina's influence had worked beneficially upon him. He was more ready to obey, much less prone to argue and rebel. She had softened and humanized him . . . He had needed some gentle influence of the kind. Without realizing it, he had undoubtedly missed that wealth of tenderness which only a mother can give. It was this that had made him turn instinctively to Carina after his first jealous suspicions of her had been allayed. Carina, with quick generous response to that unuttered appeal, had given him royally of that tenderness.

On the whole she had done wisely to tell him. From all accounts, he had received the information with pleasure, and his face was singularly bright and sunny as he took his seat at the table opposite to the grim granite countenance of Sophia Mallory.

Sophia was now perfectly conversant with all the happenings of the Carter case. She had not yet spoken to Jim on the subject, but she fully intended to do so at the first opportunity. She meant to give him a word of warning. It would be quite enough for her to say: "Jim, I should watch Peter if I were you," to make him keep an extra guard over his son.

For there was no doubt that Carina had rapidly acquired a very strong influence over Peter. In Miss Mallory's opinion she could twist him round her little finger. Jim had better be careful. . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

CARINA'S daughter was born in August at Lady Murray's house in South Kensington. Her aunt had suggested that she should come to her for the event, and Jim had agreed, because although he would have preferred his child to be born at Linfold, he reflected that it would be far easier to get the baptism safely over in London, without any remonstrance from Mr. Humphreys.

This ceremony indeed took place only a couple of days later, and Lady Murray and Jim were both present at it, as well as Richard Grove, who quite surprisingly had been invited by Mallory to be the godfather. He had asked Carina if she would like this, and had had the pleasure of seeing that she was both touched and grateful. The baby was baptized Mary Antonia, and already Carina called her Tony.

She was like Jim, having his raven hair and dark eyes, but she had her mother's delicate grace of feature and smallness of limb.

Sophia was not in London, preferring to remain at Linfold to "look after Peter," a process which he would most gladly have dispensed with. He hoped that his father would send for him soon, to go up and see Carina and the baby. He was glad to have a little sister. . . .

Jim bit his bullet well, on the whole. He hadn't liked it, although he could not help acknowledging to himself that the little ceremony had been both solemn and beautiful. And, after all, a girl didn't matter so much. . . .

Besides, Carina in her new rôle of mother was un-

utterably beautiful and charming, and he felt that even if he hadn't made the promises, he would have found it difficult to refuse her anything just then. Lady Murray too had been kindness itself, cheering and encouraging him through the inevitable hours of anxiety. But now it was happily over, Carina was making a rapid recovery, and he had never seen her so gay. The child too was strong and healthy, a lovely little thing. Jim paid his debt without a murmur.

In a brief letter to Sophia, he wrote: "The baby was baptized this morning at the Oratory. We have called her Mary Antonia—Mary, after Carina's sister. I think she will always be known as Tony."

Lady Chiltern had come over to see Sophia and to hear the latest accounts soon after the arrival of this letter. Miss Mallory eagerly communicated its contents to her visitor.

"Of course he must feel it terribly; what man wouldn't?" she said. "And Jim is so conservative. Besides, it may affect Peter—I know he has always been afraid of that."

"Oh, Peter will be going to Woolwich in a year or two," said Lady Chiltern, "and after that he'll hardly be at home at all. And then I thought Jim had made it quite clear from the first that she mustn't attempt any proselytizing." Her tone was uniformly cheerful and hopeful.

"Carina," said Sophia solemnly, "is a witch."

Lady Chiltern laughed. "All beautiful women are, my dear!"

Sophia shook her head. "She makes a fool of Jim. And it gets worse. He's wrapped up in her. The fuss he makes!"

"Well, he looks very happy. It seems to agree with him. And one can't be surprised at his making a fuss with that lovely young thing!"

Sophia had borne with Iris Mallory because, after her marriage, she had shown herself uniformly helpless and weak, trying so hard to please Jim that she had ended by not pleasing him at all. He had wearied of her only too rapidly. But Carina was made of very different stuff, as Sophia was shrewd enough to perceive. She had a decisive independent character, and then she had never been blindly in love with Jim as poor little Iris had been. She had had her own way since coming to Linfold to quite a surprising degree—witness Jim's far too lenient treatment of the Carters. They were prospering now in Lintown—the man had become a Catholic and was in good work too, a job having been found for him by his father-in-law. All Carina's doing, of course; she had interfered in a matter which didn't concern her, and Jim had tamely acquiesced. If she had given in and not written a line since her marriage, that was probably because she hadn't wanted to. Jim would certainly have rescinded his prohibition if she had asked for it. . . .

"You'll see, she'll do exactly what she likes with that child of hers. Jim won't have any say in the matter," continued Sophia, in a tone of gloomy prophecy. "When I think of Iris and Peter—" She stopped short.

"Iris was very different," said Lady Chiltern, who had been really fond of the first Mrs. Mallory, although recognizing that she was wholly unsuited to Jim. "Carina is quite modern. She was independent before she married. I always think that makes a great difference to a girl."

Something in Sophia's hostile tone displeased her. She liked Carina. And Sophia was capable of making mischief. . . .

"And when you think Jim actually invited Richard

Grove to be one of the godparents!" continued Miss Mallory.

"Why shouldn't he? Such an old friend of the family," murmured Lady Chiltern, pacifically.

"Jim can't bear him. I believe he put his foot down about the friendship."

"I think Miss Tony's very lucky to have such a celebrated godfather," said Lady Chiltern, pleasantly.

"Jim has never cared for celebrities. It would have been appalling if Carina had dragged him into a dreadful Bohemian set!"

"Lady Murray has a high opinion of Mr. Grove—I've heard her say so. He was so kind to those two poor girls after their father's death."

"But isn't it dreadful to think of those two young girls living alone in a flat in Rome? No one to chaperon them or look after them, except Richard Grove." There was an increase of acerbity in Sophia's tone.

"My dear Sophy, he was never in Rome till after the sister's death. I believe he did go out then to see if he could help Carina."

Sophia was silenced by something in Lady Chiltern's tone that suggested disapproval.

"And they managed so wonderfully, poor children. A friend of mine knows Lady Murray very well and heard the whole story from her. Carina behaved like a little heroine all through her sister's illness, she worked like a slave, and nursed her into the bargain! It was during the War, too, when things were so difficult everywhere. It's such a comfort to feel the poor child had such a happy fate in store for her. Do you know, I think Jim's to be envied his good fortune?"

"Jim might have married anyone!" returned Sophia, with renewed spirit.

"Yes, and he had the good sense to choose Carina. I like a woman of character—fearless and capable. It seems to me she's just the right wife for Jim, and just the right stepmother for Peter!"

Sophia was completely silenced now. Carina certainly had an able defender in Lady Chiltern.

"Of course, you heard that Mr. Humphreys caught her proselytizing in the village," said Miss Mallory presently.

"Proselytizing in the village? Oh, my dear—surely you must be exaggerating? Blanche told me she couldn't get her to talk about her religion at all. It was a relief to my mind, for she would have found such a willing victim in poor dear Blanche."

"Jim was very much upset. Carina found out that that silly little woman, Mrs. Carter, who came from Lintown, was a Catholic and hadn't had the baby baptized. Mr. Humphreys had spoken to the man repeatedly about it. But he fell ill, and Carina sent word to the priest, and he motored over—Mrs. Humphreys saw him pass the rectory—and he not only baptized the baby, but proceeded at once to instruct the husband. Of course, Mr. Humphreys couldn't have that sort of thing taking place in his parish, and he told Jim they must be sent away."

"And have they gone?" inquired Lady Chiltern, who could not help feeling interested in the little narrative.

"Yes. Back to Lintown. I believe the man's got work there."

"Then it all ended very happily," said Lady Chiltern. "And if Jim finds himself in an awkward position every now and then, he has only himself to blame for marrying a Catholic. It was such a brave thing to do, wasn't it? He couldn't marry Carina under any other condition, except that of bringing up their children as Catholics. I hear he told Mr.

Humphreys that there was absolutely no chance of winning her unless he made the promises."

"And Jim of all people in the world!" subjoined Sophia. "Doesn't it show you what a sinister influence Carina has over him? And how's he going to stop her getting hold of Peter too. The boy worships her."

"Would Jim mind so very much?" inquired Lady Chiltern.

"Mind? Of course he would mind!" Sophia gave her massive head a toss. "He would disinherit him at once. He would never let Linfold pass into Catholic hands." She spoke with energetic conviction.

"But, my dear Sophy, supposing he did disinherit Peter, the estates surely would pass to Carina's children? And they are all to be Catholics. It wouldn't be the slightest use for Jim to cut Peter off with a shilling."

The argument was on the face of it unanswerable. Lady Chiltern had undoubtedly scored a point. She added triumphantly:

"You see, whichever way you look at it, Jim has burnt his boats."

Sophia received this assertion in gloomy silence. There was no doubt that Jim's path was beset with difficulties. He was more desperately in love with Carina than ever since the birth of Tony, and he would be less and less likely to suspect her influence over Peter. And it was just that influence which Sophia so passionately resented. There was nothing to be said against Mrs. Mallory as a wife. She was uniformly charming to Jim, and of course she was young, pretty and gay, and her presence added sensibly to the general cheerfulness of Linfold. She had a happy contented nature, and had adapted herself with a certain grace to her new surroundings. Sophia was prepared to grant all this, but it was her

influence over Peter that she felt to be so dangerous. She was certain that it must ultimately pull against his father's legitimate authority. Jim, too, seemed more soft and lenient with Peter, probably because Carina objected to any severity. Sophia was often actuated by obscure jealousies which she scarcely recognized under such a harsh name; she would have called this particular one anxiety for Jim. He mustn't be fooled by the two people who were dearest to him in the world.

"When are they coming down?" inquired Lady Chiltern.

"At the end of next week," responded Sophia gloomily. "I shall just wait to see them and then I'm going home. I wish Jim would send Peter to France for the rest of his holidays—he's very backward in French. And it's such a long time for him to be here, seeing Carina every day."

"We must hope for the best!" said Lady Chiltern, with a slightly ironical laugh. She considered that dear Sophy was making mountains out of very diminutive molehills. "Well, I shall come over and see them as soon as possible and bring Blanche. Blanche adores babies."

She rose to go. Sophia accompanied her to the door. On the whole, she had found her less sympathetic about Carina than she could have hoped. But, then, Carina bewitched everyone—men and women alike. "All's fish that comes to her net," Miss Mallory thought dejectedly. And she had a pretty firm conviction that Jim would return home more enslaved than ever.

She was not mistaken. Her brother had turned to his wife with a fresh passion of adoration. He never spoke and apparently never thought of anyone but Carina and her baby. Sophia herself, even Peter,

was relegated to the background, mere shadows in the face of these new domestic joys. Such presents, too, as he had showered upon his wife! A long string of pearls that Carina wore just as carelessly as if they had been sold by the yard; a wonderful diamond ring that as often as not rolled off her little thin finger, and had to be retrieved from under a sofa or cabinet; delicate silken wrappings that Sophia's sagacious eye immediately recognized as of Parisian origin, and of a reckless costliness.

The little party motored down from London, arriving toward the close of an August day. The great heat had gone, and there was a cool refreshing wind blowing in from the sea. Sophia and Peter were standing on the terrace as the car approached, in readiness to welcome Carina on this her second home-coming. Jim helped her out with the utmost solicitude, and insisted upon her going up to her room at once. She must have her tea upstairs, he said. Carina, looking pretty but rather frail, assented. She was a little tired after the journey, and the rapid movement of the car had made her head swim. She greeted Sophia pleasantly, and Peter with an eager affection, as if fearful that he might consider himself ousted by the little newcomer. But the boy was all eagerness to see the baby. No touch of jealousy perturbed him . . . Jim watched him as he bent over the tiny scrap of humanity almost concealed beneath a mass of muslin and silk.

Sophia had often prophesied ill of the marriage, but she was obliged to confess to herself that night that it hadn't turned out so badly after all. There was no doubt of Jim's happiness, and that Carina was really devoted to her husband, she was beginning to perceive. If only she would keep her hands off Peter! . . . That was precisely where danger lurked and menaced. Sophia had not the

slightest fear of Jim's conversion. He wasn't the kind of man ever to be swayed by spiritual emotion of any kind. There was something firm and hard and resistant about him. But Peter had something of Iris's softness, something too of her nervous impressionability; he had more temperament than his father, and was, besides, far more naturally religious.

Already, though they had only been in the house a few hours, Sophia felt out of it. They didn't want her at all, though they were so kind and thoughtful, and anxious that she shouldn't be forgotten; they didn't even want Peter, though there was a fixed determination to make him feel part of the little group. They only wanted each other and their child. It was wonderful that Peter should accept these changed conditions without either anger or jealousy. He seemed to wish only, as far as Sophia could see, to be permitted to wait hand and foot on his step-mother.

She realized with bitterness that, excepting for the rector and his family, Carina had the whole neighborhood on her side. Lady Chiltern led public opinion a good deal around and about Linfold, and it was quite certain that she had become a ready victim to Carina's captivating charm.

"Of course, I know that, to use a vulgar expression, she wiped my dear Blanche's eye," Lady Chiltern had been heard to remark with a certain rueful irony. "But when you look at her, you can perfectly understand it. The only wonder is that she ever accepted him. She might have done even better, but of course it would never do to tell Sophy Mallory so."

CHAPTER XXV

CARINA lay on a couch near the window of her sitting-room. She could feel the soft summer air, with the tinge of brackishness that gave it such a delicious quality, flowing in upon her face. Below her was the terraced garden with its clipped box borders, its formal beds, its gleaming statues, made a hundred years ago in enthusiastic imitation of an Italian one. At one side there was a pergola of roses, bright with some late ramblers, on the other was a sunk pond upon which some white lilies floated among their thick burnished leaves. A stone balustrade divided the terrace from the sunk fence, beyond which the green sward and great trees of the park stretched out in cool vistas of mingled sun and shade. Through a gap in the downs that in the delicate distance showed their grey silhouettes against the sky, she could see the dim blue glimpse of sea. Already she loved the view, and all that it meant to her. In less than a year Linfold had taken complete possession of her heart, and she could imagine no happiness apart from it. Lady Murray had done well to urge this marriage upon her. It had been productive of great joys.

The baby's cradle was placed close to her couch, and by lifting her hand she could draw aside the filmy shell-pink curtains and see the little dark head lying within. It was now nearly three weeks since she had passed through those mysteriously cruel phases of suffering to win her motherhood. And as she looked out at the golden August evening, its

peace, its tranquillity, its quiet calm, she felt perfectly happy and satisfied. Surely no woman had ever received so much. Those slight disturbances, due to a want of adjustment, that had fretted her married life during its first months, had quite passed away. She knew Jim better, understood him better, was aware of his idiosyncrasies, and was thus able to avoid anything likely to displease him or arouse his slightly brittle temper. She knew that he loved her better now than he had ever done before. She did not love him more, but she was aware that her love for him had undergone a subtle change and possessed a new and more stable quality. The child had bound them together. It was something across which they could look fearlessly into each other's eyes, even despite temporary anger and disagreement.

He came softly into the room. But he was part of the dream now; his presence could never signify an intrusion. She held out her hand to him. He bent down and kissed her, lingering a little over the embrace.

"Well, darling?" he said, sitting down beside her.

"I've been lying and looking at it. It's all so beautiful this evening, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Jim. "But Linfold's always beautiful—summer and winter. And now you've made it perfect. It wanted something—something that you've given it, Carina." His voice was all softened with tenderness.

"I'm so glad you feel that, Jim. . . ."

He thought she had never looked so mysteriously beautiful as she did to-day. The slight rather long oval of her face was a little sharpened by illness, and looked pale against the bright almost fierce gold of her clipped hair. There was a new, very soft expression in her eyes and about her mouth. She

looked quite absurdly young for her twenty-six years—almost like a child.

“It’s ripping being back at home—you and I and Tony.” he said.

“And Peter—” she added softly.

“And of course Peter,” said Jim. “What made you think of him?”

“I don’t want him to feel that he’s left out in the cold!”

“I’m sure he doesn’t do that. He adores his little sister.”

“Yes, he’s wonderfully gentle with her.”

Jim glanced at the cradle. In his present happiness he felt but little remorse for his past weakness. It was astonishing even to himself that he should feel so indifferent about the fact of his own child having been baptized a Catholic. It was almost natural that a little girl should be brought up in her mother’s Faith. A son would have been a much more complicated affair. And yet he was dimly aware that Carina wished for a son.

He rose, rather abruptly. “I must go. You know, I promised to run Sophia home in the car. She’s waiting.”

Again he kissed her. She was so beautiful . . . a wonder-woman . . . He had hurt her in the past, and now he blamed himself bitterly for those outbursts of ill-temper; he wished she could never have known that side of him. That day in Rome for instance, when they had met Grove; his anger about the book. Yes, it had always been his fault, and he was thankful to think he had never really disturbed that calm sweet tranquillity of hers. She was so controlled, so disciplined. She had never responded either with anger to match his own, or with helpless reproachful tears. And she bore no

malice; she met his tenderness with a cool tenderness of her own.

She looked up smiling into his face. "Come back again soon!"

When he had gone, she suddenly thought of Iris. She had been thinking a great deal of her lately, had wondered a little at the failure of Jim's first marriage. Iris must have known him in this softened mood; she had been nearer to him in spiritual things; she had loved him perhaps better than Carina had ever done; they had been young together, and she had put his first-born into his arms. Yes, it always puzzled her when she thought of Iris. Since coming to Linfold, she had seen many photographs of her, thrust perhaps carelessly away in the drawers of writing-tables, or hanging in Peter's room. They had shown her under many aspects, as a young girl, with dark hair flowing over her shoulders, rather heavy in figure, wearing the now strange dress of the middle nineties with its fantastically enormous sleeves. Then as a bride, with a sensitive wistful face, her hair drawn up over a pad, her full skirts hiding her feet. Then with her baby in her arms. This was an enlargement made from a smaller photograph, and it hung framed over Peter's bed. Even in this one she was no longer so pretty, and one could see how thin she had grown. There was a rather painful photograph of her, taken a few weeks before she died, lying emaciated and worn on a couch in the garden. But the thought of Iris invariably aroused Carina's compassion. Jim had owned that he hadn't always been kind, and she knew too that at a very early age he had removed Peter from his mother's influence and sent him to school. He had taught him to ride, to hunt, to play games, to be fearless and manly. And Iris had perhaps looked on, sick and trembling, a prey to nervous fears. She

was quite powerless. Illness had only deepened her little tragedy. . . .

The nurse came into the room at that moment and Carina said to her quickly:

“Give baby to me, please, nurse!”

The woman looked astonished. “Oh, I think it would be best not to disturb her, ma’am. She’s sleeping so beautifully.”

“No—give her to me—I want her,” said Carina, almost with a touch of passion.

She looked overwrought and excited. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes very bright. The nurse wondered if yesterday’s journey had tired her and given her perhaps a touch of fever. She had never seen her in this mood before. Carina had been perfectly normal, had shown courage and control. Now for the first time she was displaying signs of nerves and fear. What had alarmed her?

The nurse lifted the slumbering infant from its crib, and placed it in Carina’s eager, outstretched arms. Mrs. Mallory clasped it almost convulsively.

“There—don’t wake her,” urged the nurse, a little puzzled.

Carina was saying to herself: “He shall never take you away from me. Never—never. Iris must have been weak with him. And it’s there—that iron will—though he hides it now. He’s capable of doing it—just as he did with Peter. But it’s different for us—we’re Catholics. That makes you far more mine than his . . .” She covered the child’s face with kisses. Tony, unaccustomed to such vehemence of affection, awoke and began to cry.

“Let me take her, ma’am. She’ll tire you,” said the nurse, patiently.

Carina suffered her to take Tony from her. But when she saw the woman going toward the door

she cried out: "No! Don't take her away! I want her near me. . . ."

She sank back exhausted. There were tears in her eyes.

The woman slowly retraced her footsteps, rocking the baby in her arms, and soothing it to sleep. "Something's happened to upset her," she thought. "It's Mr. Mallory, you may depend. He was up here not so long ago, and he must have said something . . . She was quite all right before. Never saw anyone less nervous and hysterical."

"There—there—try to keep quiet, ma'am. You will only make yourself ill, and that will vex Mr. Mallory."

Carina lay there very quietly, her eyes closed, and the black lashes making a sharp defined line against her cheek. Presently she looked up again and said: "Let me have her now, nurse; I won't wake her."

Reluctantly the nurse put the baby back in her arms. It was thus that Jim found them when an hour later he returned from Middleford.

"My dear Carina—you ought to be resting."

"That's what I told Mrs. Mallory," said the nurse. "But she asked for the baby."

"Put her back in the cradle, please," said Jim.

But Carina clasped the little form. "No, Jim—let me have her. She's so comfortable like this."

She looked up at him and he perceived the traces of those recent tears on her face. He signed to the nurse to leave the room, and then said: "Darling, has anything upset you since I've been away?"

"No, no . . ." said Carina. "If anything upset me it was my own foolish thoughts."

It was impossible, however, to reveal those foolish thoughts to Jim, and she tried to change the subject. She pushed aside the little soft shawl and said: "Look at Tony, Jim. Isn't she lovely?"

It had the desired effect. He bent down and their three faces were close together.

"Yes," he said. "But she's quite a Mallory, Car."

"Girls nearly always take after their fathers. Peter—" she hesitated, "isn't Peter like his mother, Jim?"

A shadow crossed Jim's face. "In some ways," he said, rather curtly, "but I don't think he's much like her now. Perhaps a little about the mouth. And then his eyes are blue like hers were, though I always think they're more like my mother's. She had such wonderful blue eyes!"

He didn't want to talk about Iris now. The thought of her was always associated in his mind with a vague remorse. What had made Carina speak of her this evening?

"You are more to me than Iris ever was!" he declared. "I'm happier now than I've ever been before. Happier than I've ever thought it could be possible to be!"

The assurance drove some of those gloomy morbid thoughts from her mind. Of course she could depend upon Jim. He loved her, and he had never truly loved Iris.

He lifted her hair delicately in his fingers. It was soft as floss silk, but fine as very thick hair seldom is. Its warm rich gold shone with a kind of burnished lustre. Without it Carina might have seemed colorless and inconspicuous, with her white narrow face, her dark grey-green eyes.

"Tell me you're happy, too," he whispered. "You were crying just now, but I hadn't said or done anything to make you cry, had I?"

"Oh, no—Jim—it was just weakness, foolishness. Of course I'm *very* happy."

"You've made me feel so much more sure of your love lately," he said slowly, looking at her very in-

tently. "I used not to feel so sure. It made me irritable—miserable. You were so young—so unaware. I'd taken you away from your old life—all the effort, the excitement, the success, even the fame."

She colored faintly under his scrutiny. Jim was not subtle, but he possessed a singularly clear vision.

"I felt you didn't always consider that what I'd given you, made up for all that I'd deprived you of—" he added.

"Deprived me of?" she repeated, and her clasp of the baby tightened a little.

"Oh, well, you know what I mean, Car. That writing business—it was always rather hateful to me, and I couldn't help showing it. I ought to have waited patiently until you had your child. I ought to have known that a child would absorb all your thoughts—your energies."

"But, Jim—I can't promise that it won't come back—the old wish to write. It's been in abeyance, I know, because all my thoughts and prayers were so concentrated upon Tony. But later . . . Would you mind it now so very much, Jim? You spoil me so."

His face stiffened a little.

"Yes, I should mind it, Carina. Did Grove say anything to you about writing again?"

"No—I hardly saw him—the only thing he did was to give me a message from Swaine, to say they'd be glad to have another book in the Spring."

"But you couldn't in any case write another book before the Spring," said Jim.

"No, I suppose not," said Carina.

"And you won't, will you, Car darling? For my sake?" he urged.

More than ever did he dislike the thought of any publicity for his wife. Mrs. Mallory of Linfold Park must be unknown to fame. Deep, too, in his

heart was a scarcely acknowledged fear of being known himself as Carina Ramsden's husband. Like many men who are at once generous and jealous, he preferred to have all the giving on his side.

"Very well, Jim," she said.

She realized then that fundamentally he hadn't altered at all. In his heart his dislike of her religion and her work was as deep as ever. It was only outwardly that his love for her had softened him. Her heart sank a little to find that they were no nearer to each other than they had ever been. Their souls were deeply, permanently estranged, and she knew of no bridge by which she could cross those deeps and go to him. No man could be more tender and loving than Jim Mallory, but none could be harder and more obdurate. Just now he was devotedly determined to give her everything that in his own judgment she ought to have. But she would not have dared ask for what she really needed—her own chapel in the house, and the permission when she was well to take up her writing again.

She glanced at the baby sleeping on her arm. Tony . . . her own daughter. The child who was to be brought up in the Faith. Yes, she could give it that splendid heritage, in comparison with which Jim's wealth counted not at all. She had hoped that with the coming of the child he would envisage her Faith differently. He would see—surely he must learn to see!—how beautiful it was, rich in lovely grace.

"You must let me drop a line to Swaine and tell him there's not the smallest chance of your being able to let them have a book next year," he said.

The words chilled Carina. But she only said:

"Do just as you like about it, Jim. I sometimes wish you were quite a poor man and out of a job,

and then I should have to work to keep you and Tony!"

"What a truly horrible idea!" said Jim, laughing.

He felt he could never let Carina go away into that imaginary world of her own creating, diligent and absorbed in matters that did not concern him at all. He could not forget how deeply his pride had been wounded by her apparent obliviousness of all that concerned him, during those weeks she had spent writing in Cornwall before their marriage.

"You've got Tony—isn't that enough?" he said. "Why, if you began to write again, you might neglect her!"

This time it was Carina who laughed almost joyously.

"Neglect Tony! Why I should have her close to me in her cradle all the time!"

But from that moment the matter was put aside, as if by mutual consent. There were still boundaries across which her feet might not trespass; subjects that could bring the lowering frown swiftly to his brow. As he rose to go away, he lingered for a second by her side.

"Carina, we both made sacrifices when we married, and we mustn't try to get each other to go back on them."

There was a note of warning in his voice. It was as if he wanted to remind her that while she held him to the letter of his promise, he intended also to exact from her a corresponding sacrifice.

"No, Jim—we mustn't do that!"

He hurried away. It was fortunate, he told himself, that Carina was so unconscious of her own power. It was getting more and more difficult to refuse her anything.

CHAPTER XXVI

“COME and talk to me, Peter.”

Carina was lying out on the lawn. The weather was still bright and sunny, but a little autumn haze hung over the sea, and the trees in the Park were already faintly touched with gold.

