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CLAY AND RAINBOWS



“IT'S AN AWFUL BOTHER, THANKS,” SAID THE VISION”

—Page 11

Clay and Rainbows

A Novel

BY

DION CLAYTON CALTHROP

AUTHOR OF "SUSETTE," "ST. QUIN," ETC.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY
ALFRED JAMES DEWEY ✓



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TO MY WIFE

MARY VIOLET CLAYTON CALTHROP

m.v.g.
s. 25-14.

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CLAY AND RAINBOWS

Part I

CHAPTER I

I. DANSE MACABRE

ORANGE and blue and black: orange lights on blue pavements, and great piles of houses like cliffs, black against a blue-black sky. The rush and hurry of cabs, the plunge of huge omnibuses; the scattering crowds of thousands of people. Orange lights on white shirt-fronts and bare shoulders standing in the doorways of theaters; whistles blowing, horns sounding, the sharp metallic ting of bells. Conversation like the breaking of waves on a shore. A vast, excited murmur. One great solemn voice, the voice of that enormous energy called London.

Between the houses like cliffs a constant stream, tearing, beating, surging. In the great streets like a torrent of black waters; in the quiet squares the drift and overflow. Cabs like frightened beetles darting away as if from the touch of an unseen hand; terrified buses, like huge animals, plunging wildly as if to certain death down the hill of Piccadilly, snorting, puffing, shaking, charging riotously at lamp-posts, ending at street corners their wild career and stand-

ing there sweating, while white-faced mortals, wonderful adventurers, crowd into the orange light inside. Calmer, more stately private motor-cars, swift and silent runners, steering a dignified way through the whirling stream. And, behind all, the feeling of fear. And at every crossing an Angel of Death, sword in hand, calmly smiling.

Above all like a gigantic blind face the blue-black sky heavy with thunder.

A city of contrast; a city that, like some huge driven wheel, threw out sparks of light here and there, leaving the darkness more foul and abominable. With, here, some thousands moving calmly to supper in brilliantly lighted places, and, there, black forms crouched on benches by an evil leering river whose eyes were the reflections of lamps, and whose arms leaning over the Embankments were always inviting, pointing a way out, whose voice sang the icy slumber song of suicide.

A dark square where melancholy trees pointed torn fingers to the threatening sky, a square of monotonous houses heavy with sleep; a square inhabited, it seemed, by one figure, and that of bronze, perpetually pointing to a policeman's cape which lay, rolled, on the pedestal. A square like a dark stagnant backwater from the prevailing stream, with houses like hard rocks, and the gardens like a scorched oasis. Suddenly an evil, silent thing in the form of a motor-car steals round a corner; a door opens; a square of orange light makes an ugly hole in the gloom, and a man in a livery, like some expensive warder's, comes

down the steps and leaves in the doorway a figure of amazing fragile beauty. If the square has the loathsome appearance of a toad, she, then, is the jewel in the toad's forehead. She is something that sparkles and flashes under the light, a short skirt of silver gauze, with a cloak of some transparent stuff that shines and seems to reflect every color under the moon. In her black hair a silver star twinkles. And she is so frail and charming, and so slender and white that one wonders she can live at all in the tremendous pressure about her. She is twenty, and her name is Philippina.

A red carpet is rolled down the steps and across the pavement. She steps royally across it and enters the motor-car that persists in looking sinister; the door is closed, and in one minute the square is dark again, and its odd deity remains pointing at the policeman's cape.

In an hour from this time the streets are nearly empty—empty, but burning hot. The few people abroad suffer from a sensation of choking. The last omnibuses have gone; cabs remain in long lines here and there for late revellers. One notices now the broken people, the people this great dragon of a city has crushed and thrown aside—the beggars and tramps, the women in tawdry finery, the men out of work in well-brushed suits that once fitted other people, the scavengers, the hungry, the gaol birds, the birds of prey that slink by railings and avoid the eyes of policemen.

The voice, the snarling, vicious voice of the great city, is quietened now to a threatening drone.

Then, as if some fury of temper had swept over the dragon whose maw is never full, and whose claws crush the suburbs and whose tail lashes the slums, the skies are ripped open and a vivid blinding light shows for one instant the benches full of outcasts, the groups of cabmen, the helmets of the police, and then, in awful darkness, comes peal after peal of thunder. Then rain in big hot drops, in quicker drops, in torrents, blotting out everything.

Men and women dash for shelter, rags are drenched, the cover of a coffee-stall sags with water, policemen appear shining and mysterious, the covers of cabs reflect every flash of lightning. Windows are opened and hastily shut; into ball-rooms, houses, nurseries, the thunder sends a penetrating sound. Men driving cumbersome market carts pull sacks in vain over their heads and shoulders, while their horses stagger and slip on the greasy roads.

That light in the window there is because a child is being born. That light is because a man is dying. That sudden black knot of people round the hospital is there because two of those terrified animals they call cabs have hurled themselves at each other. And in the cries of pain, of death, of childbirth there comes always the low murmur of the relentless energy of the city.

And, suddenly, one sees the agonized pale face of a running thief, panting for breath, with the law behind him.

II. CAPRICE

At four o'clock in the morning a Pierrot and a Troubadour came out of the Embankment entrance of the *Savoy* each smoking a cigarette and each with his face turned to the sky.

"Topping air," said the Pierrot.

"It smells like daisies," said the Troubadour.

"All right, old chap," said the Pierrot. "A little whisky and soda and so to bed—what?"

As they spoke a motley crowd of Knights, Devils, Dutchmen, Kings, and Costermongers with their attendant ladies brushed past them and were packed into cabs by kind Commissionaires. Shepherdesses and Chinamen gravely bade good night to Queens and Jesters, and giving addresses all over London vanished silently into the night.

Later King Charles would have difficulties in finding the key of his flat; and dainty Pierrettes would kiss drowsy mammas in Kensington, while a few rash and very youthful spirits would brave the sunlight on Hampstead Heath.

And later still the ball-room cleaners would sweep up several fragments of broken hearts and a great many more broken promises and think nothing about it. It was their job.

Cabs would be warmed or chilled by kisses given or refused. And to the world's great lumber-room there would be added lost Shepherd's crooks, dainty pieces of lace and ribbons, handkerchiefs given as gages, ball programmes, reputations and unseen melting glances from beautiful or daring eyes.

The little whisky and soda having become two more, it happened that when the Pierrot emerged he was cursing because some one had taken his coat, and the Troubadour, who wore a cloak and looked very romantic, was angry because there were no cabs.

"Why on earth," he said to the Pierrot, "you didn't tell Jakes to bring the car beats me into a cocked hat."

"You'd look rotten in a cocked hat," said the Pierrot, who had recovered his temper. "Besides, I'm going to walk."

"In that kit!"

"I haven't looked a silly ass all the evening," said the Pierrot, "so I don't see why I should now."

The Troubadour stood a little apart from his friend and regarded him solemnly.

"It will be like one of Willette's drawings," he said. "Come on."

It was quite true. The white face, skull cap, white clothes and the gray morning light made the picture.

"Black cats are more than coronets," said the Troubadour laughing.

"I don't know what you mean, but I bet we get rotted," said the Pierrot. "Anyhow, me for home."

One might think the City was the kindest, mildest place, breathing nothing but peace and goodwill. The very pavements smiled. The colors were soft and melodious, Trafalgar Square beamed upon

them. Kindly policemen, versed in the ways of youth, bade them go cheerily on their way. And if there slunk away from them sodden rags that clothed a human body and sour looks that showed a starving soul, the easy benediction "Poor devils" brushed misery aside.

Piccadilly herself was an invitation, and in the silver light looked like a path between Palaces, if one forgot the Hospital the other end.

They passed the Colonnade of the *Ritz* and stopped to look across the Green Park. How grateful every tree, every blade of grass looked for the bath of rain. The Tower of the Catholic Cathedral stood up like a silver stem against the sky. The Westminster silhouette seen through the trees was a fairy picture.

The Pierrot, who had been chattering about the chances of a certain horse, became silent. His friend leaned against the railings. "We are in our real clothes, Tim," he said. "You a sort of happy, melancholy, volatile chap, all love affairs and no love. Me a gloomy bard crying for Romance."

"Rot!" said Sir Timothy Swift. "You're in the Guards."

"Being in the Guards isn't life."

"Then what is life? Oh, shut up!" said Timothy. "This is all bunkum. Or it is the last whisky and soda; or it's—what is it?"

"The morning when everything is washed clean all ready to be made dirty again."

"Do they stand this stuff at the Tower?" asked Timothy, very much impressed.

"I tried very hard to fall in love to-night," said George Weatherby, the Troubadour, "but it wasn't any good."

"The little Dresden girl?"

"No, certainly not. The woman in the green dream, the woman with the eyes like yesterday."

"Oh, Ina Poundberry. Whew!"

"I wish you wouldn't profane the morning, my dear Tim. I particularly didn't want to know her name. One falls in love with woman, not with individuals. If one is in love one is always charmingly unhappy."

Timothy stood puzzled, and then his face lit as with a brilliant idea. "Ham and eggs," he said.

The Troubadour frowned at him. "Oh, you're impossible," he said. "You've got no romance, you bally idiot. You never read. You never think. And you are never serious."

"I have a sovereign," said Timothy. "And we might expend it at the Junior Turf Club, which is just here. In fact the Cab Shelter."

"Speaking of ham and eggs," said Weatherby dreamily, "reminds me of a little woman at Staines——"

"Look here," said Timothy, interrupting and swinging his friend round, "do you pose or are you real?"

"I never know," said Weatherby. Then he laughed, and his voice changed to the ordinary young man's dragging accent. "It's a relief sometimes to drop out of the ordinary way, don't you think so? You see I'm cooped up with a lot of fellers who think like Racing

Calendars and never dare let go. Why mayn't we let go sometimes? The Colonel writes poetry, old Sandridge thinks of nothing but music, but the rest of the chaps may or may not be bits of the Army and Navy Stores. I don't know."

Early as it was there were three men in the cab-shelter drinking coffee out of thick cups and eating huge platefuls of fried eggs.

"Look at the mummers," said one, as Timothy and George entered.

"Give us a song, guv'nor."

"He ain't a song-bird, he's a acroback."

"My treat," said Timothy. "What'll you have?"

As he spoke one of the men looked at him closely.

"I think I've drove you, sir, Melbury Road?"

"That's right!" said Timothy, laughing. "Come on, ham and eggs and coffee, boss, for two."

As they sat eating the side issues of London were discussed before them. The mean and generous fares, the odd happenings, the men who shot themselves in cabs, the women who ran away, the thieves who had been driven, the detectives who had followed them. One of the men was in the middle of an extraordinary story of how he drove two gentlemen in evening dress into Epping Forest where they met two others, also in a cab, how two had stripped and fought in silence, when there was a crash, a shout in the street. Instantly every man left his place and ran out.

In the road two horses attached to a big market wagon were slipping and plunging, threatening every

moment to turn the wagon over. The driver, who had been asleep, lay a crushed heap in the road where he had been thrown. A policeman was running with two other men. Timothy was there first. The moment one saw him run one saw the perfect stride of the accomplished sprinter.

The end of it was one of London's peculiar pictures. Two horses quivering and steaming held by chauffeurs. A policeman taking notes from a dazed man who stood rubbing his arm. A woman of incredible age, sprung from nowhere, accepting a cigarette from a Pierrot and having it politely lit for her by a Troubadour. And cherries from the fallen baskets all over the road. And nobody seemed surprised.

Weatherby walked home to his rooms in St. James's Street. And Timothy Swift, refusing a cab, continued on his way down towards Kensington.

III. FANTASIA

Had one put Timothy's own words to his thoughts one would have found them to be "It's awfully jolly." Not that "awfully jolly" was in the least what he meant, but that his was a limited vocabulary. He was thinking of the sparkling freshness of the morning, of the splendor of being young, of the quaintness of his adventures, and of the several fair ladies he had flirted vigorously with in the course of the evening. To have met with one of them now would have made the morning perfect.

He was twenty-five, without parents, brothers or sisters. He had plenty of money, sound limbs, no

cares, and had been expensively educated to do nothing as well as possible.

George Weatherby's suggestion that it was a day in which to fall in love fitted exactly to his mood. He wished he could.

The few people round the coffee-stall at Hyde Park Corner gave him a jesting "Good morning." He replied in the same spirit.

He felt so freakish and inconsequent (perhaps the genie of his clothes) that he nearly asked a very young policeman in Knightsbridge the nearest way to fall in love. And as he passed the Barracks and came to the next stretch of Park railings, he was undoubtedly one of the happiest men in England, if not the world.

A quarter of a mile farther brought him to another adventure. In the middle of the empty road stood a taxi-cab, the bonnet up, and a puzzled, perspiring driver scratching his head.

"Broken down?" Timothy sang out.

And immediately a head of wonderful beauty looked through the open window. Three strides brought Timothy to the door. "I say," he said, "can I help?"

"It's an awful bother, thanks," said the vision.

Timothy looked up and down the road. "There isn't a cab in sight," he said.

"Well, I can't go any farther," said the driver.

Timothy held the door open and the vision actually took his hand and thanked him with her eyes. It was a supreme moment. From a fairy purse of gold she paid the man, and then, picking her way carefully, so

that she might not soil her silver shoes, she walked by Timothy to the pavement.

She was dressed in something that sparkled and shimmered in the morning light, a short skirt of silver gauze, with a cloak of some transparent stuff that shines and seems to reflect all the colors under the sun; and a live star twinkled in her hair. She was so fragile and slender and white that he wondered she could really be alive.

So he said, "You were at the Murchisons'."

And she replied, "How clever of you!"

And he answered, "I'm not clever, but how could I forget?"

Said she, "I don't see how you could remember, as I wasn't there."

This rather took his breath away, so he said, "I don't believe you have been anywhere. I believe you are always like this."

So the fairy answered, "Have you got a cigarette?"

Very presently there it was, warm between her lips, and she puffing away for all the world like any ordinary mortal.

Then Timothy said, "I say, let's be mad and walk."

She answered, "In these shoes?" and laughed.

Said Timothy, "But you tread on air."

And she answered, "Thanks very much, dear stranger, but please find me a cab."

But he couldn't. One can't.

"Isn't it romantic?" he suggested.

"Are you Irish?" said the fairy.

"Half. Are you?" He would have said anything, but he was nearly half.

"No," she replied, "I have no Romance. I'm altogether English. My father's a brewer."

"He brews nectar," said Timothy.

"Beer," she corrected. "Well, I suppose we must walk."

"To Eternity," said Timothy, feeling very fluttered.

"If Berkeley Square is Eternity. Number 154."

They started back along Knightsbridge.

"Weren't you at the Murchisons'?" said Timothy again.

"Oh, yes, I was really," she said. "And then I went to a mad supper party down here with a girl, and we sat up awfully late and—here I am. Mother will be sick."

"Let us forget Mother and her indisposition," he urged. "Let's be really mad. I am Pierrot for tonight, you are Fairy. I saw you at the Ball, I worshipped from afar."

She looked at him with her deep-blue, laughing eyes. "Mr. Pierrot," she said, "you don't expect me to believe you, do you? And Pierrots are as common as cabbage butterflies. And I adored—adored—a Troubadour in black."

"I say," said Timothy, "I said, 'Let's be mad,' not 'Let's talk of George Weatherby.'"

She clapped her hands, laughing at him. "Now I know his name, how ripping!"

"I don't believe you're a fairy at all," said he.

"You're just a perfectly ordinary person in Fancy Dress."

"Poor Pierrot!" she answered. "Was he hurt?"

He was silent for a moment, but a look into her eyes gave him laughter again.

"Isn't it rum," he began, "two daring people defying——"

"There's a cab!" she cried.

Without troubling to look at it, he said, "Engaged."

"I can't walk all the way home," she said.

"Do walk a little farther," he pleaded. "It is so wonderful to be able to talk to a girl who understands you. I believe you would understand me better than any girl I know. Most girls would be so stupid about walking madly about like this."

"Do you know many girls?" she asked innocently.

But he saved himself in time. "Very, very few," he replied earnestly. "I don't really care for girls. Now, you!"

"Now, me!" she insisted.

"You are more of a dream than a girl."

"I wish men wouldn't think we are different. I am not a dream. At present I want another cigarette, more chocolate, and a cab. Dreams don't take cabs."

"I've been in a cab with a dream," said Timothy.

"One of your own?"

"I think it must have been about you. It was about some one I always wanted to meet and never could. And now——"

"And now we are nearly at Berkeley Square, where all good dreams die."

"I say, you're awfully clever for a girl," said Timothy.

"With the very limited experience you mentioned just now," she answered, "I should think you were very clever about girls."

"Now you are sarcastic, and fairies aren't sarcastic."

"What are they, Mr. Pierrot?"

"They are dark and mysterious and little and jolly, and they wear silver shoes and they break people's hearts into little bits," he answered.

"That Irish half of you is awfully persistent, isn't it?"

"It gives one the blues, you know," said Timothy, "but it gives you a heap of life besides."

"Ought I to say, 'Thank you very much for your kind flirt'?" she asked.

"Don't be unkind," said he.

They turned into Berkeley Square.

"I think you've been ripping," she said. "And we have passed heaps of cabs and I've said nothing." Then she spoke more seriously. "I say, isn't life splendid, I mean these kind of bits of it: these sort of joy rides. Isn't it jolly to be young and go to dances, and sit up late, and meet jolly people. And——"

They both stopped. From one of the houses came a long cry of pain.

"The Almiracs," she said, with her teeth clenched. "He beats her when he comes home drunk."

“What a damn shame!” said Timothy. “The swine!”

The Fairy gave a little sigh. “She loves him,” she said.

Timothy put out his hand. “Tell me who you are?” he asked. “I haven’t met anybody for years who I—who I——”

“Who you walked home all alone with because the moonlight had got into your head. Please, Mr. Pierrot, could you make a noise like a taxi, because Mother sleeps awfully lightly, and is sure to listen for me coming home in her sleep.”

“My name is Timothy Swift,” he said, “and I’ll do my best to make the noise, only please tell me who you are, so that we can meet again in the ordinary world.”

“Here’s the door. Whisper. Make the noise first.”

He put forth his best powers and did an imaginary taxi-cab, both wheels and a hoot, very badly.

“Now tell me your name,” he begged.

She opened the door and stood in the doorway. “Flip,” she whispered, and closed the door swiftly but silently.

It was Miss Philippina Newberry.

“Cab, sir?” said a voice at his elbow, so close that he jumped. Then again, but quite close too, came that cry of pain.

“Cab, rather!” said Timothy, full of anger.

“That’s old Newberry beating his wife,” said the cabman. But Timothy did not hear.

CHAPTER II

A MAN OF FASHION

A MAN called Fellowes looked after Sir Timothy's person: a man called Walters looked after Sir Timothy's garden: a man called Jakes looked after the motor-cars: a man also called Fellowes, brother to the other, was butler to him: there were besides men of law who looked after his business, farmers who looked after his farms, and bailiffs who looked after them. And there were a lot of women who cooked and waited and brushed and cleaned; and all for the comfort of the comfortable young man who eyed the morning sunlight with blinking eyes and thrust a pink-silk pajama'd arm out for his early tea.

Fellowes, an old man with a white necktie known as a choker, was folding and putting away his clothes. The Fellowes below stairs was busying himself with preparations for breakfast. In the household of busy figures only Sir Timothy lay abed, a swathed and lazy drone.

"Get the Directory, Albert," he said, "and look up 154, Berkeley Square."

The old man, who had been Timothy's father's servant, left the room.

As soon as he had closed the door, Timothy leapt out of bed and examined himself in the long looking-glass.

“Haven’t got all the beastly stuff off yet,” he murmured, still seeing patches of last night’s Pierrot white on his face. “Did I look like a fool? Am I an ass? Yes.”

The door opened, and the man appeared. “Name of Newberry, sir. James Newberry.”

“A brewer and not knighted?” said Timothy. “There must be something the matter with his politics. Shave.”

Picture: Young Gentleman being shaved by old and faithful servant. Lilac-colored bath robe, Sheraton mirror, safety razor, slight sprinkling of Lavender salts in the water, Persian slippers. Outside a cab-rank with May sunlight splashing the cabs through plane trees; the voice of London like a comfortable drone, warm and lazy, hiding the hideous undercurrent of the song.

Pale-faced clerks going to work; very actressy-looking actresses going on the tops of omnibuses to rehearsals with some of last night’s make-up still on. Shop shutters being taken down; people reading feverishly in the Financial pages of papers. A hurry, jangle, turmoil all over the vast city where the picturesque and the obscene jostle elbow to elbow, where everybody is crowding everybody, where murderers are eating eggs, and honest men are licking the banana skins from the gutter. And in a retired, peaceful, scented, warm corner, a young athlete being shaved.

“Flip!”

“Beg pardon, Sir Timothy, did I cut you?”

"No," the lazy voice answered. "Something else cut me. Cigarette. Bath."

A quarter of an hour at the punch ball, a quick, invigorating bath, half a cigarette, breakfast. Things handed silently, everything in a glow of comfort, a bowl of crimson ranunculus on the table and a young man idly peeling a banana.

If for one moment he could have seen the banana market with the great carts piled high with the golden fruit, with dirty men cursing as they lift the big stems, and the clerk in a monotonous voice repeating the numbers as he ticks them off on the invoice. Horses tossing chaff from their nose-bags, and women nearly naked to the waist and incredibly filthy hanging round watching, with dough-faced children in their arms!

"James," said Timothy to the other Fellowes, "ring up Mr. George Weatherby and tell him to lunch with me at the Stag Club, if he isn't on duty. Tell Jakes to have the car round at twelve. And where the devil is the—oh, here it is."

"You are lunching with Mr. Tempest to-day, sir."

"Oh! Well, James, one of our finest excuses, not toothache or influenza, something like—detained owing to the death of a favorite canary, anything you like."

George Weatherby could come. Sir Timothy was reminded that he was leaving for the Eastern Counties at four o'clock. The car arrived and Jakes received

the following amazing order: "Drive to Berkeley Square and when I tell you drive very slowly. I want to look at a house."