Before very long, Peter would be returning to Eton. And since she had come back to Linfold, Carina had seen comparatively little of him. He had been away now and then for a few days, staying with school friends, and when he was at Linfold his father constantly claimed his company. But to-day Jim had motored over to see Sophia, and though he had suggested that Peter should accompany him, the boy had made a slight grimace and said: “I’m sure Aunt Sophy would rather have you to herself. I shall play a round of golf.”

When the round was finished, he had returned to find Carina in the garden.

“We’ll have tea,” she said. “Go and tell them to bring it, Peter.”

Tea was brought, and he insisted upon pouring it out, and waiting upon her.

“It’s so jolly finding you alone,” he said. “It hardly ever happens now. And I hated Linfold when you were away in London.”

Every term made a striking difference now in Peter’s growth and development. In many ways he was mature for his years, with a certain seriousness of outlook. He was ambitious and worked hard. He had a strong motive for wishing to succeed; he felt sure it would please Carina. At fifteen he had

almost reached his full height, and he had the clean, wholesome supple look of the trained athlete. His brown face, his sleek black hair, the dark eyes looking like twin blue pools, his long grace of limb, made him a very attractive young creature. And he was feeling just now enormously fit. It was so jolly to come back and find Carina there with that darling baby of hers. Already he felt a strong proprietary interest in his little sister. She was such a jolly kid, and hardly ever cried.

Carina looked at him and thought: If his mother could see him now!

The thought hurt her, stabbing her with a new fear. She glanced toward Tony's cradle. But no—she couldn't die, as Iris had died, when her child was only a few years old. She must live to teach it. It would be even worse for her than it had been for Iris to be separated from her child.

Peter had finished his tea, and had been sitting for some minutes in silence. Then he said:

“Carina—I've got something to tell you. But you must promise first not to tell Dad. At least not yet.”

“But you know I oughtn't to have any secrets from your father, Peter,” she said, smiling.

“Boys often tell their mothers things they wouldn't like their fathers to know. It's because mothers are more understanding and more forgiving.”

She felt a little stab of anxiety. Still the appeal was almost irresistible. And perhaps whatever it was she had better hear it.

“You can tell me, Peter. . . .”

“When I was staying with the Pickerings last week my friend Winfield was there.”

“Winfield? I don't seem to remember the name.”

“The one I told you about—whose mother's a Catholic.”

"Oh!" Carina's exclamation was almost a gasp of surprise.

"He lent me a book—I used to read it when I was in bed. It was called, *The Credentials of the Catholic Church*."

She felt a shock of surprise, coupled with joy, and, alas, deeply tinged with fear.

"It's a wonderful book," said Peter musingly.

"Yes," she assented.

"No one could read it and not see that the Catholic Church is very different from what we are taught about it in history."

She was silent. Even the very fact of listening to him gave her a faint sense of disloyalty toward Jim. Peter said at last in a low tone:

"It made me wish to be a Catholic, Carina; it made me determine to become one directly I'm old enough to have my own way in the matter. People can choose, can't they? I suppose—just at first at least—Dad would be most awfully against it."

"Yes, I'm sure he would, Peter."

"But then what did he do about Tony? Wasn't she baptized a Catholic? Winfield asked me that, and I couldn't tell him."

"Yes, she was baptized in a Catholic church in London."

"Dad didn't mind?"

"He said nothing. You see, he'd promised."

"But if he lets one of his children be a Catholic he can't say anything if the other wishes to be one!" There was triumph in Peter's tone.

"But it's different for you, dear. Your mother—"

"Yes, yes, I know. But I'm thinking of Dad. He can't be so fearfully prejudiced, or he wouldn't have given in about Tony."

"Peter, don't you realize that I couldn't have married your father unless he'd made those promises?"

"Is the Church as strict as all that?" he asked, in an awe-struck tone.

"Yes. The Church has to safeguard the faith of her unborn children."

Peter was silent. At last he said:

"I'd known Winfield for some time, but I never thought about the Catholic Church until you came here, Carina. I used to think it must be a bore, having to go to confession and not eat meat on Fridays and all that. But that book—it was extraordinary—it seemed to open my eyes. Like a blind man receiving sight. I want to be a Catholic, Carina. Even if I knew Dad would kick me out and disinherit me, I don't believe it would make the smallest difference. But with you and Tony, I simply don't see how he can."

She longed then to tell him exactly what his father's feelings on the subject were. That he was prepared to suppress any disposition of the kind in his son with the utmost severity. And even for her sake, loving her as he did, she could not believe that Jim would refrain from fulfilling his threat to the letter. He was still capable of enforcing his iron will upon Peter.

"You'll have to wait some years, Peter. I think any priest would urge you to wait. You see, you're hardly sixteen yet."

"Yes, but I shall be going to Woolwich in about eighteen months. Sometimes I feel half inclined to tell Dad just to see what he'd say. Would you advise me to do that, Carina?"

"I can't advise you." She was conscious of shifting responsibility, but in her still weak state she shrank from the scenes that would certainly ensue if such a disclosure were made. In any other circumstances she would have advocated the fullest frankness and confidence between father and son. Peter

seemed to be convinced that his father's prejudices must necessarily be weakened, now that he possessed a Catholic wife and child. Carina, less sure on the point, wished with all her heart that Peter could have waited a few years before coming to his present decision.

"There's Dad," he observed, as Jim's figure came striding up from the garage.

"Don't say anything to him now," Carina said nervously.

Jim approached the little group on the lawn.

"Sophy kept me rather a long time. She had some tiresome legal business for me to look into," he remarked. "Is there any tea there, Carina?"

"You'd better have some fresh. Run and tell them, Peter."

The boy ran off.

"I hope you haven't been letting Peter tire you, Car darling?"

She shook her head. "He never tires me. I like having him."

"He's wonderfully improved. I never saw such a change—" said Jim. "I haven't had to speak to him once these holidays. I'm proud of my son, Carina."

"I'm sure you must be. He's a dear boy, Jim."

Tony woke and began to whimper. Jim lifted her from the cradle and put her into Carina's arms. When Peter came back he found them both absorbed with the baby. He regarded them whimsically.

"I'm quite cut out now," he said.

Carina looked up quickly. "Never, dear Peter. You've got your own special place!"

She put out her hand and touched Peter's, and as she did so she looked at Jim, with a smile that was full of trust and confidence. It was as if she wished to bring the father and son closer together, so close

indeed that when the time came for Peter to carry out his resolve and become a Catholic, Jim would accept it with temperance and wisdom, recognizing also its inevitability. At that moment Carina had a very strong wish to help Peter. They both loved her, and she felt that while that love lasted they could never become essentially estranged from each other. It was only in that brief bitter period, just at the beginning, that her coming had threatened to estrange them. It had been, quite unconsciously and innocently, her fault. But the winning of Peter had proved a very simple and easy proceeding, and now she was in the enjoyment of a perfection of happiness to which both Jim and Peter, and in a stronger yet more mysterious degree little Tony, contributed. Her life seemed full, like a cup filled to the brim. It was almost overwhelming, this sense of complete happiness, of perfect content. It made her feel that she was receiving more than she could possibly give in return. Her love for Jim was steady, equable, sincere, but quite free from any unrest of emotion. He could not love her like that, and sometimes in his restless passionate soul she knew that he suffered. He wanted desperately that she should be satisfied with the things he could give her with such prodigal generosity. And this evening, if he could only have known it, she *was* satisfied. But if his boy were hereafter to demand of life something that Jim was not prepared to give him, would there not be further suffering of an even more bitter kind? Into that anger and blame she too would be swept, as into a cruel and angry sea.

She began to dread in every nerve that future inevitable collision between father and son. It would be terrible, like the clashing of two fierce elemental forces.

She had read the *Credentials of the Catholic*

Church, but then she had been brought up in the Faith, and its substance was familiar to her; it could offer no surprise of novelty. She was perhaps a little astonished at the deep impression it had made upon Peter's mind. It had been for him a sudden illumination, a swift unveiling of spiritual truth that had hitherto been hidden from him. She remembered his words, *Like a blind man receiving sight . . .* Something fierce, fiery and wholly incontrovertible had, for him, emanated from those simple, forceful pages of Catholic apologetic. Through his affection for her, his mind was already attuned to receive its message. She had urged him to wait, but would he wait? He had all the impetuosity, the eagerness, the generous spirit of sacrifice, that are seldom so strong as in early youth. There was something of Jim's indomitable obstinacy in Peter. It had been repressed, but not eliminated by the fear his father had deliberately inspired in him throughout his childhood and boyhood. But the boy was rapidly growing up, and something of manly independence characterized him.

And Jim's softened mood might deceive Peter—might lead him on to make confession of his intention, believing that his father would accept it without remonstrance. . . .

Now when she looked at their two faces side by side she felt a devouring fear of the future. Help had come to Peter quite apart from herself; she had loyally obeyed Jim in the matter of not speaking to him on the subject of religion. But it had come as it were from outside, and in the most natural manner possible.

Jim said suddenly: "You're looking tired, Carina. You'd better go in."

"Nurse must fetch Tony, then. Peter, go and tell her, please."

The boy ran lightly into the house. They all went indoors. Just at that very moment when Carina had realized her happiness, this cold fear had descended upon her heart. She clung to Jim's arm as they walked toward the house.

It was almost a relief to her when Peter returned to Eton at the end of the holidays without having said a word to his father on the subject. But she knew the day was only deferred. In her thought of him joy was so closely knit together with pain and dread, that she did not dare dwell upon the strange happiness his determination had given her. It was an answer to all her prayers for him. . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

THE two years that followed Tony's birth, spent almost entirely at Linfold, were perhaps the happiest Carina Mallory had ever known. No other child had followed Tony, which was something of a disappointment to her, for she had wished very much for a son. What had constituted a disappointment to her was, however, a recognized relief to Jim. He had always felt there would be difficulty in coping with a Catholic son, so he considered that things had turned out for the best. Carina was supremely happy with her little girl, to whom she devoted a great part of her time. She refused to hand her over to the entire charge of a nurse, however experienced. This decision was confirmed by Jim's refusal to allow her to engage a Catholic nurse for Tony. He couldn't, he declared, have that sort of thing let loose among the servants. Besides, Carina was there to teach her all that she ought to know. Mrs. Mallory accepted the decision with characteristic mildness. She had learnt never to dispute with Jim about non-essentials, but she registered a determination to keep the child with her as much as possible. She hung a crucifix and a medal of Our Lady above her crib, and placed a stoup of holy water in the nursery. Tony wore a little blessed gold medal round her neck. The walls of her nursery were decorated with pictures of the Holy Family, and with some Medici prints of the more famous Madonnas of Raphaël. There was a white marble statue of the Sacred Heart on the mantel-

piece. Carina tried to make the room resemble her own nursery, always so clearly remembered. A child seldom forgets its first pictures. Their subjects and color are among the first things to be inscribed upon its subconsciousness. Tony was thus to be familiarized with the thought of the Mother and Child from her earliest infancy, and as soon as she could speak at all, Carina began to teach her little simple prayers.

Jim did not approve of the "Popish images," but he did not, on the other hand, remonstrate. He was scrupulous about his promises, and then Carina had given way so readily about the nurse. Sophia had observed that the nursery was "idolatrous," but Jim checked her grimly. It was all part of the incredibly bitter draught he had to swallow. It hurt him, just as setting forth alone on that weekly pilgrimage to the parish church, and sitting isolated and solitary in the front pew, never failed to hurt him. But it was the payment he had to make for the otherwise flawless happiness of his marriage.

Long ago he had realized that Carina wasn't another Iris, to be bullied and snubbed into submission. Her spirit was free. And as long as she was a loyal and loving wife, supremely solicitous for his happiness and comfort, he knew he had no right to complain.

After more than three years of married life he was more in love with Carina than he had ever been. They seemed closer to each other. Carina looked as young as ever, and was even more beautiful. A new portrait of her hung at Linfold, among the many family portraits dating from several hundreds of years back, that were there. It was done by a famous French artist. She had her child on her knee, loosely held. Her clipped red-gold hair shone against a background of shimmering white and silver, very cool in tone. She was dressed all in white, with

a touch of green, subdued but wonderful. Tony's dark head nestled against the mother's pale arm.

When it was exhibited at the Academy, permission for which had only been wrested from Jim with the utmost difficulty, some of the critics remembered that Mrs. Jim Mallory had been known to fame before her marriage as Carina Ramsden, the writer of beautiful and unusual books. Photographs of the portrait appeared in many of the illustrated dailies and weeklies. A publisher wrote offering her very advantageous terms for a new novel; the editor of a magazine invited her to contribute a serial. To feel that she was not yet forgotten in the world of authors touched and delighted Carina. But it was characteristic of her complete understanding with her husband, that she was able to show him both the letters. He laughed, however, in half-annoyed fashion.

"How can they possibly think Mrs. Jim Mallory has time to scribble for them?" he inquired ironically.

"So many women far busier than I am, do find time," replied Carina.

"But you don't want to write, do you, Car darling?"

"No, Jim. At least, I haven't wanted to for a long time."

He was afraid that these flattering overtures would fan the flame of artistic craving in his wife. He knew she had this power, strong, fierce, latent, if artificially subdued and repressed. He could divine something of its almost irresistible driving force, when he remembered her as she had been in Cornwall just before their marriage. So completely, cruelly oblivious of everything except the work in hand . . . He was still afraid that one day it would leap out and confront him in all its naked

elemental force. It wouldn't be yet, perhaps, while Tony was so little and demanded so much of her mother's time. He might have resented this tendency of Carina's to be so absorbed in the baby, if he had not feared the temptation that might assail her to write in a life that held more leisure. Jim often secretly made small concessions. And Carina realizing them was divinely tender to him. He told himself over and over again that this rash and even imprudent marriage had been abundantly justified in its results.

Peter was nearly eighteen, and had been for some months at Woolwich. He had passed in very high, in an examination where marks ruled high, and he had kept his place by sheer hard work. He was perhaps less brilliant than some of his colleagues, but he was extraordinarily industrious. Carina's influence was still so strong that he worked principally to please her. Her recognition of his efforts, her approbation, were essential to him. And to return to Linfold and find her there, counted among the truest joys of his life. Tony, a precocious delicious creature of two, adored Peter, toddling about after him whenever she could, like a plump little worshiping shadow.

Peter was now extremely independent. He had his own motor-bicycle, with a side car for Carina whenever he could induce her to accompany him. He went in and out pretty much as he chose. Jim felt that the time to relax discipline had come. Peter was a man, and from all accounts was a trustworthy and capable one. Jim had great confidence in him, and now seldom questioned him.

During the winter succeeding Tony's second birthday a change could be observed in Peter Mallory. He came back as usual for Christmas, but often absented himself for whole days together. It became

more and more unusual for him to return home for luncheon, and on several occasions he was late for dinner. Jim apparently paid little attention to these manifestations of unpunctuality; he passed them over with only the mildest word of remonstrance.

Sophia Mallory came to Linfold for the New Year, and her dissatisfaction with the state of affairs was speedily adumbrated. She watched Peter for a day or two. There was something mysterious about him, she decided. Perhaps he had embarked upon some secret love-affair. An unsuitable designing girl was trying to entrap the young heir of Linfold. . . . And Jim, immersed as usual in his wife, failed to suspect anything. But if Peter could count on parental blindness and preoccupation, he could not quiet the swiftly-aroused suspicions of his aunt.

"Where on earth's Peter?" she inquired one day at luncheon, when as usual he had failed to put in an appearance.

"Peter? Why he's gone in to Lintown, I suppose. Where else should he be?" said Jim.

Nevertheless, Sophy's words awakened a slight uneasiness in his mind. He looked across the table at his wife, who was engaged in feeding Tony with a spoon. Tony was lazy at meals and preferred to be fed. Sophia sometimes wondered why Jim permitted this indulgent attention. He ought to send her up to the nursery till she was old enough to behave properly. It was high time he took Tony in hand.

"Carina, do you know where Peter is?" Jim asked.

She looked up and said, "No, Jim," and then continued to feed her child. In the little silence that followed, Jim's uneasiness communicated itself to her.

"He went off soon after breakfast on his motor bike. I think the exercise is good for him when he can't hunt," she added presently.

England was bound then in the blackest of black frosts.

"Still, I think he ought to say where he's going and when he means to come back," said Sophia.

Jim stirred restlessly. Yes, it was quite true. Peter now spent many hours of each day away from home. He hadn't thought much about it, but Sophia's words had suddenly created within him all sorts of hideous little misgivings and anxieties. He wondered if Carina shared them, whether she had observed anything.

"Oh, Peter's all right," said Carina with smiling confidence. "Now, Tony darling, just one more spoonful and it's done. Just one more." She held the spoon to the small, resolutely-closed lips.

She waited patiently, but Tony showed no signs of yielding. She possessed her full share of Mallory obstinacy.

"If she doesn't obey at once, she must go upstairs," said Jim, in a voice that betrayed anger.

"Come, Tony," said Carina.

Sophia's manner made her nervous. She felt that she was tacitly encouraging Jim to assert his authority.

Jim was now thoroughly upset and anxious about Peter, and man-like his wrath began to vent itself upon the first object that annoyed him. He got up, seized the spoon from Carina's hand, and said sharply: "Tony, if you don't eat this at once I'll take you upstairs myself!"

His loud voice terrified the child. She burst into tears, giving little sharp screams of terror. Carina quietly lifted her out of her high-chair, and took her

on her knee. Across the smooth dark head cuddled against her she faced Jim quite calmly.

"Please leave her alone, Jim. You only frighten her."

"My dear—you're ruining her. If she doesn't learn to obey now, she never will." His eyes flashed. "I had to teach Peter to obey when he was that age. He had his first whipping when he was two!"

"I won't have Tony whipped," said Carina calmly. Her eyes were almost frosty as they met Jim's. "Please leave her to me. If she doesn't stop crying I'll take her upstairs myself."

"I hate all this disturbance at meals. We never have a moment's peace. The child wants a good strict nurse—that girl is no use at all. I remember we couldn't do anything with Peter till we got Parkinson."

Carina had always refused to hand Tony over to Parkinson though once or twice Jim had suggested it, and the old woman herself seemed to wish for it. She was too much of the old school, a strict disciplinarian, and Carina did not wish to have her child's spirit broken. She wanted to train her without violence.

Jim went back to his seat, baffled and resentful. Sophia criticized in silence. She was able to compare his methods now with those he had been wont to use when Iris was alive. And she was also able to compare Carina's calm firm attitude with Iris's swift breaking into tears. Not thus would Iris Mallory have answered and acted. But it was just as Sophia had told Lady Chiltern long ago—Carina had bewitched Jim. His will had deteriorated. He couldn't call his soul his own. He wasn't even master in his own house. He was a shorn Samson! . . .

Tony's sobs subsided. The plate was removed with the last spoonful still uneaten. In the midst of

the silence that followed this brief tempest, Peter, the primary but innocent cause of it all, came into the room.

With his easy, nonchalant air he advanced toward the table, when Jim burst out with:

"Where have you been to all the morning? We've nearly finished lunch! You're using this house just like an hotel and I tell you, I won't stand it. You're up to some mischief, I'll be bound!"

Peter turned rather pale. He sat down near Tony and opposite to Sophia, who eyed him with a look of malignant triumph. What did his father mean by this sudden ebullition of anger? Something must have upset him. He glanced at Carina, and then at Tony, whose infant face was still distorted with weeping.

"I don't understand, Dad. I didn't mean to be late. But I got kept in—in Lintown."

Sophia glanced at Jim as much as to say: "There, didn't I tell you. You and Carina are ruining that boy between you."

"Well, I'm not going to have any more of it, and so I tell you," said Jim. "You're to come to my study directly after lunch, and I shall insist upon your telling me exactly where you've been spending so much of your time lately. You're not your own master yet, as you'll jolly soon find out!"

Jim's brows met in a straight formidable black line across his face. Peter had not seen his father so angry for years.

"Very well, Dad," he said, in a subdued tone.

He was obviously nervous, and yet Carina felt she could discern a kind of sick relief in his young face. No hint of the truth had reached her. She was as ignorant of the real explanation as Jim or Sophia. It had not occurred to her to attach any particular significance to Peter's prolonged absences; the boy

needed fresh air and exercise, there was little to amuse him at Linfold in the depths of winter, and his motor-bicycle was still rather a new toy to him. He enjoyed the liberty and independence it gave him. But on reflection she saw that he had not been very confidential to her since his return home this time. He had not once come up to seek her alone in her sitting-room, and have a quiet talk when Jim was out. But she had unlimited confidence in Peter, as well as unlimited faith in him. She trusted him completely, despite these novel reserves and withdrawals. She believed, too, that if there had been anything amiss he would have told her. The thought of the impending interview between father and son disturbed her not a little. Jim in this mood of jealous suspicion was dangerous. He was hard, abrupt, violent, and a young man of Peter's years required wise and delicate handling. She wished Jim could have relegated the task of questioning him to her.

She was not afraid that her husband would be actually violent with his son, but she did fear that in his anger he would say things to wound and affront Peter, to estrange him when he ought to have tried to draw him closer in the bonds of a wise, loving, understanding authority.

The meal proceeded, more or less in silence, to its conclusion of coffee and cigarettes. Peter declined to smoke. He sat there, composed as a statue, and with something of a statue's mysterious immobility. His eyes never glanced in Carina's direction. Once he stretched out his hand and caressed little Tony, stroking back her hair, so like his own in its sleek silken blackness. Sophia kept up a desultory dialogue of dismal platitudes with her brother. She had accomplished the graceless task she had set out to do; she couldn't endure to see poor dear Jim so hoodwinked by his wife and son. Thanks to her, he

was on the alert now, his suspicions were thoroughly aroused. . . .

Carina felt that the little group at table had suddenly divided itself into two belligerent parties. On the one side the protagonists were represented by Jim and Sophia, while on the other she herself was grouped with Peter and Tony. She was conscious of a fierce wish to support and encourage Peter. Jim was not wise with his children. He wanted to take the short cut to submission by means of violence. He was impatient and imprudent in his anger.

Jim was obscurely aware of Carina's antagonism. It increased his ill-humor. Well, even if he had to look on and let her ruin her own child with criminal indulgence, he wasn't going to be humbugged by Peter. He meant to discover what the boy was up to. At first he had been annoyed with Sophia for suggesting that anything was amiss. But now he felt a kind of uneasy gratitude toward her. She was rough and tactless, but she could and did unerringly hit the right nail on the head. Her eye was clear, and her hand steady. Those were Mallory traits which he could appreciate.

Luncheon was finished. Carina rose and lifted Tony from her chair, and led her toward the door. She smiled at Jim and Peter, and then went out of the room, followed by Sophia. Very soon she heard Jim go across to his study and slam the door. He and Peter were together. . . .

Feeling nervous and anxious, Carina took Tony upstairs. At the top of the stairs there was one of Iris's innumerable portraits, and as she passed it she happened to glance at it. She had so often passed it, unobservant and indifferent. It was badly painted, and she wondered why Jim left it there in that rather conspicuous position. But to-day it seemed to her that Iris was actually looking at her with a pleading,

wistful appeal. Pleading perhaps for her son. . . .

Carina stopped in front of it and murmured: "Oh, I've done my best for him—you know that, don't you? I've *loved* your boy—"

She had a curious superstitious feeling that Iris was in some way satisfied with this response. . . .

Carina's bedroom was just above the study. She put Tony into her cot and then went to the window, softly opening it. But she could hear no sound of voices from below. The study window was shut.

She longed then to know what was passing between father and son. . . .

The Park was wrapped in its wintry beauty, of pale foreground and delicate distances. A slight fall of snow that had taken place a day or two before, still whitened the spreading fields to silver, and against it the brown and purple lace of the trees was softly etched. The high pale sky was almost cloudless, and the wintry sunshine—the first there had been for days—flowed over the scene like a frail golden illumination, though insufficient to melt that ice-prisoned world. It was one of the first days of January, and there was no least hint of spring in the sharp biting air, only perhaps the menace of a prolonged and severe winter. Beyond the terrace and the spreading, undulating park, Carina saw a misty glimpse of the sea, pale, impalpable, almost at one with the sky.

She could appreciate the beauty of the scene, but it was of a severe, austere kind, that awed even while it attracted.

Linfold held her. Now for three years it had been her home. She had hardly ever left it for more than a few days at a time. She had learnt to love it and all that it had given her. She felt grateful to Jim because he had showered so many and such precious gifts upon her. She blamed herself now

for having had those secret, bitter, hostile little thoughts of him, because of his anger with Peter. She told herself that she ought always to remember how good he had been to her, how kind, how supremely faithful. And in return she must learn to love him more, to consider him more, to excuse him when necessary. . . .

Tony had fallen asleep in her cot. The whole house seemed to be permeated with a deep and unnatural silence. She longed for someone to come up and speak to her. She wanted Jim. . . .

CHAPTER XXVIII

CARINA was still sitting there deep in thought when Jim came into the room. By a glance at his face she saw that his anger had completely subsided. A hope that Peter had been able to account for his movements in a manner that was perfectly satisfactory to his father, rose in her heart.

She went toward him, with a glance at the crib as if to remind him that Tony was asleep.

"Carina," he said.

"Yes, Jim?"

"I don't know what's come over Peter. But he won't tell me anything. I feel that he's hiding something from me, although he assures me there's nothing wrong. So I've come to you . . . You've always been in his confidence, I know."

"I'm not at all in his confidence just now. Whatever it is, he has told me nothing. I've been a little anxious too. But I'm so sure of Peter."

"Yes, and so am I. But this absenting himself, day after day!" His brow was puckered in a frown. "He's been seen in Lintown several times, and he's got a Woolwich friend there. But I don't feel as if I could go and ask those people—strangers to me—how much of his time he spends with them."

"No, of course you couldn't do that, Jim."

"But I can't have this going on either. Peter's always been straight and above-board. He won't be going back to Woolwich for some weeks. What do you say to a trip abroad? That'll take him away from whatever it is. I'm only sorry you don't know

more, Carina—I made certain you'd be able to throw some light on the subject."

"I wish I could. But this idea of going abroad. . . . You'd take him yourself, Jim?"

"Oh, we must all go, Carina. I couldn't face it without you."

"But of course I'll come. I only thought you might want to be alone with him—without any tiresome woman. I'm always glad to get out of England in the winter."

Her eager acquiescence in the plan mollified him. It was almost as if they were discussing the question of her own son, so absolutely did she enter into his fears and anxieties.

"Oh, you mustn't be anxious," she continued; "Peter's a dear boy . . . I feel in my heart it's all right—your son and Iris's. . . ."

"Iris's," he repeated, as if the word had become strange and unfamiliar to him. But it awoke a hundred trivial, poignant, almost unbearable memories within him. He drew Carina to him and kissed her.

"When shall we go, Jim?"

"As soon as we can get off. It'll spring a surprise on young Peter—we shall see how he takes to the idea!"