How very different was London in the morning, her voice was nearly feminine, hundreds of women passing by the big plate-glass windows of shops; children darting into Kensington Gardens; men with huge trays of flowers that seemed to light the street with colored flames. The swish of silk, the subdued murmur of millinery, the pungent smell of tobacco on the air, mingling with many perfumes, and Sir Timothy Swift gliding by seated in luxury in his big car like any Roman patrician driving through the mob. An elephant going through the Parrot House at the Zoo would have much the same effect.

In the midst of such overpowering surroundings one loses sight of the man. It is not easy for the world to understand a happy man, and still less easy to understand that happy men are the most profound. They think and know only the big simple things, as children know them. Clothes, food and love occupy their days, and life is always providing constant surprises in each of these departments. Of backgrounds they know nothing as they are always in the front of the picture. If they are religious, they go straight to God fearlessly; if they are of the world, they enjoy the world, its sunlight, flowers, beautiful people and things rapturously. They are all lovers. By love they do not mean the scorching breath of passion that devours and burns the unhappy, but a wholesale and indiscriminate embrace that treats all people as equals. They are

a race apart and little understood, and they irritate those who see themselves by introspection and are ready to find dust in every room and sinks of iniquity in every family. And all unconsciously they benefit the world at every turn by smiling and by stray chance passages of affection that are never, never lost. The difference between the heart and the liver.

Timothy on his way to town gave priceless gifts away; he smiled at children, he smiled, in a more subdued way, at pretty girls, he bowed to old ladies who crossed perilously before his car. And when the trees and flowers blew their scents to him, and the children smiled back their complete understanding, he thought to himself, "What a topping day!" And arrived at Berkeley Square intoxicated.

(Of course such a man would walk down a slum street where disease, poverty, hunger and dirt were masters, and see nothing but the sunlight on a pot of musk in an upper window. But, did he own that street, there would be flowers in every window and meals on every table. As it so happens, the world, taught by intellectual instead of stupid people, will not recognize that love is a cure for everything and with enough love such streets could not exist. But then, all such streets are owned by unhappy men.)

"Drive slowly and pass 154."

In the daylight it did not look like the dwelling place of a butterfly Princess, and, as a matter of fact, neither did it announce the brewer. It was merely a house built by an unimaginative man, for unimaginative people to live in, and so was a great

success. Timothy's eyes fastened themselves on an upper window where a row of flower-pots bloomed. "Her window," he tried to sigh. "Drive to the Stag Club," he said.

It was the cook's window, as it happened. Philippina only cared for cut flowers. But love is blind.

One can judge of the Stag Club by the hats: they are made to cover only the most fashionable heads. The hall-porter has only to look at the hats to know exactly who is in the club. And the walking-sticks are a dream. There are no married men in the Stag Club, except the waiters. The hall-porter who has been there thirty-five years, regards hall-portering as a priesthood and the Stag as a Temple. It is whispered that he refused to marry the Earl of Hackney's cook and that she died and left him everything. Anyhow, plenty of the Stags have borrowed of him late at night.

There was a letter for Timothy from his uncle, a letter like a telegram. Oliver Swift wrote letters like that because he considered telegrams should only be sent in cases of dangerous illness or great business pressure. "Glad to see you. I will have six-thirty met.—OLIVER."

Timothy tore it up, and entered the smoking-room.

The room was occupied by a long thin being, so thin that the creases of his trousers took up most of his leg. He was on his back in a deep chair, and appeared to be undergoing a kind of burial in illustrated papers which were heaped up all around him. On a table by his side stood a tall glass half full of

whisky and soda, and a hand rested on the table, holding a cigarette-holder a foot long. As Timothy caught sight of him the events of the night came clearly before him. This was Lord Almirac, and she had said, "He beats her when he comes home drunk." Then if Almirac were married he wouldn't be a member of the Stag.

"Mornin', Swift."

"Didn't know you lived in Berkeley Square," said Timothy.

"Guess again, dear boy. What the dooce made you think so? Live in St. James's Place."

So she had lied.

"Don't know what made me ask. Have a drink?"

"Got one, dear boy."

Timothy rang the bell. "Have another." The whisky and soda vanished in one gulp.

"Do you happen to know anyone called Newberry?" said Timothy.

The young man raised himself with extreme care. "Nuberry—Nuberry? Oh, yes. Little bit of a thing with rather jolly eyes. Father, brewer. They say he knocks his wife about. Cheer-O."

Timothy flushed and clenched his fists. "Poor little girl," he thought.

"Father," went on Lord Almirac, "not a bad chap. Likes his grub. Beefsteak Nuberry, they call him. I don't believe the story. Have you backed Ipswich?"

"No," said Timothy. "I do."

"Do what, dear boy?"

"I think it's true he knocks her about. Swine!"

"With you, dear boy, with you. Swine let it be. Have a cocktail?"

"No, thanks. Do they say he does it often?"

"'Bout once every six months, they say. Damn shame. What? Handsome woman. One of the Welkins of Norfolk, I'm told. Jolly little flapper. They tell me dances well."

"Yes."

"Know her?"

"No."

"Oh!"

"Of course it may not be true," said Timothy.

"Of course. I say, saw funny thing last night. One of those white fellers, Pierrots, walking about with a girl in a sort of shiny stuff. Odd in Town; thought I'd overdone it for the moment. Rum place, Town."

"What were you doing at that hour?" said Timothy, glad of his disguise.

"Driftin' about, dear boy, driftin' about. I get so bored sometimes I get into a cab and say, 'Push her about for an hour.' Night air, they tell me, good for the brain."

"You must see any number of queer things," said Timothy.

"Rather. Can't hide in Town, you know. Once told the gov'nor I was peggin' away at Sandhurst and the old man saw me handin' a lady out of a carriage on the Cinema Things. Beastly shame: I mean what's private life comin' to, eh?"

"I don't know," said Timothy, still wondering about the girl. "Anything in the papers?"

"Nothin'. There never is. Hallo, here's George."

George Weatherby came striding across the room. "Hallo, Almirac. Tim, good. I'm beastly hungry."

They sat together at a little table facing the Park, all its mystery gone now, a mere swirling mass of tress, humanity and sky. And here Timothy told the story of his night's adventures: told it in his own ineloquent language and waited for his friend's reply.

"Oh, you lucky devil!" said Weatherby. "I never have adventures and you, you without a scrap of Romance in you, knock up a piece of perfect poetry. Well—are you smit?"

"She's rather a jolly girl," said Timothy.

Weatherby banged his fist on the table so hard that a waiter hurried up with the wine-list.

"I'm so sorry!" said Timothy. "I've been talking, and I forgot. What will you drink?"

"Drink!" said Weatherby. "Burgundy. Red wine, man, is what you want. A jolly girl! You meet a sylph in the street at daybreak and escort her home under the most romantic circumstances, and you call her rather a jolly girl."

"Well," said Timothy humbly, "I did think she was rather jolly."

Weatherby leaned across the table. "I wonder what you are made of?" he asked. "I think you must be inhuman or imbecile. Don't women make your heart beat? Don't they lift you clean up out

of your rotten little rut? I tell you, I'm a romantic man and no romance ever comes my way, and you—are you callous, or bored, or what in the world are you?"

They could discuss a little flimsy tinsel idyll, a little gossamer morning dream like this, with the May sunlight on them, and a tremendous sense of cold water and health about them, but the things that vex the world sped by them uncounted. Cubist painting, new music, Socialism, the growth and decay of nations, Labor movements, Education, were all as nothing to them. They were young animals, faithful, pleasant young animals who would have fought and died for that abstract idea "King and Country"; to whom cricket, hunting, racing, the condition of grouse and the chances of a good dinner weighed more than the enormous pressing weight that was even now around them. Of the conditions that made the isolated comfort of the Stag Club possible, they knew nothing. One wonders what would be their state of mind if they were suddenly confronted with only one of the truths of the great city they lived in, if for one instant they might see a thousand hungry children looking up at the Club windows as they ate *Pêche Melba* and ordered old brandy and big cigars. A thousand white, miserable faces, some plain, some subtly beautiful, some imbecile and others stamped with vice; small children holding out pitiful hands for mere bread. Would they ever have realized that of such is the Kingdom of Heaven?

They toyed with the little flirtation as connoisseurs bend eagerly over the watermark of a stamp.

They put forth ideas that might make further acquaintance amusing, and in one was the true Gift of the Spirit moving darkly, and in the other a courage that could face death calmly and in that very moment regretting that he had not shaved.

They did not know that they were both idealists; they did not know that realism is only the sight of the eyes, while idealism is the eyes of the heart. The ordinary facts of life did not really impress them; they did not stop to consider why they were here: they went on, like children, by the promptings of singularly clean but rather intemperate natures. A portrait of Timothy Swift would give you a sharp, slightly Roman, face, hair nearly red, a clean red skin, hands very much covered with fine, fair hair, a slim body, not over tall, and eyes of transcendental blue, the blue of forget-me-nots. And there was also the peculiar spring of his walk, coming, no doubt, from much training, for he had been within an ace of beating the world's record over hurdles.

George Weatherby was of such an opposite figure that the dissemblance was almost startling. A big-framed man, with dark brown hair, a crisp moustache, olive complexion and full red mouth, an unmistakable soldier's face, a little authoritative and not very clever. But he had a curious imagination and a certain languid wit, gained, perhaps, from his mother, who was half Italian.

Their field of vision was so far limited by their education; they had both been put as raw material into the sausage-machine of a Public School, and

had been turned out along with the rest of the string in a neat uniform skin, one as like as another in every detail. They had been to a university; had been stamped with indelible ink, "Gentleman. Extra Special. Complete Product." But their souls, the vivid flashing fire within that made all of them individuals, that soul peering between the bars of the flesh, put out delicate fingers, and asked now and again for comfort.

The episode might have died a butterfly death had not Almirac lounged up to their table and announced that he had asked Mrs. Newberry and her daughter to lunch in the following week. The tiny thread that was to bind their lives together began to twist its first slender coil round them. Like many momentous occasions, this appeared to have only a trivial importance.

"Mrs. Nuberry and Philippina are lunchin' with me at the Savoy next Wednesday. I said I was luggin' you chaps along."

"Look at the Finger of Fate with its hair brushed," said Weatherby.

"You never said you knew them as well as that," said Timothy.

"Wasn't thinkin'," said Almirac. "Forgot I owed them food. You bumped into me and set me thinkin', don't you know, and I suddenly got a brain wave. Nuberry, I thought, by George, I thought, I ought to feed them. So I got the porter to ring them up, and she said, 'May I bring Philippina?' So I said 'Good idea!' Wednesday, don't forget. George, shove it

down for Wednesday, *Savoy*. I'm askin' Grace Ettrick; nice girl, Grace. You know Grace Ettrick, Swift? Red girl with jolly teeth. So long."

"Well, there you are," said Weatherby when Almirac had lounged away.

"Philippina," Timothy murmured. "She said Flip."

CHAPTER III

LONDON WITHOUT CLOTHES

TO show how a woman, merely because she is a woman, will occupy a man's mind, Timothy forgot all about the four o'clock train, and at precisely five minutes past four was sitting in nothing but a small towel in the smoking-room of a Turkish Bath. Round about him in various attitudes of great ease were men of every shape and size, gross, dreadful men striving to reduce their superfluous fat; lean, athletic men getting down to a certain weight; men who had lived over-well the night before; tired men seeking a few hours' rest and peace, and men obviously taking their first Turkish bath for the sake of experience.

As he had walked down St. James's Street the sun was making all kinds of pictures, and, by the same token, the clouds were helping him. First snow-white castles appeared towering over St. James's Palace, while the sun threw that beautiful building into deep shadow. Then the clouds grew gray and dark and the sun blazed on the Palace and threw the street into gloom; and then huge fantastic cloud-shapes piled themselves high over the street, dwarfing everything, for which picture the sun discreetly retired and left an even gray monotone of houses against the billowing masses of white. Very, very few people paused to

notice these pictures painted by the oldest Masters in the world.

Timothy turned down a side street filled with light, cabs, carts and hurrying pedestrians, and entered the Crescent Baths. The taking off of shoes, the putting away of all personal ornament, of money, in a box, the reduction from a name to a number, were all like a restful ceremony. The sudden change from the life and jostle of the pavements to this warm, quiet place, domed like a mosque, gave him a feeling of passing from *Vulgaria* to Rome.

There sat London's great preacher with a tousled mop of hair, a little, insignificant figure; there a prize-fighter sat like a gladiator; there a blotched face topped a god's body; and the splash of water and the murmurs of the massaged went on; and the fragrant scent of soap filled the air.

London rolled on over head, out of sight, out of hearing, whilst here sat sweating the preacher who moved her thousands, the comedian who ruled laughter as the wind rules the surface of the sea, the prize-fighter to whom thousands paid homage, the financier whose manipulations caused markets to open or close like the mouths of sea-anemones. And here Sir Timothy Swift sat with a cigarette between his lips wondering how much that he felt about Miss Newberry was serious and how much just part of that game of life he had played since woman first swam into his ken.

There had been Gladys and Daisy, Joan, Emily and Henriette—Henriette, that snake-like dark woman

like a crimson camellia growing in the hot shadow of a southern wall. When he had told his uncle Oliver about Henriette, Oliver had smoked silently for ten minutes, and had then said, "So you think you would like to marry this charming Frenchwoman?" And Timothy, who was then twenty-three and on fire, replied, "It's difficult to say, but I simply must." Then Oliver had nodded sagely several times, and had then requested that the wedding might be put off for a month so that he could attend. No one but Oliver knows what Oliver did, but there was no wedding, and the name "Henriette" is not mentioned in that house.

And now it was Philippina. And as Timothy thought of that, he remembered his uncle, and the four o'clock train, and he became suddenly scared, because, since he had forgotten his train thinking of her, this might be being in love, which is a serious and very frightening thing. However, there was nothing for it now but to catch a later train after submitting himself to the hands of the masseur.

At this moment two men passed through the curtains into the hot room, one a spare lad of about twenty and the other an enormous man with gray hair and a big, voluptuous face, square-jawed and hook-nosed like one of the Roman Emperors. The young man greeted Timothy joyfully. "You here, Swift?"

Timothy's mind sought for the boy's name. "Welkin! Yes, I've been getting a bit off."

"This is my uncle, Mr. Newberry."

The two semi-naked men, togaed and towelled,

greeted one another in the telegraphic fashion of the day. "How de do." "How de do."

The three sat down and amiably perspired together. And this was the man who beat his wife when he came home drunk! It seemed impossible. Philippina's father!

There are some men who have been ruined by their own charm. People, women especially, fall easy victims to an inborn irresistible manner. They start very often by a hatred of being disliked and bring all their charm to bear upon strangers to whom they have just been introduced. They marry at the highest moment of their susceptibility and never trouble to charm their wives afterwards. They make love to their daughters when they are only just out of the cradle and forget them when they are growing up. The world in general never finds them out, the world in particular loathes them with a deadly loathing as it loathes snakes. Newberry was one of these men. His massive handsomeness was impressive, his voice was very clear and musical; he had the finest polish in manners and the culture of a much-travelled Englishman. He had broken many women's hearts, destroyed homes, ruined men, but he had never beaten a dog, said a cross word to a child, and would have half-killed a man who ill-treated a horse. He charmed Timothy. He forgot the seven o'clock train.

As Newberry talked so visions of the Desert grew before Timothy's eyes, so tigers crouched in jungles, so celebrated French actresses smirked in their dressing-

rooms; a wizard in anecdote, Newberry carried both men with him to odd cafés in Constantinople, to camping-grounds in Labrador, to bull-fights in Spain.

Figures stalked past them in the gloom of the Baths. In the circular room where men lay like fish on marble slabs and were pounded and punched and soaped like babies; in the long Divan where oddly fresh-looking men smoked and drank coffee, Newberry's charm seemed to pervade the place. The three dined together, but it was not until the middle of dinner that Timothy ventured to say, "I believe I'm to meet your wife and daughter at lunch next Wednesday."

"Be careful of Flip, she bites!" said Newberry laughingly. "Flip's always out for a scalp."

And Timothy nearly said, "She can have mine."

So the little odd idyll went on and moved from the dawn-lit street into the glare of restaurant lights, and so the moonbeam adventure drew unto itself more and more actors—Weatherby, Almirac, Newberry—until the cast of the play grew longer and more important. And part of the freshness went out of it.

And when the mail train whirled Timothy away into the darkness there were already three scenes to the play—A soft rosy-fingered dawn: The Stag Club: A Turkish Bath. And the fourth was to be "The Manor House, Fenthorpe. Breakfast."

CHAPTER IV

THE SMOKING SPHINX

THE atmosphere of the Manor House at Fenthorpe was a rebuke to the present day. The House as good as folded its hands across its porch, and its windows looked sagely on the world, as if to say, "Don't fidget, my children, don't fidget." It had the air of some huge pot of old pot-pourri, fragrant with the dust of two centuries of manners; and in the garden old-fashioned flowers grew calmly ignoring the surprising feats of modern horticulturists. Old blush roses, the York and Lancaster Rose, moss roses eloquent of sentimental ages; arbors of Clematis and Honeysuckle intertwined; a bowling-green bordered on its raised banks by beds cut into half-moons and circles. Here Red Hot Pokers and Periwinkles grew, and Evening Primrose and Night Stock, with Clove Carnations and that old-fashioned kind called Painted Ladies. And there was an Herb Garden for Thyme and Lavender, Sweet Marjoram, Rosemary and Chives.

Two sea-gulls with clipt wings walked on the upper lawn, and an old, rather dilapidated pointer lay sleeping on the grass.

At precisely seven o'clock Oliver Swift hobbled down the stone garden steps and lowered his bulky frame into an iron spring-chair. It was the signal for a curious orchestra to commence. Spot, the

pointer, thumped with his tail upon the grass, the sea-gulls uttered their weird cry like the cry of children in distress, ten or fifteen very fat pigeons alighted on the ground by the chair, on the old man's hat, on his shoulders, and one, more daring, on his knee; wag-tails, with their excited running walk, hurried across the grass.

Oliver Swift first filled and lit his early morning pipe, the fourth, as a matter of fact, since half-past three, for he slept very badly, and was most of the day and night in pain from both gout and dropsy. The birds, who knew his every movement, waited. Then, putting his left hand into a deep pocket, he produced handfuls of corn and crumbs and scattered them around his feet. The sight of his uncle surrounded by birds was always in Timothy's mind. There was always a feeling with Timothy that his uncle had been there for ever and ever, and would be there for ever and ever in unbroken peace and quiet. Oliver Swift was the only man he had ever known who gave him the impression of real greatness, the only man who carried with dignity the mantle of the great Victorian days. His large head with its massive and imposing forehead was covered with long silky hair parted from back to front and brushed forward in sweeping curls. His face was framed in whiskers that grew from ear to ear under his chin; and his body was so exceedingly square that it almost appeared as if his legs were put on at the corners. One of the most pathetic things about him had happened several years before when Timothy was stopping at the House. It

was the year in which Oliver Swift found himself unable to walk and unable to shoot for the first time in thirty-two years. Timothy was sitting in his study with him ready to drive down to the farms to walk the fields for partridges. Oliver Swift's servant brought in his shooting-boots, gun and cartridge-bag and stood waiting. With a smile of great gentleness Oliver Swift held up his swollen foot and measured it against the boots. He took up his gun and with an obvious effort brought it to his shoulder, opened it, looked down the barrels, closed it, and handed it back to his servant. "Henry," he said very quietly, "I shall never need those again." It was more than Timothy could bear, and as he walked quickly out of the room he heard his uncle say, "You may put them away with my fishing rods and all the yachting things in the oak cupboard in the hall, and lock the door. I'm an old man at last."

From that day to this Timothy had never heard him grumble or curse his fate, only that he would say now and again, and always with the shadow of a smile, the terms of his sentence, "I'm beyond it." It was a courage as rare as it was dignified. And it belonged to another age.

As nine clocks more or less struck eight simultaneously, Timothy entered the dining-room. A large black cat dozed on a chair by a window, an extraordinary contrivance for making coffee boiled noisily. Oliver Swift bowed to him: he seldom shook hands.

"Glad to see you, my boy."

For many years this had been Timothy's home.

When he was sixteen his father and mother had died in Borneo where they had been indulging in their passion for orchid hunting. Sir Rollo Swift had been made a Baronet partly for political reasons and partly for his many interesting discoveries in the botanical world, the results of which were now in the Swift Collection at South Kensington Museum. His mother, who had been an Irish beauty, Eileen O'Doolan, had travelled the world over with her husband, living in strange countries, in camps, in huts, in anything they could find, and between them they had spent a large fortune in collecting plants and flowers and in turning Holme, their seat in Norfolk, into an Horticultural Garden and Museum, which was left to the nation.

Timothy, whose memory of them was of a huge man with a great red beard perpetually looking through a microscope, and of a dark, lovely, small woman writing labels in a wonderfully neat hand, became possessed of several thousand a year derived from lands and stock principally in South America. He owned, but let, Saint Benets, a large country house, and retained only a shooting-box and his house in London, which had belonged to his mother.

He came frequently to his uncle for advice. The advice young men often seek and seldom get: Henriette, for example. This time he had come for advice of a more delicate kind. For the past two years he had felt that curious yearning all young men feel that something ought to happen to him. To use Lord Almirac's phrase, he was "driftin' about." And he was getting sick of "driftin'." In the natural course of

events marriage was the something that happened to most of his friends, and not a few of them were quite insane, so he thought, over little brats with purple faces and a perpetual slobber.

Coming directly to the point, as was his habit, he turned from the ham he was carving to his uncle.

"I say, don't you think I ought to do something?"

Oliver Swift, who smoked through all his meals, took a puff or two of his pipe and a mouthful of brawn before answering, partly because people like Timothy generally answer themselves.

"I mean," said Timothy, "I'm getting on. I've no profession and I've pots of money which I don't spend, and—well, I'm sick of being a slacker."

"The brown fat by the knuckle is the best part of that ham," said his uncle Oliver.

"Thanks. You know what I mean. Would you advise me to go big-game shooting—or—well, get married?"

Oliver Swift was stroking the whiskers under his chin when unexpectedly the absurd coffee-machine burst into the conversation with a piercing whistle and a cloud of steam.

Oliver Swift turned a tap, blew out the spirit-lamp, and with considerable patience drew a cup of coffee from several glass tubes and a copper receptacle.

"Big game," he said, pouring some hot milk into both cups.

"You really think so?"

"They are both big game. In one you hit something that dashes out of a jungle at you, and in the other you

get hit by somebody who dashes into your own private jungle. Sugar?"

"Please."

Oliver Swift lit a fresh pipe. Three pipes ready-filled were placed in every room every morning.

"Do you happen to know a man called Newberry, a brewer?" said Timothy.

His uncle appeared to gather inspiration from a ring of smoke. "He bought some port at Crewberry's sale in '78. If he hasn't drunk it, it has got thin and lost its flavor."

"I expect that's the man."

"Younger than he looks. He was born the year Merry Jonkins won the Gold Cup. What about him?"

"Nothing. I just happen to have met him."

"A daughter?"

Under cover of lighting his pipe Timothy murmured, "Quite a child, I believe."

"Big game," said his uncle, looking at the smoke-blackened ceiling.

"You really think I ought to do something," said Timothy.

"I will join you in the garden when I've finished the paper. You may give me a hand."

Timothy helped the old man out of his chair and handed him his stick. He knew it was best to wait for his answer.

When his uncle was moving towards the door he looked round at Timothy and touched one of his swollen feet lightly. "Once," he said, "I walked across the Andes. I'm beyond it now." Then he went out

of the door. But a glance of great affection passed between them.

There was nothing new and nothing tawdry to be found in that house, everything looked as if it had always been there, even the many old and better forgotten Masters whose gloomy landscapes, generally of storms approaching, stout female bathers, or doll-faced people in wigs, had an air of being better than they were. China, glass and silver were on every shelf and on most tables, and clocks of every sort abounded, clocks in front of which Oliver Swift used sometimes to stand as if to listen impartially to their arguments about time. There was an air of ghosts about the house, but of comfortable, bewigged, snuff-taking ghosts, ghosts who drank small beer for breakfast and were red with out-of-door sports.

No harsh voice of London sounded here, only country sounds that made the peace more peaceful; the scream of the saw-mills, the cackle of geese and the greedy conversation of guzzling ducks; whips cracking in the streets, and the occasional lowing of a cow.

“For ever and ever,” everything seemed to say, and even the butterflies seemed to belong to some collection.

Impossible to imagine Philippina in such a place. She would brim over, hug the un-hugable cat, tease the venerable dog, joke with the pompous pigeons, and have breakfast in her room.

Yet the house wanted a woman, so a woman would have said. A woman to clear up papers, and peer for dust behind pictures, and see that the dog didn't

bring bones into the study, and generally disturb that feeling of "for ever and ever."

Why did Philippina persist so in Timothy's brain? Was it because she was the last of a long line of flirtations? Was it because he wanted so badly to fall in love really and truly and start a life that should have some foundation, a reason for it? He himself could not answer these questions. And he very much wondered if his uncle could.

His uncle seemed perfectly content as a bachelor, and Timothy wondered if there had ever been a woman in his life. He wondered if he dared to ask him.

It was twelve o'clock before they met in the garden. His uncle's man called him from the depths of a book by Surtees that he was reading, and announced that "Mr. Oliver" was in the garden.

A table stood between two chairs, and a decanter of Madeira stood on the table, with biscuits and two glasses.

"I am going to risk a glass of Madeira," said Oliver Swift, pouring out two glasses of wine.

"Your better health," said Timothy.

Oliver Swift looked long and lovingly at his wine, smelt it and tasted it. "I shall never be better," he said. "This wine is older than I, and it is still improving. When I am dead, it will be quite drinkable. Try this tobacco."

"I prefer my own, thank you."

"Exactly, and your own advice really. Taking advice is a blessing men learn too late. Now, supposing you marry this Miss Newberry—"

"My dear uncle!"

"I take it, she is not repellent to you."

"But I never said—"

"If speech were only with the lips, there would be few clever women," said Oliver.

"I've only met her once."

"Once is often more than enough."

"I don't think you understand me," said Timothy.

"Do you understand yourself?" said his uncle, gazing into a cloud of smoke.

"I came for some advice."

"You shall have it," said Oliver. "Do exactly as you mean to do."

"She is very pretty."

"Newberry was a handsome man."

"I met her in an odd way," said Timothy.

There was a long pause, filled by the demand of the sea-gulls for biscuit.

"Don't marry because you have nothing better to do," said Oliver.

"Look here," said Timothy, leaning forward eagerly, "you know the sort of chap I am. I've done the Winchester, Oxford business, I've had a bit of a fling—"

"Seven hundred and fifty odd pounds."

"About that; well, what am I now? I go to the Club, I go to all the things one does go to, I dress decently, I dance devilish well, if you know what I mean, and I—well, I do all the whole boiling—but I don't get anywhere."

"Does this young lady propose to 'get anywhere,' as you call it?"

"I scarcely know her. It isn't her, it's the purposelessness of it all. Now, you are here, comfortably settled with dogs and clocks and the whole thing arranged pat."

"Yes," said his uncle, with a weary old smile, "the whole thing arranged pat."

Then he added, with a twinkle of his eyes, blue like Timothy's, "Only one thing upsets me, and I'm setting that right this morning."

"Are you bothered?" Timothy asked. But before the reply came, James announced,

"Mr. Delpher to see you, sir."

Oliver winked solemnly at his nephew, and said, "Show him out here, James, and bring another glass."

A man appeared, a smooth, comfortable man in a tightly-buttoned black frock-coat, a hat in his hand with a deep mourning band round it, a wisp of black tie, and a wisp of black hair brushed across a bald head beaded with perspiration.

"Good morning, Mr. Swift. I hope I see you well, sir, and the gentleman."

Oliver Swift pointed to a third chair with his pipe.

"A glass of Madeira will do you no harm, Mr. Delpher."

"It's very condescending of you, sir."

"Mr. Delpher," said Oliver, addressing his nephew, "combines the arts of picture-dealer and undertaker. Mr. Delpher" (who here made a little humble bow) "is our great stand-by. After burying our friends very neatly he buys their pictures. One good turn deserves another."

“Proud, sir,” said Mr. Delpher. “I have a little Italian thing that comes from the late-lamented Mr. Charles Pinhorn’s collection, a little brace of Cupids, amorini, I think is the word, wonderfully pretty, sir, and very reasonable.”

“He’s got his eye on my pictures,” said Oliver, smiling. Mr. Delpher made a little protesting gesture. “Or he’s a bad business man. Now, Mr. Delpher, I shall take a deal of wood, you know that. Timothy, we believe that he has us all secretly measured and lays in a stock of wood in readiness. Judges us by our backs in church, eh, Delpher?”

“Your uncle will have his joke,” said Mr. Delpher, emptying his glass.

“Fill Mr. Delpher’s glass,” said Oliver. And here Mr. Delpher made another little protesting gesture and passed his glass swiftly.

“Are you going to buy a picture, uncle?” said Timothy.

“No, my boy, I’m going to get a solemn promise in writing from Mr. Delpher. Now, sir, if I see you out, and you are a liverish man, you know, I want a letter from you to be left for your son.”

“A letter, sir?” said Mr. Delpher, smiling over his wine.

“I’m very proud of the polish on my oak stairs and when they carry me down I will not have”—and he banged his sticks on the ground—“I will not have your men, or your son’s men, wearing great, clumsy, hobnailed boots, d’you see? and for every scratch on

the banisters or the stairs I shall take a shilling off your bill in my will."

From the undertaker's inner pocket a black pocket-book appeared. "Rest assured, sir," he said quite calmly, "it shall be attended to." Then to Timothy, "One for his joke, sir, always was. Why, Mr. Swift, sir, you are good for twenty years."

"Pray God I am not," said Oliver solemnly.

Out there in the fair, ordered garden, with swallows flying merrily by, the ages-old fragrance of flowers, and the ordered energy of Spring, Death and the trappings of Death seemed part of some subtle Comedy, as if a jester donned cap and bells of black and rattled a skull in place of a painted bladder.

Timothy knew his uncle as a punctual being, always the same, always imperturbable, kindly, wise, crippled. From breakfast until midnight—when he would say "You may light the bedroom candlesticks"—he was the same urbane gentleman. He did not know the man of long sleepless hours of pain: the man who sat in his chair by the bedroom window gray with agony, silent with age and lack of sleep, watching the dawn break of another day.

For five days no further word was spoken of Timothy's own particular subject. They were quiet days, given over to giving apples to the fat gray mare, walking down the long Fen roads, eating the good old-fashioned meals, and drinking excellent wine. Days given over to the creak of windmills, the luxurious sound of the mowing machine, the caw of rooks, the hum of bees. Five days shut away from modernity, without a tele-

phone message, without electric light, or motor-cars, or any sign that the world had progressed in several centuries. And on the sixth day Timothy announced his departure. He could bear it no longer, he felt, not that he had grown old, but that he had stopped growing at all. Here, he felt, one could never live nor die: here one went on for ever and for ever. It was the garden of a Rip Van Winkle: a legend of Sleepy Hollow.

That night when they were discussing the merits of the claret after dinner and before dessert, his uncle spoke.

"I know what you are feeling," he said. "Tell me your feelings for this Miss Newberry."

To tell the story of their meeting was like asking a butterfly to grow old, like introducing a fairy to a horsehair sofa, like presenting a feather with a swimming bath, or asking a rocket to take notes of the stars on the way up; but he did it. He even embroidered it a little to make it sound more probable.

"When I was young," said his uncle musingly, "we used to wrench the door knockers off the doors of St. James's Square, and collect policemen's top-hats, and go to Evans' and the Cider Cellar. Yes, it's a dainty enough story. It's as good an excuse for paying your addresses as any other. Our women were not like that; they had no sense of humor, or if they had, they hid it. Men liked what they called 'simple women.' Have you ever met a simple woman, my boy? She would be a great rarity. I think some of the women

of my day had a great sense of humor, or they would never have married the men they did."

"Were you ever in love?" said Timothy boldly.

Oliver Swift lit a fresh pipe and blew a cloud of smoke thoughtfully from his mouth.

"I was in love with your mother."

"For ever and ever," said the peace of the room. Wind whispered in the trees outside. The glasses sparkled in the candlelight, the fruit glowed, the mahogany gleamed, the old crippled bachelor lifted his glass and drank slowly. It was something beyond Timothy; it was too big.

Against his dilettante story this was the purple and gold of Romance; against the black and white of his precious idyll this was a full-blooded picture. "A picture by Willette," George Weatherby had said. This was a Giorgione.

Oliver Swift broke the dangerous silence. "I am too old to make new friends, too lame to take new journeys, too hard and fast to accept new ideas, so I sit here, my boy, and wait, and it seems a long and weary time. I cannot even live in your youth. You bring much of your mother back to me. She was impetuous, quick, beautiful. Neither she nor I knew until afterwards. That was why I never saw her alone after she was married. That was why she followed your father to the ends of the earth. That was why she asked me in the last letter she ever wrote to be a sort of guardian to you.

"I never knew," said Timothy.

"I have often wondered," said the old man, "if

she thought of this garden when she was dying. She lived three months after your father died: three months of torturing fever, carried from the jungle by men in a litter for six days, until she reached the coast, and they carried your father's body behind her. It was in this garden that we first knew. It was by accident that our hands touched—that was all; neither of us spoke, but a fire was lit then that has never gone out. So I am waiting."

"And my father?" said Timothy.

"Almost the saddest part of all the pitiful business. It was not until after the honeymoon that he found out that he had never really loved her. He cared for her, he was gentle and kind and thoughtful, but she was a woman who longed to be adored. That is why your father plunged into botany and orchid collecting and travel. You see why I am telling you this."

"I understand."

"Perhaps there is more in you than you know yourself. There was in me, there was in your mother. Some flowers and some people bloom late. Women are fussy, odd, irritating creatures with no power of reason, with small meannesses and little ideas, but Woman is God's greatest creation. She rules the world. We are her toys, her children, her lovers. She has a power of sacrifice no man can ever gauge. No dog understands cats. Dogs are like men. Cats have a contempt for dogs. I mix my meanings possibly, but I'm an old man. To all intents and purposes I am a dead man. While you are not yet alive. I wonder if you understand me."

"I think I do. But the world is slipping away; in five years I shall be thirty. I must do things."

"Things, my boy, as you call it, will do themselves. Patience is the virtue of genius and age. In two weeks I shall be sixty-five, not old as years go, but pain makes one old. Many men of my years are active and strong. I've had my day; I must wait."

"I shall never forget this talk," said Timothy.

"You will forget it," said his uncle, smiling, "as soon as the moment comes when youth calls youth. You forget I too have been in Lover's Lane. I too have worn tight boots and smoothed my hair and written verse and waited in the rain. I've prayed for a cloud across the moon and heard my heart beat against my ribs. The first girl I ever kissed was my father's dairy-maid, and she boxed my ears, and sent me a penny cigar next day. I was very sick."

"One would never guess all this," said Timothy, smiling.

"I am not a romantic figure," said his uncle, pulling his whiskers gently. "Finish the claret."

"I shall go back to town to-morrow," said Timothy, "and see if I can't find something to do. The doctor tells me I mustn't run again; I don't know why: heart strain or some rot. But there are heaps of things to do. You never suggested the Army or anything when I was a kid."

Oliver Swift merely answered with a puff of smoke.

That night Oliver sat up in a great padded chair by the window, his feet swathed in cotton-wool on a gout stool. He had not been to bed for two years,

as lying down was bad for his heart. And he put on his spectacles and read a letter the paper of which was already turning yellow. It was a long letter written in a neat Italian hand. He turned over the well-remembered sheets, drawing in his breath between his clenched teeth every now and again, for the pain was on him. He came to a passage and stopped.

“Don’t force him, he’s not the kind of boy to be forced. He’s a little like me, don’t you think, and must go his own way, even if he has to pay for it afterwards. One day he’ll run up against something that will hurt him and that will make a man of him. The Dutch doctor here gave me a frank answer. ‘If you are lucky you will die in a week.’ So it’s good-bye. I believe in the hereafter. Tim is inclined to be delicate; I think his chest is weak. Perhaps that’s only fussy. God bless you.”

In the gray of dawn Oliver Swift was still by the window with the letter beside him. Half a dozen smoked pipes lay by his side on the window ledge. He looked eighty, but as the sun broke through the clouds and the birds began to chatter in the trees, he pulled himself back from Death, as he did every morning by the action of a great will. And lighting another pipe he sat back, waiting for the day to begin.

CHAPTER V

ROMAN REMAINS

“MISS NUBERRY,” said Lord Almirac, “you don’t know Sir Timothy Swift. You’ll grub next to each other.”

They shook hands.

“I think we have met somewhere,” said Philippina wickedly.

“In another world, perhaps,” said Timothy.

They could hear Almirac’s bored voice talking to some other guests. “Oh, yes. Mrs. Nuberry, you know Weatherby. George Weatherby. Of course you do. Romeo Weatherby, they call him in the Guards. Looks an awful ass in a busby. I’ve seen him. Oh, Grace, you know everybody. I say, let’s eat. Anybody peckish—what?”

“You said ‘Flip,’” said Timothy in an undertone. But Mrs. Newberry heard him.

“Everybody calls her Flip. It was her own name for herself when she was a baby.”

“Am I everybody?” said Timothy.

“Well, you are not anybody in particular,” said Philippina.

“Then—”

“Of course Flip to you, if you like.”

“Getting on, ain’t they, Mrs. Nuberry? Awful swift, these young people. Grace, you’ve spilt.”

"I always spill on a new dress, it brings me luck," said Grace Ettrick. "If you find anybody run over in the street with a spill on their bosom, it's me."

"Just as careless to get run over as to spill," said Lord Almirac.

"What a lot of babies they are, aren't they?" said Mrs. Newberry to Weatherby. "I feel quite an old woman."

"Then a woman can't look as old as she feels," said Timothy.

"Bless you," said she, "this isn't Nature, it's Art. My natural complexion would take your appetite away; it has taken mine away for years."

All the time Timothy kept watching Philippina's mother. He kept saying to himself, "This is a hard woman." Then, after another look, "No. This is a woman painted to look hard." Then, "They say he beats her when he comes home drunk."

Mrs. Newberry gave an impression of being very expensively dressed, and at the same time a suggestion that her diamond rings might not be real. She was a big, showy woman, with a fine figure spoilt by being over-corseted, and robbed of poise as her feet were pinched into small very high-heeled shoes. There were several women in the restaurant very like her, women with hard laughs, hard eyes, hard mouths. They gave one the impression of being not so much unmoral or vulgar, but of being mechanical. Grace Ettrick, with her obvious red hair, white face, and insistent mouth, was of a different order. She was one of those women who appear all body. One felt that

she was lightly wrapped in a few yards of silk which was more for decency than for dressing. Hers was a conventional daring, strongly contrasted colors, vivid mouth, speech full of the latest fads in the artistic world. She was to be seen at all the advanced plays and picture shows, and read pessimistic foreign authors with avidity but with little real understanding. She was the kind of woman who insisted on calling a spade a spade when nobody wanted to talk about spades, least of all to know what she called them. Rumor had it that she intended to marry Lord Almirac.

"So we meet again, Mr. Pierrot," said Philippina, under cover of a chatter about Steinberg.

"And I really do call you Flip?"

"Philippina is silly, don't you think so? And we know each other rather well, don't we?"

She seemed so fresh, so dainty against the other women and the sentimental side of Timothy's nature was warmed by the frankness of her looks, the complete confidence with which she claimed him as her property.

Mrs. Newberry spoke to him. "I hear you met my husband at the Crescent Baths the other day," she said. "I think it's so funny the way men discuss life in towels."

"Women do in dressing-gowns," said Weatherby.

"Early Victorian," said Grace Ettrick. "Absolutely gone out. That was only a sentimental picture invented by men who never bored themselves to talk to women. 'After the Ball,' you know the sort of picture, they tell me it's still painted every year for the Academy. Two girls with their hair down sitting before a fire, with

a terrier gazing at a faded buttonhole. Thank God, we've killed that—I mean the people who think. Do you know the mad boy's work, Felakin? It's delicious: all blots, but full of soul."

"I say, don't talk paintin'," said Almirac. "What's the use of paintin', that's what I ask myself. What's the use of it?"

"How practical!" said Grace Ettrick.

"And by the way, talkin' of rum things," said Almirac, "I've got an arena in my garden. Old Roman affair, dashed old fashioned, they tell me."

"An arena! How exciting!" said Philippina. "Do let's look."

"Come on Sunday," said Almirac. "I say everybody come on Sunday. I'll have a brace of cars to take you down. Rather amusin'. Bones and all that sort of thing, don't you know. Funny fellers, the Romans, so they tell me."

It appeared that everybody could come except Mrs. Newberry. Philippina drew down the corners of her mouth.

"I'll chaperone," said Grace Ettrick.

"We shall have to get somebody for George," said Almirac. "What about Dolly Sterne?"

"Do I know her?" asked Weatherby.

"A heart-breaker, dear boy, an absolute top-hole heart-breaker. She'll make your heart palp. Dark, mysterious, young, rich. She's refused me six times, clever girl.

"I don't know what people are coming to," said Mrs. Newberry. "However, it's your age, not mine."

“I am old twenty-four,” said Almirac. “And a bit tarnished at that. We’ll have lunch at the house and then go out and watch the worthy professors diggin’. Is it a go?”

It was, apparently, quite a go.

Timothy and Philippina had very little conversation together, but Philippina could talk with a fork and flirt with a piece of toast, and in some way Timothy felt like a schoolboy being played with by an experienced woman. Whether it was love or no, it was, at least, a very agreeable sensation.

Grace Ettrick broke up the party by saying she had to go to the Coliseum. “They are playing an act from ‘Charley’s Aunt’ or something like that entirely in gray curtains. I must see it. Scenery is so old-fashioned, isn’t it? And there’s a perfectly infectious duck that dives. So sorry. Many thanks. Yes, a cab, please. Sunday, Pinch.”

Pinch being Lord Almirac, who had been Lord Pinchbeck during the lifetime of the late Earl of Almirac.

In the great dining-room of Dewdham House Lord Almirac was at his best. Underneath the lazy, indifferent boy there was the fine gold of his breeding, but, like Timothy, he had no aim in life “bar,” as he called it, “bar driftin’ about.” His mother, who was an American, spent most of her time in a villa belonging to her in the South of France, his sister was an Anglican nun, and his younger brother was still at Eton. Almirac’s life was divided between racing and the theater, that is to say he enjoyed the excitement of betting and had nothing to do in the evenings. Some one once asked

what was Almirac's walk in life, and had been told, "From the Stag Club to a taxi-cab."

After lunch the party divided into couples and strolled off across the garden towards the bottom of the park where the excavations were in progress. Weatherby with Mrs. Sterne, a young woman whose husband called himself an explorer. "I saw him shoot a tiger in India," she explained frankly at lunch, "and married him on the spur of the moment. I never see him now except when he comes back from the North Pole or somewhere and wants dinner. He sends me notes pinned on to tusks and things, you know—'Best love, my twenty-second rhino, longing to be with you, Dennis.' "

"What a convenient husband," said Grace Ettrick.

"I think spurs of the moment are rather out of date," said Mrs. Sterne.

Lord Almirac led the way with Grace Ettrick. "I shall have to introduce you to old Fisher, keen feller, quite a bright boy of seventy. Revels in diggin', so they tell me. Does anybody know anythin' about Rome? Not the Pope business. I mean the Romulus and Remus end of it."

"It was not built in a day," said Philippina.

"Top hole. You tell the Professor that, he'll love you."

Timothy and Philippina walked last. The air, the beautiful garden, the nearness of the charming girl intoxicated him. He was of that emotional temperament that responds at once to beautiful surroundings. He liked to touch beautiful things, to be close to beauti-

ful people. It was a kind of very simple sensuousness. And Philippina knew this perfectly well. She knew she was alluring in a white dress. She knew her eyes were effective. She wanted to play, and she hated being in earnest. She hoped nobody would ever make her feel violently. She once went to Mass in a Catholic church and was so moved by the incense and the music and the strange solemnity that she never went again. It frightened her.