"And where do you want to go?"

"Oh, you know foreign places so much better than I do. Something that will interest and amuse him. Rome . . . would you care to go to Rome?"

"Oh, Jim, of course I should! And it would interest Peter—the ruins and monuments. And you liked it, didn't you? I've often wanted to go back."

"Yes—Rome isn't half a bad idea."

"And . . . Jim . . ."

"Yes, Car, darling?"

"Don't let Peter know why we're going. Don't show that you suspect anything. You've been won-

derfully patient and good with him. It's so much wiser than making him afraid."

He said gravely: "I believe you're right, Carina. I was very angry at first—but afterward I felt that it was only making him more silent and reserved. All he would say was that there was nothing wrong, and that some day I should know."

They stood side by side, looking out at the fragile, delicate beauty of the winter landscape.

"It's a wrench to go," said Jim, slowly. "You know, I'm never happy away from Linfold."

"I know you're not. Still, we must try to help Peter. I do feel it's all right, though. I do think that if he were in any perplexity he'd tell me. In the meantime you mustn't be hard on him."

"How you do spoil them both—Peter and Tony," he said.

"I want them to love me," she said simply. "I know what it means to a child to be very happy."

Jim felt appeased and quieted. The thought of a journey to Rome began to acquire a certain attraction for him. And the sunshine would do Carina good—she was looking much too pale. She felt the cold winter days very much; she seemed almost to droop under their austere influence. They discussed plans a little longer, and then Jim went back to his study to write some telegrams. He felt there was no time to be lost, so he proceeded to book rooms and order tickets and sleeping berths, thankful to have this occupation to distract his thoughts from his son. He had arranged everything before he went into the drawing-room at tea-time. Peter came in almost at once, and seemed relieved to find that there was a truce. His young face cleared. He had resented the heated cross-examination to which his father had subjected him after luncheon, and though Jim had been much more temperate than usual, he

had not expected the atmosphere to become so quickly serene. It was Carina's doing, of course—she knew exactly how to manage his father. She was too wonderful for words. Life at Linfold would be impossible without her.

Peter as he grew up had lost something of his respectful admiration for his father; he had become inclined to criticize sharply the lack of self-control, the disposition to lose his temper on the slightest provocation, so constantly displayed. Peter even stigmatized it as "bad form," and wondered that his father should have reached the age of forty-four without having learned adequate self-control. His own cool temperament resented those violent outbursts, and had he dared he would have shown something of the contempt he felt for them.

Carina gave him a cup of tea, and then said:

"We've come to the conclusion it's too cold for words here this winter, so we're planning a trip to Rome."

"Are you?" said Peter. He glanced curiously from his father to his stepmother.

"Carina wants a change," said Mallory.

"Shall we all go?" asked Peter.

"Yes, of course. Do you think I'd go without you and Tony?" Carina smiled.

"How *simply* topping!" said Peter, as if he didn't quite believe it. "I've never been to Italy, and I've wanted to see Rome most awfully. Next year we might go to Switzerland." His eyes shone.

Jim's face cleared. Carina was right—she always was. And if he had been less harsh and peremptory with Peter that day, he might by now have been in possession of a perfectly plausible, innocent explanation of his son's frequent absences.

"You might look up some Italian before you go," said Jim.

"I'll give you lessons," suggested Carina.

"Will you really? I'd love to learn! I did pretty well in French last term."

The boy was genuinely delighted at the prospect of the journey. He had not been abroad since their trip to Norway, the year his father and Carina were married. It was a ripping idea to go just now, when there was no prospect of hunting or golf.

Mallory was at once puzzled and quieted by Peter's joyous reception of the plan. He drank his tea, and then left the room, saying he still had some writing to do. Peter was left alone with his stepmother, for Sophia was spending the afternoon at the rectory, where she had been informing Mr. Humphreys gravely that "Jim's boy was quite out of hand. His stepmother spoilt him, and his father could do nothing with him. Between them, they were laying up endless trouble for themselves and Peter."

Mr. Humphreys shook his head, and then said Jim was certainly a changed man since his second marriage. It was a pity, a great pity, but there it was, and it couldn't be helped. He hoped sincerely he wouldn't yet live to regret it in sackcloth and ashes. "Sackcloth and ashes, my dear Miss Mallory!" he repeated, with dramatic emphasis.

"Now we can talk," said Peter, drawing up his chair to the fire. "I'm simply dying to know, Carina, if this idea of going to Rome was yours or Dad's."

"It was entirely your father's. I should never have suggested it. You know that as a rule he hates leaving Linfold."

"Do you know, I'm glad it came from him?" said the boy, earnestly.

She felt then that while he half feared she might

now ask him for an explanation of his conduct, he yet faintly wished that she would do so.

Carina looked at him steadily.

"Are you? Why?" she said.

"Because if he suggested it, he can't blame anyone."

"Blame?" She lifted her brows. The boy's manner was ambiguous. "But why should anyone be blamed?"

"Well, it depends of course on how things turn out!"

She thought the time had come to speak plainly.

"Peter," she said, "I don't know in the least what you mean—you've given me no clue. But I want to beg you to be very careful not to displease your father. I think you must have seen that he wasn't quite happy about you—"

"That's a nice way of describing a towering rage!" put in Peter, laughing.

"Yes, but it was your fault. You've shown a want of frankness, to me as well as to Jim. It makes us both anxious. That isn't right, you know." Her voice was very gentle, and as she spoke she laid her hand lightly on Peter's hard brown one.

Peter slipped his arm round her neck. "Carina," he whispered.

She disengaged herself gently. "Yes, dear?"

"You know I'd tell you if I could. But I don't want to. It's better not. Only, you mustn't think there's anything wrong. I think if there were anything wrong I'd tell you first—I should *want* to tell you. You've been such a friend to me—such a real pal, Carina!"

His voice actually trembled a little.

"It's very nice of you to say that, Peter. But I can never take your father's place. He has the first

claim on your confidence and love." Her tone was slightly stern.

"Of course I know that. But I can't give him what I give you!"

"I'd rather you didn't say that to me, Peter."

He smiled at her. "You *are* wonderful," he assured her.

"I'm glad, though, that you like the thought of coming with us to Rome."

"I simply can't tell you how much. I've longed—yes, even *prayed*—to go there!"

Those words gave Carina her first faint clue to what was passing in Peter's mind. They seemed to illuminate the situation which before had seemed both obscure and ambiguous. A very real misgiving crept into her heart. For more than two years Peter had never mentioned the subject of religion to her. After that one talk he had not again referred to it, and as the time passed on, Carina had believed that with him that particular phase had disappeared. Much had happened during those two years. He had left Eton and gone to Woolwich, and a new world of interests, work, and amusements had come into his life. And he loved it all ardently, the work, the games, the many activities that had sprung up in his path as he grew from boy to man. When at home he had accompanied his father to church regularly and without demur. She thought that perhaps these fresh contacts with the world had ousted those ancient spiritual cravings.

Even now it was only the least hint, but it made her very anxious. She could understand that his delicate consideration for herself prevented him from confiding fully in her. Her heart sank a little. It wasn't, she told herself, that she didn't wish to see Peter a Catholic, for she was conscious of desiring this grace for him with all her heart; but she knew

that he would have to pass through troubled stormy waters to reach that haven, and she feared lest his ardor should fail in the face of those inevitable obstacles.

Jim came back and found them sitting together over the fire.

"I suppose it'll do if you take Jackson. You won't want the girl as well to look after Tony?" he said.

"No—Jackson can look after her and me too. She'll be only too delighted to come on any condition." Her voice held that gay easy decision which invariably convinced Jim.

"Shall you be ready by Monday? That gives us three days. We could leave by the early train for Newhaven, and go by that route."

"Very well, Jim."

"Peter, you must tell Parkinson to see that your things are in order. And if you want anything, you'd better get it in Lintown to-morrow."

"Very well, Dad."

Peter had moved across to the sofa, away from the fire, yielding his seat to his father. He now watched them as they discussed the arrangements. He secretly admired the way Carina managed his father. No one in his own experience had ever done it so cleverly, so skilfully. And knowing his father's character, its despotism, its fierce obstinacy, its violent, jealous, implacable moods, he realized how wonderfully she had in a certain sense subdued him. Less frequent than ever were Mallory's outbursts of uncontrollable rage. It was almost as if he had learned to be ashamed of them . . . Carina looked like a slip of a girl beside him, and no one glancing at her casually would have suspected her of possessing that fine, indomitable, fearless spirit, ardent and flame-like. . . .

With her on his side, so ran Peter's thoughts,

surely things would ultimately pan out all right. And she *was* on his side—she had to be.

He slipped out of the room, leaving them together. He felt that if he remained with them, he should make premature confession of all that was in his heart, trusting to Carina's sweet influence to see him safely through the ordeal.

"Peter likes the idea of going to Rome," said Carina to Jim when they were alone.

He pulled her nearer to him, and she leaned against him as if she were tired.

"You were right," he said; "if there'd been anything wrong he wouldn't have been so eager to go away. As it is, the prospect delights him. I suppose some day he'll tell us all about it," he added wistfully.

"I'm sure he will, Jim." Her voice was cool and steady.

"You haven't asked him what was the matter?"

"Oh, no. I don't wish to force his confidence."

"Carina, once I used to feel that you might become a barrier between Peter and myself. He took such an enormous fancy to you when you first came, that I felt my own hold over him was weakening. But now you're like a link drawing us closer together—preventing our misunderstanding and mistrusting each other."

Carina said very softly: "You see, you're both so dear to me."

"Is that true? Do you really mean it? You've been happy with us?"

She laughed. "Of course I mean it. You've given me such solid happiness, Jim."

"But I'm such a rough brute. You must feel that . . ."

"I feel nothing of the kind!" She was smiling, but there was a dewy tenderness in her eyes. She

was thinking: "If this does separate them, I must bring them together again."

He looked at her almost incredulously. He could never quite give up the idea that she still regretted that frustrated fame. She had accepted everything so joyously, but surely in her heart the old ambition could not be quite quenched. Yet perhaps his own theory was true—that women were always happiest in a purely domestic life with their children about them. Even the most brilliant and gifted ones would choose just those joys, careless of other prizes.

"I'm glad you've been happy," he said slowly. "I've often been afraid of your regretting your former life, with all its intellectual interests."

"It wasn't any use regretting," she said quietly; "you showed me so plainly you didn't like it. I rebelled a little at first—was I very horrid, Jim? But I saw afterward that you were right. Children when they come, claim so much of their mother's time. It's only right they should. I'm not unreasonable, Jim."

She spoke with a swift decision. It had not been very easy for her at first, but afterward she had accepted deliberately those new duties imposed by changed conditions. And then he realized that always she was actuated and controlled by a strong spiritual force that was her ultimate guide in all matters. She wasn't really ruled by him, even when she submitted to his decisions. She was governed by something at once more austere, and more insistent in its demands upon her will. He loved her all the better for that. She wasn't a woman you could break to pieces—like Iris, for instance. She would always keep the fair, large freedom that was her spiritual birthright and heritage.

She had brought ideals to bear in that new life of hers. Her child played a very important part in her life. Carina was a very maternal woman, and she

had a natural love of and understanding for little children. Her beauty still held Jim in his first bondage, but her development had been a delicious thing to watch. Even the slow, steady development of her love for him that increased year by year. To-night she hadn't tried to hide it. It was as if she wanted to draw him nearer, much nearer.

They sat there, still, and absorbed in thought, their hands interlocked and Carina's head pressed lightly against his arm. To her it was a wonderful hour when without words it seemed almost as if the veils between their souls had been torn down, and that they had seen and known each other for the first time. They were conscious of happiness, of mutual forbearance and understanding. Their lives had become deeply and closely interwoven.

And yet, she couldn't have adjusted herself to those new conditions, he thought, without considerable effort and self-discipline. But she had in the end adjusted herself very completely. And he had given way in what she considered essentials. There were fundamental things about Carina which you had to realize you couldn't touch. Things that had gone so marvellously to the forming of her. That religion of hers for instance, it was part of her very being. Yes, they had both made sacrifices, and in reward they had attained to their present harmony.

When at last she spoke, she said: "Jim, I hope you'll never be hard on Peter. Sons seldom keep quite to the lines laid down by their fathers. There must be change and progress in each generation. Peter's a child of the twentieth century with all its storm and stress and heroism. But you've got a son to be proud of. . . ."

"You've done more for him than I ever could. I sometimes think he almost forgets you're not his own mother. You've done so much for us all, Carina."

She did not speak. His words were less sentimental than passionately sincere. A little praise from him meant so much. He had observed perhaps her efforts; he had watched her at work, silently, self-sacrificingly, for them all. Himself, Peter and Tony. . . .

"But that's what I wanted to do," she assured him.

Jim turned his face to her. "Oh, my darling, I love you," he said.

She always remembered that talk in after days. His kisses before he would let her go . . . His reiterated "My darling, I love you." She had never felt so certain as she did then of his love and approval; his recognition of the part she had played. It had been hard at first—that part—so hard that it had stirred her to a fierce interior rebellion that almost overcame her. Then becoming easier . . . and then a thing of unimaginable joys, when life seemed filled to the brim. As now . . . as now. . . .

CHAPTER XXIX

THE day for their departure broke grey and wet. Clouds drooped over the Sussex Downs, and evaporated into a pale mist. The sodden green meadows from which every particle of snow had vanished were traversed with the brown irregular lines of jagged hedgerows that cut them abruptly. In the garden a few early snowdrops, spoilt by the rain, hung down their heavy opaque heads. It was a melancholy day, without the crisp definite cold of winter, and with as yet no hint of advancing spring.

Nevertheless, despite the weather and inclement conditions, Carina felt an odd pang at leaving the old house perhaps for many weeks to come. She felt for the first time nervous about the future, as if the journey might prove to be a fateful one, and that when they returned home they might find some subtle change in the place or in each other, to prevent them from enjoying that complete happiness which of late had been abundantly theirs. Except indeed for that slight passage of arms between Jim and Peter, there had been nothing for a long time to cloud their harmonious content.

She tried to shake herself free from this mood which seemed to her morbid, but it was not quite easy to do so. It took possession of her, and in the journey across France it prevented her from sleeping, so that by the time they reached Rome she was a wreck, worn out and nervous from sheer fatigue.

"Why, I thought you were such a splendid traveller, Car darling," said Jim.

"So I used to be," she answered with a wan smile. "I don't know what's come over me."

She couldn't possibly tell Jim of those morbid imaginings and apprehensions that had seized her just as they were on the point of leaving Linfold, and which had been so strong that she had almost entreated him on her knees to relinquish the proposed trip. He would have laughed at her, and perhaps, too, he would have shown annoyance, for he disliked any manifestation of nerves or hysteria. He and Peter had both looked as joyous as if they were setting forth upon some romantic adventure. It was odd that their happiness hadn't in the least communicated itself to her. She could only feel this desperate longing not to leave Linfold, despite its melancholy aspect, the chill of the falling rain, of the drifting clouds.

But when once she had recovered from her fatigue, the old joy of being in Rome took possession of her. Jim and Peter were obviously very happy indeed; their suite of rooms at one of the big hotels was comfortable and sunny, the flowers with which she daily filled the vases, giving it almost an aspect of summer. Tony seemed to thrive.

The sojourn in Rome passed very smoothly in those first days. So smoothly that English people staying in the same hotel could not help observing and speculating upon the gay, mutually devoted little party who at meals occupied a table near the window of the restaurant. At first it was a little difficult for strangers to place them; the man was obviously so much older than his companions. Yet they decided that the girlish looking woman with the wonderful red-gold hair clipped short to her neck, must certainly be his wife, despite the difference in their ages. He was so evidently *en adoration*, and besides she wore a wedding ring, and was obviously the

mother of the beautiful little girl who hardly ever left her side. Then, on the other hand, it was manifestly impossible for her to be the mother of that tall young stripling who possessed such a marked resemblance to the elder man. Their names in the visitors' book were Mr. and Mrs. James Mallory, Mr. Peter Mallory, Miss Antonia Mallory and maid, of Linfold Park, Sussex. There were some people from that county staying in the hotel, and they threw a vague light on the subject by saying: "Jim Mallory of Linfold? Oh, yes, one knows the name quite well. I heard he'd married again—that tall boy must be the son of his first wife. He took everyone by surprise by marrying Carina Ramsden. But she's quite given up writing since her marriage."

Jim was aware of the attention bestowed upon his wife, the glances of admiration that her beauty evoked, and on the whole he was not displeased.

Carina knew Rome superficially by heart, but the deeper and more complicated archæological problems of that vast palimpsest were matters she had never had time to study. She was, however, a good guide, and Jim and Peter were never happy unless she accompanied them on their orgies of sightseeing. Jackson could surely be trusted to take Tony on the Pincio—Tony must really learn not to cry for her mother . . . a great girl of two and a half! Thus Jim, but Carina was less satisfied with the arrangement to which she found herself bound to submit. She had an uncomfortable trick of carrying with her that thin, childish wail, and its ghostly little echo haunted her while she dutifully went through the ruins of the Forum or climbed the steep path to the top of the Palatine Hill.

Very soon a discomfiting fact was impressed upon her consciousness. While Jim's passionate interest was wholly devoted to the gigantic ruins of bygone

Rome, the palaces of the Palatine, the temples of the Forum, the massive tombs of the Appian Way, the vast tragic splendor of the Colosseum, Peter's supreme enjoyment lay in visiting the great basilicas, the monuments of Christian Rome, and the churches, so many of them built in the very early days of Christianity, and still cherishing their traditions of the sojourns there of St. Peter and St. Paul. He was deeply interested too in that period of strangely intensified spiritual life known as the Counter-Reformation, when so many new churches had been built, and so many ancient ones lovingly restored and decorated.

He kept his enthusiasm within bounds and said very little about it. He accompanied his father on purely archaeological expeditions without demur, but if he ever had to choose a place for the morning's visit, it was always a basilica or a church that he suggested.

The fact apparently escaped Jim's notice, but not so Carina's. It gave her food both for hope and fear. But she watched Peter, and saw him sinking almost insensibly into the open arms of the Church.

Carina was delighted to find herself able once more to go to daily Mass. She rose early and went every morning at seven o'clock to the great church of Sant' Andrea delle Fratte, with its wonderful cloister and garden of orange trees. Carina loved that quiet hour, spent before the Blessed Sacrament, in the spot where the miraculous conversion of the Jew, Ratisbonne, had taken place nearly eighty years before. He had gone thither in scoffing mood, when suddenly as he stood there, he saw amid long rays of mystical light the luminous figure of Our Lady beckoning to him. Beyond in the choir was the great picture of the martyrdom of St. Andrew, while on

each side of the sanctuary Bernini's smiling, joyful angels still gazed down upon successive generations of worshipers.

One morning as she was kneeling there, at the commencement of Mass, Carina saw a door at the side of the church open and Peter's young figure appeared on the threshold. He did not see her, and she watched him with something of anguish in her eyes as he dipped his finger into a stoup of holy water and crossed himself. He genuflected toward the altar, before he knelt down at some little distance from her. He performed these actions with the easy grace that tells of long custom. He knelt there, his face hidden in his hands; she could just see the back of his sleek black head.

Carina could hardly think of her own prayers that morning. Her thoughts were full of Peter, and the prayers which she was at last able to say were all for him. For a long time he had hardly mentioned the subject of religion to her, and until that night when he had spoken of his earnest desire to go to Rome, she had believed that his interest in the subject had weakened a little. She knew that he had been working very hard, and that he was also proficient at many games which naturally occupied much of his time, so that perhaps he had had less leisure in which to reflect upon the deeper things of the soul. Carina had felt too the reserve, almost imperceptible at first, yet very real, which had characterized his attitude toward herself during the past year. He had seldom come to her in the old way, sitting at her feet, laying his head on her knee, speaking to her with eager frankness and confidence. But she had been inclined to think this was merely one of the results of his transition from boyhood to manhood. For there was not—there never had been—any diminution of his affection for her, his immense

desire to please her. She knew that even now, if she invited him to explain what had of late seemed so mystifying and ambiguous in his conduct, he would have told her everything without reserve. But she had been afraid to come too close to that secret of his heart. She had been afraid of hearing something that Jim might not know. She was conscious of a subtly divided loyalty when she considered, dispassionately and impartially, the relations of father and son. It was not that they were not good friends. As Peter had grown to manhood he and Jim had enjoyed a certain comradeship, and here in Rome it had been especially noticeable. During Peter's childhood Jim had been too stern a father to enjoy his son's full confidence; the boy had been nervous of evoking unwittingly that violent and uncurbed anger. But, then, Carina had herself long since learned the inadvisability of discussing certain matters with Jim. Her religion, for instance—that was a subject that must be kept out of sight, and mentioned as seldom as possible. . . .

This thought came into her mind now as her eyes rested wistfully upon the sleek black head in front of her.

Peter held a book open before him. He was evidently following the Mass with the closest attention. At the Gospel he sprang up and crossed himself on brow and lips and breast. At the Sanctus he knelt down and at the Elevation, after one glance upward, he bent his head, remaining thus for a long time in an attitude of profound devotion. Somehow—somewhere—he had learned the Mysteries of the Catholic Faith. He could follow with perfect ease the wonderful liturgical prayers, the petitions, the actions of the priest, the Holy Sacrifice. . . .

All of a sudden she remembered his words, spoken

to her that night when the decision to come abroad had been made.

"I'd tell you if I could . . . But I don't want to. It's better not. Only, you musn't think there's anything wrong. . . ."

So it had been this then, all the time. She had had her suspicions that night, but they had hardly taken tangible form. Carina felt almost frightened. What would Jim say when he came to know? Would he blame her? The fear choked back the rising hope that had sprung into life. She realized that she was no longer so afraid of Jim's anger as she was of forfeiting his love. His love that was now so infinitely precious, that had come to dominate her life in a curious, unexpected fashion. Her eyes filled with scalding tears.

When she went up to the altar-rails to receive Holy Communion, she passed Peter without making any sign that she had seen him. Directly Mass was over, he hurried out of the church. She was still uncertain as to whether he had seen her or not.

She went back to the hotel that morning, her thoughts in a whirl. It was a bleak day in January, and Rome lay grey under a grey sky. The city looked austere and melancholy, as if troubled with its ancient, tragic secrets. To prolong her walk a little, for she felt a curious dislike to encountering Jim that morning, she went round by the Spanish steps. Already the flower-sellers were arranging their stalls. Even on the dullest of winter days those jewel-like masses gave an impression of summer warmth and color to the scene. There were branches of frail almond blossom, pink and silver on their brown boughs; bunches of damp heavy-headed violets, dimly purple; and quantities of carnations, crimson and pink, white and lemon-colored. Carina stopped and looked admiringly at the flowers. The man said

"*Vuole?*" and held out a bunch. She shook her head and passed on. She climbed the steps slowly and wearily, as if some great fatigue had taken possession of her.

Jim was already in the hall when she came in, and his cheerful face betrayed no sign of anxiety or displeasure.

"I do hope you're well wrapped up, Car darling," he said; "it's as cold as England to-day, and quite as sunless!" His tone was solicitous for her welfare.

Carina glanced at her coat; it was fashioned of soft thick fur and reached to the bottom of her skirt. It had been Jim's gift to her.

"I'm not a bit cold, thanks, Jim. The morning air always refreshes me."

She followed him into the restaurant. He nearly always joined her there for their morning coffee.

"Peter's late," he said; "I thought he was up. I looked into his room before I came down and saw that he wasn't there."

Carina colored faintly, but she said nothing.

"I don't mind telling you that I'm very pleased with Peter, Car." Mallory sipped his coffee complacently. "I see I was altogether too hasty in suspecting that something was wrong. Only, one must be careful with boys of his age."

"I was sure there was nothing wrong," said Carina uneasily.

She wished that she had the courage to be perfectly frank with Jim, and tell him what she had seen that morning. But it was Peter's secret, not her own, and she hesitated to cause friction between father and son. She went on eating, feeling that each mouthful would choke her.

It was almost a relief when Peter sauntered into the room.

"Good-morning, Dad. Good-morning, Carina."

He took his seat at the little table, and told the waiter to bring him some coffee and rolls.

"What are you going to do to-day, Dad?" he asked.

"I'm going to the Palatine," said Jim.

It was his favorite walk.

"I thought of going out to Verano—to the Campo Santo," said Carina in a low voice.

"I'll come with you," said Peter.

To his surprise she answered: "No—not to-day. I'd rather go alone."

In reality she felt that if she shared that intimate moment of standing beside Mary's grave with him, he would impulsively confide his secret to her. But Peter felt hurt at her refusal, explaining it to himself as an unwillingness on her part to share those poignant memories with him. He answered rather sulkily:

"All right. I'll go on the Palatine with Dad."

"I hate cemeteries," said Jim. "Chilly, depressing places. Don't catch cold there, Car."

"Oh, I shan't catch cold."

"But you're looking pale and fagged this morning. I think you ought to rest more." His eyes were fixed in searching scrutiny upon her face, which at that moment was almost deathly white.

"You don't feel ill or anything, darling?" he said, in a low, tender voice.

"Oh, no, Jim. I'm perfectly all right," she answered brightly.

All the time she felt as if she were deceiving him.

But she wanted desperately to be alone that day, and it was for this reason she had formed the hasty intention of going out to San Lorenzo. It would occupy most of the morning, and she hoped that by the time she returned, her equilibrium would be at least partially restored.

Jim's quick eyes had already perceived that there was something amiss. Naturally he had attributed it to her health, to the fatigue consequent upon her early walk and long fast. He disapproved of these things for Carina, and was glad to feel that at Linfold she had no opportunity for such religious excesses, as he secretly termed them. But to Carina it was a matter of pure joy and thankfulness to be able to return once more to those practices which she had faithfully followed for so many years of her unmarried life, when she would hardly have permitted a single day to pass without receiving Holy Communion. Even in the worst period of Mary's illness she had almost always been able to slip out early and consecrate that first hour of her waking day to God. It had helped her to endure all the suffering and grief and anxiety which had been hers.

Jim insisted that she should drive out to the cemetery, and she complied. He and Peter stood on the doorstep of the hotel as she drove away.

Peter would have a long morning with his father, and she wondered if he would gather courage to tell him the secret that possessed his heart. She longed for Jim to know, and yet she dreaded with every nerve in her body the moment of revelation. It would be a very crucial moment, and perhaps afterward things would never be quite the same again.

CHAPTER XXX

IN THE days that followed, Carina felt as if she had been granted a reprieve. There was no climax to interfere with their enjoyment of Rome. But whereas she perceived that the Catholic Church continued to make a deeper and deeper appeal to Peter, Jim seemed to disregard it deliberately. He never entered a church if he could help it, and when he did so, it was quite ostentatiously as a sightseer, with his guide-book in his hand. He made himself perfectly *au fait* beforehand with all the works of art and precious objects it contained that were worthy of notice. He did not like St. Peter's and said so, almost lecturing Peter on the subject for fear he should be guided by Carina into an entirely opposite opinion. It was muddled from the beginning, he used to declare, and mistake had succeeded mistake. Its size was monstrous and disproportionate. The Baroque statues of the Saints were absurd. Compare them with the *Pietà* of Michael Angelo! He was disquieted, however, when he saw Carina kneeling before the *Pietà* for a moment's prayer—that essential aspect of it had not occurred to him. But Carina found time to point out to Peter the beauty of the marbles and mosaics that enriched the basilica; the exquisite craftsmanship of Bernini that found ultimate mystical expression in the lovely Tabernacle that guarded the Blessed Sacrament; the grace of the Baldacchino that owed its existence to the same master-hand, rising above the Tomb of the Apostles with its hundred glimmering lamps burning like orange flowers in the dusk; the golden clouds from

which was suspended the Chair of the Fisherman-Pope.

While Jim discussed and argued, Peter remained silent, his eyes shining. He watched Carina wistfully when she knelt before the Tabernacle, but he himself remained standing by his father's side, not daring to imitate her.

As they turned away, Mallory said with a touch of impatience:

"I really refuse to admire anything on account of its size!"

St. Peter's stood for something he intensely disliked. More than any of the other basilicas did it remind him of the dogmatic side of Carina's religion. The Pope, for instance. He had always hated the Papacy, and had no wish to visit this, the latest successor of St. Peter. Carina might do so, if she wished it, but he wasn't going to permit Peter to accompany her. Unfortunately, he reflected, the quiet Protestant atmosphere of Linfold had done nothing to diminish his wife's zeal and ardor for her own Faith.

In St. Peter's he felt himself to be surrounded objectively by those inimical influences which still formed such a barrier between himself and his wife, not impairing their love, but certainly shadowing the brightness of its glory. Now that he was so sure of her love, he had begun to feel the division in spiritual things rather less; she could come to him across it with her divine tenderness. But here it was very insistent, and its presence imbued him with something of his old irritable restlessness, accentuating the sense of ultimate separation. St. Peter . . . the Pope . . . the long procession of Popes—over two hundred and sixty of them since the days when St. Peter had gone out probably on this very spot to be crucified head downward. A legend per-

haps. . . . He didn't believe that there was a scrap of historical evidence to prove that St. Peter had ever come to Rome at all. Tradition showed you his dwelling place, his altar, the font where he baptized, the dark, terrible dungeon where he lay a prisoner. No one had ever doubted these things till the Reformation beat its hands unavailingly against the indestructible gates of the Papacy.

As he stood there near the Confession where Carina was kneeling in prayer, he watched the people one by one going up to the bronze statue of the Saint, and kissing the worn foot.

And everywhere in marble and in bronze, on tomb and baldacchino, the Triple Crown and the great Keys reminded him of the sacred threefold charge, the terrible power bestowed upon St. Peter and his successors. It challenged one, even here. Mallory moved uneasily toward the door, and stood waiting under the portico for Carina to join him. She came up a few minutes later followed by Peter, and they stood at the top of the steps looking down upon the piazza enclosed on two sides by Bernini's sumptuous colonnade, and lit by the falling silver of Maderna's twin fountains. To-day the sky was blue and high-hanging, and decorated with those immense solid-looking white clouds that may have inspired the Baroque artists in their mystical representations of the Saints ascending upon just such clouds as those into heaven.

"There's lots of time still before lunch," said Peter; "as we're so near, let's drive up to the Janiculum."

"Very well," said Mallory.

As Jim and Carina descended the steps side by side, the boy lingered behind them. He looked back at the portico above which was placed the sculptured representation of Christ giving the keys to the kneel-

ing apostle. Yes, you were confronted with that theme on the very threshold, and never afterward in the interior of the basilica were you permitted to lose sight of it. The pilgrims who came hither did not come only to worship Almighty God and His Divine Son, but they came also to give homage to that Son's Vicar, visible upon the earth as Head of the Catholic Church, whose sway extended unquestioned over millions and millions of men now as in past ages, and whose voice was gladly and joyfully obeyed by those millions.

Peter crossed himself and said:

"Lord, I believe. Help Thou my unbelief . . ."

When Sunday came, Jim was scrupulous about going to the morning service at the English church. Probably if he had been alone with his wife, he would have accompanied her to Mass, as forming part of the significant "Roman" spectacle. Many English visitors, as he knew, soothed their consciences by saying they "could worship God and say their prayers as well in one church as in another," while those of "High" tendencies would remind themselves that this was at any rate "the Catholic Church in Italy." But many who were indifferent to the subtle claims of "geographical Catholicism" frankly enjoyed the music at St. Peter's or at the Lateran, the stately procession of Cardinals and priests, even the fragrance of what Browning called, the

*" . . . Good, strong, thick, stupefying
incense smoke."*

Jim, however, felt it incumbent upon him to set Peter a good example of consistent Christian behavior. He informed him therefore that he must be ready to start shortly before eleven.

"Oh, I wanted to hear High Mass at St. Peter's!

Everyone does in Rome. Carina's going—do let us go too, Dad."

A cloud of disappointment shadowed his sensitive young face. But his eagerness made it all the more imperative that he should be denied. Mallory frowned and said:

"I prefer that you should come with me to the English church."

Peter went on with his breakfast in silence. But the crisp rolls and butter, the fragrant coffee, tasted like ashes in his mouth. To be in Rome, and yet not to be allowed to attend High Mass in St. Peter's!

. . . The thought was incredible, ludicrous, tragic. All at once he saw his father as narrow-minded, intolerant, prejudiced. A man who held himself within the arbitrary limits of his own local position, who was afraid of criticism and let himself be governed by what is known to the Catholic as "human respect."

. . . Peter felt the galling chain of his own complete dependence upon him. He wanted liberty and freedom, above all in spiritual things.

Mallory, exasperated by his son's silence and impenetrable demeanor, said curtly:

"Don't sulk, for goodness' sake, Peter. You still behave like a baby if you're not allowed to have every mortal thing you ask for!"

He glanced at Carina, who had taken no part in the conversation. Was she supporting the boy in his queer mute rebellion? Her face was quite tranquil. She seemed almost to hold herself aloof from them in that significantly detached attitude of hers.

"You don't mind going alone, Carina?" said Jim.

"Not in the least. It would have been nice, though, to have had you—and Peter."

Her smooth level tones quieted Jim's nerves.

"Another time, perhaps. But Peter and I mustn't forget our duty to our own Church, though we hap-

pen to be in Rome. We must remember that we're English and have our own Established Church to which, thank God, we belong."

"I could never forget that here!" Peter burst out unwisely.

Jim raised his eyebrows.

"So much the better. But you needn't lose your temper, need you?"

He eyed his son. What on earth did he mean by that impetuous speech? Mallory was resolved not to put the obvious interpretation upon it.

Carina pushed back her chair.

"I must go up to get ready. You know, it begins about half past nine." As she passed Peter, she laid her hand for a moment on his shoulder. "You and Dad must come with me another time."

"Yes . . . yes . . ." said Peter eagerly.

He sprang up and followed her out of the room. He didn't want to be left quite alone with his father just then. Jim was clearly in an irascible mood.

Mallory lit a cigarette and went into the lounge, glancing perfunctorily at some English papers that were lying there on the tables. Something in Peter's manner had perturbed him, awakening old misgivings that had long ago ceased to trouble him. He had seemed so bitterly disappointed at being thus compelled to go to the English church—a disappointment out of all proportion to the slight sacrifice exacted from him. But Jim felt that he had been wise to insist. There was danger in exposing a sensitive, susceptible adolescent to the mighty magic of Rome. Had he not from time to time felt its spell working upon his own heart and imagination—a spell he had resisted with a fierce, deliberate effort of will? He remembered that night when he had knelt side by side with Carina at Midnight Mass in Lintown. Then, and for long afterward, that had seemed to

him a singularly hallowed hour, full of a mysterious sanctifying grace, that had touched even himself, intolerant and full of resistance as he was. And for Peter the Catholic religion would have a special attraction because it was Carina's Faith. Jim sighed. For a long time he had almost forgotten to dread the harvest that might be reaped from his own sowing. He had not been a young man when he married Carina; no one could accuse him of youthful impulsiveness, yet he had chosen her, a devout Catholic, to be his wife, the mother of his children, the step-mother of his son. But his conscience, though lulled by apparent security, had never been quite easy. He feared always to find that strange and bitter fruit might yet be gathered from that one lapse of his from wisdom and prudence. And it would have been useless to blame Carina for something for which he himself was primarily responsible. Yes, he had permitted himself to be ruled by his love for her. He had tried to give her up, and he had failed. And surely he had done well. She had been a most loving and tender wife to him; she was the devoted mother of his child; her influence over Peter had been a suave, sweet, wise one. She had always been beautiful to Peter, from the first day of her coming to Linfold; she had subjugated him with her charm and tenderness. . . .

Jim flung down the newspaper; he had not read a word of it, for his thoughts irritated while they sought to absolve him. He had allowed Carina to have a pretty free hand with Peter, but she must not trespass beyond the defined boundaries. He was ready to put his foot down on any tentative sign of such invasion. It was part of his inherited creed not to trust a Catholic where religion was concerned. He had made an exception perhaps in Carina's favor, because of her unfailing tact and discretion from

which she had only departed in that one deplorable instance of the Carters' case. But Humphreys had said that one never knew how far a woman was under the thumb of her confessor, who might dictate things that otherwise would never occur to her.

He tried in vain that morning to shake himself free from these disagreeable reflections. Peter's queer attitude of silent mutiny had aroused them. For a long time he had not thought of the Catholic Church in connection with his son, but now the old misgiving had leapt into life again. Perhaps it had been a little rash to bring Peter to Rome. He had counted upon his supreme interest in the ruins and ancient monuments.

During the singing of psalm and hymn that morning, Mallory could not help noticing that Peter's lips were obstinately closed. And he even had the uncomfortable impression that though the boy's lithe young body was so near him, his soul was very far away.

Carina always felt after that first Sunday in Rome that she was living on the edge of a volcano, the thin crust of which would presently crumble, precipitating them all into the boiling molten abyss below. She could no longer close her eyes to the fact that the thing which had been absorbing Peter's time and thoughts, first at Linfold and now in Rome, was no other than the Catholic Faith. He had now presumably entered upon the final phase of the struggle. Carina felt something of the combat reflected in her own heart. It was as if she were sharing in his very fears; as if, too, she were an actual witness of the spiritual warfare in which he was engaged. She sometimes felt as if the blows and wounds were falling upon herself.

She longed for Peter to triumph, and yet the consequences would, she knew, be terrible for them all.

Although she was certain of Jim's love, she still believed that Peter's conversion might cause an actual temporary breach between them. He would assuredly blame her. . . .

She felt almost as if she were faced with the prospect of a slow and cruel martyrdom. When she knelt down by the Confession in St. Peter's that morning, the tears flowed into her eyes. Dark and overwhelming waters threatened to engulf both her and Jim, submerging them, dividing them, like two drowning persons swept remorselessly from each other's arms.

She saw Jim from a new angle, as of one having power to inflict mortal hurt upon her. Her love for him, so weak and negligible at first, had gradually permeated all her being. It was that very love that had placed a new sharp weapon in his hand. Because she loved him he could wound her to the death.

The little fatal seeds of disease and disaster are sown from the very commencement of life and action. And, looking back, it seemed to her that she had always known, even when she married Jim, that shipwreck would come, if it ever did come, through Peter.

So in the days that followed she waited, with perfect outward serenity and calm, for the storm to burst. Day after day, as she saw Peter come into the church of Sant' Andrea for the early Mass, she knew that there could be but the one outcome. He never showed any signs of having seen her; sometimes she even fancied that he deliberately avoided meeting her eyes. He knelt there, always in front of her, in an attitude of profound recollection. When she saw him thus, it seemed to her that the thundercloud darkened and came a little nearer, obscuring all the horizons of her life, even blurring the future,

in which nowhere was Jim's face visible to her. She groped helplessly for the old familiar voice and contacts; they slipped past her in the darkness, eluding her.

CHAPTER XXXI

ON THE following Sunday morning, after a week of assiduous sightseeing, besides several expeditions to the hill-cities that were within easy reach of Rome, Carina returned from Mass rather later than usual, to find Jim partaking of his morning coffee alone. She had not seen Peter in church that morning, and concluded that perhaps he had overslept himself. She sat down at the table, after greeting her husband, thinking no more of the boy's non-appearance. His absence caused neither of them the slightest anxiety, and evoked from Jim only a brief, acid comment upon his increasing unpunctuality. It was only as eleven o'clock approached and the boy was still not visible that Jim, who was then ready to go to church, began to get annoyed.

Remembering the little episode of the preceding Sunday, he had already determined that Peter should not be absolved from accompanying him again to-day. He was even prepared to encounter the same resistance, a repetition of the sullen silent attitude, his moody absentmindedness in church, his unconcealed boredom.

Jim was alone, for Carina had already started for St. Peter's, and he had walked down to the tram with her and seen her get into it. He was certain, therefore, that Peter hadn't stolen a march upon him and accompanied Carina secretly to St. Peter's. She had gone alone, looking charming, on that chill bright day of icy airs and brilliant sunshine, in her fur coat and a little hat that disclosed the short hair—the one

touch of color about her. She had waved to him from the window of the tram, and afterward he had walked slowly back to the hotel, thinking of her and half-wishing that he had gone with her to-day. But that would have been to set Peter a bad example, to manifest afresh his own weakness. . . .

Eleven o'clock struck, and there was no sign of Peter. He was not in his room, and upon inquiry Jim found that he had not breakfasted. Mallory became annoyed, then anxious, and finally alarmed. But surely no harm had come to him? He ascertained that he had been seen to leave the hotel at an early hour—about seven o'clock. Yes, he had looked well and cheerful, the night-porter informed him. But he had said nothing and had left no message.

Since they had left Linfold, Peter had shown no disposition to absent himself, to elude his father, to vanish for hours together on mysterious and unexplained errands. But now . . . it had begun again. Jim gradually worked himself up into a passion of anger. He wasn't going to have this kind of thing, disturbing his domestic peace. Peter should be told some plain home-truths when he returned. It was a pity he was too old to be chastised.

Jim did not go to the English church that morning. He told himself that he was far too much upset about Peter. The boy was dodging him. He was up to some mischief, else why this persistent secrecy and reticence? This time he intended to get to the bottom of it. Hitherto he had avoided a definite scene with his son, out of consideration for Carina. Yes, that was the fatal, invariable reason of his hesitation, his lack of decision. . . .

At one moment he even entertained the thought of going to St. Peter's in order to meet Carina there and escort her home. But surely she would feel an intense surprise at seeing him arrive alone. No, he

preferred to wait here for Peter, to accost him the moment he came in, and insist upon an explanation.

He smoked innumerable cigarettes and glanced at the latest papers from England. The midday Ave Maria sounded from the neighboring belfries, a jangle of sound, rising and swelling in the still air. Carina ought to be back soon. There was still no sign of Peter. Jim rose at last and went into the hall.

A cab drove up to the door, and from it descended two figures, his wife and Peter.

So they had been together after all. Whatever the secret was, Carina was obviously aiding and abetting his son.

Jim went up to them.

"Peter, I've something to say to you. Come up to my room at once."

His voice held a harsh ugly sound.

Peter glanced up as if slightly surprised. "Very well, Dad," he replied cheerfully.

They all went up in the lift together. Carina looked cold and nervous; she was very pale, and felt almost sick with apprehension. The cataclysm was close at hand. Jim's face and manner told her that.

While they were in the lift, he did not speak. Carina was the first to emerge from it when they reached their landing. She hesitated for a moment, and Jim, perceiving it, said: "No, Carina. I must see Peter alone. I've got something to say to him that you mustn't hear."

He was extraordinarily controlled, but his eyes were slightly bloodshot and the veins stood out like cords on his temples.

"Jim!" She uttered his name appealingly.

He did not seem to hear her, for he strode away down the passage toward his room, which was the

last of their suite and had its own separate entrance. Between this and their sitting-room was Peter's little slip of a bedroom.

Carina went into her room. Jackson had just brought Tony back from her morning outing on the Pincio, and the child was lying in her cot asleep. The maid withdrew noiselessly, and Carina went to the window and looked down upon the busy street below. She saw the scarlet-rimmed trams moving rapidly past, and the foot-passengers thronging the pavements. A lumbering wine-cart went slowly down the hill, for the road just there curved abruptly to a steep descent. In a garden close at hand the sun was shining on a grove of palms. Her mind was a prey to the gloomiest misgivings that invaded it like a swarm of malignant insects.

It was true that she had encountered her stepson in St. Peter's that morning. He had come at an early hour, he explained, in order to escape the service in the English church, and he had had a cup of coffee at a restaurant in the piazza. Beyond that, he had offered no explanation of his presence. During their drive back together he had seemed in the best of spirits, entirely free from anxiety or fear.

It seemed to her that hours must have passed before a footstep sounded in the passage and Mallory came into the room. His thick greying hair was slightly dishevelled, and under his prominent black brows that traced a fierce line across his face, his eyes gleamed with a kind of satisfied, exultant savagery.

He still had the carriage and physique of a much younger man; the easy grace, the supple athletic movements were still those of comparative youth. But his face now betrayed signs of age, and showed unmistakable traces of that violence of temper which had never been perfectly disciplined and controlled.

"Carina!" he said sharply.

"Yes, Jim?" She came toward him. Was his anger to be directed against herself? She, innocent of offence, of even a shadow of disloyalty, felt that upon her would inevitably devolve the full weight of the blame. Upon her so powerless. . . .

"I'm going to take Peter home to-night," he said.

"Home? To-night?" she repeated.

She wondered why the words seemed to have no meaning at all for her. Another thought, however, struck her immediately, and she said: "But it's impossible for me to be ready in a few hours like that. We'd better wait till to-morrow. And Tony has a little cold. It wouldn't be wise for her to travel."

"Oh, you needn't trouble about that," said Malory roughly; "I'm going alone with Peter. You're to stay here for the present. But I must get him out of the way."

Carina raised her eyes to his. "What has Peter done?" she said.

She felt a slow sinking of the heart.

"Don't try and fool me, Car," he exclaimed, in a loud angry tone. "You know perfectly well. Of course, it's all your doing. Don't pretend ignorance—it drives me mad!"

He was in a passion of rage, and seemed hardly to know what he was saying. He was in the mood when a man will sometimes use violence and even strike blindly at what he most loves. If she had been a less fearless woman she would have shrunk from him then, from the look of anger in his blazing eyes.

"I really don't understand," she said, in a cool firm tone. "Do be calm and try to explain."

"How dare you lie to me?" he shouted.

"I'm not lying to you—I've never lied to you," said Carina.

"Do you mean to tell me that you don't know

where Peter's been spending his time all these days and weeks? Whenever, in fact, he's been away from home and refused to give any account of his doings? You encouraged me to bring him here, when you must have known that under the circumstances it was the worst place in the world for him. You've fooled me long enough, but you can't deceive me now. You knew, and you encouraged him, though you were perfectly aware what I should feel about it. Those priests of yours—it wasn't likely that they would let him alone!" The rest of his speech was lost in explosive incoherencies, impossible to follow.

"You are mistaken," she said, "I never had the slightest knowledge—I never even guessed anything—till the day we settled to come abroad. And then it was only guessing—I knew nothing for certain."

She perceived now, that Peter had had a definite reason for not telling her. He hadn't wished to incriminate her. "I'd tell you if I could. But I don't want to—it's better not . . ." She could hear his voice, just touched with emotion, saying those words, and even then scarcely a hint of their significance had entered her mind.

"I shall take him home, away from this pestilential city," continued Mallory, "and if he persists in disobeying me, I shall disinherit him. I've always said that I would. Linfold isn't entailed—I can leave it to the Fergus Mallorys. And I'd rather burn it to the ground than run any risk of its passing into the hands of the priests after my death."

"Jim—listen to me! I'd no idea that Peter—"

He stopped her. "Oh, yes, I know; he told me the same lie."

"It's a long time—more than two years—since he mentioned the subject to me. Of course, since we've been here I couldn't help seeing how it was with him. But I'd no right to tell you what I fancied—it might

have been a mistake. . . .”

“A likely story!” sneered Mallory. “Who else could have taught him—lent him books—deliberately perverted his mind at a young and impressionable age? Who else but you—the one person whom I trusted—the one person I loved?”

Carina had come a little nearer to him as if to pacify him, and now in his fierce anger he pushed her roughly away. The gesture was so violent that it almost amounted to a blow. Carina staggered beneath it. She had the feeling then, that all her happy life had fallen upon irremediable ruin.

The thunder-cloud had burst, the many waters had overwhelmed her; she and Jim were two drowning persons drifting apart . . . apart always till their death. . . .

“He had the insolence to tell me that he thought I shouldn’t really mind, because I’d married a Papist myself, and allowed Tony to be baptized in the Roman Catholic Church. Yes, he brought that up against me. If he’d been a little younger I’d have flogged him within an inch of his life for that!”

Carina stood there, her small hands hanging helplessly at her sides.

“So I’m going to take him home out of your way! You shan’t see him again. You pretended to care for him—you made him devoted to you—and this was what you were aiming at all the time! Pretending to care for Peter! All this affection was only a cloak for your proselytizing propaganda . . . You were out to entrap my son! But you can’t fool me any more. If you’d let Peter alone, we might have jogged on as comfortably as most people till the end of the chapter. But that’s just what you wouldn’t do—you couldn’t keep your hands off my son. If I leave Tony with you, it’s only because she’s too young to be separated from her mother.”

Carina opened her lips but no words came. Had she really no right to her own child, the baby she had borne, and cherished with such absorbing care? Could Jim take Tony from her if he chose, leaving her quite alone and solitary in Rome? She looked at him aghast. This man, who had once loved her, had changed in the last half hour to a bitter, implacable foe.

"How long do you mean to leave us here?" she asked at last, with a glance toward the cot where Tony moaned and stirred in her sleep as if something of her father's savage violence had penetrated into her baby dreams.

He did not answer.

"For long, Jim? For *how* long?"

"As long as I choose. It depends upon Peter—whether he means to behave reasonably or not. I'm not going to sacrifice him to you any more!"

"You mean I'm not to come back?" For the first time her voice was not quite steady.

"You've left me no choice. You've lied and deceived me and fooled me to the top of your bent. Sophia warned me—but I was fool enough not to listen. And Humphreys warned me—even before I married—of the danger, the risk I was running. I thought they were exaggerating. I have learned to my cost they were right."

She did not rebel. His power was obviously too great. She must be thankful—oh, she was thankful—that in tearing her beautiful life to shreds he yet refrained from inflicting upon her the death-wound of separating her from Tony! That ultimate torture of being parted from her own child was not to be hers. At least not now. But who could tell what the future might hold? She saw herself fleeing into the wilderness, hiding from Jim, lest he should come and claim Tony. . . .

Hitherto she had listened in incredulous silence. But now reality was forced upon her. It was a sentence of banishment. All of a sudden Linfold seemed to hold her with clinging hands.

Bruised and broken now, she sank into a chair beside Tony's cot and hid her face from him. Surely he would soon come to his senses and regret all that he had said . . . Jim was never very long angry. The tears flooded her eyes.

"Peter told me that he was making arrangements to be received into the Roman Catholic Church before we left Rome. He intended to tell me when everything was finally settled, apparently supposing that I should have nothing to say against it. He knows differently now. And he goes home with me to-night. I'm going to have no more nonsense."

He watched her as he spoke. She bore her punishment bravely, without rebellion, without entreaty. That fine pride of hers sustained her.

"I forgot how clever you were, Carina," he added, with a sneer; "you hid that side from me. You played the loving, dutiful, submissive wife to perfection. I was completely taken in!"

Suddenly she rose and seemed to grope her way across the room toward him, as if she were moving in the midst of a hostile darkness that concealed invisible foes, and was feeling after human contact.

"Jim, dear—don't let's quarrel—" She was close to him now, and she laid her hand timidly on his arm.

She had never known that gesture fail before to calm him. Now it only infuriated him anew. She had always bewitched him—always! He had resolved to steel himself against her enchantments, and he shook her off now with a rough energy, as if she had been to him a repulsive object.

"As long as Peter's at Linfold, and until he's con-

vinced me that he's going to obey me in this matter, I won't have you in the house!" His voice rang through the room. Yes, he had brought this disaster upon himself by marrying a Catholic wife, thus introducing an alien and powerful element into his home. He had reckoned upon the superior strength of his lifelong influence over Peter, but Carina had proved too strong for him. Never while life lasted, he told himself, could he forget that interview with his son. For the first time it had not been a dispute between parent and child; they had confronted each other as man to man. "How was I to know you'd take it like this?" Peter had inquired. "You'd married a Catholic—you'd promised that all your other children should be baptized and brought up as Catholics. What objection could you possibly have after that to my being one?" . . . He had wanted to strike Peter then, to strike him to the ground, but his hands had dropped helplessly to his sides. Peter had been the least to blame of all.

He went out of the room. She realized then that, moved by some tardy and mistaken sense of duty toward his son, he had cast her off. And now it only seemed to her that the whole sequence of events, since her first meeting with Mallory, had moved forward tragically, inevitably, to this climax. On the night of Lady Murray's dinner-party the first seeds of to-day's horror had been sown. She was engulfed at last by the overwhelming waters, and as the waves passed over her head she lost all sense of security and stability. She had held out her hands to Jim, as she might have done had she been actually drowning, and he had repulsed her. She muttered uneasily to herself: "It isn't true—it can't be true . . . this can't have happened to me . . . it's impossible."

But it had happened. The loud-roaring tidal wave had passed over her head. . . .