She was too superstitious not to repeat certain prayers at her bedside night and morning, but they were mere repetitions, so many words. If her thoughts strayed as she was saying them, she had to go back to the beginning. Yet there were fine things in her: courage, resource, an easy, affectionate heart, a selfish form of kindness, and a trace of something utterly pathetic as of one who crossing the bridge of Life puts out a timid hand in the absolute certainty that a stronger hand will hold it and comfort her. It was this quality that attracted men. They wanted to take care of her.

Ever since she was fifteen she had attracted men and she had enjoyed her power. She had, by now, passed the adoring age. She had adored a priest who made her go to the Mass that frightened her. She had adored an old judge, a chauffeur, and had one serious flirtation with a middle-aged voluptuary, a flirtation that suddenly opened her eyes wide in horror and from whose scorching memory she was now slowly recovering.

In consequence this odd, emotional, rather fantastic

Timothy Swift appealed to her—nineteen and a critic! Nineteen, with an attitude towards life!

Although she knew that she could easily make Timothy in love with her, she had, at that time, a kind of pique that Almirac treated her as a child, a thing that makes all children sensitive. She had tried to get a response out of him, but had nothing but a calm rebuke from his off-hand manner. So indignant was she that she hated Grace Etrick with a bitter hatred and at the same time thought seriously of copying her *négligé* moral attitude, and what we might call her *déshabillé* of mind.

The thoughts of youth are not always long, long thoughts, but are very often swift, cruel and bitter.

So she decided between the house and the Dutch garden to make up to Almirac by flirting violently with Timothy.

“Let’s look at the tulips,” she said. “And let’s not be so awfully serious.”

“Am I serious?” he asked.

“Deadly.”

“I was thinking,” he answered.

“You are awfully young,” said Philippina.

“Twenty-five.”

“I’m nineteen and very careless about it. I mean, I’m sometimes two and sometimes ninety.”

“I know,” said Timothy.

Then she made use of a never-failing remark. “I don’t think I’ve ever met anybody quite like you.”

He flushed with pleasure. “I’m sure I’ve never met anybody quite like you,” he answered.

“Isn’t it funny—Life, I mean?” said Philippina. “We meet in that odd way, and here we are talking like old friends.”

They stood in the beautiful Dutch garden with its clipped yews and stone seats and brick paths. The regiments of tulips, yellow and red and blue and purple and almost black, shone in the Spring sun. Butterflies hovered round them, pigeons cooed in the trees.

“It is so difficult to get to know people,” said Timothy. “I mean their insides.”

She took his hand and held it against her heart. He could feel it beat through her dress.

“That’s me,” she said laughing. “Just a bump, bump, bump. I’ve no brains. Just a butterfly.”

The touch of her hand sent the blood whirling in his veins. He was in love, or thought he was.

“One meets people like this,” he said, “or at lunch or at dinner, and one never really knows them.”

“Some people know each other at once,” she said mischievously.

The idyll was coming back. It was not early morning now with the hushed voice of London for accompaniment, but a garden lit by tulip flames and fanned by butterflies.

“It’s so jolly being able to call you Flip,” he said. “I wonder if you’d call me Tim, heaps of people do.”

She was perfectly calm and composed when he took her hand. If she thought for one moment that he was a nice boy and that it would be a pity to play with him, that thought was put away and killed without a pang. No thrill ran through her young body, only the com-

fortable sensation that being made love to on a sunny day in a beautiful garden was a delight in itself. So she said "Tim," and gave his hand a gentle squeeze.

And for the life of him he couldn't go on. The scene, if scene it could be called, was over.

"You know," he said, awkwardly releasing her hand, "I'm trying to find something to do. I'm tired of doing nothing and I've heaps of money. I don't know whether to travel or what to do. What would you advise, Flip?"

And as she didn't very much mind what he did, she said, "You see, I'm only a girl and I don't know very much about these things. Shall we go on to the digging?"

Such a look of relief came into his eyes that Philippina nearly laughed. She knew as well as he did that this had been a miserable pretence at love-making, one of those little gentle emotional episodes in which healthy young people always indulge. But she did not know that Timothy was striving to release something inside him that longed to get out to freedom, as if he had a bird caged in his heart whose throat was full of unsung songs.

As they moved away he said hurriedly, "I say, Flip, couldn't we meet to-morrow—Kensington Gardens by the Orangery? One can't talk here, and I've heaps to tell you. In the morning, it's jolly in the mornings. I'm a dull chap and no good at talking, but—"

"Oh, Tim, Tim," she said, shaking her head at him, "you're an expert flirt, but I'll come."

But it wasn't right. As they walked towards a

circular mound of grass where workmen were busy, he knew it wasn't at all what should have happened. "Have I no heart and no feelings?" he asked himself. "That wasn't the game somehow. She's everything a man could want, she's frightfully pretty, very sweet, and all that, but when I took her hand I wished I hadn't."

Behold then the bearded Professor explaining things long dead to three couples of young, intensely alive people. Behold six people about to make history, gazing on the remains of those who had made it years before. They stood in the arena whose floor of hard chalk had been exposed and looked with scarcely credulous eyes at the little patches of sea-sand that had been put down centuries before to keep the gladiators from slipping. They fingered the broken brooches of Roman ladies, saw where the beasts' den had been, where wooden posts had kept the people back, saw where, centuries before that even, men had sunk shafts to reach a bed of flint below the chalk, digging them painfully with the antlers of red deer, and then had fashioned arrow-heads and axes for their warfare and the chase.

Each one took the wonder in his own way. It came to Weatherby as a clash of arms; he could almost see the men waiting the rush of the infuriated bear, almost smell the hot, acrid smell of the excited crowd sitting on the chalk terraces round the arena.

Grace Ettrick held that it was "Charmingly pagan. Such dears, the Romans!"

Mrs. Sterne said she never seemed to be able to get away from antlers and bears.

Almirac said it was a dashed rum thing to have in your own place. "I mean to say, fancy walkin' about here for years over this and never knowin' these cunnin' old beggars had a place here. Some nasty sights, they tell me."

"We suggest that prisoners of war were done to death here," said the Professor.

"How horrible, and how exciting," said Philippina.

Timothy said nothing. It was in his mind that these Romans had done something, that the Professor in understanding what they had done, had done something. As he looked at Philippina as she walked daintily behind the Professor, he longed to be able to feel "this is my woman," to be able to cry aloud to everybody, "Don't look at these dead Romans, look at me, I am in love!" but it was hopeless. And the more hopeless he felt it was, the more he became possessed of a grim determination to achieve this love, this purpose in life, which was to build his world round the dainty elusive fairy in the white dress, to turn his charming idyll into a passion that should sweep small things aside.

The Professor, who had been asked to tea, encompassed the party with a flow of erudite knowledge, so much so that the Romans appeared to take possession of the place, so much so that these grim warriors seemed to be standing listening to the tinkle of the cups, and to be watching solemnly the passing of hot cakes. George Weatherby became enthusiastic. He offered his help in the digging whenever he could be free. Grace Etrick and Dolly Sterne discussed a new idea

for a toga opera cloak. "I should like to have had one of those kind of men in love with me," said Philippina. And as the Professor rose from the table, his eyes kindled by his excitement, his beard a mass of crumbs, and his great height domineering over them, it seemed for a moment as if Rome had conquered Britain again, and that her cohorts were marching victorious over the Almirac property.

It left them dazed and silent after he had gone. Just for one instant the fervor of a genuine enthusiast glowed over them like the rays of the setting sun. Weatherby with his Pseudo-Romanticism, Grace Etrick with her sham artistry, the others to whom life, though young, was often very boring, were bewildered by this sudden clash with the memories of those great grand dead.

"Well, all I can say is," said Almirac at last, "that it means a big whisky and soda for me. If anybody says whisky and soda, let 'em help themselves. Hope old Fisher hasn't bored you."

"He's a darling!" said Mrs. Sterne.

And with that cheap catchword for epitaph, they buried the Professor with his Romans, and stuffed themselves with chocolates.

When Philippina arrived home she found scribbled on a piece of paper in her bag, "Twelve o'clock, the Orangery."

CHAPTER VI

I. KINDERGARTEN

GREEN and white and gold. Trees, nurses, children, flowers. A smell of puppies and hot earth, and clean washing and that scent of children which is a mixture of pear-drops and Heaven. And the voice of that old energy which makes London and refills her, and gives her children and flowers and young things as budding trees and little birds to nestle on her enormous bosom.

Shouts of laughter and snatches of song, and thrushes going mad with joy; and colored air balloons and dogs taking ladies for walks and meeting other dogs and not liking them, or liking them so much that they tie perfectly strange ladies together in dog-leads as they waltz round and round.

The London voice of an immense maternity of nurses gossiping, of young mothers and those about to be young mothers walking with young fathers who burst with pride and shyness.

On one side in a Palace, a quiet room full of Queen Victoria's dolls, with not so far away a great statue by Watts of Physical Energy, and between them a Round Pond where very small boys, with the names Hercules or Ajax, or any of the other people who defy things, round their caps, launching ships or tremendous argosies with tremendous gravity, to the surprise and admiration of the ducks.

With very young women explaining to other very young women the exact food that should be given to the Kings and Queens of Nurseries, having not long since been in nurseries themselves.

With here and there a ragged beggar picking up cigar stumps and cigarette ends as a dreadful example to the children; with nobody caring to remember that the beggar was once a child too, and laid in a mother's arms and was considered little else but another mouth to fill.

Here are girls trying to look as if they had not just put up their hair and lengthened their frocks, and girls whose pigtails are a source of delight to their young admirers and a kind of pump handle to their young brothers. And here are young gentlemen on their holidays with canes and straw hats and a grave air of being men of the world, trying to enjoy cigarettes and being completely bowled over by flashing eyes, and effecting lame introductions and having done so, absolutely failing in conversation, which begins in giggles and ends in silence.

And here are health enthusiasts without hats, and simple-life students in sandals and Art green dresses, showing that they have no figures and looking very mild beside the young mothers.

And all round about outside the Gardens are young and handsome policemen, especially put there by a kind Government to get engaged to blushing nursemaids, at whom they smile as they stop all the traffic to allow of perambulators crossing the road.

But the keepers of the Gardens and the gardeners

are all fathers, especially put there by the chief Ranger of Parks and Gardens to scowl at small boys who throw balls on flower-beds or have a lingering desire to fall into the ornamental waters.

And the whole beautiful thing has a song of its own, to which grim old London adds a deep boom in the bass, while the treble is all songs of birds and the splash of fountains and the hurried ecstasy of children's voices. And if one could only see them, there is such a push of Guardian Angels that the place is scented by flowers from the open doors of Paradise.

And if a pessimist walks through the Gardens by accident, he becomes illumined by a great and holy joy that nearly all these wonderful children will grow up ugly or ill-tempered or poor or oppressed.

It is the sound of the River of Life, Love-fed and flowing through flowers. It is the music by which the world lives. And its majesty is so exquisite and so heart-searching that it dissolves the bitterest hearts and heals many pains.

Outside a child's funeral is passing: a little box covered with white flowers; the child itself asleep in the arms of God, like a flower broken off at the stalk. But death is only a gateway, a shadow between two lights, and to a child it is a little wicket between two fields. And to the old and weary it is a place where the crooked are made straight.

II. MORCEAUX ÉLÉGANTS

Enter, through the posts by the Palace, a young man eager to taste life to the uttermost and yet fearful

that he had not learnt his part. If Messrs. Turnbull and Wallet are correct, this gray suit is the very finest in London. A flower rides proudly in a button-hole, as if to say, "See, I am carried in a gateway of the best silk." A black bowler hat crowns deep chestnut-colored hair. A walking-stick with a golden band flashes in the sun. The whole effect calculated to amaze any female. Add to this dazzling health, and you have a vision of Sir Timothy Swift arriving at the Orangery.

To him arrives, a quarter of an hour late, one of those blue dresses which, for its very simplicity, no man has the hardihood to describe. There is a hat in which one feather stands upright and alone, disdaining both company and Nature. There are shoes whiter than snow. And Miss Philippina Newberry advances a perfectly gloved hand, and says, "What a funny, funny place! What do we do now?"

This is rather disconcerting, because in the program we now fall violently in love, and obliterate the very earth and sigh louder than the traffic, and sit silent till the sinking sun splashes the stars up and the moon rides in her purple dome.

It is made more disconcerting by the tottering arrival of a small child who leans heavily on Sir Timothy's knee and perpetually claims him for her father until the arrival of a nurse, mildly protesting.

"You see, people never come here," said Timothy lamely.

"So I notice," says Philippina, looking at the crowd.

"I mean nobody one knows."

"Your daughter, for instance," says Philippina, laughing and pointing with a parasol at the departing baby.

"You don't give a chap a chance," he says, down-cast.

"Poor Tim!" says the impertinent young lady. "Are you in trouble?"

He plunges wildly into a totally different subject than that which he had intended. "You look very jolly in that dress."

She smooths her skirt meditatively. "It's not a bad color."

"Blue suits you," he says desperately.

"Mother thinks it does."

"I liked your mother awfully."

("Surely," he thinks, "this isn't in the least like it. Why don't I adore her?")

"What an odd man you are!" says Phillipina. "Yet I like you. I don't care much for men, not young men. I like a man who has done things. When are you going to do something?"

This is exactly right. It swings the conversation into the right lines.

"Would you care if I did something? I mean, do you think one ought to take up big game or politics, or—or—something? No one cares very much what I do. You see, I'm quite well off and I've got a couple of houses and all that, and I feel I'm getting stale."

“You used to run, didn’t you?”

(How heavenly of her to remember that. But of course she had looked him up very carefully.)

“The doctor has put the lid on that,” he says. “Over-trained once, or something. There are so few things a man can do. I might marry, of course.”

Now, though Philippina knew perfectly well that he was, as it were, looking her over, and that this was exactly the kind of thing he would say, she looks him full in the eyes in the most innocent way and says, “Why don’t you?”

When he was trying to think of an answer a man came up with a demand for a penny for the chairs, and having been given a shilling and told to keep the change, insists on joining in the conversation.

“Wonderful weather for the time of year.” That sort of conversation.

So Timothy and Philippina move away, and the question is never answered.

He expresses a desire to call on her mother.

“Tuesdays,” is the answer to that.

And all the time he is longing to be able to say, “I have dreamed of you ever since I first saw you. You are my life, my world, my salvation. Your eyes set me on fire, your lips are like a rose of flame, your hair holds the secrets of the night.” And all that sort of thing. Only he doesn’t know the words, and she won’t help him. And honestly, and he is very honest, he can’t feel like that.

The call of youth to youth has come to them certainly, but not that call which makes men into Gods

and women into Goddesses and Kensington Gardens into Olympus.

As a matter of fact, he is getting very hungry, having pretended to himself that he could eat no breakfast. And if the cook put it down to love, the butler put it down to internal indisposition, so there the matter ends.

“You want a friend to help you,” says Philippina, relenting a little.

“I want a woman to help me,” he says.

“Haven’t you any sisters?”

Now, having looked him up in Burke’s *Peerage* and all the other books, she knows perfectly well he has no sisters. And it wasn’t kind.

He answers in a sepulchral voice, “No, I have no sisters.”

She might have made the fatal error of saying, “I will be a sister to you,” but it happened at that moment that two young men of her acquaintance passed, and she hailed them and introduced them to Timothy, who frowned black frowns at them. And she put the tie of one straight and called him “Cuthbert.” And was more alluring to the other, so that when they went on their ways at last they walked on air. But poor Timothy bites his lips and says, “What a lot of people you know!”

And she answers, “I like knowing people, don’t you?”

And then, feeling the ground slipping from under his feet, he plunges wildly at an apologia.

“It sounds so jolly foolish to say these sort of

things in cold blood, but the fact is I'm a lonely man. Nobody cares if I live or die, or do things, or do nothing. I thought you might understand. You see, if a man is running in a race he has somewhere to start from, and a man with a pistol to see that he starts, and heaps of pals yelling, "Go in and win!" and there's the tape to be touched at the other end, and it all seems worth while. But when you're just like a pebble on the beach, and exactly the same as all others, it's—well, it seems impossible to get a start. I wonder if you do understand? Girls do help fellows to buck-up and get something done, don't they? You know they do. I'll be truthful with you, it'll be easier. Flip, I want to fall in love, and I can't."

She laughs so much she has to sit down on a seat. "Oh, my dear, my dear," she says, mopping laughter tears from her eyes. "Are you trying to fall in love with me?"

"I am," he says bluntly.

"Aren't I nice enough?"

"You are everything sweet and adorable, but you always laugh at me. I know I'm a silly ass, but you might help."

"Do you mean by falling in love with you?"

"I don't know what I mean."

Then she sits bolt upright and says quite genuinely, "Tim, do you believe in people falling in love on purpose—I mean, by thinking it out beforehand, in order to keep them straight? I'm not joking, I'm deadly serious. I do know what you mean,

only you put it so funnily. I'm frightened too of just drifting about and—and getting into an awful mess. There isn't much of the real ME I believe. I am vain and frivolous and extravagant, and I don't think I have what you call a soul. Yet I do know that sometimes when I have woken up in the night and can hear my heart beating, I get terrified like a child, and I wish I was better, or could want to be better. And I wish, like you, that I had a hand somewhere in the world that I knew would stretch out, even across the seas and earth, and take mine. Perhaps neither of us are made to be lovers. But we might try."

He sits down by her and looks at his boots. "Flip," he says, "there's something I wouldn't tell anybody but you. I have a feeling that there is something big, some kind of sacrifice, I shall have to do because it's waiting for me. Underneath I'm rather a serious kind of chap, and I often wonder if there isn't a heap of good to be done in the world. But I don't know how to start. It wouldn't be any good suddenly giving a sovereign to every cabman and that sort of thing. Both of us, I think, are like dry tinder, and we are waiting for somebody to put a match to us; then we shall become fires."

"That's what I'm frightened of," she whispered. "I've such awfully wicked thoughts."

And then she looks at her bracelet with a jump, and says, "It's one o'clock, I must run like a hare. Get me a cab, dear, I've got to lunch with Pinch at the *Ritz*."

"Pinch?"

"Lord Almirac."

"How long have you called him Pinch?"

"Don't be silly. Since Wednesday. He asked me to in the car coming home."

And Timothy compresses his lips into a hard line, and takes her solemnly to the cab, and tells the man to drive to the *Ritz* in a voice like a hired assassin.

"You aren't angry?" she asks.

"Not in the least," he says. "Good-bye." And the cab drives away.

Then he curses women, and remembers all of a sudden that he is supposed to be lunching with George Weatherby at the Tower. Cab Number Two.

III. RHAPSODIE HUMORISTIQUE

To a sensitive being the Tower of London is a breathing thing; its memory-haunted courts still ring with the last words of Queens and Martyrs.

Timothy sat in George Weatherby's quarters, waiting for lunch and looking across towards that fatal spot where Sir Thomas More, and Queen Anne Boleyn, Lady Jane Grey, Essex, the Virgin Queen's lover, and others had seen the last sun of their lives rise. The footsteps of doomed Dukes and saintly men seemed to ring on the stones; unknown tragedies of the underground dungeons vibrated in the air, while soldiers, unconscious of the marvels round them, walked upright across the space before the windows.

A bugle sounded, and almost directly afterwards

George Weatherby came into the room, hailed Timothy, excused himself for being late, and hung up his sword and sword-belt on a peg. Then, with great deliberation, he proceeded to make a Martini cocktail.

The great ghosts, had they peered in, could have seen sole, vol-au-vent, devilled chicken and cheese disappear; and the meager, ordinary conversation would have amazed them.

After taking a slice of cake and a glass of port, Timothy began on his real business.

“Look here, George,” he said, “you understand these things.”

“A woman?”

“One can’t hit off the—well, what the dickens do you call it?”

“Never the time and the place and the loved one altogether,” Weatherby quoted.

“Hit it on the head in one go.”

“Miss Newberry.”

“Second bull’s-eye.”

George Weatherby lit a cigar. “Very charming girl, very. Is it the real thing, Tim?”

“I’ve only met her, as you know, three times, and always under impossible circumstances. I mean, the first time was frankly grotesque, you’ll admit that. The second was at Almirac’s.”

“When you stayed behind in the Dutch garden.”

“How on earth did you know that?” said Timothy.

“When I took Mrs. Sterne into the Dutch garden I found a handkerchief.”

“But dash it, George, Mrs. Sterne is married.”

"I took her there because she said she was fond of roses."

"But my dear George, they were tulips."

"So we discovered. Don't be dense. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. After that?"

"I met her this morning in Kensington Gardens."

"My dear man," said George, "what an impossible place. All brats and bathchairs! Why, it's the place my men go to. The servant question means a lot to us. Of course you haven't given yourself a chance. A real flirtation—love affair, if you like—you needn't frown—wants the most careful nursing. Backgrounds make a lot of difference. I know exactly what you are feeling—it's the absence of that moment—that sudden, inspiring moment. Conservatories were wonderful things, a Japanese lantern, a few hot-house flowers, and an old-fashioned waltz have made many happy marriages. The river by moonlight, bathing, ruined castles, the things we miss in this unsentimental age—they were the things. Men used to play cat's cradle with girls when it was too frosty to hunt; they used even to serenade them. That kind of wisdom, the wisdom of the foolish, has gone out with whiskers."

"What would you do, George, in my place?"

Weatherby stroked his mustache, and looked exceedingly young and wise. "Can't you see her off for abroad at a big station? That's a tender moment."

"But she's not going abroad."

"That seems a pity. What about the Natural History Museum, among the stuffed birds?"

"Don't rot, George. I'm serious."

"So am I, perfectly. I remember a charming little woman I took there—birds: nests; don't you know. I proposed to her by a stuffed chaffinch, not a soul about, never is. She wouldn't have me, said her Art came first, or something; an actress, dear little woman, fair hair, and brown eyes like a mouse. Coralie was her name, I think."