She went back to her seat near Tony's cot, and a deadly chill came over her, enveloping her as if with a garment of ice that clung to her from head to foot. Even now she could scarcely believe in the reality of the scene through which she had just passed. She had often seen Jim angry before, had heard him utter words that he had afterward deeply regretted; from the first days of her marriage she had realized that her husband was a man of violent and often uncontrolled temper. But she had never before seen him so bitterly and implacably angry. So angry indeed that he purposed to leave her for an indefinite period, with no thought apparently of the deep and lasting wrong he was about to inflict upon her. He no longer believed her word. On the contrary, he believed that she and Peter had combined to deceive him. She had caused the breach that now threatened between father and son. And she had been so careful. . . . Never once had she permitted Peter to accompany her to church in all those years at Linfold; he had never attended any service in a Catholic church with her during that time. But, because of her and of his love for her, he had been led from very early days to make inquiries for himself into the religion she professed. He had attended Mass, and had come under the peculiar and powerful influence which the Blessed Sacrament so frequently obtains over ardent and sensitive souls. He had gone forward—how and when, she did not know—quietly and secretly, but very earnestly. And now he had come to the crossroads, when he would have to make a definite choice. Carina was not a convert, and she had not had to make that choice, nor offer the sacrifices it so often entails. And in her heart, forgetful now of her own grief, she felt an immense

spring of compassion welling up and flowing toward Peter, because if he chose aright he would have to suffer very bitterly. He would perhaps set lasting enmity between himself and his father, thereby suffering heavy temporal losses; he would be cut off too from any communication with herself. And he was a boy who loved his home, and all the simple wholesome joys and affection that he found there. Carina's heart ached for Peter. She longed to go to him, to speak words of confident courage in this hour of trial. She would have endeavored perhaps to urge him to be faithful to his high resolve. But something within her told her that that at least would not be necessary.

Tony awoke and began to cry. She was hungry, and Carina rang the bell and ordered the waiter to bring some food up to the sitting-room, for herself and the child. She did not dare go downstairs and meet Jim again just then.

CHAPTER XXXII

TONY was unsettled and restless, as if she were subconsciously teased by her mother's sorrow. She flung down her doll, refused to regard her india-rubber horse, and after weeping a little in the purposeless manner of small children, asked that Peter might come up and play with her.

"Peter can't come now, darling," said Carina, soothing her.

"But I want him!"

"He . . . he is going out with Daddy . . ."

"Will he come back to tea? I want him to play bears with me," lisped the baby voice.

"I don't know, dear . . . I'll put on your things, and take you to the Pincio."

The afternoon was fine, and the fresh air would be good for Tony, after the heated hotel room. All at once the great hive-like building with its busy-idle life had become hateful to her. Tony stood patiently while her mother dressed her. In a few minutes they were descending in the lift to the ground floor.

Carina glanced nervously around, but she saw no sign of Jim or Peter. She wondered where they were—what they were doing. Perhaps they had gone out to see about their tickets. They might have some difficulty in getting places, especially if they wished to have sleeping berths.

She was thankful for the little distraction afforded by this task of taking Tony out. It was impossible to fix her mind upon that incredible future while the child was with her, demanding her whole attention.

Like all children Tony seemed to expect a show of animal spirits from her adult companions.

As she passed the window of the smoking-room she saw Jim standing there with folded arms. His face was hard as a stone mask. He watched them without moving.

Carina thought suddenly: "He doesn't love me any more."

She had often, especially in the early days of their marriage, accused herself of not loving him enough. But now she was ready to fall on her knees and entreat him to reconsider his harsh decision. His bitter, unloving words had driven a sword into her heart. She felt it like a physical wound. Did that mean that now, when he did not love her any more, she loved him as once he had loved her?

She hurried toward the Pincio, holding Tony's hand tightly in hers. Tony had evidently not observed that pitiless stone image at the window, or she would certainly have called to "Daddy" and besought him to accompany them. She was fond of her father, although she was terrified of him when he raised his voice to her. It was Jim's nature to be rough and autocratic with children; he had little patience with them.

It would have been terrible to leave Tony to the tender mercies of Jim. Tears came into her eyes at the thought, and before she could wipe them away, Tony had noticed them.

"Kwying, Mummy?"

Carina tried to laugh. Tony clung to her hand.

"Don't kwy, Mummy," she said, and lifted her rosy little face for a kiss. Carina bent down and kissed her almost passionately. No, she would not have tamely submitted if Jim had threatened to separate her from her child. She would have fought for the possession of Tony.

She felt as if she had gone to the edge of a dreadful precipice, and that Jim's hands had urged her to the brink of it. It was terrible to feel the force of his power as she had felt it to-day. Iris had felt it too, and it had killed her. For the first time Carina almost envied Iris because she had been able to die. But then death had meant separation from her little son on whose behalf she had suffered such vicarious torments. No—that would be the worst fate of all,—to die and leave Tony. She began to pray that it might not happen—the very thought chilled her. It must be terrible for the mother of a little child to find herself dying. She shrank from the thought and drew Tony closer to her.

On the Pincio, standing by the stone balustrade whence generations of tourists have watched the sun setting behind St. Peter's, Carina looked down upon Rome. Everything to-day was outlined with a curious soft distinctness. There was a fluid golden light in the west that seemed to flow tenderly over the houses, the grey roofs, the noble domes. The flattened glass dome of the Augusteo flashed in the pale winter sunlight.

Surely, Jim would not humiliate and shame her by leaving her here alone, in a hotel where she had several acquaintances and where gossip would be busy trying to explain his sudden departure with his son. It seemed impossible, she told herself over and over again, that in one short half hour Jim should have become her implacable foe. She looked at Tony, playing so happily and unconsciously with her doll, now restored to its position of first favorite. Her child and Jim's . . . Had he lost all affection for Tony, as well as for herself? Did he care only for Peter? Was the old first tie, after all, the only strong and permanent one? She saw now how morbidly even if half subconsciously he had, dur-

ing the three and a half years of their married life, permitted himself to cherish the fear that as a punishment for his marriage Peter would one day succumb to her influence and become a Catholic. He had been warned more than once, so he had told her, of the risk he was running. Yes, throughout those years, despite the harmonious acceptance of the spiritual gulf that divided them, he must have feared and dreaded the blow that had now fallen upon him. And in revenge he had struck out blindly, as a man wounded by a cruel blow will strike in the heat of revengeful anger. She wished she could have known some details at least of that critical, tragic interview between the father and son. She wanted to know what Peter had said, besides the words Jim had repeated to her; how he had looked . . . how he had borne himself in that moment of revelation, faced by those threats of punishment, of disinheritance.

"Mummy—my dolly's tired. She wants her tea."

Tony always attributed to her doll her own fatigue and hunger.

"Does she, my precious?"

"Yes—she'd like to go in now and play bears with Peter!"

"Then we'll take her in, darling."

Carina dreaded the return to the hotel. She was afraid of meeting Jim with that new hard look in his eyes.

She had hardly reached the sitting-room when Peter entered it. His face was very grave and there was a suspicious brightness in his eyes. He put his arm round her and kissed her.

"Carina, you know what's happened, and I'm awfully sorry for your sake. Forgive me. I ought to have seen what it would mean for you. But I thought Dad would at least believe me when I told

him it had nothing to do with you—except for the fact that you were a Catholic—you, the most perfect woman in the whole world!”

“But, Peter—I can’t bear your going off like this,” she said.

“Oh, you mustn’t think about me. It’s his leaving you here alone with Tony, that I don’t feel as if I could ever forgive.”

“Where is Jim?” she asked, wondering how Peter had been able to snatch the interview with her.

“He’s gone out for a few minutes. I’ve been watching for an opportunity to run up and say good-bye to you, Carina. To thank you over and over again for all you’ve done for me. He would have stopped me, if he’d known I was coming.”

“Don’t stay, Peter—you’d better not. Your father is very angry, and we must try to see his point of view too. I wish I could have helped you more.”

Her eyes were bright with tears, and her voice held a desolate sadness.

“If you didn’t do more, it was because I wouldn’t let you. Oh, I tried so hard to keep you out of it, so that the blame anyhow shouldn’t fall on you. But, you see, I didn’t succeed, and I’ve brought this awful trouble upon you. Carina, perhaps if I give up the idea for a year or two until I’m of age, he may forgive us both, and come and fetch you very soon. Would you like that?” He took her hand. He was much taller than she was now, and he looked down at her with a queer boyish tenderness, just as if she had really been his mother.

“No, Peter—even for my sake and to help me, I shouldn’t like you to do anything against your conscience. If you feel that the Holy Spirit is calling you, don’t hold back for any earthly reason . . . I shall manage. . . .”

“I must ask advice,” said Peter; “this isn’t a thing

I can decide for myself. All this has complicated everything so. . . .”

“I hope you were good and patient with your father,” she said.

“I tried to be. It wasn’t easy when he began to blame you—to say you’d deceived him. Sometimes I think he sees the truth himself and is fighting against it. One has that feeling just at the beginning, you know. And afterward you feel that if any obstacle were to be put in your way it would simply kill you.”

“You’re quite, quite sure about it, Peter?”

“So sure, my dear Carina, that the prospect of being disinherited doesn’t trouble me in the least. I can work It’s only the thought of you that holds me back. . . .”

“You mustn’t let it hold you back,” she said. She felt as if she were pronouncing her own death-sentence.

“I knew you’d say that. But, you see, I’m not sure if I ought to accept the sacrifice. I feel that when I’m received, it will take my father such a long time to forgive you. In his present mood forgiveness is out of the question.”

They stood facing each other in silence for a few minutes, and then Peter said:

“I must kiss Tony good-bye, Carina. No, I can’t play bears to-day, Tony! What a darling she is! I’m glad you’ve got her out of the general shipwreck. . . .” He stooped down over the child, and pushing aside the dark curls he put a butterfly kiss on her rosy little face.

“And now good-bye, my dear, dear Carina.”

She kissed him, holding his hands in hers.

“Good-bye, dear Peter. Be very patient, won’t you, with Jim? Remember he’s suffering too. And

pray for us both." Her mouth quivered a little. "Write to me, if you can. . . ."

"Of course I'll write. Please pray for me, Carina—pray that I may always feel the same courage about it as I do now—that I may always have the same faith."

He went out of her presence then very quietly, and with a look on his face of such passionate sincerity and earnestness, that she was never able to forget it. He was ready to sacrifice everything but herself, and before this thought he hung back. Carina crossed herself and said a little prayer for him. She prayed that he might indeed never lose his present high resolve and courage, the faith that was as a burning flame.

The afternoon had darkened into dusk. A star or two hung trembling in the sky. With the help of Jackson she put Tony to bed, and then went back into the sitting-room with the door open between the two rooms so that she could hear the child's every movement. It was getting near the time for Jim to start for the station. She knew the hour of the train quite well. She wondered if he intended to come and say good-bye to her. She sat down, and tried to read. It was nearly seven o'clock when the door opened and Mallory came in, dressed for travelling. He wore his heavy fur-lined overcoat.

"We've had our dinner and now we're going to start," he said, in a hard toneless voice. He had a queer sodden look about the eyes.

"Yes?" she said.

"We shall travel straight through to Linstead."

"Yes?" she said again. Then desperately: "Jim, how long do you really mean me to stay here?"

"I don't know. It depends upon Peter,"

"Upon Peter!"

"Yes—I shall give him every chance to submit—to obey."

His eyes, she thought, were the color of rusty iron, and had something of its lustrelessness.

"And supposing he doesn't?" she urged.

"Then he'll have to shift for himself. I think he thoroughly understands the position. They'll find," and he gave a grim laugh, "that he isn't the catch they imagine!"

He was obviously thinking only—but oh, so deeply—of Peter. His grief was for his son. Not for the wife he was leaving, nor for their little girl—Carina believed that he hardly gave them a passing thought. As in the old days before she had come into his life, his heart and mind were wholly occupied with his son, his first-born. Through all his harshness he loved the boy as perhaps he would never again love child of his.

"And then?" she asked.

"I can't think about the future now." He looked at Carina, and his face was still as hard as a stone image, and almost as expressionless.

"You mean I'm to remain away indefinitely—perhaps forever?"

He was silent.

"Jim, you've no right to exile me like this! You're treating me as if I'd done something wrong—something disgraceful!"

Her voice was passionate. She was thinking almost with anger: "He may have been cruel to Iris, but at least he never sent her away. She lived and died under his roof."

"Come, Carina," said Mallory, coolly eyeing her, "you know you never cared about me—you didn't try to conceal it when we were engaged, did you? So don't pretend you're heart-broken now."

"I'm not pretending to be heart-broken," she re-

turned indignantly, her pride sharply touched. "I'm only asking for justice for myself and Tony. You're putting me in a false position."

"Don't make a scene, for goodness' sake, Carina. We needn't advertise our unfortunate disputes before the whole hotel. You know perfectly well why I'm acting in this way. You've been a disloyal wife to me. You've come between me and my son. You've used his affection for you to stab me in the back. I won't have you at Linfold again until he has given up this idea. I make no promises about the future. It's all so uncertain . . . But I must think of my son."

Carina looked at him desolately.

"It means that I shall never come back," she said. "Peter won't give way, Jim—you know that as well as I do. And if my return depends upon his doing so, I shall not even wish for it. He won't be the first or the last to give up great possessions for the Faith!" Her eyes kindled.

"That will do, Carina," he said coldly. "Good-bye."

He went into the bedroom and bending over Tony's cot he kissed her. Then he returned, nodded slightly to Carina, and went out of the room without a single further word of farewell. When he had closed the door she burst into a passion of weeping. Up to the last she would not believe that he really intended to leave her, stranded alone in Rome like this. But now she felt the parting to be a final one. His love for her was quite dead. For more than three years it had enfolded and protected her life with a warm and beautiful atmosphere. His love had seemed to shield her from all rough contact with the world and its harsher side, and because of it she had readily forgiven all his faults of temper and obstinacy; they were mere surface things that did not

strike deep into the soul. If he had been self-willed and domineering, he had yet made the way of submission easy for her. He had given her so much; he had filled life to the brim for her. And latterly it had been so easy to do Jim's will in little things, because in regard to the great things of his promises he had been so scrupulously faithful.

Now he had gone away, and he had said no word to hold out any hope as to their future meeting, or to suggest they should ever see each other again. Yes, he had taken Peter away, and had closed the doors of Linfold upon herself and Tony. He had, almost without warning, left her alone in a shameful, humiliating situation. She would be known to all her little world as the woman whom Mallory had ceased to love, the wife he had turned from his door. He had deliberately cast her off, and his last words to her had shown her how little she counted—how little their long love counted—in comparison with Peter.

A chill, blank sense of despair began to invade her heart, and whereas she had never truly believed that Jim intended to desert her, she was now equally incredulous as to any future reconciliation. The very manner of his going had set the final seal upon their separation.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE days that immediately followed Jim's departure were quite devoid of any news of him, but after his arrival in England Carina received several letters from his solicitor, informing her of the financial arrangements he proposed to make. There was a finality about these plans for allowing her an adequate supply of money, that gave if possible an added touch to the desolation of her present position. All she did was to write in reply refusing to accept any money from her husband. In her letter to the lawyer she added: "I have sufficient in the bank for my present needs, and I can always earn more if necessary."

She wished that she had never come to Rome. Her present grief, so bitter, so steeped in humiliation and failure, spoilt her other beautiful and tender if sad memories of the Eternal City. She knew far too many people there to be able to keep her solitary position quite unknown, and unfortunately before the catastrophe she had already announced her arrival to several of her old friends, who had shown much eagerness to pick up the threads and see her again. But at least for the present she need not tell them how terribly things had gone awry. They must believe—as long as possible—that Jim had been called suddenly back to England, and that she had elected to remain a little longer in Rome for reasons of health. Her husband had brought her abroad, she had her child with her; on the face of it the position appeared perfectly normal. She was ill

enough in the days that followed his departure, to convince anyone who might be at all curious on the subject, that her health was sufficient excuse for her remaining behind.

It was a definite illness, bringing complete prostration and filling her with a certain apprehension, even terror of the future. She dreaded to consult a doctor lest her fears should be confirmed. But she wrote a note to Lady Murray, briefly telling her of all that had passed, and urging her if possible to come and join her in Rome. "If you can possibly bring me any news of Linfold, I can only say I shall be very, very thankful. But don't try to see Jim," was the pitiful little postscript.

She had written to Peter too, but had received no answer. His silence was significant. . . .

Carina's old friends in Rome had never prophesied well of the marriage. How would she like living in England all the year round—she who was so accustomed to the sunny days, the blue skies of the south? And then there was too much difference in age and general outlook. Mallory was a fairly well-known man, it had been easy for them to ascertain that he was of the sporting squire type, conservative, narrow-minded, deeply attached to his own property and spending the greater part of his life upon it. It wasn't in his favor either, that he had put a stop to her writing, and that since her marriage she had only published one book, obviously written just before that event. It was rumored that he had done this deliberately, disliking any kind of fame or notoriety for her. Those who saw him in Rome did not doubt of Carina's affection for him; she seemed perfectly happy with him and her little girl, and that tall son of Mallory's. And Mallory had seemed devoted to his wife At first nothing leaked out, of the dispute that had ended in their sudden separation.

Carina's word was accepted, for certainly she was much too ill to travel. The only wonder was that Mallory should have cared to leave her. . . .

They had all agreed, when discussing her, at the Roman tea-parties that winter, that between Mrs. Mallory and Carina Ramsden there was a great gulf. Three years of matrimony had changed her beyond belief. Mrs. Mallory was beautiful, assured, and cold. She wasn't eager and ardent and spontaneous as Carina Ramsden had been; those youthful qualities had disappeared, and there were not voices wanting, to add that no doubt they had been quenched by the severe conventionality of her new mode of life. It was known too—for these things are always known—that Jim's first marriage hadn't been at all happy. And now Carina was alone in Rome, alone with her child, and apparently ill Such a young attractive creature—what could her husband be thinking of? He had gone, taking that overgrown stripling of a son with him. The pieces were all there, in a chaotic jumble, like a jig-saw puzzle waiting to be fitted together and made into a harmonious picture. The fiery tongue of gossip was not idle for long. There were hints of a grave quarrel between husband and wife. Mallory had left with his son almost at a moment's notice—a most unexpected departure. On that last day Carina hadn't appeared at meals at all. The Trueman-Laceys, who were staying in the same hotel, reported that the relations of father and son seemed exceptionally strained. No doubt Carina had had some pretty stiff lessons to learn in those last three years.

Mrs. Trueman-Lacey—a frivolous gossiping creature whom Carina had never been able to endure—paid her a visit of affectionate inquiry on hearing that she was ill. She knocked at the door of her sitting-room, taking Carina, who was lying on the sofa,

quite by surprise. But as she had purposely come unannounced, there was no possibility of escape, and Carina had to meet the torrent of questions as prudently and patiently as she could.

"Oh, I shan't be alone long," she said, nervously. "My aunt, Lady Murray, is coming out; I daresay we shall take an apartment for a few weeks. I always think it's so miserable for a child in an hotel."

For it surely couldn't last longer than a few weeks—this unnatural separation, this significant silence. Perhaps Lady Murray would bring her news of a comforting nature. Carina was hoping for that more than she would dare admit even to herself. The dreadful part was that she felt she would die if Jim didn't come back to her. She couldn't live without him. It wasn't only the feeling of his strong love for her, but it was the companionship, the shared interests, and daily little events of their life together. It was everything that made married life at once easy and difficult, sweet and bitter. Just the sharing of things with another person. This cold separate existence seemed to have no meaning at all.

"Oh, then you don't expect Mr. Mallory to come back and take you home?" inquired Mrs. Trueman-Lacey, in her thin staccato voice.

"Oh, no, Jim's much too busy. And just now in the hunting season . . ." She was aware that the explanation lacked conviction, that it would hardly deceive a child. She wished her visitor would depart, but Mrs. Trueman-Lacey having effected an entrance was not disposed to relinquish quite so readily her chance of finding out something. She hinted, she probed, she questioned as delicately as she dared, but she elicited nothing from her victim.

"I shall look in to-morrow and I hope to find you much better," she informed her. "And if you don't get better soon, my dear, I should just write, if I

were you, and tell Mr. Mallory that you don't think Rome's agreeing very well with you, and that he'd better come out and fetch you home at once!" She gave this counsel in a brisk cheerful tone.

"Oh, I don't want to worry Jim about my health," said Carina feebly.

Carina longed for her aunt's arrival. She felt that she was the only human being, besides her husband and Peter, whom she now wished to have with her. They had not seen a great deal of each other since her marriage, except just at the time of Tony's birth, but they had corresponded frequently, and sometimes Lady Murray had spent a few days at Linfold, when she had been delighted to find that her niece was so happy and contented in her new life. It would be a blow to her to learn of the sudden catastrophe that had fallen upon them now.

Lady Murray made her plans for departure almost immediately on the receipt of Carina's letter. It told her little beyond the appalling fact that Jim had actually left his wife, refusing to permit her to return to Linfold, because Peter had announced his intention of becoming a Catholic. Carina gave no hint of personal grief or discomfiture; the letter was for the most part only a cold and succinct statement of fact, without comment or criticism. It could not possibly mean that she was glad? . . . Lady Murray swiftly set that unlikely hypothesis aside. No woman, she reflected, however hideously unhappy her marriage, could find any relief or pleasure in being deserted. It was like having a blow in the face, with all the world looking on to witness one's humiliation. It was, in short, to be flung publicly into the dust. Nothing could compare with it except perhaps the brutal breaking off of an engagement. And Carina had a proud nature. She must have suf-

ferred greatly—she must still be suffering. She could not be left alone. And naturally she had turned to her aunt Nora. . . .

Lady Murray rang the bell for her faithful maid, Martha.

“Tell Smith to go to Cook’s and get two tickets for Paris on Monday, and for Rome in the *luxé* on Tuesday. He must take our passports with him.”

“Very well, m’lady.”

The maid withdrew, and immediately delivered the message. Both she and Smith had grown grey in her ladyship’s service, and no order, however sudden, perplexing, or preposterous, could possibly have “rattled” either of them. But speculation was not unnatural to them, and Smith remarked cryptically:

“This has got to do with Miss Carina . . . She’s in Rome—there was a letter from her by the h’afternoon’s post!”

“You mean Mrs. Mallory,” corrected the maid, primly.

“Yes, I mean Mrs. Mallory,” grinned Smith. “Er leddyship made that match or I never saw one made! I can remember the dinner-party here when they first met. He was *took* with her at once.”

Martha cut short his reminiscences; there was no knowing when he would stop when once he got fairly launched.

“You’d better be starting. And don’t forget the train de *luxé* from Paris.”

Jim had been gone rather less than a fortnight when Aunt Nora arrived in Rome. Her shrewd handsome face was like sunshine and tonic-wine combined to Carina, who was still obliged to lie on the sofa most of the day, and was growing intensely weary of her four walls.

She let herself be gathered to that ample breast,

and a renewed sense of stability and balance returned to her.

"Well, my dear, I've come you see," said Lady Murray.

"Yes, I see," said Carina, holding out her two thin arms. "You dear!" she added impulsively. "It was perfectly sweet of you to come so soon."

"But, my dear child, what on earth's happened?"

"Just what I told you in my letter."

Lady Murray sat down by her side and took possession of one of her hands. "Are you sure there was nothing else? It seems almost too slight—especially when he allowed Tony to be baptized a Catholic!"

"Ah, that's just what Peter was counting on," said Carina.

"You'd really given him no other cause for anger or jealousy?" inquired Lady Murray.

"None at all. In fact, just when I thought I was being a really brilliant success as a wife, Jim showed me I was an unforgivable failure. I fell from such giddy heights that I'm still feeling rather shaken and bruised." She smiled wanly, but her tone was almost gay. She had made a stern attempt to pull herself together during the last few days, when the first violence of the shock had in some way diminished. Innocence is at least a great support when one is, so to speak, on trial. She had conquered the first impulse to despair.

"Did you hear any gossip or anything before you left?" she asked.

Lady Murray shook her head. "I started so soon there was no time. I telephoned to Linfold, and luckily it was Jim himself who answered. I was mortally afraid of hearing Sophia's voice. He was very uncommunicative, except that he was still hoping to

avert the ultimate catastrophe. But he very soon rang off."

"Did you tell him you were coming?"

Lady Murray nodded.

"What did Jim say to that?"

"He said you were at liberty to make any arrangements that you pleased!"

Carina winced.

"I'm sure," said Lady Murray, "that there must be something behind it all. This can be only a pretext. Or else one must charitably suppose him to be mad."

"There's nothing else, and he isn't at all mad," said Carina.

"This comes," said her aunt, "of marrying a man you never really cared for. Sooner or later, however clever you are, they always find it out. . . ."

"But I *did* care for Jim, Aunt Nora," protested Carina, with tears in her eyes. "I'd learnt to care very much indeed. I daresay I wasn't much in love at first—I didn't pretend to be. But there was always something about him that attracted me, and made me feel I wanted to see him again. And latterly—since Tony came—" She lifted her face, white and troubled, under the mass of red-gold hair.

"Then what on earth made him do it?"

"Because though he seemed to love us—Tony and me—I believe he really only cared supremely for Peter."

"I do hope you didn't encourage Peter, Carina?" said Lady Murray, almost severely.

"Peter wouldn't let me. He was so awfully afraid of laying me in any way open to blame. Wasn't it sweet of him to think of it like that? He was simply horrified, poor boy. But of course it was my doing in so far as I was a Catholic, and that very soon made him want to know more about it—I think at

first he was only moved by a kind of sympathetic curiosity. But then that was Jim's fault, too, for marrying a Catholic!"

Lady Murray was secretly relieved to find that Carina was on the whole so calm, so capable too of a dispassionate and temperate discussion of her unhappy situation.

"You can apply for a restitution decree after a certain time has lapsed," said Lady Murray, who had informed herself on the point before leaving London. "But that means you'll first have to write Jim a perfectly formal little letter asking him to come back to you."

"I shall never do either of those things!" said Carina warmly.

"I'm really very sorry for you, Carina. Especially as you do care about him—that makes it all the harder. I blame myself for encouraging the marriage. But it seemed so suitable—such a solution."

Carina said emphatically: "Don't reproach yourself, Aunt Nora! I'm very glad I married Jim—I wouldn't alter that if I could. We were very happy, and then I've got Tony. That's what really matters—a child of one's own . . . thank God, he's left her with me! And then what makes it easier in one sense is that I am suffering for the Faith. I know it's only a miserable paltry little suffering that hardly counts. It isn't like being racked or burnt. But it's suffering, all the same—it *does* hurt. It's humiliating to be left as Jim left me."

"My dear, it's appalling."

Lady Murray leaned back exhaustedly in her chair. A slight diversion was caused at that moment by the entrance of a waiter, who carried in a tray with some supper for her. There was a cup of hot soup, some cold chicken and salad, fruit, and a bottle of wine.

"Come and eat something, dear Aunt Nora; you must be famished," said Carina.

"Yes, I detest meals in the train. It's worse than being on board ship. I can never face that shaky restaurant car more than once a day. Some people seem quite to enjoy it."

There was a little silence while she proceeded to eat her supper. But she was thinking of Carina all the time. "The man must be mad," so ran her thoughts, "to turn his wife out on such a miserable pretext. And such a wife! Really, she's more lovely now than she ever was." She gazed suddenly at the beautiful charming face opposite to her. Yes, Carina had gained, not lost, in beauty since her marriage.

"I've never cared for Jim so much as I do now," said Carina, tranquilly, as if she were analyzing someone else's situation rather than her own. "I suppose that's always the case—that one never knows how dear a thing is till one has lost it. I'm afraid if he were to walk in now, I should be quite abject!"

"He must be made to come to his senses," said Lady Murray, peeling a fine orange. "Yes—another glass of wine, my dear. You'd never had any serious quarrel before, had you?"

"No, not for ages, and never anything very serious. I gave in, you see, about my writing, and about seeing Richard Grove—I soon discovered those were the two thorny points! And since Tony was born, he's been different—more tender, less critical. I really think I've been perfectly happy these last two years."

Looking back it was difficult for her to see exactly where she had failed. Of course during the first year there had been the inevitable clash of temperaments that were perhaps not too well suited to each other at the best of times; it was a period of difficult adjustment such as most married persons of strong

personality are bound to experience. But of late the harmony had been very perfect. And it was a harmony that Peter had shared, and to which he had indeed contributed.

"I remember his once getting angry with Peter for reading one of my books—he forbade him to read any of them. That was when we were first married. But I hoped—we all hoped—his prejudices had grown less violent." She paused for a moment, and then said hesitatingly:

"Aunt Nora—I've still got something else to confess, but you must promise not to tell Jim!"

"You know I can't bear making promises in the dark, Carina," said her aunt briskly; "they can land you in such horrible difficulties—such tangles of equivocation!"

"But this is an important secret, and I'd like to tell you. You're the only friend I've got in the world now, dear Aunt Nora."

"Well, then, I suppose I must promise." She sipped her wine, sincerely hoping that Carina was not about to reveal another and yet more grisly skeleton.

"I'm going to have another child," said Mrs. Malory, simply.

Lady Murray stared at her.

"You didn't tell Jim?"

"No—I was waiting. But I'd made up my mind to tell him that very day."

"I should advise you to write to him at once. It will make all the difference. He can't go on with this madness under the circumstances."

Carina said indignantly: "I shall do no such thing! I only want Jim to come back for the one reason—that he loves me, and can't do without me. I should hate him to come for any other. I'm not going to work on his pity." Her eyes flashed.

"I hope he's giving you some money? If he isn't, I shall have to see about it," said Lady Murray.

"Oh, I've heard from his solicitor, offering me an allowance—he wanted to pay a quarterly sum into the bank for me. But I've refused it. I've got a good balance, and then there's the capital I made. It isn't much, but it'll last me a good long time. I've spent so little of my own money these last three years. If you'll stay with me for a bit and help me to find an apartment, I shall start work again. I'm not afraid of work, and I know I can keep myself—and my children. Didn't I keep myself and Mary? But I can't stay in this hotel—the people persecute one with questions and kind inquiries. Now you've come, we can look for something."

She spoke as if the banishment were final. Her plans were evidently devised irrespective of any hope that Mallory might return and claim her.

"But if Jim comes?"

"He won't come. But in any case, I don't intend to hide. I shall leave my address with the lawyers."

Lady Murray checked an impulse of anger.

"Does Richard Grove know?" she asked presently.

"Yes—I felt I ought to write to him. I couldn't leave Richard in the dark." She paused and then added: "He never wanted me to marry Jim."

"Oh, he was afraid you'd give up your work."

"And I did give it up—it was the thing Jim hated. I made the sacrifice to please him, and because he'd made sacrifices in order to marry me." Her eyes softened. "I really hadn't felt much wish to write . . . but now I think it's coming back to me."

"Someone must see Jim and speak to him—he must be made to see reason!"

"I don't want Jim to be worried," she said simply. Her loyalty, considering the cruel strain imposed

upon it, was almost flawless. "And I shall never wish to go back to a man who quite obviously doesn't want me. Not for any reason, Aunt Nora!" She held her head proudly. Mallory had not destroyed anything of that fine indomitable spirit of hers. "I've been independent so long, I am not at all afraid of being alone and of having to work."

"Carina, you can't be so supine as to sit here and let things go on as they are. You must think of your child—of your children! It's an impossible situation for you!" Lady Murray's voice was crisp and decisive. "After all, you're Jim's wife—nothing can alter that."

"Yes, I'm his wife. It's nearly four years since we first saw each other. I shall be twenty-nine soon."

"You don't look it. I will say this for you, that you look quite extraordinarily young," said Lady Murray.

Her anger against Jim Mallory was slowly deepening. He had behaved with unpardonable harshness, and she wanted to tell Carina so. He ought to have seen for himself that she was looking pale and fagged, and wanted care and tenderness. But Carina was far too deeply attached to her husband to take any pleasure in hearing him denigrated. Yet her life was in ruins, and her heart was almost broken with grief—one could discern that across the bright rather determined gaiety of her manner, and despite too that brave calm of hers. She, an innocent woman, had been left practically deserted in Rome, and her husband had not even troubled to tell her the probable duration of her banishment. What wonder, then, that she accepted it as perpetual?

There was no word bad enough for Jim; he had behaved like a cad, and how dared he behave thus to her niece! Lady Murray's thoughts were now

almost fiercely resentful; she was sorry she had not gone down to Linfold before she left England, and bearded Mallory in his den, and expressed some of her sentiments aloud.

His first wife had died of a broken heart, and if Carina did not die, it was only because she was made of sterner stuff than poor little Iris Mallory.

The coming of another child seemed to add a final and cruel complication. Lady Murray began to wish she had not made that promise. Jim ought to be told. Drastic measures were necessary to bring him to his senses. Yet there was dignity too in Carina's total freedom from self-pity, her proud determination not to resort to sentimental measures in order to call Jim back to her.

Lady Murray had never been troubled with religious scruples or prejudices, and on the whole she was as free from spiritual difficulties as any woman of her age and intelligence could be. She went to the Established church on Sunday mornings at eleven o'clock, and was, more often than not, openly bored by the sermon. She couldn't quite believe in her heart that the fear of Peter's conversion to Catholicism was at the root of Jim's action. There must be another motive which had not yet been discovered.

Perhaps that idea had also occurred to Carina, since she was so certain it was not a temporary but a final separation. . . .

CHAPTER XXXIV

DURING the days that followed her arrival in Rome, Lady Murray watched her niece closely. Directly she was better she rose early, went out to Mass, and on her return breakfasted in the sitting-room with Tony. They did a little sightseeing together of a mild and unfatiguing type, and also searched for an apartment, for Carina was anxious to leave the hotel as soon as possible. She seemed tranquil if not happy when engrossed in these small activities. Her health had improved, and her face showed strangely little sign of grief. She was extraordinarily patient, and seemed to be living on a hope that she dared not express. She spoke of Jim readily, and even seemed to like talking about him and their life at home. It was easy to see that her heart was at Linfold. When letters came, she seized upon them with a kind of feverish eagerness—almost the only emotion she ever displayed—and then after examining them her face would grow stone-cold with disappointment. But to her aunt it was evident that this man, who had once been so desperately, so even imprudently in love with Carina, had now ceased utterly to care for her. Lady Murray, who had jogged through thirty-five years of harmonious if unexciting matrimony, was always astonished at such ruptures. People, she was fond of saying, hadn't the same sense of responsibility that they used to have. And she was sure that Carina was not in the least to blame. She was behaving so perfectly, and there was every reason to be-

lieve that she had been a model of discretion and prudence, even of self-sacrifice.

Rome was crowded that spring, and Lady Murray met many of her London friends and acquaintances . . . Carina begged her from the first not to hold herself aloof from them, and indeed she was able to fortify herself against undue questioning by a brave, disarming show of frankness. Yes, she was with her niece, Mrs. Mallory, who had come abroad for her health. The winter in England, you know . . . And she wasn't accustomed to it. There was one child—a little girl. Mr. Mallory had brought them to Rome soon after Christmas, but had now returned to Linfold. A busy man . . . his finger in every local pie . . . Yes, there was a son—by the first wife—now at Woolwich, a handsome, very promising boy. Devoted to his stepmother—Carina had contrived to make even that relationship a gracious and charming one. If ugly rumors were abroad, neither Lady Murray nor Carina heard them.

They found an apartment in a modern palace standing close to the Tiber on its right bank. It was high up, and there was a beautiful view over Rome, with the lovely bend of the Ripetta just in front of them, and the fine dome of S. Carlo beyond. Across the massed roofs of grey and golden tiles, and the dark rim of pines on the Pincio, they could see the lovely outlines of the Alban hills soaring against the sky. From the other side of the flat they saw across intervening green gardens, dark with ilex and palm, the great Dome of St. Peter's, colored in tones of cool pallid silver at dawn, and at dusk deeply purple against the glowing sunset sky.

Carina was delighted with the apartment, and

very soon after they had arrived there and settled in, she began to work.

"That'll be the saving of her, if she doesn't overdo it," thought her aunt.

It was a return to the occupation of her old life before she had met Jim. But whereas then she had worked for Mary, she could now feel that she was working for Tony, and for the second child that would one day be born to her. Apparently she did not dwell much on that coming event—perhaps it was too remote.

She worked with an immense absorption, almost as if nothing else existed in the world for her. In reality Carina was thankful to find she still had the creative power, the strong desire to work, driving her forward like a superior force. During the past three years these faculties, once so urgent and imperious in their dominance, had not troubled her, and sometimes she had believed they were actually becoming atrophied from sheer inanition and want of use. But stimulated perhaps by that long rest, her mental energies seemed now more vigorous than ever. She was in many ways a much more experienced woman than the Carina Ramsden who had written those skilful, artistic books that had brought her name and fame before her marriage. She had come into contact with people of different creeds and ideals from her own. She had seen life at many points, had been both inexpressibly gladdened and deeply wounded by it. Her outlook had widened, but she seemed now to be walking among shadows from whence, if she looked back, the bright glory of her past happiness hurt her eyes.

"Now don't work yourself to death!" said Lady Murray, coming in one brilliant morning to find Carina sitting at a table strewn with well-filled sheets.

Her hair was slightly dishevelled. The fury of creation was upon her, devouring her. She looked up from a white sea of manuscript.

"Richard Grove was right—too long a holiday is a mistake. One gets out of practice. The technical part becomes rusty. I believe the fear of getting stale is quite a modern idea. Were Raphaël and Michæl Angelo and Bernini afraid of getting stale? Look at their output!"

"That's all very well, my dear. But they were men," said Lady Murray.

April had come with its wealth of wistaria and Banksian roses, its fresh vivid young green, glimmering like a carpet in the Campagna. But there had been a sudden burst of heat toward the middle of the month, and Lady Murray had feared it might exhaust her niece. On the contrary, however, Carina appeared to be stimulated by it to a fresh display of mental energy.

"Dear Aunt Nora—I want to finish. One's always so afraid of something stepping in to stop one. I don't think I've ever begun a book without the thought—not exactly a fear—that I mightn't live to finish it. And this must be out in the early autumn. I've written to Swaine about it—he's willing to give me the same advance-royalties as I had last time. And I've sold the serial rights—Richard Grove's seen to that—the first instalment will be out next week."

She fastened several sheets together with a metal clip. In her work she always showed a most dainty and meticulous care.

"I should like to have seen Richard," she added, softly.

"I think he was very wise not to come," said Lady Murray, with decision. "Of course it was absurd—a man old enough to be your father—but

Jim was always inclined to be jealous of him!" Hers was a practical nature, and she knew that women living apart from their husbands, especially when they were young and very pretty, could hardly be too scrupulously careful. It was indubitably for this reason that she had resolved to remain with Carina all through the summer heat in Rome. She couldn't possibly have left her alone, even if no baby had been expected.

Lady Murray's hopes of a reconciliation had appreciably diminished. When the baby came, perhaps But that wouldn't be till the end of August. Carina seemed determined not to go away till after that event. "I want my son to be born in Rome," she had told her aunt.

Lady Murray insisted upon driving out with her every afternoon. Carina avoided the Pincio and the Borghese Gardens, and they nearly always went into the Roman Campagna, and walked for a little there in the cool of the evening. Tony invariably accompanied them. Carina had sent Jackson home, and had engaged an Italian *bambinaia* to help her to look after the child.

"Jim wouldn't let me have a Catholic nurse at Linfold," she remarked one day, "but I can do as I choose now."

The book was finished in June. Lady Murray was thankful when the neat parcels had been despatched to London and New York. It was very hot in Rome just then, with long hours of burning sunshine, and since the completion of her book Carina had looked pale and seemed listless and lethargic. She was consumed with homesickness although she made no complaint. In the bright fierce glare of a Roman summer her eyes ached for the cool greenness of Linfold with its glimpses of sea, divinely blue.

Lady Murray had often suggested that they should return to London, but Carina was quite decided on the point. She never meant to return to England unless Jim wanted her to go back to Linfold. She could make a home for herself and her children in Rome.

"And you know you needn't stay with me, unless you like, after the baby's born. I'm not unselfish enough to let you go before then," Carina told her.

"My dear, I shouldn't dream of leaving you," said Lady Murray, with energy.

She watched her, as she sat by the window one evening when an approaching thunderstorm had kept them indoors. Carina's hands lay idle and helpless-looking in her lap. She had never felt like this before, inert, almost lifeless, as if the very vitality were ebbing from her. Hope and suspense were alike being succeeded by a kind of dull, placid acquiescence. She did not even feel that she wanted Jim very much. At first, of course, it had been terrible without him, but now she was too tired. Remembering the joy she had felt before Tony was born, she wondered idly why no reflection of that emotion was able to touch her now. If she gave a son to Jim would it re-awaken his old love for her? No, it had perished utterly, without warning, and as it seemed in a single hour. Nothing could stir those dead ashes to renewed flame. . . .

And besides, as long as possible, she was resolved to keep the news from him. The worst thing that could happen to her, she told herself, would be that Jim, still unloving, still hating the sight of her, would constrain her to return home from purely conventional motives, and in order to obtain possession of his children.

There was always the fear, too, at the back of her thoughts, that some day in the far distant future

he might come and take those children away from her. Had he not said he had left Tony with her because she was too young to be separated from her mother? But when Tony grew older. . . .

When she reached this point, Carina's courage seemed to give way. . . .

Her little son was born in the first days of September, and though she recovered quite as quickly as before, she still remained in that inert listless condition, as if nothing could rouse her. Lady Murray was not satisfied about her, and took her to the seaside for a few weeks. But Carina exhibited such a craving to return to Rome, that she had been obliged to curtail their sojourn.

The baby was baptized Innocent, and was pronounced to be exactly like his mother. He certainly possessed her reddish-gold hair and fair skin, and he had dark blue eyes, rather like Peter's. He was really prettier than Tony, who as she grew older became more and more like her father.

Carina would hardly suffer the children out of her sight; she had them constantly with her, night and day. Lady Murray remonstrated, but it was of no avail. Carina was obstinate on the point. It was almost as if she feared that some evil might befall them. . . .

Her new book, *Gifts and Sacrifices*, was published in the early autumn. Richard Grove wrote flowing accounts of its reception and success. From a financial point of view it was a far greater success than any of her former works. She wondered if Jim had seen the huge advertisements in the daily papers, *New Novel*, by *Carina Ramsden*. But perhaps he was too indifferent now to be annoyed by them.

From Linfold Jim Mallory made no sign.

CHAPTER XXXV

CHRISTMAS was approaching, and Peter had returned to Linfold. Jim had extracted a promise from him that until he left Woolwich he would take no further steps in the matter of becoming a Catholic. The boy had made the promise readily, hoping and even believing that it would induce his father to send for Carina. He was bitterly disappointed, therefore, when he discovered that Jim had no intention of recalling his wife. On the contrary, he seemed more than ever determined to prevent all intercourse between her and his son. He was convinced that separated from her influence the subject would gradually cease to interest Peter. He would come to see that the temporal losses which would inevitably follow his conversion would be very heavy and quite permanent. The fact that he had made the promise of present submission to his father's will, augured well for the future. But to have Carina back would be to frustrate any hope of the kind.

One evening Peter walked into his study and laid a book on the table.

"Dad, I've brought you a copy of Carina's new book."

"I don't wish to see it. Take it away . . ."

Jim gave it a little push. But his keen eyesight had read the title on the colored "jacket." *Gifts and Sacrifices* by Carina Ramsden. So she had used her old name. . . .

"Dad—I wish you'd ask her to come back. I'm sure she would if you asked her—she's so forgiving always."

Jim Mallory controlled his anger with difficulty. Peter had behaved admirably all these months. The forbidden topic had not been mentioned between them, and he had also been almost scrupulously silent on the subject of his stepmother. Jim had made it a condition—a hard one—that he should not write to her. No letters had passed between them since Carina's solitary one to Peter, written soon after their return. As he had sent none in reply, she came to the conclusion that he had not received it. She understood, and forbore to write again.

"I can't bear to think of Carina and little Tony in Rome alone," said Peter, emboldened by his father's silence.

"They're not alone," said Jim. "Lady Murray's there. And Carina is perfectly fitted to look after herself—she did so for a number of years before we were married."

"I'd like you to read her book," said Peter, timidly; "it's beautiful and sad. I'm glad, though, she's been able to write again—it must have helped her."

He took up the book, handling it with loving care, as one touches the possessions of the beloved dead. Then he sat down near his father's writing-table, and leaned his head on his hand. There was something he wanted to say, and to-night he felt constrained to say it.

"I've wanted to tell you for some time past, Dad, that nothing can make any difference now about my decision to become a Catholic. I shall be leaving Woolwich in the summer, and I've made up my mind to be received then." He spoke very simply. "And if you can't make it possible for me to stay in the Army, I shall go to the colonies. I'm afraid it will be no use my applying to my grandfather Fear-don for help."

"It certainly will not," said Jim angrily; "you'll have to shift for yourself until you're twenty-five, when you'll have your mother's money."

As he spoke he looked at his son with hard, cold, unhappy eyes. During the last few months he had visibly aged; he looked more than his forty-five years.

"I shall leave Linfold to the Fergus Mallorys," he said presently. "I'm not going to add to my folly by letting it pass into Catholic hands, either yours or Tony's."

Peter accepted the threat without remonstrance. He knew his father too well by this time to think that he ever spoke idly. And upon this point Jim's mind was most obstinately made up.

"I quite understand, Dad," he said frankly. "Somehow I've always had the idea that it would never in any case be mine. I felt that more than ever when you married again."

"That is nonsense—it was only imagination," said Jim, in a stern tone. "There is nothing to prevent your succeeding me here when I die, unless you commit some act which in my opinion is a disgraceful one. Your becoming a Catholic would be both a folly and a disgrace."

"Dad . . . now that you know it won't make any difference, won't you go and fetch Carina?" Peter's voice almost broke on the words.

Jim brought his hand down with vigor on the writing-table.

"Don't dare mention her name to me again! She has brought nothing but misery and dissension to this house. She's not been writing to you again, has she?"

"I've never had a letter from her," said Peter. He knew then that there must have been one, and that his father had not permitted him to have it.

He smothered an exclamation of anger—he would have given worlds to have held that letter in his hand, to have had news of Carina. Bitterly as he had blamed his father in his thoughts for his harsh and cruel treatment of her, he had never before felt this fierce indignation against him.

“She must be longing to come back—it’s eleven months—nearly a year,” said Peter, after a brief pause.

“I forbid you to speak of her!” said Jim.

It was intolerable that Peter should come and speak to him of Carina now. . . .

He thought of the day, more than four years ago, when he had brought his young wife to Linfold. He could see her now, wrapped in her dark furs, with that easy boyish grace of hers, a young, slight, lissom creature, all great grey-green eyes and white skin. How charming she had looked with that shock of clipped red-gold hair—he remembered his first impression of her, confided to Lady Murray, that she resembled a page in an old Florentine picture. And then later, Carina with Tony in her arms, suffused with a sort of rapturous content. How exquisite she had been in her young motherhood. . . .

He put these thoughts from him, hardening his heart against her, as all through the past year he had deliberately hardened it, so that the memory of her should not effect any surprise entrance, weakening his fierce resolve. She had taken his son from him. She had coldly set about winning Peter’s affection—how well she had succeeded, the boy’s words had just taught him. Jim would never let himself believe that she hadn’t done it from a sinister ulterior motive. Peter must be a Catholic—Linfold must pass into Catholic hands. All that property and wealth must come under the control of the Catholic Church . . . It wasn’t so much

what he had to fear from his wife, so Humphreys had told him, as what he had to fear from the priests who directed her. But he could still defeat her, yes, and defeat the priests, who must have urged her to make the experiment. He had never imagined that marriage with a Catholic could possibly prove so fruitful in disastrous consequences. Carina had been so much younger than himself that he had supposed it would be a simple matter to govern and restrain her. But his iron will had only secured her submission in certain exterior things. In spiritual matters, as Mallory saw now, he had never had the slightest dominion over her. There was always a sense in which she had seemed to dwell apart, in a fair, beautiful region whither he had no power to trespass; and in that secret remote sphere she had worked quietly, silently, but with deadly purpose and accomplishment. He had never known or guessed anything until that winter day in Rome when he had extorted from Peter the confession that he intended to become a Catholic. It was too late then for anything but the most drastic punishment, and this he had inflicted upon Carina without remorse.

But he had suffered too. He could not punish Carina, keep her out of his sight, exile her from his hearth, without flagellating his own soul. There had been eleven months of this separation, and sometimes he had felt no longer able to endure the aching desire for her darling presence. Her voice . . . the touch of her . . . And then he would deliberately slay those longings by letting his anger poison and stifle his very love for her. She must learn that she could not resist him with impunity, that when he struck he could strike hard. He could not have treated her more cruelly if he had discovered she had been unfaithful to him. The

world was at liberty to place that interpretation upon his action if it so willed, and though he did not know it, it had not failed to do so. The world saw only that she was deserted and abandoned by her own husband, and in the absense of any authoritative explanation, drew its own conclusions. . . .

"I should like to see her again, before I leave England next year—if I have to go. I loved her from the first day she came to Linfold. She was so dear and good to me." Peter's voice was tender with reminiscence. "Jim stirred restlessly before that urgent appeal.

Peter could see her now—standing on the threshold in the darkness and storm of the winter night, beckoning to him, calling him in out of the rain. His loyal love for her had never faltered since that hour. And he knew what she must be suffering, away from her husband, away from Linfold.

"And it was never her fault," he proceeded quietly, "unless you could say it was her fault for being a Catholic at all. That made me think of Catholicism for the first time. But you knew that—you must have foreseen that there would be a risk." His clear dark blue eyes looked straight into his father's face. But the sense of being judged by that young and limpid vision aroused anew Jim's anger.

"Peter, I can't imagine why you're speaking to me in this way. I won't stand it any longer—you can leave the room! I don't wish to hear your opinion of my wife. If you don't go at once I'll kick you out," he added savagely.

But Peter, unmindful of the threat, still lingered there.

"Dad, do have pity on her! She must be so unhappy—"

"Unhappy? She never cared for any of us. She

has Tony—that's all she wants. A brat to spoil and bring up in her own Faith!"

His tone was harsh and bitter, but it informed Peter that he himself had suffered, was perhaps still suffering. It encouraged him to proceed.

"Dad, it isn't true . . . she loves us all. Think how awfully happy she made us . . . It was you who turned against her because of her Faith. Why, it was the most perfect thing about her! I wonder you didn't see that yourself. I wonder it didn't make you find out for yourself what the Catholic Church was really like, instead of asking old Humphreys and Aunt Sophia who know nothing but their own ignorant prejudices." An increase of courage made his voice sound clear and ringing, and he was subtly aware that he had at last gained his father's attention. "And in any case you ought to have her back! It isn't safe for a young beautiful woman like Carina to be wandering homeless about the world, because her husband has deserted her for no fault of her own!"

The blue eyes flashed like tempered steel.

"I tell you she's not alone. She's got Lady Murray and Tony with her. She's much happier free, and living that independent life. . . ."

Greatly daring, Peter leaned forward and touched his father's brown hard hand.

"Dad," he said, "don't persuade yourself that she's happy. If you know anything of Carina, you must know that she's broken-hearted. Oh, she wouldn't show it. I'm sure she laughs when she plays with Tony—she always said you should never show little children if you were sad or worried—it wasn't fair to them. But in her heart—"

A strange change came over Jim's hard features. It was not so much that they softened, for there was no visible softening, but there crept into them a look

of the most intense pain. It was as if someone had suddenly and stealthily stabbed him with a sharp instrument, and though he had bitten back the cry that had risen to his lips, he was yet feeling the torture in every nerve of his body.

Peter was almost horrified to find that his words had at last pierced through that armor of ice and iron which encircled and guarded his father's heart. It was terrible to watch that face he had both loved and feared, as it responded to the agony his own words had produced. He waited for a moment, half expecting that Jim would rise in sudden violence of reprisal and use physical force to turn him out of the room. He was still far too strong a man not to be able easily to overwhelm his son. But Peter had never feared him less than he did at that moment. It was like seeing a statue come to life, awakening to consciousness not of joy as in the old fable, but of acute and even terrible pain. A person suddenly awakening from anæsthesia in the midst of some hideous surgical operation would have looked, he thought, just as his father had looked then.

It wasn't fair to watch him now . . . Peter slipped quietly out of the room, half afraid of the result of his words.

When Peter had gone out of the room Jim felt alone, as he had never been alone before. The gulf just revealed in all its depth and darkness, between himself and his son, was too wide to admit of future approach. Peter had drifted away from him, and Carina stood eternally between them, a shadowy but powerful figure. Powerful . . . Yes, he used the word advisedly. It had nothing to do with her physique, which was more fragile than strong-looking, nor with her keen fiery intellect, her decisive character and personality. It was a spiritual power

that she derived only and wholly from the faith that was hers—"the most perfect thing about her," as Peter had just said. Vested in her that faith was like a steady glowing flame that seemed to flood her with light and warmth. The fault had been his, to admit that powerful element to his own house. How could he have expected a young boy like Peter to resist that so potent force? He had himself at times felt the necessity of consciously resisting it, although he was aware of danger, and on his guard against it. Like so many of his countrymen, inheriting the prejudices, the calumnies, the false representations of upward of three hundred years, he had been taught to regard the Catholic Church as a sinister and ambiguous force. He did not go so far as a certain Anglican divine who assured his simple hearers that its activities were more political than religious, and that Christianity was only incidental to it! But from one source or another, and especially from history taught always from the Protestant standpoint, he had acquired a number of theories and supposed facts against the Church into the truth of which he had never troubled to inquire. He was not a reader, he was in no sense a scholar; he was perhaps more ready than most men to accept a conventional point of view. But even he had had to remind himself of those early-inculcated prejudices when he had come into actual contact with the Catholic Church through Carina. It was something that had gone most deeply to the making of her, and he was bound to admit that stripped of it and its spiritual influence she might have been a very different woman. No wonder she had made that instant and permanent appeal to Peter. Jim told himself now that he ought to have trampled on his love for her, from the first moment he had discovered that she was a Catholic. He ought never wilfully to have seen again this

strange, enigmatic, fascinating creature whom he had loved and whom he still loved to his own hurt.