"I'm sure I should laugh. Fancy saying, 'This is the Long-Eared Owl, will you be mine?'"

"You've no imagination," said Weatherby. "Owls, moonlight, old churches—leads up to it in the most natural way. Stuffed Thrush—country lanes, honeysuckle, sheep bells—wedding bells. By jingo, I must patent the idea!"

"Now you are laughing at me!" said Timothy, aggrieved. "I am serious. I really am. I am very nearly deeply in love, and it would be the making of me. I want some inspiration."

"Got it!" cried Weatherby, slapping his leg. "Absolutely got it. Motor-car ride, break-down, evening, quiet wood, nightingales, what? Oh, my dear fellow, if you were really in love the inside of an omnibus would do. You are trying to magnify a flirtation begun and ended at daybreak into something that should last till the end of your life. I say, I don't like that cough of yours."

"It's nothing," said Timothy. "I've had it for over two years."

“Well, what about a break-down? Why not try it?”

“I wonder if she'd come.”

“If I know Miss Newberry, I bet she will. Go ahead, my children, and don't blame me.”

“But how can I be certain we shall break down, or if we do, how can I arrange that it's at the right place?”

George Weatherby looked at him anxiously. “My dear boy, I shall believe you really are in love if you talk in that wild way. You have a car, you have the admirable Jakes, you can buy a map. I expect Jakes is human, more human than you are, and the merest hint, coupled with the entrancing presence of Miss Newberry, will do the trick. You ask her to go for a drive with you; you ask Mrs. Newberry if she may—just to see Oxford, or Gray's Churchyard, or a tree struck by lightning, or any old thing. Then off you go. You stop very long over lunch, you have engine trouble before tea, it gets worse after tea, it gets appalling just as the sun sets, Jakes says it will take an hour or so to put right, a lonely road, a little wood, the moonrise—and there you are. And if you are not, then call the affair off. Now I've got to go. Any further information supplied gratuitously. Tim, I like you, you are one of the simplest of God's creatures. Stay here as long as you like, and finish the port; it doesn't agree with my servant.”

He rose, buckled on his sword and left the room.

Timothy took another glass of port, and lit a cigarette. From the courtyard came the crisp sound of

men's feet, the shouts of orders, the sudden rumble of drums.

“Was it all ridiculous?” he wondered. “Was it all just a silly game?” The image of Philippina rose before his eyes, dainty, slender, young, tempting. Was this the big thing in his life? A slight fit of coughing caused him to put down his cigarette.

“I must get something for that cough,” he thought.

After that he passed out between the gray walls fragrant with the memory of dead lovers, and so into the jangle of London streets.

CHAPTER VII

THE TOUCH OF A WAND

MRS. NEWBERRY having given her consent, and Philippina a solemn promise to be ready by eleven, the day in the country had been arranged.

Timothy had thought that Mrs. Newberry melted a little while he talked to her, had been on the verge of a confidence, and had then resumed her enamelled manner before giving her consent.

“Girls do what they like nowadays,” she said. “Bring her home in time for dinner. It is Oxford you are going to, isn’t it? I remember it as being a place where old men seemed never to have got over the death of Aristotle, and young men were perpetually discovering each other. Everybody goes to Germany now to get educated, don’t they?”

“I was at Christchurch,” said Timothy.

“Really. Do you still feel the effects of it? My husband was at New College and he still thinks it was the center of polite society. Why don’t you take Flip to the sea? I’m sure a little wild Nature would do her more good than old buildings. Why don’t you do something vulgar? I’m sure vulgarity is very stimulating. Doesn’t the refinement of to-day enervate you? It enervates me. Look at this room: my husband bought it out of an Exhibition! ‘As we have no taste ourselves,’ he said, ‘we’d better buy the best on the

market.' Don't you think it rather reeks of the market instead of the taste? I think perfection is so boring."

"We might go to the sea," said Timothy, looking round the black and gold room for the first time.

"Do," she urged, "and eat shrimps out of a paper bag. I used to as a child; and we used to take off our shoes and stockings. I'm sure Flip would love to do that, she's so proud of her feet. I suppose it's no use my warning you, is it?"

"About what?" said Timothy, blushing.

"How sweet of you to blush. I used to. Warning you about Flip. She has no heart, she's only very expensively finished. Just give her plenty of good food and bring her home. I like you, you're so naïve, and one doesn't meet with really simple people very often. I'm sure you love Punch and Judy shows, and those kinds of things. Flip has only got as far as the Russian Ballet. The Russians have such a charming genius for impropriety; they make it seem quite artistic, don't you think so? Grace Ettrick is mad about them, of course. She came here to dinner the other day in nothing but a wintry smile made of gray chiffon. She shocked the servants, but my husband was delighted. Very brave these women in our climate, aren't they? Must you go?"

He took her hand, and looked at her hard face with its hard smile, and as he looked he saw for an instant a real kindly look come into her eyes. "Poor dear Sir Timothy," she said. "Don't get hurt, it would be such a pity. Had your mother those blue eyes? I'll see

that Flip is ready in time. Good-bye. Do take care of that cough."

After that came the difficult task of Jakes, the chauffeur.

"I'm going for a day in the country to-morrow."

"Yes, sir."

"I am taking a lady."

"Yes, sir."

How Timothy longed for George Weatherby to help him out. "I want to go to some place by the sea. Perhaps you know of some small place: not a trippery place, you know—just a place with an Inn and a few boats."

"Very good, sir."

"I rather wanted," said Timothy, turning his back on Jakes, "to break down after tea."

"I'll manage that, sir," said Jakes cheerily.

"The lady likes—likes sunsets."

"I am a married man, sir."

"The deuce you are!" said Timothy, turning round.

"Anywhere near a little wood, sir, or some quiet ruin, or something of that, sir."

Timothy could see no trace of a smile on the man's face. He hesitated and stammered, "I'll leave it to you. We call at Berkeley Square at eleven."

The awkwardness of the situation was saved by the entrance of Lord Almirac, faultlessly dressed in brown. Jakes withdrew at once.

"Interruptin' you," said Almirac.

"Not a bit," said Timothy. "Have some tea, or a drink of sorts?"

“Whisky and a dash of soda,” said Almirac, lowering himself into a chair. “Swift, I’ve done it, dear boy.”

“Done what?” said Timothy.

“I’m a starter. I’m one of the full-blown ones. The ‘all right’ flag has gone up, old chap. Grace Ettrick.”

“You don’t mean to say you’re engaged?”

“Before I knew where I was, dear boy, before I knew. She said, ‘You ought to marry,’ and I suppose I said, ‘Name the day,’ and the thing was over. Half an hour ago, old boy, in a cab. I had to tell somebody. I hope you are not bored, but there it is. Settlin’ down in me old age, what? No more little suppers; no more rags. I tell you, Swift, I’m funkin’ it horribly. It came so doosid sudden.”

“But you are very happy. I congratulate you. If there is anything I can do for you——”

“Pass over the whisky, dear boy. I’m upset, that’s what it is—I’m upset. I never knew I was in love till half an hour ago. Grand woman, so they tell me. I must wire to the mater and break it gently. What do you think? ‘Expect married shortly,’ or something like that?”

It seemed like an omen to Timothy. If Cupid haunted cabs, then surely he would haunt some quiet country place. He took note of Almirac’s flushed face, of his carefully hidden but obvious nervousness, of the abrupt way in which he spoke to disguise his feelings. Would he be like that too?

“Well, I am really delighted; she’s a jolly girl,” said Timothy.

"One in a million, dear boy, one in a million. Do me all the good in the world—pull me up, you know. Swift," he said earnestly, "I want pullin' up. I've drifted about long enough. You are all right, dear boy, sound wind, and you don't live high. Look at me, twenty-four and bored—awful, isn't it? Started too early racketing about. You'll be the next."

"One never knows," said Timothy.

"Never thought I should get spliced," said Almirac, rising. "I shall be all the rage for a bit, what? So long, old chap. Think kindly of me when I'm gone."

When he had gone Timothy sat down and thought hard.

Your true poet is the soul's complete journalist; he must watch every movement, report every phase, be in at the birth of every desire and the death of every ideal. Given these young men to study, what would he find? Would he find great adventures hiding under cloaks of flippancy to cynicism? In the great tangle of colored threads that weave the tapestry of a life, would he find the golden thread slowly but surely coloring the whole, so that when death came the picture would be one sheet of gold? Or would he see the gold tarnishing and dropping into decay?

Timothy dined alone that night in a fit of terrible depression. Almirac had depressed him. If that was all love did, then why trouble so much about it? All the delicate, sensitive side of his nature cried against the commonplace expression of life as he suddenly saw it, a series of events principally useful in drowning genuine feelings.

But the next morning found him full of eagerness, glowing with the desire to take Philippina into the country and there test George Weatherby's romantic suggestion.

A delicious figure in green awaited him at the house in Berkeley Square. Rugs were arranged, a large box of chocolates was carefully placed on the floor, and soon they were darting in and out of the traffic, through crowded streets, through suburbs, through miserable jerry-built streets, to that curious fringe where new roads and red-brick villas are torn out of fields like bleeding gashes in the quiet side of the country, and then, almost imperceptibly, they were passing lazy country villages.

They lunched at two o'clock in a quiet country town where there was an Inn so old it seemed to have forgotten how to be an Inn. Jakes knew all about it. But Jakes was a man of great experience. He had been in a garage for three years, a garage to which couples came and hired motor-cars and took them out for drives in the quietest of country places where they were never likely to meet people they knew. So Jakes was a sentimental guide for a radius of over sixty miles round London.

The room they lunched in was a long, panelled room in which political dinners and local dances were given: a room where once coach company filled the place with noise or bustle, and punch was brewed, and huge fires burned. But now it had the air of a reformed rake, and its Gods were Britannia metal teapots in a glass-fronted buffet; and its attendant spirit was an

old waiter who looked as if he collected gravy splashes for a pastime; and its wine-list showed its empty cellars.

Jakes drew his master aside. "The proprietor has some good claret put away, sir, if I may make so bold; and the chops is like chops. And—(not the ghost of a smile)—the engines isn't working not the way I should like to see them, sir. We may have a bit of trouble."

"Thank you," said Timothy, hurriedly. "See to them, Jakes."

"Don't you adore this place?" said Philippina at lunch. "We can pretend we're eloping and I'm some one else's wife."

At five o'clock they ran into a little cove like a green cup with a little silver river running through it and the sea shining like gray silk beyond.

This time Jakes reported serious engine trouble, and Philippina said, "What does it matter? I never want to see London again. Tim, I want to live here for ever. Is this where we have tea?"

"At the cottage, Miss," said Jakes.

So they had tea at a cottage that looked as if it had grown there. It had a thatched roof which was over the eye of a window, and the blue sky was reflected in the window and made it look like a sailor's eye. Everything smelt of tar and nets and crabs and lavender and wood smoke. And the tea was entirely the invention of some hungry genius, for it had three jams and four kinds of cake, and cream and prawns and new bread.

And after tea Philippina said she must paddle, so they went down to the sands and took off their shoes and stockings like children, and took hands and waded in up to their knees, and sang ridiculous songs. And she had to dry her legs on his handkerchief. And after that something began to sing in his heart like a kettle on a hob just boiling. And she called him "darling" half by accident and then apologized. And he said, "Say it again." Then she threw his wet handkerchief at him and ran towards the cottage, carrying her shoes and stockings. And when he turned round he saw that three large weather-beaten men were sitting in a row just behind him, gazing at the sea.

Then they started off again, but very slowly, and stopped about three miles away, while Jakes shook his head a great deal and fussed over the engine. And at seven o'clock they were thirty miles from London, just by a little wood, in the deep, dark silence of the country.

"I shall have to wait here, sir," said Jakes. Then he talked very learnedly about the car's inside, and said that he might have to go back five or six miles for petrol. And it might be a couple of hours before they could start again.

"I don't care," said Philippina. "Could you please wire to say I'll be late?"

Then Jakes took a can for the petrol, and strolled away up the road for about half a mile, then he climbed a stile, sat down under a hedge, lit a pipe and closed his eyes. He had done his best.

The sky grew darker, and stars appeared like ship-

lights in the sea of heaven. And the trees grew more and more mysterious. And a very young moon came out.

They entered the wood, and their feet made no sound on the carpet of leaves and moss, and the kind darkness wrapped them in a magic cloak. And it was very still.

Presently they found themselves by a big tree-stump and they sat down.

"Isn't it creepy?" whispered Philippina.

It seemed as if some magic wand had touched everything. The wood breathed love to them, branches of trees sustained them. He took her hand.

"I love you," he whispered. And it seemed the wood and tree took it up. "I love you."

"Tim, you mustn't say that."

"Flip, my darling, I never knew how much I loved you till now."

Then she turned to him, and her face was lit only by starlight, but her eyes shone. "I'm not worth anything," she said. "Tim, dear, let me be real for once. I'm a heartless person. I'm afraid I could never stick to anybody. I take and take, and I never give. So let's go back to the car and forget this—this heavenly place. You are too much of a darling to—to bother about me."

He took her in his arms and kissed her and kissed her and kissed her.

"Have you ever kissed a girl before?" she whispered.

"Heaps," he said, absent-mindedly.

Then she laughed, and her laughter turned to

tears, and when he tried to comfort her she said, "Oh, my dear, my dear, you are so funny and honest, and as clear as crystal. You dear delightful person. Only you would have said heaps. But I know none of them mattered, Tim. I've been engaged every year since I was just sixteen, but none of them mattered."

"Do I matter?" he asked.

For answer she lifted her mouth to his and kissed and kissed him.

Then he told her all about himself, and she told him what she wanted him to know about herself. She told him about the priest and the judge and one or two of the young men, but not about the middle-aged voluptuary. And she told him about her mother, and how her father came in mad with drink and passion sometimes, but not often now, and hit her mother. And how her mother always forgave him. And in the middle of it he began to cough.

"Oughtn't you to see a doctor about that cough?" she asked. "Promise me you will."

He promised he would. He sat with his arm round her and told her how he would do anything in the world for her, and she had only to hold up her little finger for it to be done.

The kindly night made a cloak for them and they became as one person, sitting close together, with their hearts running in and out of each other's bodies, carrying secret thoughts.

Jakes looked at his watch and found it was half-past eight. He stretched himself, knocked out his pipe against his boot, and murmured to himself, "Well,

if he ain't engaged by now, it ain't my fault." For it was to this very wood he had taken Mary Jane for a joy ride and had become engaged to her, and that is why he knew it so well.

Then, carrying the same full can of petrol, he walked slowly back to the car and sounded the horn.

The blast echoed through the wood, and Tim and Flip started. It brought the world back to them, it brought its vulgarity and noise and hurry. She straightened her hat and pulled at her skirt and coat, and he lit a cigarette, so that when they came singly out of the wood they pretended to have all the repose of two people who had been picking blackberries and had been rather bored. But the side lamps shone on their faces, and Jakes knew.

Through dark lanes between hedges they flew, as swiftly as the wind; through quiet villages and avenues of trees, through ill-lit streets and new roads like gashes in the country side, through suburbs, vast streets where open markets flared and people shouted, "Buy, buy, buy!", through the heart of the City, empty except for cleanness; past theaters, music halls, crowds, a blaze of many lights, and then Berkeley Square.

"To-morrow," he said on the doorstep. "I won't come in now."

She blew him a kiss from the doorway.

And Jakes, as he drove the car towards Melbury Road, smiled as one who has done his duty.

CHAPTER VIII

A SEAT IN THE GRAND STAND

OLIVER SWIFT sat by his study window smoking. As the afternoon faded gently into evening he, too, seemed to partake of something of its mystery and sadness: the shadows fell over him and his room as over the big trees outside. The swallows, in contradiction to the level calm, raced round the house, screaming. The old man seemed saturated in the spirit of the place, so that he appeared scarcely alive, but was like the old furniture, the old paintings, the silver and china. He did not think: he allowed his great vitality to feed his body while his mind framed the past in the old gold of age. Balanced between his knees was a long-handled spud with which he had earlier dug the plaintains from the lawn. The task of removing them completely was so long, and, to him, so slow, that it seemed it would require and receive a thousand years of quiet work. In this there was no conflict, but a reserved, passionless game, a little like a Greek punishment.

His several clocks struck six, and he compared them with an elaborate watch which told the phases of the moon, and the date, besides the time. This done, he blew his whistle, and the silence was broken by the footsteps of his man.

“Has the evening newspaper come?”

“Not yet, sir.”

At that moment an imperious knocking at the front door was heard, a violent ringing at the bell, followed by the cheerful whistling of a boy. It sounded like the blazing defiance of youth, intensely alive.

“That will be a telegram, sir,” said the man, without moving.

“You may bring it to me,” said Oliver Swift, “and at the same time bring me some whisky and water.”

He opened the yellow envelope with a little pocket envelope-opener, without haste, but with slightly trembling fingers. He had the old-fashioned aversion to telegrams, and he always, even now, expected bad news from them.

It read in the terse, staccato language of the day of machinery: “Arrive dinner to-day.—TIMOTHY.”

Oliver Swift handed it to his servant without a word, then, in his amazing attitude of patient waiting, he settled himself down to listen.

He was listening to the varied sounds on the London Road that ran alongside his garden wall on the left. These sounds connected him with the vast turmoil of the boiling mass of the great city. Up the road he had been driven by coach as a boy to school in Saint Paul’s Churchyard. Up and down the road he had ridden as a young man, and driven to the various activities of his very active life. To the left was a turning to the river, where his yacht used to lie at her moorings: to the right lay the way to his old shoot. A throng of ghosts of himself filled the road.

The several clocks struck seven, rooks cawed noisily

in the trees, and then a sound like the humming of a great bee filled the air, the sound of a motor horn, the sound of something ripping the air: the new Romance arrived. Sir Timothy's car stopped at the gate.

Instantly the bustle of life filled every part of the house but the study, which was as yet sheathed in its enveloping quietude. Then Timothy Swift burst into the room.

"Hallo, uncle! How's the gout? I'll dash upstairs and change. I shan't be a second."

"Well, my boy."

The door shut, the old man smiled gently, footsteps ran up the stairs, a door banged, the sound of tinkling glasses came from the dining-room. The air was filled with youth.

The next picture is of Timothy with the cellar key and the cellar candlestick standing over the bin of Château Margaux, carefully withdrawing a bottle.

As soon as the servants had left the room and the decanter of port stood by Timothy's glass, he burst out eagerly, "I've done it, uncle. I'm engaged. The world is a fine place. I'm living on air."

Oliver smiled. "And who is the fortunate lady?" he asked.

It appeared she was not only the most wonderful being in the world, but the most beautiful, the wittiest, and of an incomparable charm. It appeared that he and she were made for each other in no com-

mon mould, but of the rarest clay. That he was not good enough for her; that he was more than amazed at his daring, and that it was to his uncle, that understanding man, he had come to discharge some of these electrical feelings.

“Yes,” said his uncle Oliver, which answer seemed exactly right.

“And I suppose, I am really quite well off,” said Timothy. “I know dashed little of my affairs, you know—just the rough hang of it. By the way, it’s Philippina Newberry.”

“Beer?”

“Roughly, very roughly speaking, yes.”

“And birth?” said Oliver.

“My dear uncle, to the very finger tips. They’re all right, you know. Isn’t it wonderful? I’ve got a real object in life.”

“What object?” said Oliver.

“To make her happy.”

“I suppose we may consider that an object,” said Oliver.

“I’ve been engaged five weeks now,” said Timothy. “but only publicly for a week. And they have gone like a dream. She’s away for a week now, so I’ve run down here. She wants to live abroad for a bit and see things.”

“And buy things.”

“Rather,” said Timothy. “You remember our last talk? Well, here’s the result.” Then he began to cough.

“You will see a doctor, of course,” said Oliver.

“What for?”

“You will insure your life for a large sum,” said Oliver. “It is usual, and you can afford it. Besides, I think that seeing a doctor will do you no harm.”

“Do you mean this rotten cough? That’s nothing.”

“It will be better to see a doctor. There is a young man of the name of Curtis, who is the son of old Curtis here, I should like you to go to him. They tell me he is one of the very best doctors of to-day.”

“I’ll go on Saturday,” said Timothy, dismissing the doctor from his mind. He lit a cigar.

(Death, passing through that room on his journey, looked at Oliver and passed him by, as he did every morning; then he looked at Timothy, paused, went on, looked over his shoulder, and went on his way.)

To see the uncle and nephew sitting there at their ease was to see one man having dropped out of the race watching quietly the preparations for another race, where a youth, quivering with emotion, toed the line and waited for the pistol.

Timothy was like some glowing lantern, whose rose-colored light flooded every direction in which it was turned. In that room more full of memory and retrospect than looking forward, the young man was oddly out of place. No room is big enough for a young man in love: he wants to climb mountains and shout to the sea, and flick his fingers at the stars. He possesses the earth, and with one arm about the waist of another pathetic child, he cries to the Heavens: “Look at us: no one has ever been like us before!”

“Yes,” said Timothy. “You’ll see awful pictures of us in the papers, and we shall get the most weird things sent to us: five hundred dessert knives and inkpots, and blotters done over with poker-work, pictures of sentimental animals, and all that sort of thing. I hate all that part of it, but there you are. Bless me, old Newberry talks of a Bishop to do the dreadful deed.”

“I suppose,” said his uncle, “that your tastes are in common? You’ll expect me to ask you if you feel you can grow old with this young lady?”

“We shall never grow old—at least, Flip won’t. She doesn’t want any children.”

“Really!” said Oliver, with uplifted eyebrows. “Are they out of date, or am I?”

“She said it was awfully rough on a girl,” he explained. “Uncle, she’s the littlest thing; just a sort of school-girl size. It’s very good of you to listen, but you and she would get on very well together.”

“Yes,” said Oliver. “One of the amazing things about engaged people is that they are each persuaded that every stranger will take to the other at once. It may or may not be true. I suppose in your case you have always found your friends’ wives perfect treasures?”

“But Flip is different,” said Timothy, indirectly answering the question.

“They all are.”

“I know lots of men who are in love with her.”