It had been very quiet at Linfold without her, quiet and very sad. It was especially so when Peter was away. Sophia Mallory, actuated by a stern sense of duty, came over sometimes to stay with him for a few days, but they were not congenial to each other, and as he never mentioned Carina's name to her she could learn nothing. He rather dreaded her visits, but he clung to Peter, and had missed Carina less when the boy was with him.

And during the past year Peter had never ventured to speak to him as he had done to-night, had never once dared to make a direct appeal on Carina's behalf. What had urged him to do so now, with such strange persistence, almost as if he had had some definite presentiment of approaching calamity? There had been a stern expression in the boy's eyes as he denounced his father's treatment of Carina. Jim had passed from anger to a dumb, paralyzed bewilderment, as if indeed it had been less Peter who was speaking than his own conscience suddenly become articulate in order to arraign him.

It was the first time he had been compelled to envisage the fact that perhaps it was he who was wrong in his estimate of the Catholic Church. Had he, in his ignorance, his intolerance, his anger, been *fighting against God*? As that fragment of text recurred to him, he could not but believe that those very words must have been in Peter's mind just now, although from some motive possibly of filial delicacy he had not ventured to utter them.

But they seemed to stare Jim in the face now. He could not get away from them. And they widened immeasurably the gulf between him and his son.

CHAPTER XXXVI

JIM and Peter possessed still a common meeting-ground in their love of sport; thus while the spiritual gulf between them had never been so wide, they were still outwardly good friends with many similar interests that gave energy to their home life, and made it even agreeable and pleasant.

Only a few days after that conversation they motored together to the meet which was held that day at Chiltern Towers. It was one of the most important meets of the whole season, and neither of them would have cared to miss it. Jim, who was so little seen in ordinary society now, still hunted and shot with unabated vigor, and he was glad that Peter continued to share these tastes. He was proud of his son and as they started forth that morning, he noted with a fresh appreciation the boy's handsome eager face, his clean length of limb, his strong-looking nervous hands. Intellectually, as his father was not slow to perceive, Peter far surpassed him in brilliancy, while in games and sports he was at least his equal. In fact, Mallory was bound to acknowledge that, except in that one fatal deviation from the normal, Peter was all that the most fastidious father could wish his son to be.

And so far the irrevocable step had not been taken. Peter's promise held good until the summer, and there was still hope that before then he might carefully reconsider his decision.

The day was sharp and chill, but there was no hint of frost. There was little wind, and southward the sea was merged in a misty pale sky. The russet-

colored woods of Linfold Glen lay like a shadow in the sloping fold of the Downs.

Mallory could never traverse that particular bit of road without thinking of Carina. They had driven along it together on the day when he had asked her to be his wife, and again on the clear starry night of Christmas Eve on their way to Midnight Mass at Lintown. She had always loved that view of the Downs and the sea. . . .

They motored quickly to Chiltern Towers, where they met the groom with their hunters. But Mallory had not gone very far that morning when his horse—a favorite one—developed lameness, and he was forced to relinquish the day's sport and return home. Peter was almost as disappointed as his father, and even begged him to ride his mount instead. But Jim shook his head, smiling a little ruefully.

"He's all very well for you, Peter, but he's not up to my weight!"

He stopped for a few minutes at the Towers on his way home, to greet Lady Chiltern and Blanche, and to inquire for Lord Chiltern, who was growing rapidly worse.

"My horse went lame—I had to give up. And it's sure to be a ripping day with no end of scent. However, Peter'll enjoy it—that's one comfort," said Jim, to the mother and daughter who had both come in to receive him.

"Dear Peter—how handsome he's looking! I suppose he'll be leaving Woolwich soon?" said Lady Chiltern.

"In the summer," said Mallory. "He's nearly nineteen now."

His haggard rather melancholy appearance was not lost upon Lady Chiltern. She knew nothing of the rights of the case, for Jim was reticent and never mentioned his wife, but there was endless gossip—

of a not too charitable kind—about them, in the neighborhood of Linfold. Most people, remembering Iris, were rather ready to blame Jim for this second matrimonial collapse. Others inclined to the opinion that Carina was an ambitious woman who had married a man much older than herself on account of his money, and therefore clearly deserved all that she had got. The master of Linfold remained wrapped in an obstinate silence. He had returned from Rome last winter without his wife and little girl, and there seemed at present no prospect of their ever coming back home. Malice hinted that there must be “something” at the back of it all. Something perhaps that Jim was too proud to divulge. Whatever the truth, there was no doubt that he looked a singularly unhappy man, who had aged very much in the past year.

As he rose to go he remarked:

“Peter said something about looking in on his way home if he wasn’t too late. Please get him off in good time if he does—”

“Oh, we shall be so glad to see him,” said Lady Chiltern; “he’s quite deserted us lately, hasn’t he, Blanche?” She turned to her daughter, who assented in her grave almost melancholy manner.

Whenever she saw Jim, Blanche thought: “I could have made him happy . . . How could he suppose that little slip of a girl could care for him?” She still cherished these secret resentful thoughts against the woman who had stepped in so lightly and won the prize she herself had fruitlessly striven for. Sometimes it was almost a kind of miserable relief to her to know that the marriage had turned out so badly, and after only three years, too.

She said good-bye to Jim when he rose to go, and then went to the window to watch him drive away in his car. She thought he looked more interesting

than ever, with his silvery hair, his grief-worn face. It was terrible to think of his loneliness at Linfold when Peter wasn't there. And he was becoming more and more of a hermit, refusing all invitations to luncheon or tea.

"Dear me," said Lady Chiltern in a tone of vexation, "here's Carina's new book lying on the table. I do hope he didn't see it. I've often asked you, my dear, not to leave her books about!"

Blanche looked round. "I was reading it when he came in," she said; "I would have hidden it if I'd thought of it. It's odd of her, isn't it, to go on writing books, knowing how much he dislikes it?"

"Carina knows her own business best," said Lady Chiltern briskly. "But that's no reason why you should leave her books about when I've repeatedly asked you not to. I only hope he didn't notice it."

"I daresay he didn't," said Blanche; "he's very unobservant."

She sighed. She wished Jim would come and talk to her about Carina, and tell her all he was feeling and suffering. She had so much compassion and sympathy to offer him. But he was always like that when he came—abrupt, a trifle haughty, as if he feared any intimate approach or questioning . . . even from old friends.

"Poor Blanche, she's losing all her looks," said Jim aloud to himself as he drove away. He had far too little conceit to suppose that she had ever been in love with him or wished to marry him.

The day was long, spent in solitude without Peter, and Jim contrived to invent some business which should take him into Lintown that afternoon. He did not return to Linfold until tea-time. Peter had not come in, but he had hardly expected to find him, knowing of his intention to call at the Towers on his way home.

Remembering his old friendship with Blanche before the coming of Carina, he wondered if Peter still confided in her. Whether she was aware of his spiritual aspirations and difficulties. But no, on reflection he thought it unlikely that Peter should speak of them. He was naturally reticent and reserved, and though he had many friends he rarely admitted anyone to great intimacy. It showed wisdom, and Jim felt that his own sorrows were safe in Peter's hands; he was most unlikely to discuss them with anyone. There was comfort in the thought. Jim preferred that no details of his disaster should be known, nor any hint of his son's intended rebellion.

Since their conversation that night—a revealing one for them both—Peter had made no further allusion to Carina. He had pleaded no more, after that one effort, so full of youthful courage and zeal. But he knew his father's obduracy; he had suffered from it nearly all his life. It was a hard, cruel, significant thing, and when you came into contact with it, it bruised you. His own mother and Carina had each in their several ways known it and suffered from it.

Peter was sorry for his father, knowing him now to be a most unhappy, bitterly disappointed man. It was true that he had marred his own life, but he could not be made to see that he, and he alone, was at fault.

When dinner-time approached and Peter had not returned, Jim grew restless. He went to the window and looked out, but the winter night was very dark, and a strong breeze was blowing in from the sea. There were no stars, and the sky was quite black overhead. Suddenly a thought struck him and he went into the hall, took up the receiver, and telephoned to the Towers. He felt a curious and quite

unnatural anxiety. It was nearly half past seven; Peter ought to have been back at least an hour ago. Unless, of course, hounds had run far in the opposite direction . . . He was annoyed with himself, however, for feeling anxious. The fact was, his nerves were going to pieces—he had been through more than any man could usefully stand. . . .

“Is that Lady Chiltern speaking? Oh, Blanche, is that you? It’s Jim Mallory speaking . . . I want to know if Peter’s there . . . Not there? You haven’t seen him? You’re sure he didn’t look in on his way home? Never mind—thanks very much—I made sure he was with you—”

He hung up the receiver. Presently across the silence he heard the distant rumble of a motor-car. The sound came nearer. Yes, it must be approaching the house. He wondered who it could be—it was an unusual hour for visitors to come, in the winter . . . Nervous and apprehensive he went into the hall. Almost immediately he heard a violent ring at the bell. Saunders, always prompt in the matter of answering bells, came quickly from the back premises and opened the door. A blast of cold air came in, chilling Jim. He saw Dr. Western—the local practitioner—step briskly into the hall.

“Oh, good-evening, Mr. Mallory—I’m sorry to say your son’s had a bit of a spill. We’ve brought him back in my car. They took him to the cottage hospital at Cross End first, but he fretted so to get home.”

Mallory pushed past the doctor without replying. His face was livid, as if he had received a physical blow upon the heart. He was outside on the step just in time to see two men lifting the motionless body of Peter from the car. He caught a glimpse of a white face, of dark matted hair lying damp above the brow. Western’s reassuring tones had not in the

least deceived him. He felt what the Italians call a tightening of the heart. Peter . . . his son . . . Peter. . . .

"Is he . . . ? Can you take him up to his room?" Jim could hardly articulate.

"Well, it would be better if you could put a bed for him on the ground floor," was Dr. Western's reply.

The ambulance litter was carried into the big dining-room, now so seldom used, and placed on the table. Mallory stood there, close to his son. In the sharp glare of the electric light he noticed the shrunken face, the extraordinary pallor. Suddenly the mouth twitched, and the blue eyes opened.

"Dad!" he said.

Mallory stepped nearer and took the limp hand that lay there in his own. The lump in his throat threatened to choke him.

"Ask them all to clear out—" said Peter.

Jim turned for a moment to the doctor.

"Would you mind telling Saunders to fetch Parkinson, please? You can give her the orders better than I can. And he wants to be alone with me."

Dr. Western and the two men went out of the room, and the father and son were left alone.

"It's my back—" said Peter—"I'm done for, Dad. They won't tell me so, but I know. I expect one always knows."

His eyes were very bright, and when he had finished speaking he compressed his lips as if he were trying to bite back the pain.

"Oh, no, Peter—please God, you're wrong. The pain makes you feel like that—you'll be all right soon." Mallory's voice sounded strangely even to his own ears. He was almost as pale as his son. It was as if the physical shock and suffering had com-

municated themselves to his own sound and healthy body.

"I . . . I want you to do something for me, Dad," said Peter.

His strength seemed to be diminishing; his voice was more feeble, the effort to speak, greater.

"Anything in the world, my dear boy . . . Anything in my power . . ."

"Then will you telephone to Father Pemberton at Lintown? The Catholic priest. Ask him to look sharp and come . . ."

Mallory hesitated. That was the last request he had expected his son to make.

"Tell him—please—not to lose any time . . ."

The voice was weaker, but it held an intensified urgency.

"You're sure you wish for this, Peter?" said Mallory, his eyes full of pain.

"Please, *please*, Dad. I only waited to please you—but now I can't wait any more. . . ."

Mallory touched with lightest pressure that limp inert hand.

"I'll telephone at once," he whispered, stooping closer to make sure that Peter should hear him.

He went out of the room. His pulses were beating like hammers in his temples. He felt like one moving in an appalling nightmare. In the hall he encountered Dr. Western.

"He thinks he's dying," he blurted out, his voice breaking on a dreadful sob.

"Well, I'm afraid he's pretty bad, Mr. Mallory. We'll send for Derrick with your permission—he's done wonders in these cases."

"Do you know how it happened?"

"His horse came down at a very high fence, and rolled on him."

Mallory went to the telephone, for the second

time that evening. But he did not touch it for a moment. He stood looking at it in a queer dazed way, almost as if it were a sentient thing, possessing formidable powers.

Peter was, if not actually dying, at least in grave danger of death. On the physical plane there was nothing Mallory would have withheld from his son to ease his suffering. He would have poured out his great wealth, eagerly and generously to the uttermost farthing, to secure him a moment's relief. But Peter had asked only for Father Pemberton. Mallory was aware even then of his own extreme distaste for the task thus thrust upon him. He shrank from it. Even across his grief and anguish something within him rebelled fiercely.

These thoughts hardly occupied a second of time. Peter . . . He couldn't forget the look of sick eagerness in those suffering eyes—the desperate urgency of the voice—the fear of being denied this thing that was so visible in his face.

Mallory took up the receiver. There was a little delay before he could get the right number, and while he was waiting he became suddenly aware how passionately anxious he himself was to speak to the priest and entreat him to come. He was actually sharing in his son's suspense. The knowledge seemed to diminish his own scruples. He felt that he could not deny anything to Peter now. He was grievously hurt; he seemed to have earned by his peculiar sufferings, the right to have whatever he chose to ask for. . . .

“Is that Father Pemberton? It's Mallory speaking—Mallory of Linfold Park. I want you to take a motor and come over here as soon as possible. My son's met with a bad accident—he may be dying—he has asked for you . . . He's wanted for a

long time to be a Catholic, but I wouldn't let him. Can you come? At once? Thank you. . . ."

His voice was hard, firm and controlled. But when he hung up the receiver a sob of relief escaped him. Peter must have what he wanted—all that he wanted . . . Even this. . . .

It came into his mind then to be thankful that this hadn't happened in Iris's lifetime. She had always so feared and dreaded that some accident of the kind should happen to Peter. She used to cry when he went off to the meet, a proud, upright little figure riding beside his father. Jim had laughed, even jeered, at her fears a hundred times; sometimes he had even rebuked her sternly, with a touch of anger. And now . . . Peter was lying in that room across the hall, all the fine and beautiful young strength and power crushed out of him. The tears gathered thickly in his eyes. Peter was the thing dearest to him, closest to his heart . . . He couldn't think of Carina now; his thoughts were all for Peter. Such a good dutiful son, in all but the one thing . . . The one thing he had denied him. But he was going to give it to him now. Perhaps it would be his very last gift to Peter. It seemed to Jim then as if some Power outside himself, stronger than himself, urgent, insistent, imperative, were controlling him. Once or twice Carina had made him conscious of that power, although he had fiercely and violently rebelled against it. And now he had the half-superstitious feeling that he was to be made to pay for that rebellion, for his cruel banishing of Carina, for the impediments he had placed in his son's path.

In the vastness of the ruin and desolation that now surrounded him, he was conscious of a retributive quality. As if he, with puny strength, had indeed been *fighting against God* . . . There was something terrible to Mallory in this thought,

as if he had found himself suddenly alone, and confronted by an overwhelming elemental force.

They were busy, when he returned to the dining-room, in making the necessary preparations. A bed had been brought down, and Peter was now lying upon it. The household had worked with the utmost celerity. There was not one of them who would not have cut him or her self in four pieces, for Peter.

His eyes were closed now, the dark lashes lying like a shadow along his cheek. The face still had that curiously pale and shrunken aspect.

Dr. Western approached Mallory as he entered the room.

"I don't know what you said to him, Mr. Mallory, but it seems to have had a wonderful effect upon him. He was so distressed and uneasy before, as if he had something on his mind. And now he's quiet and calm. Several times on the way here he asked if we were nearly at Linfold—he seemed so very anxious to say something to you."

"He wished to see a priest. I've telephoned to Father Pemberton to come over from Lintown at once."

A faint suggestion of astonishment showed in the doctor's face. Rumor had been rife in the neighborhood that the quarrel between Mallory and his young wife, resulting in an actual separation that had now lasted nearly a year, had sprung from religious differences. Mrs. Mallory was a devout Catholic, and Mallory's prejudices against her Faith were very strong. His second marriage had perhaps caused more surprise than the ill-success that had attended it.

"Dad . . ." The faint voice from the bed only just reached him. But Mallory caught the word and hurried toward his son. While he felt a terrible, heart-breaking conviction that the young life

was ebbing rapidly and surely away, he longed to hold him back from death, by sheer physical force, until Father Pemberton should come. Surely, he would be permitted thus far to retrieve the past. . . .

"I've telephoned to Father Pemberton," he said, speaking very distinctly; "he's promised to come at once—he'll be here soon. Try to keep very quiet till he comes. . . ."

Mallory's tone was reassuring; it seemed to soothe Peter. For himself Jim could not understand his own passionate desire that the priest should arrive in time. Was it only because he desired to make amends for his own past sternness, and give Peter what he had so long withheld from him? But he knew dimly that it would be his culminating punishment if Peter should die before Father Pemberton came.

Peter gave the faint ghost of a smile.

"Thanks most awfully, Dad . . ." he murmured.

His face twitched slightly with pain, but in a moment the lips were as tightly compressed as ever. His courage was wonderful.

Presently he looked up again and said:

"Dad, I wish Carina were here. . . ."

Mallory's lips framed the words: "I wish to God she were! . . ."

He felt as if a curtain had been dragged aside, and that a strange search-light were casting an illumination, vivid and blinding, upon his actions of the past year. His cruelty to Carina . . . His cruelty to Peter . . . They were actions he had justified to himself a hundred times daily. But now, with a remorse that was new to him, he beheld not only their futility to hinder the work of God and the invincible progress of His Church, but their own immense, fruitful, and desolating harvest. He could

never repair the evil he had done. And he saw now almost as it were in a vision, the significant power and strength of the Catholic Church. He felt as if in the conflict against it, he had been beaten to the earth. . . .

"Peter . . . my darling boy . . . Peter . . ."

The words, like a cry of anguish, seemed to escape from him unawares.

Peter lifted his eyelids.

"You mustn't bother about me, Dad. You've got Carina and Tony."

There was a long silence. The doctor left the room and telephoned to Lintown for a nurse to come at once. He dictated an order for several things she must bring with her, enumerating them in clear concise tones.

Mallory, left alone with his son, was consumed with suspense. An inward impatience tore his heart. He wanted to make amends to Peter, but he had a strange fear that even this would be denied him. He wasn't worthy to give him that last great gift, so long refused, so long withheld. He had a morbid fear that Peter would die, frustrated, before his eyes. An hour passed, and then the sounds of a motor-car were heard coming up the drive. Mallory rose quietly from his seat and with a slight gesture to Dr. Western went into the hall. He opened the door himself, and felt the cool caress of the night wind blowing against his face. Father Pemberton had alighted from the car, and was standing on the doorstep. Something, he knew not what, though dimly he guessed what it must be, constrained Jim to drop on his knees for a second, and words escaped him:

"Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof . . ."

The priest gave no sign of greeting, but as he fol-

lowed Mallory across the hall he uttered some Latin words. Jim knew then beyond doubt that he had brought the Divine Presence with him to comfort and strengthen Peter on his last journey. He was to be sustained by the Food for which his young starved soul had been perishing.

Something like a throb of joy vibrated through Jim's heart. He felt then that he was to be allowed to help in bringing this ardently desired gift to Peter. It was as if Almighty God had accepted his tardy contrition. . . .

Before he opened the door he said to the priest: "My boy's dying—a hunting accident. He wanted to be a Catholic last year, and I wouldn't let him. Do what you can for him, please, do *all* you can. . . ."

He opened the door. Motioning the doctor to withdraw, he approached his son's bedside.

"Peter," he called gently.

There was no response from the figure on the bed. The white face was statue-like in its enigmatic calm. Mallory's heart stood still. Was it too late after all? . . .

"Peter! . . ." he called again, and waited in suspense.

The boy opened his eyes. They were no longer bright, a slight film glazed them.

"Dad . . ."

"Father Pemberton has come, my darling boy."

Life seemed to flow back into the face; its white calm was broken up.

The priest had placed the pyx containing its precious Burden on a table, lighting two candles from the sick-call case that he had brought with him. The holy water for Baptism, the sacred Oils for that last anointing, were there also.

He knew Peter well. In those winter days before

the sudden and fateful journey to Rome, the boy had been coming regularly to him for instruction. He signed to Mallory to leave him alone with his son.

Mallory went out of the room, dazed and confused, but with tears of relief in his eyes. He went into his study, shut the door, and fell upon his knees, offering prayers of gratitude. In that hour of passionate emotion, of outward defeat, of grief and bereavement too great to be put into words, he could acknowledge with every beating of his heart the Mercy of Almighty God. Peter had lived long enough to see Father Pemberton. He would die as he had wished to live, in the arms of the Catholic Church. . . .

How long he remained there, he did not know, but he was aroused at last by a knock at the door. Then Dr. Western's voice was heard across the profound silence of the room.

"Mr. Mallory—will you come back, please? Your son is asking for you."

From somewhere among the obscure shadows a figure rose heavily to its feet. Mallory followed him into the dining-room. A faint, sweet, yet pervasive odor accosted him; it was both pleasant and unfamiliar.

The sense of confusion and bewilderment was very strong now, and at no point did he seem able to come into contact with reality. He was still one of the actors in a strange, strange dream, where things which he could not possibly prevent or arrest were going irresistibly forward. In the midst of this confusion he heard the priest's voice saying:

"Your son has made his confession. I have baptized him and received him into the Church. He has made his First Communion and had Extreme Unction. You will find him wonderfully prepared

and resigned. I am going now to say the prayers for the dying."

Father Pemberton knelt down and began to recite rapidly and monotonously some Latin prayers. Sometimes Peter's lips moved as if in response. But he was aware too of his father's nearness, for once he looked up at him and smiled.

"Thanks most awfully, Dad. It was very good of you. I'm quite ready now . . ." He smiled, a little secret smile.

Mallory could not speak. Reality had touched him at last, with the sharpness of a sword's point. He knew that Peter was dying, was leaving him. He put his hand on his as if he would have held him back.

"Peter . . ." The word rang through the room. It seemed to call the boy back. He opened his eyes.

"Dad . . . you'll go and tell Carina, won't you?"

"Yes, yes, my darling boy . . ."

"She'll come home now? . . ." The words trailed into silence.

"Yes . . . yes . . ."

Peter gave a faint fluttering sigh, and slipped away into the Unknown.

Father Pemberton rose from his knees, sprinkled the body with holy water and gave the last Absolution. The solemn words echoed through the room. Then he knelt down and recited aloud the *De Profundis* psalm.

Mallory stood there watching him. From his subconsciousness half-forgotten words rose to his mind: "*Fortified by the Rites of Holy Church.*" Those tremendous, fortifying, sanctifying Rites that had

enabled Peter to say with a quiet and beautiful confidence: *I'm quite ready now.* . . .

He fell on his knees.

“Peter—my son! my son! . . .”

CHAPTER XXXVII

IT WAS to Lady Murray that Jim sent the telegram announcing his son's death from an accident. The funeral was fixed for the 27th of December. He added, "Wait letters," as if he feared they might hasten home so as to be in time for it. But as a matter of fact the telegram was delayed, and did not reach Lady Murray till after Christmas.

Of course she must show it to Carina at once. Jim said nothing of future plans, his *Wait letters* was vague. Nevertheless, the situation created within her a very real anxiety. The terrible shock of his son's death might not perhaps change Jim's attitude toward his wife, but it might conceivably evoke within him a desire to obtain possession of one or both of his children. His conduct throughout the past year had been so extraordinary, so even cruel, that Lady Murray was scarcely to be blamed if she now regarded him as a man who would go all lengths to achieve a desired end.

She went into Carina's room. It was a golden December day, and the skies were almost as blue as in summer. The plane trees along the Tiber were still thickly covered with their large yellow leaves. The river was faintly turquoise-colored; it slipped noiselessly far below the window with only the white width of the road between. The houses of Rome were transformed into golden palaces by the clear sunlight—the same houses that in wet weather often look as sordid as overgrown hovels. It was a characteristic scene with the domes, the towers, the ring-

ing bells, the river flowing under its frequent bridges. Monte Soratte lay like a grey shadow in the grey plain of the Campagna. Near at hand the dark pines on the Pincio were etched against the sky like a delicate dark smudge. Over there to the North the low green hills of Parioli were dotted with white villas.

"I've had a telegram, dear," said Lady Murray, going up to her niece who was playing with Tony on the floor, while the slumbering Innocent lay in his cradle near at hand.

Carina spent most of her time with the children. Since Innocent's birth she had not written a line. That burst of energy which had produced *Gifts and Sacrifices* had burnt down to dead ashes. It had been tremendous while it lasted, but it had sapped her strength pitifully. Still, the sale of the book had relieved her from any financial anxiety, although, as Lady Murray had often pointed out, there had never been any need for that particular bogey to frighten her. But neither from her husband nor from her aunt would Carina accept anything either for herself or her children.

"Who's it from?" said Carina. Her careless inattention was swiftly checked by one glance at her aunt's face. She sprang to her feet. "Why, what's the matter, dear Aunt Nora? Has anything happened to Jim?"

"No, no it isn't Jim—it's poor darling Peter," said Lady Murray, soothingly.

Carina took the telegram from her aunt's hand and read it. Jim gave no details, just the mere outline of what had befallen him. She wondered a little why he had troubled to send them word.

"Oh, I wish I'd been there—I wish I could have helped him . . . I wonder how it happened."

“We ought to get his letter very soon. This has taken three days to come.”

For many months Carina had not wept, and it had seemed to her sometimes that her tears were all dried up. But now they flowed freely. She was thinking of Peter as she had last seen him, splendidly tall and handsome, full of life and vitality, a young, vivid, almost romantic figure. She remembered his words too, spoken as it were from the most profound depths of his heart: *Pray that I may always feel the same courage about it as I do now—that I may always have the same faith.* . . . And she had not failed to pray for him that he might never lose that high burning courage. . . .

She comforted herself, too, with the thought that even if he had not become a Catholic before his death, he had at least had the “baptism of desire,” which in her mercy the Church accepts. . . .

“It will break Jim’s heart,” she said, presently.

“Yes,” said Lady Murray.

Jim’s hard heart was softness itself where this son of his had been concerned. His devotion to Peter had not always been a prudent one. It had often led him into harsh methods with the boy if he fell ever so slightly below the standard of what he wished and expected his son to be. His childish faults had been punished as severely as if they had been real offences. Jim had always been afraid of spoiling him, of being too soft. The result was that he had often erred on the side of severity, alienating Peter from him. And now he had lost this dearly-loved son, the boy of his heart, the first-born, the child of the woman for whom he had never truly cared. Would these children of Carina’s ever make up to him for this desolating loss? It was idle to speculate, for since the breach between Carina and her husband, Lady Murray had felt she must always

have held a completely false estimate of Jim's character, and that she could never really have known him at all. He had simply wrecked Carina's life. She tried to be sorry for him now, because he had undoubtedly suffered the maximum of punishment. But she could not forgive him for his unjustifiable treatment of her niece.

Carina put on her hat and coat and announced her intention of going out.

"I shan't be gone long, and I hope Innocent won't wake. And Tony will be a very good girl, won't she, if I leave her with Aunt Nora?"

She stooped down and kissed Tony, who assured her of the excellence of her intentions, and then left them with Lady Murray. She was gone about half an hour, and her aunt divined that she was praying for Peter. In the sadness of her present life she prayed far more frequently and regularly than Lady Murray could ever remember her doing as a girl.

During her absence another telegram arrived from Jim in which he announced his intention of coming to Rome immediately—he hoped to arrive on the last night of the old year. This piece of news perturbed Lady Murray almost more than that of the first telegram. She could not tell in what sort of mood, penitent or the reverse, he now proposed to come to Rome. But he must have one of two motives in his mind. One was to effect a reconciliation with Carina and beseech her to return home; the other was to deprive her of Tony. She wondered if he had ever learned of the birth of Innocent. Carina had endeavored to keep it a close secret; she was such a recluse now, that she saw hardly anything of her old friends in Rome. The baby had also been born at a time when most of the English colony were absent from the city. But if Jim came now, he would learn that he had a son. The possibility of his de-

priving Carina of both her children was an unthinkable one even for Jim Mallory.

Sorrow might have softened him, but on the other hand sorrow sometimes has been known to harden a self-willed indomitable character, and it was more than likely his present grief would have the latter effect upon Mallory. It was an anxious moment. In a few days he would be with them. She wondered how Carina would feel about it.

Carina came in just before lunch. She was calm, but her face still bore traces of tears.

"I've asked for a Mass to be said for Peter to-morrow morning, at half past seven. Will you come too, darling Aunt Nora?"

"Yes, of course I will, my dear," said Lady Murray.

Carina went into her room to take off her hat. When she came back, Lady Murray said hesitatingly:

"I've had another telegram from Jim. You'd better read it. He is coming here very soon—"

Carina grew very pale. "Coming?" she repeated.

"Yes—he's starting at once. He'll be here on the 31st."

Carina's heart sank like a stone. "He's coming to take Tony away from me," she thought. But she did not utter it aloud. She went up to the child and took her on her knee. Tony was an affectionate little creature, greedy of caresses, disliking sometimes, too, that her mother's kisses should on occasion be diverted to Innocent. Especially when he cried and screamed, and appeared to his little sister to be very naughty indeed. When she herself shrieked, her mother would say, "No, I can't kiss you till you're quite good," but this discipline was not extended to Innocent, who strangely enough seemed to be kissed the more when he screamed most violently.

"Of course you'll receive him?" said Lady Murray, with a suspicion of dryness in her tone.

Carina said listlessly: "He's got a right to come. I'm his wife. I hope he won't make it too difficult."

"I think it may comfort him very much to learn that he has a son," observed Lady Murray.

Carina shook her head. "Nothing can ever comfort him for the loss of Peter. He was the one thing he cared for in the world."

"Once," said Lady Murray, "he put you before Peter."

"Only for a very little while—when he thought he was in love with me. But directly Peter wanted to become a Catholic, I knew the difference. Only Peter counted then. I didn't grudge it—I loved him so much that I perfectly understood. Peter was almost as dear to me as my own children. It was often difficult to take Jim's part when they squabbled. I always wanted to take Peter's. Not because he was always in the right, but because I cared so much for him."

When she thought of the manner of Jim's going, all her fears rushed back afresh to her heart. She could see him now, with his stern handsome face as he went out of her presence, as she thought, forever. She had known then that his love for her was dead. It had been a brief passion, violent and tempestuous while it lasted, but perhaps never very genuine. And he had broken her heart, just as surely as he had broken Iris's.

"Why do you think he's coming, Aunt Nora?" she asked.

"To see you, I should imagine," said Lady Murray, who would not have voiced her own fears for the world. It was no good harassing Carina with dreadful little possibilities before there was any need.

"Only that?" Mrs. Mallory's voice was dubious.

"What other reason could he have?"

"I was wondering. . . ."

"Carina, I hope you'll take my advice and be very kind to him, and sympathetic. So much may depend upon the manner in which you receive him. If he wants forgiveness, forgive him. He must be suffering, and the fact that he's turned to you in the midst of his grief, at least says something. Of course I know he's behaved atrociously, unpardonably, but he's been heavily punished."

It seemed to her then that the beautiful pale face hardened a little. But Carina said nothing. Joy and fear and grief were struggling within her for the mastery. Jim was coming back to her, as it were across his son's grave. If Peter had been alive, their meeting must surely have been one of perfect joy.

Then fear, one of the ugliest and most fierce and debasing of emotions, drove out joy and sorrow. Jim was coming to take Tony from her. He would not live, childless and alone, in that great house. He would say too that he had a right to his child. Yes, she was afraid of Jim in his sorrow. He might be as dangerous as a wounded beast and almost as irresponsible. This grief of his must have cut him to the heart. He had been passionately fond and proud of Peter. So many of his highest hopes were bound up in the boy. Yes, she could picture him a man stricken to the heart by the loss of what he held most dear. She shared his grief, for Peter had been very dear to her, and next to Jim, he had been almost closest to her in the intimate way of friendship.

For the next few days Carina was ill at ease, and in a state of tremulous, ill-suppressed excitement. Tony might scream and shriek with all the power of her strong young lungs; she received nothing but caresses, and was never once told that she was

naughty. She enjoyed the same immunity from tender discipline as did the plump and pampered Innocent. Carina hardly permitted the children to be out of her sight.

She wondered sometimes if Jim would find her much altered, or whether he now cared too little to notice any such change. She examined herself in the mirror, and decided that she now looked quite her real age, which was twenty-nine. She was thinner of course, and she was very pale, and her eyes were more sunken than they used to be. She didn't sleep well, and then though she had made a quick recovery, she had never felt quite so strong since the birth of Innocent. And what would Jim say to his new little son? Perhaps he would blame her bitterly for having kept the event such a complete secret from him. She could adduce a variety of reasons, but could she ever venture to tell him the true one, that lay so deep-rooted in her own fear? . . . Innocent was a beautiful baby of not quite four months. He was fair, but he had blue eyes with dark lashes that were very like Peter's. She wondered if Jim would notice the likeness to Peter, and whether it would please him. . . .

But through all her speculations Carina never permitted herself to dwell on the hope that Jim was coming back to her in a softened mood, desiring a reconciliation. That prospect was far too much like a lovely flattering dream. No, she had disappointed him, disillusioned him; he had even accused her of causing an estrangement between himself and Peter. Jim's love for her was dead, and nothing could kindle those grey burnt-out ashes to flame. When she remembered this, she was half-ashamed of the wild ungovernable joy that possessed her at the thought of once more finding herself face to face with Jim, looking at him, listening to his voice, observing his

strong athletic movements still so full of the grace of youth. At such times she was almost like a young girl, awaiting the arrival of a long-absent and betrothed lover. She was afraid of her own joy . . .

CHAPTER XXXVIII

JIM had evidently reconsidered his intention of writing, for after the second telegram no further news was received from him. It was easy enough to understand—this obvious shrinking from putting pen to paper to give even brief particulars of the tragic catastrophe that had befallen his house.

Carina was thus without any knowledge of what was passing in that bereaved, tormented mind. She could picture him isolated, solitary, grief-stricken; his soul crying out for the boy who had been so dear to him. If, like Sir Austin Feverel, he had tried to “pollard him by despotism” as Richard of the Ordeal had been pollarded, he had at least like that other father always had his son’s interests and welfare most sincerely at heart.

She would have been thankful for even the briefest note, to give her some clue as to his state of mind; one could read between the lines in the shortest missive when one knew the writer well. She was once more groping in darkness; this time with two helpless infants clinging, as it were, to her skirts and looking to her for guidance.

The last day of the year—the day that was to bring Jim—set in, stormy, and now and then a few flakes of snow fell from the clouds that travelled in swift battalions across the sky. Last night there had been snow on the Alban Hills, and at sunrise Carina had seen those pale fields transformed to an ethereal rose-color against the fiery redness of the dawn. The Tiber was running high, fed by rain-filled mountain streams; on its broad bosom there floated a heap of

débris mingled with a yeasty foam. One could hear the sound of its fierce waters, pouring under the bridges.

All day Carina was restless and betrayed it; for the moment her cool brave composure was gone. Lady Murray observed this, but made no comment. It was a terribly difficult position for the poor darling child, she told herself, this not knowing whether your husband was returning to you after a whole year's absence, as a friend or as an enemy. Carina had had a great deal to try her nerves, and a less courageous woman might well have sunk under the ordeal imposed upon her. No one could help her. Lady Murray was determined not to witness the meeting, holding it would be cruel to treat Jim as a supposititious enemy and come to the support of Carina. Besides, in any case it would surely be a painful moment for them both.

Her own anger against Jim had abated; one could never be very indignant with anyone in such deep sorrow. She had to remind herself that he had exposed her niece to the most malicious of gossip and had cruelly wronged her who was most innocent of offence, in order to feel the least touch of enmity toward him. But whether Carina was prepared to overlook the past, to forgive him freely and suffer him to take her back to Linfold and start life afresh there, with all this dreadful past year between them, was another matter. Lady Murray of course desired this "happy ending." She tried to sum up points in Jim's favor, making a mental list of them, telling herself that he had been an excellent husband up till the time of the estrangement, and whatever people might now say or think, he had certainly once been most devotedly and even desperately in love with his wife. No other motive but love could have in-

duced him to make what he must have known was an unwise, imprudent marriage.

Toward evening Carina went out for a walk alone through the windy, lighted streets. It was pleasant to lose oneself in the slow-moving throng that paced the Corso at that hour. Carina pursued her way scarcely conscious of fatigue or exhaustion, even when she had prolonged her walk far beyond its usual limits. She wanted, as the saying goes, to "kill time." Nervous apprehensions were growing upon her, and they could never be allayed until she had come face to face with her husband and learned his attitude toward her. She was almost "fey," like a woman on the brink of great happenings. It was the prospect of seeing Jim that seemed to imbue her body with this new almost fierce vitality, so that she was as one treading on air. She could not altogether quench the sense of exultant happiness that possessed her. A word from Jim could quench it—she must wait for him to say the word, and plunge her back into the nebulous darkness of the past year. . . .

It was nearly a year since he had gone away, and during all that time he had never written to her, had not made even any inquiries as to her health and welfare through his solicitors. She might have died . . . for all he knew or cared. The estrangement, so sudden and complete, had promised to be permanent.

She was to learn to-night the effect Peter's death had had upon him. The thought sobered her.

Night had fallen upon Rome swiftly, with curtains of deep blue and purple dusk. The sky was scattered thickly with stars, bright, frosty-looking, and marvelously patterned. Stars that lit their bright lamps so close to the pines that were massed inkily black on the Pincian hill. One never saw them close to the horizon like that in England, almost as if they

were stooping to whisper their starry secrets to Mother Earth. Carina looked up at them as she crossed the Piazza del Popolo. Over the People's Gate the Great Bear was hanging in the clear Northern sky. Perhaps no group of stars can be so productive of nostalgia to the British exile as this one; looking upon it he seems to hear the rush of the North Sea in his ears and the winds that torment his island home sweeping past him.

Carina crossed the bridge. The street lamps pricking the road along the embankment made it look like a fairy avenue of pallid trees and jewelled lights. She was conscious now of fatigue. And there were still some hours to be lived through somehow before Jim could possibly arrive. The torture of suspense was upon her.

Lady Murray proposed an early dinner. Jim could have some supper when he arrived, and as the train was generally late it would be useless to wait for him. Directly the children were in bed, they sat down to a silent little meal. Lady Murray, always tactful, asked no questions. And after dinner she went to her own room on the pretext of writing letters. Carina was left alone in the *salotto*—to wait for Jim.

Her thoughts fled backward, partly because she dared not let them dwell upon the future—the future that even now seemed to be knocking at her door. And always she saw how completely and how heart-breakingly those past days had been associated and inter-knit with Peter. He had been there from the beginning; she could see him sullen and rebellious at Lord's, all his young soul in fierce revolt at the thought of being supplanted by her in his father's favor. Then the scene of her arrival at Linfold, with Peter coming into the library, cold, distant, scarcely trying to hide his aversion. And then com-

ing to her out of the darkness and storm of the winter night, with the rain and wind beating about him . . . to be gathered to her and kissed, and assured of her love. Never again after that evening to be her enemy, but always her beloved and devoted son. And when that love had borne its sure, inevitable, spiritual fruit, Jim had stepped in and ruthlessly separated them. Peter and she were destined never again to meet in this world. Of his subsequent history she knew nothing at all; she had often beaten her hands in vain against that dividing wall of darkness. Her old uneasy fear of her husband came back to her now, as this thought pressed itself upon her. After Tony's birth she had been so free from that fear. That event had subtly changed their relations, making them limpid and equal. Her love for Jim had grown apace after that. And then she remembered the final bitter leave-taking when he had looked at her with hard eyes from which all trace of love had been extinguished. He had gone out of her presence in a cold passion of anger, because of Peter. And now Peter was dead. . . .

Peter was dead, in his splendid youth, with all his high promise unfulfilled; and Jim was coming back to her, a stricken, broken-hearted man.

Peter was dead . . . She wondered if there had been any time before the end, for him to send her a message.

There was a little stir in the hall, just beyond the door of the *salotto*. She heard the sound of a trunk being flung upon the hard flooring. It must be Jim . . . and she had not expected him quite so soon. She glanced at the clock. Yes, his train must have been unusually punctual. She heard the murmur of voices, and she tried to rise and go to the door to greet him. But she could not move, for the great trembling in all her limbs. She could not

even rise from her low seat beside the window, through which she could see the wonderful clustered lights of Rome. When the door opened and the figure of a man, wrapped still in a heavy travelling coat, stood hesitatingly on the threshold, a mist swam before her eyes, blotting out the room and all it contained, hiding Jim's face from her, so that she could not tell if he had come in grief or in anger, as a friend or as an enemy.

She had not long to wait, for he closed the door abruptly, and with his old rapid decisive movements came across the room to her. He stooped down and put his arm about her, then he slid to his knees and gathered her to his heart. Her face was pressed against his, and she felt that his hard thin cheek was wet with tears.

She looked at him then, and saw that there were deep lines of suffering in his face, and the eyes were sombre and heavy-lidded as if he had not slept for many nights, but had grieved passionately and continuously for the son he had lost. Above his brow the thick hair was almost white, it made him look incredibly older. But he had come back to her across the terrible calamity that had wrecked and ruined his life, and she knew that he had come sure of his welcome, knowing that she alone of all human beings had power to comfort him now.

"Carina . . . Carina . . ." he murmured brokenly.

There was no need for any words between them. All the past year, with its shame and humiliation, was blotted out for Carina. She felt only a desire to comfort him, to assure him of her love that had never failed.

"Car, darling, I've come to fetch you home," he said at last, lifting his ravaged face and gazing at her with those terrible haunting eyes. "You must

forgive me . . . take pity on me. I've no son now. But Peter asked me to tell you that he died a Catholic. I sent for the priest—there was only just time. He was fortified. . . .”

“I'm so very thankful, dear Jim, that he became a Catholic before he died. I'd so hoped . . . But won't you tell me about it?”

Little by little he related the happenings of that dark December night when Peter's splendid young body had been carried in, crushed and broken, never again to leave Linfold alive. She heard how the boy had entreated his father to send for Father Pemberton, and of how the priest had come, carrying the Blessed Sacrament into Linfold for the first time since the days of the Reformation. Of how he had baptized, absolved and anointed Peter, before he went out on his last journey, sustained and fortified by the Mystical Food of the Holy Viaticum. Of how he had seemed strangely comforted and tranquillized. He had always made light of the pain—his one thought had been to send for the priest. Jim told her, too, of his last words concerning her, and also of that interview he had had with him a day or two before his death, in which he had entreated him to send for her, and had expressed his belief that never in any case would he inherit Linfold. It was as if he had had some strong premonition of approaching death. . . .

“And then, Car darling. . . .”

“Yes, Jim?” she said, wondering what else he still had to tell her.

“Afterward—when it was all over—I think I should have gone mad with grief if Father Pemberton hadn't been there. He stayed all night, and I had a long talk with him. In the morning very early he said Mass in Peter's room, for the repose of his soul. They took him up to his own room, you know,

after he was dead. I hardly went to bed, and Father Pemberton stayed with me. We watched in turn nearly all night. He told me what prayers to say. And after Mass he came and talked to me. He made me change many opinions that I'd always held—he taught me to see certain things in quite a different light. More as you see them, and as Peter had learned to see them. Don't place too much hope upon it, Car darling—I'm very broken now—I'd clutch at simply any straw that offered help. But there was one thing he told me that impressed me very much. He said that from the time of St. Paul onward down to the present day there have been many converts from among those who have most fiercely hated and persecuted the Catholic Church. It seemed as if the Holy Spirit was constrained to show them that they could not fight against God. Sooner or later they are pursued, captured, and forced to give in. And I've been fighting against the Catholic Church . . . even that first time I went to Mass with you in Lintown I felt it had something that no other church had—I saw a little glimmer of the truth—and I fought against it. I said that nothing should ever induce me to let Peter become a Catholic—I told him over and over again that if he did become one I should disinherit him. And then at the last it was I who had to send for Father Pemberton, and you mustn't think that I did it against my will. When I'd once made myself telephone, I suffered tortures lest he shouldn't come in time. I think if he hadn't, I should have regarded it as a sign that it was too late for me to offer contrition and sorrow for what I'd done. Father Pemberton urged me to meditate on the words: *I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest . . . it is hard for thee to kick against the goad. . . .*"

There was a long silence after he had made this—to her poignant—confession.

"I could have kissed the ground when Father Pemberton came into the house that night," he said at last. "I can't possibly describe the relief it was to see him."

"I'm sure it must have been. I'm glad you gave Peter that, Jim."

Carina's voice was very soft.

"It was Father Pemberton who urged me to lose no time in coming out to you. At first I was afraid—I couldn't believe you'd ever forgive me or want to see me again. But he said he knew you so well—he could answer for you." He lifted his hand and pushed the bright hair back from her brow with the old caressing gesture.

Carina rose.

"Come with me, Jim. You must see Tony."

She leaned a little heavily on his arm as they went out of the room and down the long passage together, almost as if strength had gone out of her.

They went into the nursery. Tony was lying, flushed and rosy in her cot, her dark hair damp and tumbled. But Jim scarcely seemed to see her. His eyes were fixed in blank bewilderment upon a tiny wooden cradle, hung with lace and muslin, that stood just beyond. The kind of cradle that Tony had slept in for the first months of her life. . . . Carina, seeing his fixed glance, went up to it and drew aside the fragile filmy draperies.

"Jim," she whispered, "you said just now that you had no son . . . This is your little son, Innocent. . . ."

He stared at her incredulously. Into all his many dreams of her this possibility had never entered.

"My son? But you never told me . . . When?"

"He was born on the second of September—here in this flat. Aunt Nora was with me."

"I don't understand . . . Why didn't you tell me? It would have made all the difference."

She could not tell him, in that hour of restored trust and confidence, of her abiding, haunting fear that he might come and take her children from her. Especially when he knew that she had borne him a son.

"He's such a darling, Jim—such a strong beautiful baby. I know he can never be to you what Peter was—but I hope he may grow up like him, in every possible way . . ." She slipped her hand into her husband's. He moved a pace nearer, and looked down at the tiny face with its mass of silken fair curls.

"He's very like Peter—like what Peter was as a baby—except for the color of the hair."

"And his eyes are like Peter's—such beautiful blue eyes."

Jim said dreamily: "My mother had those eyes. I remember when I was a little chap, thinking how lovely they were."

He stooped and touched the brow with his lips, very softly for fear of waking him. Then he turned to his wife.

"Oh, you should have told me, Car darling. You should have told me he was coming . . . You shouldn't have left me in the dark. . . ."

There was a world of tender reproach in his tone.

"Forgive me, Jim. It was so difficult to believe that you cared any more."

He looked at her hollow-eyed.

"You must have known I always loved you," he said.

Carina lifted the still slumbering Innocent from his crib, and held him out to Jim.

"I want to see him in your arms," she said.

Jim took him, holding him to his breast. The child

did not stir or wake. Once long ago he had thus held Peter. . . .

"He's very like Peter," he said again, pressing another light kiss on the little face.

They sat down side by side near the window, Jim still holding the sleeping Innocent in his arms. Below them the lights of Rome burned with a clear and steady brightness. A dome stood up, darkly etched against the night sky. Far below them they could see the Tiber flowing past strong and full, passing under the bridges with a subdued roar as of many waters.

They were both thinking of the dead boy. If he had separated them, it was yet most surely he who had brought them together again. Once Carina crept a little closer to her husband, and across the straight small form he was holding in his arms he bent his head and kissed her. She felt that in spite of his grief the little son had brought a measure of comfort and joy to his heart.

He spoke at last.

"When do you think you'll be ready to start, Car darling? I'll wait till you're ready—you mustn't make that long journey alone. But do you think it could be soon?" He looked at her wistfully. She had received him with such beautiful tenderness that he felt she must surely have forgiven him, and be ready to return to the house that for a whole year had been bereft of her presence.

"Oh, I can be ready very soon," she answered, almost with eagerness. "I shall have to give up this flat, of course—that'll take a few days. And you must have a little rest, too—you're looking deadly tired, Jim."

Tony, roused by the sound of voices, now awoke and suddenly stood up in her cot. Carina thought at first that the vision of a strange man sitting there

might frighten her, and rising ran to her side. But Tony—an adorable creature in her white night-dress—stood there close to the protecting railing with both little plump arms outstretched.

“Daddy!” she cried.

Carina had often told her that she had a Daddy in England who would one day come to see her, though always she had felt that she was telling the child a lovely and impossible fairy tale. But it bore its own happy fruit at that moment, for Jim hastily putting Innocent into his wife’s arms made two strides toward the cot and clasped Tony to his heart.

She gave a gurgle of delight.

“Daddy! Daddy!”

And it was thus that Lady Murray found them when some little time later she intruded upon them, being no longer able to bear her impatient anxiety to know what was happening between the long-estranged couple.

She felt she would not have missed the pretty little scene for all the world, and it enabled her to greet Jim with a genuine display of her old affection.

Carina put out her hand and touched Lady Murray’s, as if she wanted to draw her into the little intimate circle.

“We’re all going back to Linfold as soon as Jim’s rested,” she announced, “and you must come too, dear Aunt Nora.”

THE END



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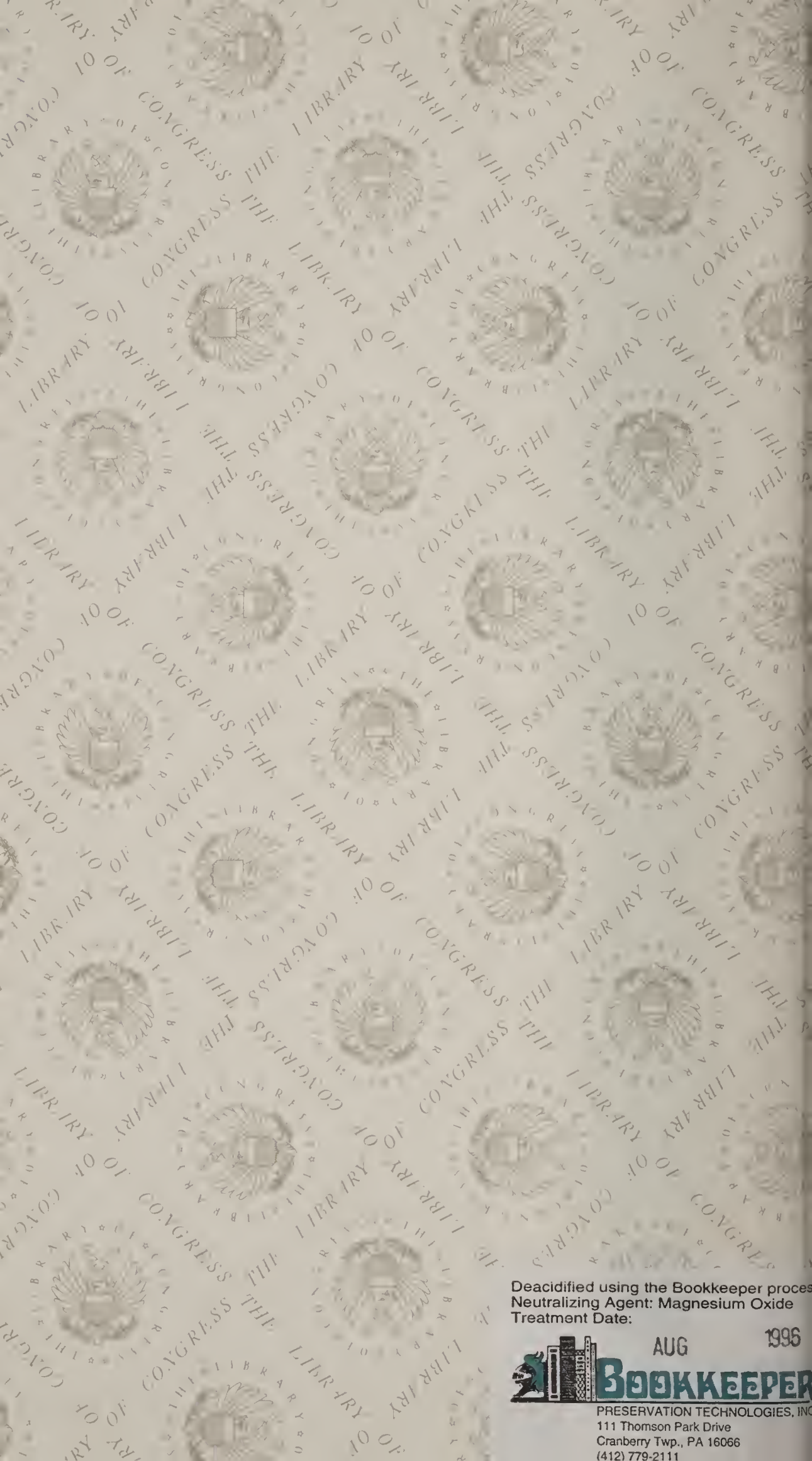
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