“Always a recommendation,” said Oliver, bowing. “By the way—Flip?”

“It’s a diminutive of Philippina,” he explained carefully.

“I understand,” said his uncle. “If I were differently situated I would invite her here, but I know no chaperones, and my bachelor house is unsuited. You may bring me my sticks.”

“You’d love her,” said Timothy eagerly.

For answer his uncle blew a cloud of smoke.

And on Saturday at twelve-thirty precisely Timothy was shown into the consulting-room of Mr. Curtis.

CHAPTER IX

HEALTH, WEALTH AND HAPPINESS

“WELL,” said Timothy cheerfully, as he buttoned up his waistcoat.

“Sit down,” said the doctor. He was a young man, tall and thin, and had the air of being carved out of white marble, not from any classic design but by reason of a certain cold hardness that surrounded him. His eyes were nearly as blue as Timothy’s, but not so human: they looked like perfect pebbles.

“You tell me you are engaged to be married,” he said, fingering an ivory paper-knife.

“Yes. Miss Newberry,” said Timothy.

“Will she wait for two or three years?”

“Wait!” said Timothy. “We are to be married in January.”

The clock on the mantelpiece, the gift of a grateful client with bad taste, struck one.

“You are not to marry for at least two years,” said the doctor. “I am going to send you to Switzerland.”

“I shall not go,” said Timothy, suddenly cold all over. And the coldness seemed to come from the doctor.

“You can cure your lungs, I think, in that time with care. I will not go into details. You have a certain form of tuberculosis. It would be a criminal act for you to marry now. Do you understand me?”

"All I have to say——" Timothy began.

"You have nothing to say. I propose to do my best to save your life for you. You will follow my directions implicitly. You will . . . drink this quickly; it's all right."

The room was swimming round him, out of it there came a hand, something warm passed down his throat. The doctor's eyes were suddenly very kind and he had melted into a human being.

"Thanks. I'm all right now," said Timothy.

"There's nothing to fear," said the doctor very kindly, "if you do exactly what I tell you."

With a swift flush Timothy said nervously, "She doesn't want to have any children."

The doctor was writing rapidly on a pad; he answered without looking up. "Young women say very foolish things."

"I—I can't ask her to wait," said Timothy. "Are you sure?"

"Try another doctor." He was cold and hard again.

"It can't be as bad as that. I only cough now and again."

Doctor Curtis turned sharply to him. "I am treating you as a sensible man," he said, "as from one sensible being to another. It wouldn't be the least use for me to sentimentalize with you, or to offer my sympathy, you'll get plenty of both. I'm paid to speak the truth to you, and to help you if I can. To marry would be criminal—caddish, I expect you'd call it. You are an infected person.

You could infect you wife—certainly infect your child. I am not talking for your benefit, but for the sake of the community. You were not educated with a sense of citizenship. Englishmen aren't; if they were our task would be easier. You have been brought up on dead languages by dead people, and when you hear a plain modern fact, you shrink from it. I know quite well who you are, and I should like to know how much you are below your training weight. I can see the answer, or all I want of it, in your face."

"But," said Timothy, struggling with emotion new to him, "I shall have to tell her. I can't."

"Why not?"

"She wouldn't understand."

"Is she an idiot?"

"Doctor Curtis!" said Timothy. "Aren't you a little—well, unconventional?"

"My dear Sir Timothy," he said, "it may seem hard to the average man to speak the truth about certain subjects, especially about the subjects that matter. In that respect I should say that women's conversation was infinitely more hygienic than men's. Most diseases have got perfectly simple, recognizable names, and the damage they do is well known, in consequence of which they are fastidiously left out of the conversation. As well leave the facts of birth and death out of the conversation. Do you want to be cured?"

"Of course I do," said Timothy. "But really I don't think you understand me. I don't feel ill."

"If I were a really callous man," said the doctor, "I should say, 'Good morning, take this tonic, and

see me again if you feel worse.' But I'm not a callous man, so I say, 'Good morning. Court the Death that is on you, marry to satisfy your sexual emotions, give birth to diseased children, and pray to God, if you believe in Him as I do, that He'll let the matter drop.' As you stand I give you seven years."

"Good God!"

"Do as I say and you should—only should, mark you—be free of this curse in two or three. If the love you speak of—or at least, show—is worth a snap, wait. Good morning. Will you dine with me to-night? I should like you to." And then, quite suddenly and in a voice years younger, "Buck up. I'm not so bad at dinner."

"I say—good Lord, I say, I've got a lot of men coming to lunch. What shall I do?"

"It will do you good. You'd better dine with me, and I'll tell you the things you have to do. You don't realize I knew you years ago. My father was your uncle's doctor."

It suddenly dawned on Timothy that he knew the doctor's face. "Are you that little funny chap that I fought behind a barn?" he said.

"I knocked you down," said the doctor quietly.

"So you did," said Timothy. Then, as if he could at last get the truth from the man, "I say, Curtis, tell me the truth. You've been trying to scare me, haven't you? It isn't true?"

"Try another doctor," he answered. "You'll get the same answer. My dear man, it isn't half bad. You go down to the East End and listen to the cough—

your cough. I'll tell you what to look for to-night, and you can see for yourself what happens to the poor devils who can't get away. I tell you, you are lucky. You can marry in two or three years—I hope."

Timothy held the arm of the chair he was sitting in very tight. "You hope," he said.

"I never give hope unless there is hope," said the doctor.

Timothy looked round the commonplace room, as like one consulting-room as another: a desk, papers, a sofa, a microscope in a case, a revolving bookcase, dull prints, six powerful lights.

"I have never thought about—well, about being really ill."

"Most people shut their eyes to the certainty of death. Death is one of the very few facts."

"You get callous, I suppose?"

"If I showed all I felt," said the doctor, "this place would be a sort of swimming-bath. You must go now; I have work to do. Dinner at eight-thirty. Not a doctor's dinner: heaps of things I tell other people never to eat or drink."

"You make mistakes," Timothy almost pleaded.

The doctor looked at his watch. "In your sort of case—not often."

Timothy seized at the hesitation. "I may not be so bad——" he began.

"It may take four years." He rang a bell, and a servant appeared in the doorway. It seemed to Timothy that it was like the appearance of a warder waiting to show him the condemned cell.

"Lady Pellingways, sir," said the maid.

The doctor nodded, then gave Timothy his hand. "Taken properly," he said, "you'll have a fine life."

When Timothy heard the front door closed behind him he said in a sort of desperation, "Curse these chaps. I don't believe half what they say." Then he hailed a cab.

He was in the wildest spirits at lunch, talking, telling stories, laughing feverishly and being so excited that George Weatherby began to wonder if the cocktail had gone to his head. Half a dozen men were there, and they drank his health.

"Your health, old chap."

"Good luck."

His heart gave a leap—a leap of fear. He wondered if he ought to tell them. He decided against it, and drank their healths in return. There persisted with him all the time the idea of going to another doctor and getting his sentence annulled. The idea of serious illness seemed preposterous, if not that, then unfair, just as he was so happy, so settled for life.

Try as he could he found it impossible to draw the conversation in the direction of his mind's one thought. In a casual way he introduced the topic of consumption. Some of the men had friends in one or the other of those establishments used for the purpose of an outdoor life.

"Poor devils," one man said, "they always think they are going to be cured. Plucky—why——" he went on with a long story.

It was all torture to Timothy, and he longed for the

men to go. They did so at last, George Weatherby remaining behind.

“George,” he said, “I’ve got it.”

“Got what?”

“This damn thing, the thing Arbuthnot talked about, the thing everybody seems to have—consumption!”

Weatherby sat silent for a moment, fingering an empty wine-glass. “How do you know?” he said.

Timothy burst out with the story of his visit to the doctor. “Curtis, his name is.”

“Curtis,” said Weatherby, “I know. The best man in Town. So he told you. Poor chap.”

Everybody seemed to bring an extra nail to his coffin, everybody said “Poor chap,” and went on with a full and vital life, the wonderful business of enjoyment.

“They cure it now-a-days,” said Weatherby.

“Two—or three, perhaps four years,” cried Timothy. “Don’t you understand, man? It means I can’t marry. It means I’ve got to go to some confounded place and live among confounded dying people. Don’t you see what that means? Flip! I’ve got to tell her. I can’t ask her to wait. It was all so jolly before I went to the doctor, and now——”

Weatherby drummed on the table with his fingers, his eyes cast down. “I know a chap who says he was cured,” he said at last. “But he had a pretty thin time.”

Timothy got up and stood looking out of the window. “George,” he said, “I’m damned if I’ll die of this thing. I’ll do everything. I’ll cut everything—but I dread those establishments full of coughing, weak people.

I'm going to dine with Curtis to-night and ask him if there isn't any way of getting out of this thing alone, quite alone. I don't think I could bear messing about with—with fellows who died off and left me. I shall leave here and go right away—mountains, they go to, don't they? Or California, or something. I'll go to Flip to-morrow and tell her. She's coming back to-morrow."

He turned round and faced his friend again. "Do you know, old chap, it seems an odd thing to say, but if it wasn't for this lung business, I might even enjoy it. Does that sound caddish, when I'm just engaged? I suppose I've got a touch of my father in me. He messed about all over the world. I think I'm a bit sick of all the silly things we do here just to get through time. And the funny thing is that I've only just thought all this."

"This man I knew," said Weatherby slowly, "went to some out-of-the-way place in Austria, and built himself a cabin and lived there for a year or two: right up near snow somewhere. He's in America now; I saw him before he left. I shouldn't have known him—a great, big, strong chap. I say, I'm awfully sorry, old man."

"Seems bad luck, doesn't it?"

"If there is anything I can do?" said Weatherby.

"I'll ask you."

Then Weatherby got up and shook hands with his friend. "Nothing ever happens to me. I don't suppose anything ever will. I wish it was me, old chap, honestly I do. I'm sure you'll get all right. Shall we

meet to-morrow, after you've told her? She'll stick to you. It makes it so much more romantic for her. Two years is no time nowadays, old chap. I must go."

When Weatherby had gone Timothy wandered up and down the house in a purposeless way, looking at the pictures and furniture as if they didn't belong to him, opening and shutting the piano in the drawing-room, lighting and throwing away cigarettes. He went into his dressing-room at last, locked the door and stripped himself. Then he examined his body carefully in a big mirror. Certainly he was very thin, but his muscles were hard, and his chest—he drew in a deep breath and filled his lungs. They looked all right; they looked—but the exertion made him feel suddenly weak. He remembered how he had thought of late that he had slacked a little in his daily exercises. Did they really know, these doctors? He became conscious of a certain lassitude of body and a great excitement of mind.

He began to dress slowly, picturing to himself as he did so his interview with Flip. She answered him that she would wait till the end of the world, they embraced, and all ended happily. Somehow the pictured interview did not run true. Face to face with the stern side of life for the first time, he began to wonder about his feelings for this alluring, dainty girl he had asked to be his wife. Had it been all a thing in a delicious dream, in rose-colored air, a phantasmagoria, or was it the natural coming together of two young people? He fretted impatiently, feeling very small and insignificant

beside this overpowering thing that had happened to him and that was greater than his desire for a wife.

Unable to bear with himself any longer, he went to the telephone and called up her house, so that he might find out when she was to be at home on the next day, and when the answer came that she was then at home and would like to see him at once, and that she was alone, he felt a sudden cold fear that showed in his voice as he answered that he would come immediately. Nothing in the whole of his life had frightened him so much as the idea of this interview; heroics, love, even self-pity, vanished before the effort to place the true, bald situation in blunt words.

The house had a forbidding aspect, all the blinds were down in the front, and the front door was being scraped by a painter. A board hung outside, showing that decorators were at work.

Flip's maid showed him up carpetless stairs to her little sitting-room at the back of the house. He had never been in this room of hers before, and he felt a delicate curiosity in being there alone. It reflected Flip's innermost spirit. It was luxuriously comfortable and warm and pink, and it smelled of scent. There were two big arm-chairs, covered with rose-patterned chintz, and a sofa with tumbled cushions, heaps of them, showing that Flip had been curled up there. And there was Flip's big gray cat dozing before the fire. In a book-case was a row of French novels, and Swinburne's poems, and the works of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and Hichens, and a book on Palmistry. On the top of the book-case and on a table by the window there were a

number of photographs in silver frames, men and women with dashing signatures, and a photograph of himself, looking very self-conscious. Every available spot held ornaments—china cats and wooden Swiss houses, and silver boxes and bronze birds. There were two big bowls of roses in the room, pink and deep crimson, looking like blood and blushes against the gray wall-paper.

He heard a door open and shut, and his heart beat faster, and then Flip came into the room. She put up her face to be kissed, and as he kissed her he wondered if he ought to.

“All the house is up, and there’s only me and Puff,” she said, hauling the cat on to the sofa beside her. “And Puff and me wants to be amused, so please, Solemn-face, tell us all the news.”

He could not think how to begin. Better begin right away, he thought.

“I’m in rather a mess,” he said.

“Puff says she doesn’t want to hear about it,” said Flip.

“I’d better tell you at once—I’m not very well.”

Flip, who had buried her face in the cat’s fur, murmured into the fur, “Tim’s got a tummy ache.”

“This is serious,” said Timothy, biting his lip. “I’ve been to the doctor to-day, and he says I’ve got to go away.”

She looked up at him, smiling. “Really and truly ill?” she said.

“Devilish ill.”

She released the cat, and leaned back against the

cushions. "I don't like ill people," she said, petulantly. "But you'll get well directly. What is it?"

"Consumption."

There was a moment's pause before she said, "People die of consumption."

"I'm not going to die of it," he said. "But the doctor says I must go away for two or three years."

He was watching her face carefully. She was frowning a little. "Tim, dear!" she said with a gasp. "Two or three years! It's impossible!"

"It's got to be done."

"But—but do you mean you'd die if you didn't go away?"

"So he says."

"Two or three years," she said slowly. "To one of those horrible places, with only invalids. Tim!"

"I can't help it. There it is."

"We were going to be married," she whispered.

He took two or three steps up and down the room, and then came and stood over her. "You couldn't wait?" he said.

For some time neither of them spoke. Then she said, "Two years?"

"Longer," said Timothy. "Two or three, perhaps four. You couldn't wait?"

She did not seem to hear the note of pathos, of almost hungry desire in his voice.

"Are you very, very ill?" she asked.

"It's very bad luck," said Timothy, "but there it is. This thing downs you in no time. It hasn't gone far with me, and I can cure it, but I've got to

fight to do it. It's my chance. It really is rotten luck, but there it is."

She was wearing a loose tea-gown with a rose-colored waist-belt that had long ends with fringes: one of these she picked at with her fingers, never looking up.

"Two years isn't very long," Timothy pleaded. "And you being so young, and all that, you could have no end of a good time. You might even come out and see me—winter sports, and all that. It's very rotten luck; but there it is. Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad after all if we were a bit older before we married, more certain about things. I'm not in a funk, the doctor chap said I needn't be. But I couldn't marry now, you see that, don't you? Not until I'd got over this thing. I'm going to give everything up to see this through. I shall probably go right away somewhere, the Tyrol, or somewhere, and live in the open—they tell me it's the best thing to do. Of course, it's hard luck on you."

He waited for her to answer, but she said nothing, and never looked at him.

"I have never loved you so much as I do now," he said. "I don't want to give you up. If I was a chap who could talk, I could tell you, as it is——" He made a little unfinished gesture with his hands. "I can't ask you to wait——" He paused, and then the whole soul of him went into the question, "Can I?"

The answer came suddenly and unexpectedly. Flip burst into tears and buried her head in the

cushions. Out of her heaving sobs he caught the words, "I can't bear ill people: they frighten me."

And he felt utterly alone, removed from all the world.

Then he went slowly out of the room and out of the house.

CHAPTER X

SOLITUDE IN A CROWD

TIMOTHY left the doctor's house that night with a confused idea that it was not at all bad to have his form of tuberculosis, that it was the finger of Death, that life in Swiss cures was delightful, that it was awful, that it was to be a hermit's life for him for several years, and that he would meet hundreds of charming people in the same case. Curtis had spoken of death and decay much as a collector speaks of stamps or china-marks. He had given Timothy an excellent dinner and a good cigar, had punctuated his advice with humorous stories, and was, to Timothy's mind, like a comedian making jokes about cemeteries.

He left the house, met a September wind, faced it and refused the offer of a cab. All he had thought permanent was utterly destroyed. He saw now, as if from a vast height, how unreal, how frivolous, had been the life he had been living. Like a rock in a garden of artificial flowers his uncle Oliver stood out as the one real man of his experience. The first puff of reality had destroyed Flip; doubtless Weatherby would drop as easily out of his life, Almirac vanish, the Stag Club forget. He was alone.

As the turmoil of the London streets surged round him he had that feeling of insignificance that has

so poignantly attacked many men. He might be run over, there would be an inquest, a funeral, a few words at the Club—"Poor Swift's gone," and that was all.

London rose up to meet him with her hideous mocking grin; people crushed between her cliff-like streets crowded past him, the traffic tore past, buses, lit up inside, showed people in dull-colored clothing sitting as if in a furnace. He walked on in a fever heat of uncertainty, the elusiveness of things, the lack of some solid basis for his thoughts, drove him almost to despair. The life of dinner-parties and dress-clothes, of racing, of Clubs, of little snug luncheons, crumbled away. He was an exiled Sybarite, and no one cared.

He thought of that crumpled rose of femininity, her head buried among the cushions, crying, "I can't bear ill people, they frighten me." Vague voices spoke to him, white faces looked at him, he was haunted by a sound, a sound he had never heard before, a perpetual dry coughing. He realized the lights of the two big music-halls in Leicester Square, the crush by Daly's theater, as the people came out, the sudden quietness of Long Acre, the roar of the Strand as he crossed into it through Covent Garden, and almost before he knew where he was or how he had got there, he found himself standing before Saint Paul's Cathedral, perspiring and out of breath.

It seemed as if he had walked through the body of London and stood now by her heart. It beat solemnly. What did it mean, this great building, purple-black against the purple-black sky? The pride

of men, or the humility of men, or the presence of God? Or nothing? To his dulled comprehension it had no meaning, he was on a level far above all that, that was for fearful souls, for the timid; for him it was so much stone since he was condemned to exile.

He did not know himself as he walked away, he had become a cauldron of seething thoughts, all new to him, and lost himself and his personality in trying in vain to untangle his mind. Only one fact remained certain, that he was cast out from everything he knew. Wandering aimlessly about, he found himself in a wide thoroughfare full of people, with great blares of light like a fog round public houses and picture palaces and butchers' shops, and the noise of people shouting that they had goods for sale, and the rattle of buses and carts. He joined a crowd at the corner of a side street where a man stood on a chair shouting to the people. He seemed to be inciting people to rebel against those who drove in motor-cars while the working man starved; there was a ring of candle-lit lanterns on the ground near his chair, and a miserable-looking man in mean clothes stood by the chair and was continually pointed at as "Arthur Smith," who had been turned away from some work in a factory. The candle-light showed the faces of those of the crowd who stood near them, dull, listless faces, most of them, with here and there a sharp, intellectual Jew-boy's face peering out. Then the man by Timothy began to cough, and he moved away, shuddering. At another corner a man was preaching, with wild gesticulations, to an equally listless group, and further there was a

group by the door of the Police Station, where two constables were dragging in a huge drunken brute who yelled and cursed all the time, followed by a woman with a black eye, who kept shouting, "Don't you 'urt my man."

As he passed among all these people, Timothy began to yearn for some one to take an interest in him, for some one even to resent his presence, but for all the people cared he might have been invisible. And the sense of loneliness was paralyzing. Then a hand was put on his shoulder, and he found himself looking into a pair of burning, mad eyes, and a voice said, "Brother, are yer saved?" He broke away hurriedly, hot with confusion, and found a passing cab.

He sat up the whole of that night in his dressing-room, looking out of the window, waiting for day to come. The fever of his mind calmed gradually as the night died away. He began to be glad to go from this place where he was not wanted. He began to think with shame of his excited agitation. It was a wonderful life he was leaving, but he was not of it. Again and again Philippina came into his mind; she was part of this brilliant, artificial life, society, money, shallow conversation. She came back from being flesh and blood, desirable, warm, to the fairy of the early morning, as he had first seen her. He would, he felt, fade away to her to the Pierrot who had met her and loved her and left her, as Pierrots do.

The first sounds of the early morning came through the open window, a mail-van, a milk-cart, the early

chatter of sparrows. There had been a mist at night, and as the sun rose the trees began to drip and a leaf or two dropped languidly from the branches, as if they were tired.

As the light grew stronger and the damp earth smelt sweet, so Timothy was born into a new life. He felt as if an immense burden had been lifted from him as he faced the things he must do. There was Philippina's mother to see, clothes to be bought, affairs to be settled, and health to be restored.

He got out of his chair and went to look at himself in the glass; his hair stood on end, his chin and lip were covered with bristles, and his eyes had dark rings round them. "Well, Ugly," he said, "buck up, it'll all come right in the wash." Then he went back to his chair, reached out a hand for his pipe, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XI

THE LAST BARRIER

“THERE are moments when you look positively handsome,” said Mrs. Newberry.

“Think of the years between,” said Timothy.

The servant, having placed the tea-things in position, withdrew.

“I read your letter,” said Mrs. Newberry. “Shall I say what I think?”

“I asked you to be kind enough to come here,” he answered, “for that very purpose.”

“You are a very fortunate young man.”

Timothy stared at her, unable to say anything.

“That is,” she added, “if you are the kind of man I think you are.”

“I am not at all the kind of man I thought I was!” he answered.

She looked at his face, drawn with a pathetic sternness, and could read there the first sudden and bitter disillusionment of life. And she was sorry.

“Timothy,” she said, “what do you think of us without our masks?”

A swift keen look came into his eyes as he answered, “Do you know that I can see, then?”

“We are ugly, aren’t we?” she said. “Ugly and selfish and feeble, but some of us are real.”

"Are you?" he said, with cold doubt in his voice.

"I have felt as you do now," said Mrs. Newberry. "I have tasted the first bitterness. Then I deliberately killed myself that was and became this that you see now, a painted shell."

He felt awkward, almost shy.

"It will do us both good to talk," she said. "This is one of the moments in one's life when talking is good. Talking, as a rule, is a masterly effort to avoid saying anything. You want to say to me that your engagement with Philippina has come to an end, and that you think your heart is very sore." He put up a hand to stop her, but she continued, "I said before you were a very fortunate young man." Then she came to him and put a hand tenderly on his sleeve. "Boy, boy," she said, "if there are tears behind your eyes, there are tears behind mine. Flip is always half in love with any man who holds her hand; she can't help herself. She would have been an awful wife for you."

"Such a little thing," said Timothy.

"Men always hold the hands of little things, if they are pretty. Little things like Flip cause half the misery of the world. She can't help being charming; she gets that from her father."

He looked at her and remembered, and she saw the look.

"The only thing I have in my life is my love for him," she said steadily. "The more he crushed me, the more I loved him. I was quite a beautiful girl, quite beautiful. Look at me now. I'm forty-one

when I'm washed, and I'm a hundred and forty-one with this paint on. He likes it. He made me do it. It helps to hide wounds sometimes, often to hide tears. If you look close, my dear boy, you will see a scar on my forehead just under the curl of dyed hair. He nearly killed me that time."

Timothy turned white with inward boiling rage.

"I'm proud of that scar," she said, "very, very proud of it. You can't understand that. That is real love. I love it far, far better than the presents he gave me afterwards. He loves me in his odd selfish way. He has loved many, many women, but he always comes back to me. Do you think I have no pride?"

"I can't understand it," said Timothy roughly. "It seems loathsome."

She smiled at him, a little wry smile of painted lips. "You think I ought to make scenes and go into jealous, passionate outbursts. I hate the other women, but I'd sooner die than let him know. I ask them to the house when they are possible, and I watch them tire him. I can talk better than they can; I can give him better things to eat, and he can be natural with me, but he has to act to them. Men are curious boys. He thinks I don't know he has two sons, jolly boys."

"Why do you tell me this?" Timothy asked.

"I miss those boys," she answered.

In a shy but understanding way he took her hand and gripped it for a moment.

"You are going to do a very difficult thing," said

Mrs. Newberry, very carefully removing a tear before the looking-glass. "But it will make you."

"I'm not going to die," said Timothy savagely.

"You are going to be very lonely, nearly as lonely as I am. The middle of crowds and the middle of solitudes are very lonely places. I often wish I had some religion. I haven't got that kind of nature, I suppose. I live in a dirty little back-water full of vicious women and stupid men, or at least men who pretend to be stupid. Most of us haven't the manners of decent servants. You have the chance to get out of it, and how I envy you the chance!"

"Couldn't you get out of it?" he asked.

"I have my job," she said, smiling. "My husband doesn't know it, but I keep him as straight as it is possible for him to go."

"Only a very few people seem to me to be real," said Timothy, slowly. "They stick up like rocks somehow. There's an uncle of mine, there's you, George Weatherby pretends not to be, but he's real, so's the doctor I saw the other day."

"And Flip?"

"I don't know about her," he answered. "I think it is because I haven't got the right words. The other people seem—well, it sounds odd, but they seem to be waiting to die. Is that odd?"

"Not at all," said Mrs. Newberry. "It's perfectly true. I'll tell you about Flip. She is like a warm atmosphere round you, but you can never touch her—it is because she has no soul to speak of. She is a kissable kitten at present. She may grow

a heart all ready to be broken one day. I think she will, and then she will be lovable and pathetic. Neither she nor you were ripe for the big adventure. But I think you will always remember her, and keep a warm corner for her in your heart."

"I think you will understand me," said Timothy, "when I tell you I'm in an awful funk. That's why I'm going to bolt right away from everybody and hide among strangers. This doctor chap only gave me one tip outside what I was to do for my rotten lungs—he told me to work. What the deuce can I do?"

"What did your father do?" she asked. "I know nothing about him. Were you fond of him?"

"He was always away," said Timothy. "Collecting plants—devilish dull."

"Collect plants, then," she suggested.

He laughed for the first time during their talk. "That's an easy way out of it."

"I hesitate to say fretsaw, because you would send me awful examples of book-rests and things, but what do men do? You can't read all day."

"I'm sorry to say," he admitted shamefacedly, "that I can't read, books at least; I only look at the paper. I'm not good at books, novels and that sort of thing."

"We come back to plants," she said. "Why not do whatever people do with plants. It keeps you out of doors, and I suppose that's got to be your life. Being an indoor person it horrifies me. The great part of an English gentleman's education lies in learning to kill nice animals in a perfectly nice

way. Go and kill things. There are things in Switzerland that people kill. What are they called? The things housemaids use in pantries—chamois. There you are, arm yourself to the teeth and go and kill chamois. I'll have my silver cleaned with their skins and feel sentimental about you when I eat."

"I wonder if you'll write to me."

"Dear boy, you shall hear all the scandals and storms of my little tea-cup. And that reminds me, we have been so earnest that we haven't touched the tea, so I'll have cake and a whisky and soda, and so will you."

He rang the bell, and then sat down and looked at her as she peeled off her gloves. It seemed strange that this fashionably dressed woman should be so human and so tender. His heart went out to her.

"I wish you were coming out!" he said.

"Wouldn't it be quite the smart thing to elope with the mother of the girl you were engaged to? Mountains terrify me and fields and trees bore me to death. I am real London, my dear boy, a real drawing-room ornament with a lap-dog and a fire, and expensive cut flowers that it would bore me to grow. I like soft things and expensive underlinen and silk stockings and novels and gossip. If I was an old maid I know I should live in a stuffy little house in Bayswater and keep a parrot and have clergymen to tea. Perhaps the fact that clergymen will always come to tea keeps me from being religious. That's frivolous, but you know what I mean. Give me a stiff whisky and soda and one of your cigarettes. What are you going to do? One of

those cure places people write depressing books about, or the Simple Life in a Ritz Hotel in Switzerland? Tell me, is sour milk still the rage?"

"You are a curious woman," he said.

"That's a compliment. Really I'm so sorry for those people who have to go away to die that I'm bound to be frivolous about them, or I should cry. It's the same feeling that makes me laugh at funerals. Tell me, where are you going?"

"I'm going to a place in the Tyrol called Arco for the winter, and if I can stick it, to a place called Madonna di Campiglio in the spring, and at least in June, with an English doctor and five other unfortunate brutes. Like a lot of schoolboys, shan't we be? Told to go to bed early and keep warm, and fed with a spoon. Isn't it awful?"

"And where shall we be?" she asked. "In London for the winter, and I have to stick it, as you say, and then to the Riviera in the spring, with thousands of unfortunate brutes all chattering like a lot of monkeys. Like prisoners we shall be, told how to dress, and what is fashionable to read, and what to eat and who to know. I envy you, sore heart, broken wing, illness, everything. At least, you will be free of the woods and mountains. Flip was the last barrier between you and a new, decent life, and she has been removed. Think of your life with her, from grouse to grouse, with a little conversation between race meetings and on the staircase at the Opera, always in a crowd, always talking to well-bred, meaningless people whose naughtiness the Devil despises and whose virtues the Saints

laugh at. All people who compromise. Compromise is the weapon of tired philosophers who hug half-way house doors; Revolt for you, my young friend. And you feel it in your blood."

"I wonder if I do," he said thoughtfully.

"A man who is a man is always a Revolutionary. Go and do something, even if it's only to get well."

"Philippina——" he began.

"You will love Philippina far more in ten years than you do now, even if you have a wife you adore and a pack of children. There is a fragrance about a man's first love that scents all his life. No other woman ever seems quite the same to him. She is an experience, the others are repetitions. Don't fret about Flip, she'd be really happy if she married a chocolate merchant and had the run of the factory. At the present moment she is a mass of baby ribbons and sentimentality and cleverness, only the cleverness is second-hand. When she has been with you she talks like you, when she has been with Grace Ettrick she copies her. I am only fair. She is a lovable little person, but not for you. Now I must go. I've talked far too much already."

A sudden impulse made Timothy bend over her and kiss her cheek. Tears started to her eyes for a second before she smiled. "My dear," she said, "I shall treasure that all my life."

Then she finished her whisky and soda, drew down her veil and asked him to ring for her motor-car.

A week later Timothy saw the Castle of Arco and the avenue of magnolias in the Place.

Oliver Swift sat waiting for the daybreak holding Timothy's letter in his hand. It ended:—

“So that part is all over until I come home perfectly fit, even if it takes ten years.

“Yours affectionately,
TIMOTHY SWIFT.”

Part II

CHAPTER XII

I. CHANSON DE MONTAGNE

ABOVE everything, calm and enormous, the frozen music of the snows. Ice-peaks glittering as the sun flushed them with delicate rose-colored light, making them look like giants who had stolen all the blushes of the world to wear. Huge counterpanes of snow still in shadow and of such a vastness that it seemed the world was made of snow. And a man standing in the opening of the Brèche de Roland shading his eyes with one hand, while the other grasped his long steel-tipped bâton. He was listening for something. From his absolute stillness and the unconscious dignity of his pose he might have been a descendant of that great paladin who, with his sword Descaudal, is supposed to have cut this great cleft to make him a way as he passed from Spain to France. From where he stood he could see the Taillon behind him, and the Mont Perdu on his right, now glowing with the sunrise. He had eaten his breakfast, strapped up his sleeping bag, and stood now with his pack and ice-axe slung on his back, listening. At first he heard most clearly the curious noises snow itself makes, shifting noises, as if

it hid something that stirred in its sleep. Then, far away, and far below him, there was a crisp noise of falling stones. The lizard sometimes caused the stones to shift when travelling from one feeding ground to another. But he was not listening to that.

He knew that in about three hours he would reach his home, that as he came down the Echelle des Saradets he would hear the boisterous talk of many springs and the whispers of trees, and then come to the more intimate music of cow-bells, his own cow-bells. He knew he would hear the ice crack as he crossed the Glacier, and his ice-axe ring as he cut himself the few steps he would require. He would cross the Saradets Prairie, come to juniper bushes with their faces pressed down against the rock, and feel the draught down the valley that led to the Port d'Espagne. There would be a partridge or two rising under his feet, or a vulture sitting broodily, like a hideous professor of death, or perhaps, high up, a great Golden Eagle flapping his way, but he was thinking of none of these things. He was listening intently to a sound he had never heard in the mountains before. It was the sound of many wings. Was it, he thought, an aeroplane, a long way off, trying to fly over the pass? Then he saw below him a black cloud that flew towards him, a thick, dense cloud. He watched it come swiftly on its journey, saw that its edges were scattered and gray; nearer, and he saw tiny dots isolated, then he realized that it was an army of swallows. As they came nearer still and the sun caught them, he saw the flash of their white bellies as they turned and wheeled in the sky, and it came to him that

they were like mackerel playing in the sea with the same silver, quick gleam.

The rush of their wings filled the air like the rustle of hundreds of yards of silk. They flew low and swiftly as they made for the pass, and almost before he knew it they were all round him, flying so quickly that he was forced to hold his head down before the onslaught, while their wings fanned his face and brushed his shoulders and stroked his hands.

They filled the Brèche with the sound of a great wind, and when they had passed through he ran down the fifty yards of the cleft and watched them out of sight, till they passed over the Col du Taillon and out over the forests of Spain.

It was something so romantic and wonderful, so impressive in the very heart of the mountains, that his heart beat, and he was hot with excitement. Then he took off his hat and waved to the vanishing cloud, and wished them a fair journey into Africa.

And now the sun was high, and he was forced to put on black glasses against the snow-glare, and to keep them on until he reached the pasture above the valley of Pouey-Espée, where the last monkhoods glowed deep blue, and the last rock pinks scented the air. From here he descended by a little path by the side of the river Gave de Tourettes, which watered his small fields and flowed past his own house.

Just above his house he stopped, and taking a stick of chocolate from his pocket, he sat down to eat and look at the beauty before him. Lean, lank, but as strong as a horse, Sir Timothy Swift looked

with joy on his own possessions. It was exactly four years since he had left London.

II. BERGERETTE

A shepherd-boy was playing on a pipe, only four notes, low notes and sweet. He sat on a rock with a big dog beside him, and all about in the mountainous pasture land the long, lean, mountain sheep browsed. Blue and sulphur-colored butterflies played over the last of the flowers, a few blue monkshoods, an odd purple pasture gentian, and thousands of delicate autumn crocuses, making purple patterns on the green.

Timothy, having eaten his chocolate and lighted his pipe, stayed on to listen to the boy's piping that rose and fell over the sound of running water. The scene was absolutely classic: the shadow of the mountains, the great white circle of the Cirque, the splash of waterfalls, and the boy with his sheep, and a curious smell of milk.

As Timothy looked at it, and looked down on his own house, he had for a moment a dim vision of gray London streets, and black, hurrying crowds, with sodden leaves behind the railings of squares, and lamps alight at five, for it was September, and he smiled as he thought how little it mattered to him now.

Just below him, in the field behind the house, a small girl was vigorously driving the cows to another pasture, and again Timothy smiled to think that

one was called Flip, and one Augusta, Mrs. Newberry's name, and another was called Grace, and the rest by the names of people he knew. They were beautiful cream-colored cows, their dignity slightly ruined by the fact that such a very small child with such a very shrill voice frightened them. And as they moved the bells of those who moved quickly jangled, and the bells of the more sedate, being farthest from the small child, went solemnly.

The other sound that added to the harmony was the loud cry of a woman urging pack-mules loaded with sticks down the valley. "Arri-ah!" very long-drawn out, with the "ah!" jerked at the end.

It was September, and already a few beech trees and poplars had caught the fire colors of autumn and blazed like torches among the summer green, or were thrown up vividly against the dark melancholy of the firs. In the valley, in the fields, beside his own house were huge rocks, remains of some battle of the giants, to whose gaunt, grim sides small confiding plants had caressed themselves like children hiding in a mother's skirts; while from every crack and crevice cocksure young trees and sentimental ferns sprang. By one side of his house was a mingled group of acacias, poplars and two beech trees, a small scrub of juniper, and several wild daphne. Men and women were already at work stripping the poplars all the way up the stem, leaving a crown of leaves at the top; the men in climbing-irons lopping off the branches, while the women gathered them together into stacks for winter food for the cattle.

The most notable feature beyond the house was an acre of rock garden containing almost every kind of Alpine and Pyrennean plant or shrub. This was Timothy's especial care and delight.

The house had been a rough farm before he bought it, and now it retained the same character, and the wing he had built followed the old lines, the great alteration being a long veranda and the big plate-glass windows. An enormous boulder shielded the house from the northern tempests, the trees broke the fury of the southerly gales, and both of them in the winter caught and held the deep drifts of snow. The Gave de Tourettes formed the boundary of his domain on the right, the Gave de Pau tore past the bottom of the fields in its deep gorge, and a little wandering stream bounded the left. A very compact, well-watered kingdom.

As he walked down the sound of the shepherd's pipe grew fainter and became merged in the regular pat-pat of some woman washing clothes in the river.

He had been away alone in the mountains, sleeping out for three nights, and he felt a longing for a bath and a good meal. "Uranie!" he called, as he stepped on to the veranda. "A bath of hot water, and, at ten o'clock—déjeuner." Then, as he turned to go into the house, his eyes caught sight of the village Curé, Monsieur le Berade, fishing in the stream. "And Uranie," he called, "invite M. le Curé to déjeuner also."

CHAPTER, XIII

OVER THE SHOULDER

LOOKING back on those four years of exile Timothy would see a perfect stranger in the figure who left London and arrived in Arco at loggerheads with cruel Fate. Casting back to those first months, as he sometimes did, he wondered he had ever borne with them.

Everything had bored him—the life, the doctor, and above all, the five other men staying in the doctor's house. He would go by the little train to Riva and sit watching the steamers unload their cargo of tourists—English mothers and daughters, Germans with weird luggage, Americans, Italians—and envy all of them passionately. He became morbid and unsociable, speaking as little as possible within the bounds of politeness, and answering the letters of his friends tersely and rarely. The beauty of Arco, with its cypress-guarded tower and its wonderful Southern vegetation, oppressed him. Life was flat and meaningless, and he spent hours of every day on his back in the woods picturing the Stag Club at lunch-time, the theaters and music-halls of London, the pavements, the figure of Almirac, thin and elegant, walking up St. James's Street, and there danced before his eyes the

fascinating picture of Flip in her every mood. All this was before the mountains claimed him.

In despair he began to wander from mountain hotel to mountain hotel, a month at one place, six weeks at another, six months at another. He felt a leper, an outcast, and arranged to always eat at a little table alone at the various hotels, as far from other people as possible. And all the time the hand of God was on him, moulding him into a man. For one thing he became a great reader. The pages of Dickens, of Thackeray, of Meredith and Hardy opened his eyes to new views of the world; their characters lived for him far more clearly and sensibly than the people with whom he was thrown in contact. They educated him as no living person could have educated him at that time. He walked with the great ones of fiction through gorges and mountain-passes, pored over the majestic pages by torrents and by little gossiping streams, lay beneath pines and heard The Three Musketeers ride by, saw Sidney Carton go to execution, Don Quixote charge his windmills, fell in love with countless heroines, while the real world about him was a mist. "Who is the Englishman who is always reading?" people asked in hotels. "Milor Swift," was the answer. When people spoke to him he came out of a haze and had to focus them in his mind before he replied. This sudden blaze of imagination was not good for him; it came in too much of a rush. People faded before dreams, and he was out of perspective with the world. The mountains and the snows and the flowers as yet made no appeal to him,

but in those two years of wandering over the Tyrol and the Alps he changed so quickly that when at the end of the second year he found himself at Pau, he found himself then, and only then, a new man—a strange being with whom he had to become acquainted.

He reviewed those years in the train as he travelled to Pierrefitte, and smiled to think of the trail of cast-off clothing he had spread over Europe—socks left behind in the Mendel Pass, a suit at La Grave in the Dauphinè, a coat at Lovère, a hat at Lauterbrunnen. Though he smiled he had the uneasy sense that wandering had taken too much hold on him, and that he needed a home. All thought of a return to England had gone from him now, for at last the mountains had taken their hold of him and he became their son.

He left the train at Argeles because he liked the place, and sat down with a great sense of comfort in the hotel veranda and listened to the laziest giving sound in the world, the chorus of crickets in the grass. Here, having no definite intention, he spent five weeks, sending for his luggage from the station at Pierrefitte.

He read very little here; it was the beginning of his reading the grand open book of nature. Sun-traps appealed to him, the heat of the sun on his skin through his clothes, the glare and glitter of it, the purple shadows and the cool mystery of trees. He remembered his joy at the sight of the sun-soaked streets of Genoa, where out of dark, cave-like shops, fat figs appeared, and boughs of orange-trees glowing

with fruit like small suns, and lemons like long moons, and purple grapes, and the cool green of olive branches.

Memories of places began now to take the place of memories of people, and blotted out the procession of the heroes and heroines of books. So he would often sit under the shelter of some rock and wing his mind back to such things as the fairy-tale towers of Thun, or a field scented by Alpine lilies under the shadow of the Meiji.

It was early in May when he strapped a knapsack on his back and started, staff in hand, for Gavarnie. The first part of the road, as far as St. Sauveur, by the little electric train, but the rest, the glorious twelve miles, he walked, little realizing that it would be over two years before he should descend that road again. As he ascended and the wonderful valley unfolded its beauty to him, he became aware of a subtle suggestion of peace, and of the need he had for this wild loveliness. As people meet people who are akin to them and feel at once in unspoken affectionate communication, so he felt with this valley—it met him half-way; it cried “Son of mine!” to his heart. And when the first view of the Cirque fell upon his eyes, his heart warmed to think of the exquisite grandeur. Something dropped away from him, his restlessness, his feeling of exile went, and he felt like a traveller returning home.

An understanding woman who saw him seated outside the hotel after a late déjeuner, thought he was in love because his eyes shone.

In those first months of spring he learned to love the flowers. There was an odd old man staying in the hotel whose name was Vale, and he it was who told Timothy the names of them, and where to find them. Their acquaintance began in this way: one night at dinner Arnold Vale saw a vase on Timothy's table and in it a few flowers he had gathered. He heard him ask the waiter the names of them, and heard the waiter obligingly pick out the crocus and name it triumphantly, more he could not do. After dinner he went up and spoke to Timothy. "I see you are interested in flowers," he said.

"Well," Timothy replied, "I suppose I am. I didn't know I was until a week or two ago, but they—they seem to want to be appreciated."

The old man looked oddly at him through his large, round, horn-rimmed glasses. "They are more trustworthy than people," he said. Then, to Timothy's astonishment, he went away. Next morning he found with his coffee and roll a small book full of colored plates placed by his cup. It was Schröster's *Alpen-Flora*, and on the fly-leaf was written, "With the compliments of Arnold Vale." He did not see Vale until the evening, and when he came down to dinner he went up to the old man and thanked him.

"I chanced to have a copy," said Vale.

The next day they went for an expedition together. Then Vale lifted the corner of a curtain of Nature, and showed him how the *Polytrichum's* soft dark moss first appears under the snow, and how the meadow cresses come, and the cudweed and the dwarf willow.

There, under the shadows of the mountains, the white crocus starred the meadow, pricking through the snow, and the childlike Soldanella, with its purple bell cones, and the soft-haired Spring anemone, like a flowering mouse, and then the Alpine Ox-eye, and the speedwell with its bunch of blue eyes, and then, as the cloak of snow was drawn away, the ground was jewelled with the vivid blue of gentian, the yellow, delicate, scented violet; and later on the Primulas, prim as their names, would gather in wet places, where they look like pink-faced schoolgirls crossing a bog.

It was the opening of a new book to a man who was in exactly that state of mind when new ideas take root and flourish. Arnold Vale became a memory to Timothy of a man like the rugged rocks in the fields about whose sides little flowers clung that bloomed gladly and gaily every year.

As the Spring merged delicately into early summer, patches of green leaves revealing their flower secrets, trees unfolding their buds, the snow gently retreating, so Timothy became the lover and son of the valley and the mountains, and finding that there was a small farm to be sold, he bought it, and by autumn was installed. He became a member of the little village community, and might have been seen during the building operations leaning on a bank with Henri Gozast, the guide, Victor Pic, the plant collector, M. Coumély, the proprietor of the big Hotel, discussing village politics, or listening to stories of the mountains. The village lights took the place of London lamps, the trees spoke to him, the

flowers nodded to him, a deep peace entered into his heart.

That part of him that had been fed by vast quantities of people, the press of engagements, the crowded social life of a young, wealthy man in London, seemed to have utterly died. That part of him that books had illuminated with their visionary heroes so that he moved in a world of inspired words, seemed to have died also. The running water, the wind, and the eloquent silence of snow-fields, filled the places of both books and people. That of his father that was in him gave him a taste for silence, so that he held communion with Nature and was satisfied. The need for himself of other sympathies was filled by the simple, primitive people who were so courteous, and he began to live again in their troubles, their histories, and their simplicity. A man in his life dies many deaths and knows as many resurrections; Nature with her yearly death and her rebirth, most wonderful, in spring, taught him that. The habit of the man changed: what was fantastic in him showed in the names of his cows, in his peopling the glens and rocks with imaginary inhabitants, in his taking grave-eyed children to look for elves playing in the rocks and woods. It seemed that life must go on for ever in this leisurely fashion, one day very like another in its doings, quite different in its pictures. Flip, Mrs. Newberry, Almirac, Weatherby, were dreams who wrote letters of a life that was almost a dream. He had no idea that this was only to be a rest-house on the way to a life of strenuous

effort, that the pendulum would swing back and plunge him into the vortex of things once again.

Then, as men grow to one another, he grew to the village Curé, M. le Berade, and from him learned the beginning of the great secret of life.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FATHER OF HIS PEOPLE

THE house of M. le Berade is a truly amazing place: its enemy the weather and its painter the sun have battered and beaten the old thing into the semblance of a gray rock. The sun has taken the shutters and doors in hand and has mellowed the once bright green paint into a thing of wonder. The outside has stood all this bravely, but Time and a purse with a hole in it have done their best to wreck the interior. The banisters are held together with string, a broken door leads from the dining-room into the stable where he keeps his two mules and his antediluvian cart. The bedroom, with its wooden bed, its bare floor and walnut hanging cupboard, is as clean as a woman of seventy-five, Marie, his servant, can keep it, and she is nearly blind. Père Berade, as the people call him, is the most weather-beaten person in all the village. He is incredibly dirty, his nails are long and black, except on Sundays, and his hair, which he wears long, is a dingy white. He wears shoes with great hob-nails in them that make him sound like an army as he comes into the church and have a grotesque effect under his vestments; everything he wears is many times patched, and he is never to be seen but with an umbrella left behind by Noah in

the Ark. Out of a brown face covered with a mesh of wrinkles two brilliant blue eyes look gently upon the erring world. Into such a casket God has put the pure, clean soul of a child, the faith of a martyr, and the tenderness of a woman. After his daily Mass he goes home to break his fast on a piece of hard bread and a bowl of limeflower tea; in the middle of the day, at noon, he takes eggs as a rule, with perhaps some broth and vegetables, and for certain three glasses of a sticky, sweet, Spanish red wine. His nose is built for the quantities of snuff, he absorbs, and his sneeze can be heard from one end of the village to the other. Year after year he has heard the sins of his people and has given them the blessing of absolution. He has heard of every kind of crime and evil, gross, dreadful sins committed by his children, and day after day he thanks God that the world is so beautiful and people so good.

Timothy met him first over a question of fishing. He landed a two-and-a-half-pound trout the Curé had hooked that was in grave danger of escape.

“And there,” said the Curé, looking at the fish on the bank, “there would my dinner have gone but for you, Monsieur.”

At that the trout, with one enormous effort, leapt from the rock and into the stream again.

“You see,” said the Curé, smiling ruefully, “it is ordained I am not to eat him.”

“If you will have déjeuner with me?” said Timothy.

“You see,” said the Curé, bowing, “it is also ordained that I shall eat well to-day.”

It was the first time, as far as Timothy could remember, that his meal had been blessed by a Grace that seemed genuine.

The dining-room was white, and the deep easy chairs were the delight of the Curé. He sat in one after the simple meal and got up in order to have the pleasure of sitting down again.

"I am again in your White's Club," he said.

"You have been to White's?" said Timothy.

"Ah," said the Curé, taking a huge pinch of snuff, "you don't think this old parish priest has ever moved from this so small a place. He is like these good children here, born under the shadow of the mountains." The room echoed with a gigantic sneeze. "I was born in Paris, M. Swift, and I went to London once with the late Duc D'Albany, a dear fellow. I spik English very good, n'est-ce pas?"

He had an appearance not unlike Lizz, with his venerable white locks, and looked in his dingy black against the sunlit wall like some figure out of a Greuze picture, while his brilliant bandanna handkerchief made a sudden splash of color. In manner he had a soft voice with protective tones, as of one who is in the habit of speaking to children, and the way of using his hands most priests have, with the thumb and first finger touching.

Timothy asked him what were his impressions of London, and as he did so the wonderful voice of that city sounded in his ears again.

"I think always," said the Curé, leaning forward, "of thousands of black ants running between cliffs,

all aimless, all as if in terror, and I think I see that they go in patterns, in ordered ways. As one grows old, Monsieur, one sees always more clearly the great wonder of order in the world. The great mass of people are turning their faces in one direction, to God. Some turn their faces away, but they peer round again, and some hide their faces, for the light is very strong."

"But surely," said Timothy, "you of all men see the wickedness of people. I'm not any good at talking of this kind of thing, but I am just beginning to think. For instance, I am not of much use in this world. I do nothing but look after myself."

The Curé touched a bowl of gentians, the last of the season, with a long dirty finger. "Who shall say, Monsieur, that you are of no use, when you have cared for a corner of God's mantle?"

"Anybody can pick flowers, M. le Berade."

"It is a step," the Curé answered. "You will find this beauty in people. I spend my days picking the flowers of people's souls. You see, Monsieur, wickedness is so easy to understand, goodness is so simple, that one often passes it by as one passes by these little flowers. Goodness is so childlike that one who is grown up sometimes loses touch with it. If you look into the eyes of children you will see what clear wells of innocence they are. Do you not see that sometimes in the eyes of men? We have in our Church a mystery that is called conversation with the Saints. It is like walking in a garden with very simple, dignified people who understand you before you speak. It is an elevation of the mind and an exceeding lightness of the

body. I think, Monsieur, that people who pick wild-flowers have arrived very nearly at the wall of that garden, but they do not know that there is a gate through which they may pass."

"There are voices in the solitudes," said Timothy, speaking quite from his innermost heart, "but they are not always good voices."

"Do you think I do not hear them?" said the Curé.

Timothy turned red, amazed to find to what depths the conversation had gone; somehow he found he could talk to this man.

"Those things," said the Curé, "that disturb the surface need not trouble the deeps. But one must be careful of storms. Tell me, Monsieur, if you care to, why you are here alone."

Timothy told him; he told him also of Philippina. But for the life of him he could not explain why he chose to remain there in the mountains and make a home among them. He was in that stage of transition when food and sleep were not enough for him, when he began to ask himself intimate questions about himself, when, since he knew no God, he conjured up nymphs of streams and fairies of rocks, and the spirits of trees to minister to a need to which he could give no name.

He wanted a friend, and in Nature he had found one who never changed.

This was the first of many talks with the old Curé, to whom he took a great liking. As a rule the old man was full of humor, the simple humor of the people

of the valley. Sometimes Timothy would sit on a rock near the church, smoking his pipe, and would hear through the open door, where three blind men always sat, the congregation titter at some remark in the Curé's sermon. He would hear the rustle of people as they moved to kneel and the scrape of their chairs as they moved to sit. The smell of incense floated out of the door, the summons of the Sanctus bell rang out clearly; men's rough voices answered the peculiar nasal singing of the women and children. Sometimes he would sit where he could see into the church, and watch the wind flicker the altar candles like flowers burning in the gloom. For a space during the Mass and Benediction the mountains would enfold this little group of faithful souls all silent but for the hurried muttering of the priest. Once, when a bird flew into the church, he could hear the children's excited whispers. Once old Jean Paul Chapelle had a fit and was carried down from the gallery by two men. And when Benediction was over, by half-past ten as a rule, after the solemn hush of the blessing, there would come a clatter fit to rouse the dead who slept outside, and the people would pour out, laughing and chattering, the women in their red and black hoods and the men in black with their blue caps, and the children with their Guild badges. Then men and women would go to say a few prayers at the graves of their dead, and lastly, the hobnails of the Curé's shoes sounded alone, and Timothy would look in to see him snuffing candles. Then, framed in the dark doorway, the Curé would bow a salutation to him.

The soft, damp mists of November veiled the face of Autumn, the paths in the woods were quiet with sodden leaves, the last trees blazed orange and gold, clouds hung over the mountains, the crocuses died, the fields were sprayed over with manure, and the cattle were gathered near to the farms, a smell of the burning of wood-fires made the air aromatic, fresh snow fell on the mountains, and the days grew short.

Often as Timothy sat smoking in the evening his smoke would conjure up a vision of Flip seated in the chair opposite to him. He would be drowsy from the exercise of cutting wood, or the milking of his cows, which he had learned to do himself. Uranie's good cooking comforted him, and in a lazy way he would pretend Flip was indeed there and talk to her. Or he would sit down and begin a flippant letter to Mrs. Newberry, when he would remember her namesake, now peacefully asleep in the cattle-shed, laugh, put down his pen, yawn, and go to bed, leaving the letter unfinished.

And one morning there was an unaccustomed glare of light in his bedroom, and when he looked out of the window he saw the first thin coverlet of snow over everything.

It was towards the end of November, and about five o'clock in the morning, when he heard a voice calling under his window. He jumped out of bed and saw a man standing there in the dim light.

"Who is it?" he called.

"Henri."

"What has happened?"

“A child is dying down in the valley. I am going with Père Berade; he asks me to ask if you will come also.”

“Me?”

“Yes, Monsieur. He said, ‘Tell M. Swift one of my flowers is dying.’ That was all.”

“I shall be ready in five minutes.”

“Meet us on the bridge.”

As he hurried into his clothes Timothy wondered why the Curé should have sent for him when so many of the men were used to accompany him. Then he thought of the talk he had had with the Curé of the beauty of a good death, and supposed that he wished him to see such a thing. Although it struck him as a morbid idea he knew there was no morbidity in the old priest, and as he stumbled along the stony path in the darkness, he felt a keen excitement at the novel experience.

On the bridge stood Henri Gazost, the guide, with a lantern, and a tall thin man was walking up and down.

“It is the father,” whispered Henri, “Pierre Boule.”

They waited for the Curé, while the lantern flashed strange paths of orange light on the road. The river dashed roaring beneath them, but above that Timothy could hear the prayers of Pierre Boule as he paced backward and forward in and out of the lantern light, which shone as he passed on the rosary in his hand.

The Curé, wrapped in a big black cloak, appeared,

and Pierre and Henri both knelt; following them, Timothy knelt also, though he did not know that they knelt because the Curé had the Host in a case on his breast under the cloak and that his right hand covered. In his left he had a steel-tipped bâton, for the house they were going to was high up above the left bank of the river.

Not a word was spoken as they moved down the road. Henri walked in front, and the light of his lantern played on the snow as it swayed. Behind him walked the Curé, the father next, and lastly Timothy. The saying of the rosary went on interminably.

They went down until they came to a sharp turning on the left, stumbled over some rough ground, crossed a bridge, and began to mount a steep track by some farms on the other side. A dog barked furiously, and his barking followed them as they climbed. They were forced to go very slowly on account of the old man, but in half an hour they saw three swaying specks of light in front of them and heard voices. Pierre Boule ran ahead. Timothy heard, "Thank God, he has arrived in time." And then he found himself blinking in a circle of lantern-light, surrounded by a group of men and women, five in all, who knelt in the snow.

Without a word the Curé went into the house, and Henri beckoned Timothy to follow. Of what followed he had but a vague idea. It seemed to him, when he tried to reconstruct the picture afterward, that he must have knelt and prayed, not remembering what he said, with closed eyes. There was a bed and

kneeling black figures, and the sound of a woman softly crying. There were candles flickering and guttering in a draught. There were the low tones of the priest, and then a silence. In that silence he had looked up and had seen the face of the girl on the bed for the first time. Her big black eyes were like fires in her thin white face, which was lit by the orange glow of a candle by the bed. She seemed to be watching somebody very earnestly. There was no fear on her face, only an uplifted look of wonderful purity. Then her lips parted, and she smiled, and out of her young, smiling mouth came tremblingly, "Jésu, Marie!" The awful sound of a man sobbing, the low tones of the priest again, and again the words from the child, "Jésu, Marie!" And then the gray light of dawn, making the candle-light pale, came into the room.

Timothy rose very quickly from his knees and went out of the door into the open air. A star still burned in the sky, and the mists lay half-way down the mountains.

He had seen Death. Suddenly there filled the air with a triumphant, joyous sound, "Jésu, Marie!"

A chill wind stirred in the valley, a wind that might have been made by the passage of Death.

Why had the Curé brought him there? Was his feeling of emotion the feeling of pathos, or of a sense of triumph? He had been stirred to the depths of his being, stirred into feeling a sense of brotherhood with the man who had lost his child. He stood wondering to himself and this new feeling that moved him so strangely, when a woman with tears running

down her face came out of the house with a glass of red wine in her hand. "If you please, Monsieur," she said, and as he took it, "And thank you."

It was this little last touch of the inherent hospitality of these people that moved him beyond words. He drank the wine feeling it was sacred.

They walked back in silence, and when they came to the bridge Timothy could see how old and worn-out the Curé was, how white and frail in the morning light.

When he arrived at his house with Henri, whom he had asked to breakfast with him, he realized what the old priest had done: he had opened his heart, which had been lonely, to a sense of the loneliness of other people, and had eased a wound.

"Henri," he said, "that was very wonderful."

"Poor little one," said Henri Gazost, "but, *mon Dieu*, I am hungry."

CHAPTER XV

A PARCEL OF BOOKS

UNDER the influence of the mountains and the atmosphere of these friends Timothy lived until four years later we see him stride down from the Brèche de Roland, in mid-September and order an early lunch. He was now twenty-nine, and looked older by reason, partly, of his keen eyes and set lips and easy poise of a mountaineer and hunter.

You may picture him on a winter evening dressed in a suit of dark blue, seated by the big table in the middle of his study, sorting and cataloguing his Alpine plants. Outside the world is all white, with dark masses of pine trees, moonlit and mysterious, against the mountain sides. A heaven brilliant with stars and flooded by the pale grandeur of the moon guarded the clear-cut outlines of the Cirque. In the vast picture of purple-blue and white the orange gleam of Timothy's lamp glowed with a friendly home spirit on the snow. Intense, amazing silence shut them in, the only sound being the crackling of his fire of wood and the occasional scrape of his cuff as he reached across the table for

a gummed slip on which to write the name of some plant.

When he had finished all he cared to do on that evening he put his books, papers and plants away, took himself to an easy chair, lit his pipe, and drew a letter from his pocket. It was from Mrs. Newberry.

As a complete picture one would see the vastness of the mountains, their cloak of frost, the huge spangled tent of sky, the small white house, gleaming in the moonlight, then the cosy, lamplit room, looking as if it were the only habitation in the world, Timothy at his ease, looking as if he were the world's only inhabitant, and the firelit pieces of paper in his hand, the smallest thing in the picture and yet the largest, for they were London.

“My DEAR FRIEND,—

“I am sending you winter food for thought—a present from a cynic to a sentimentalist—flowers out of the garden of passion—the torment of men's minds grown into exquisite words—volumes of poetry. I wonder if you are ready for poetry. The time comes differently to every person, though the need is always there. Did they stuff Longfellow into you at school? They generally do. I *adored* Tennyson as a schoolgirl, and marked all the intense lines and tried to sob myself to sleep, feeling I was misunderstood—but I was so healthy that I never could sob, because I used to go to sleep at once.

“I wonder if you will understand Francis Thomp-

son, who writes with his fingers twined in angels' hair. And the book of oddly beautiful Japanese verses—

“The spring has gone, the summer's come,
And I can just descry
The peak of Ama-ne-kaju,
Where angels of the sky
Spread their white robes to dry.”

“It is all wonder to me, all of it—poetry I mean—and I imagine it will be to you, up in your mountains. It may take the place of women; I don't know.

“Do you ever want to have a grand passion, or have you clothed yourself in the spirit of the snows. Some men, I think, are only born to love once, and sometimes they never meet the right woman except in dreams. If they meet her in reality, everything is swept aside, all the conventional hedges Society makes to keep us in.

“Your friend Lord Almirac and his wife, Grace Ettrick, you remember—dined here the other night. Flip flirts with Almirac (Does that hurt or are you healed?), but I fancy he's in love with some other woman. Grace is just the same, a mirror without a soul, but a perfect reflection of all that's fashionable. She's very Cubist now and has men in flannel shirts to dinner, men with several wives and no manners, and she dresses in alarming colors and is beautifully made up to look dead. I believe she would even wear false teeth if it would help her to be unnatural. This isn't vindictive: I like her; but I'm sorry for

Almirac. Of course, he has a genius for being bored, but there is something behind his perfectly fashionable face that makes me know he's been hurt.

"I think London would amuse you for half an hour. We have all changed our shape quite suddenly. You know we used to be straight up and down in sheaths like lilies of the valley without their beauty—well, now we have swollen our sides with panniers. Flip looks a perfect darling, like a very good shop-window figure come to life. We also Tango—I don't know if you read the papers—Tango is not a pickle, as you might imagine: it is a dance brought all the way from the Argentine in order to stir the young in their perpetual sleep. Wonderful people, aren't we, and with what a sense of humor! It wasn't any success until some one said it was improper, but now quite nice clergymen do it for bazaars.

"You have altered, that I can read in your letters. You have changed into a man with some kind of mental reservation. What is it? Love? I think not, since your reservation is not guarded, but quite natural. It may be the mountains.

"Dear friend, I wonder if you know what a gift I am sending you. I sit and look at the covers of the books and wonder they don't burst out into flower or flame. There's Browning, so full of dreams and precious things the words choke him so that sometimes he seems to strangle thoughts; and there's the silver voice of Christina Rossetti, all her fine fire burning white; and Swinburne thundering like the sea he loved so well, his purple garment torn by roses and mad

passions and soiled by stain of rue and misery: he reels with the wine of the Gods in his head and flies with Mercury's sandals. And there is a volume of Wordsworth, who saw so simply and is, like a child, sometimes rather silly, and, like a child, wonderful, knowing God. Lots and lots I haven't sent you; they are for other things—Herrick's for hock carts and daintiness, and Milton like an organ in a great cathedral. If I read you right you will ask for more. But Keats I send, and breathe my love into his pages, purity of words, words like slim Greek girls, or willows, or the flight of swallows. And a little book of Shelley, with his tongue of fire and his spirit soaring with the lark. And one more—will you like the great sweating brute who loves his body so? Write to me about Walt Whitman. He seems to me to have come into this world of classic imitations and mock mediævalism and opened a window and spat. Coarse but true.

“They are going, all my fine spirits, my flock of poets, to you in your snows—will you catch fire, I wonder. You see I am always wondering about you; you are fastened into my mind with a sprig of memory very tenderly. Are you saying ‘Stupid, sentimental old woman?’ If you are, I don't mind. But I'm not old, only tired, and that is age, perhaps. I'm old enough now to be fond of boys and girls, and that is a sign and a sigh. I regret nothing—nothing except that I never saw the beauty of youth when I had it; everybody regrets that. You must grow up to appreciate yourself, the self you left behind, the self who was light-footed and light-hearted and was never

sick or sorry. Yet if the draught of life was handed one again, the self-same wine, incident for incident, would one drink it? I hated my father bitterly until the day he died; he was a hard, unjust man, but I see his view of things now, and could meet him half-way. You understand, I have no courage; if I had I should not sit day after day and sneer at beautiful things just to be fashionable. No, I won't say that, it isn't quite fair to myself. You wouldn't give an elephant a daisy to play with, would you? My few things, the things my soul loves, are not for vulgar display, or to be trampled on by coarse people. I often think how terrible youth is, with its fine clay modelled by chance hands—people, parents, I mean, don't count influences, and if they do, they can't do anything. Think of Flip, where did she get her commercial little soul, and her not very pretty mind? Don't be angry. I want to talk to you about her. Did she love you, do you think, a little? Did she ever see heaven's blue once? I hope she did. I hope you did. People have vulgarized passion by talking about it, but passion is very beautiful, and like all beautiful things, difficult to understand. But, again, like all beautiful things, very common. People say beauty is rare, how blind they are! Every omnibus that passes is a great galleon of high adventure. And beauty! Look at blades of grass, or the backward swaying of an earwig calling her young.

“I have a mind like a sponge, and I'm squeezing it all on you. Why? An odd hour before dinner, and only the light over my desk, and those books

before me waiting to be packed. Fancy packing Browning! It sounds almost as bad as torturing Greig into a roll of paper for a mechanical instrument. I'm playing on my heart-strings to amuse myself. Can you guess why? Because in my own odd way I suppose I love you. To whom else do middle-aged women play the song of their joys and sorrows? And I'm sending you of my best, and you may wonder, but will you know? Will a chance chord in you answer me?

"For God's sake, write to me. That sounds vehement, but I'm in Hell for the moment—my own private and particular Hell, of my own making and so without the charity of God. I can't tell you what it is—it's a woman's Hell, full of mean things. Think of an angel with a broken wing. I could have been so different, and yet I love my husband. That's enough. I can understand the people who whipped themselves for love of God.

"In this dark night of life I come to you, asking the door of your heart to be open that I may fly in there and sit silent till compassion heals me. This is too old and odd for you, perhaps, and yet I seem to read you in your letters as getting to know the world that lies beneath the surface. The old priest, the dying child, that story of the broken woman who came back, you understand those things.

"What will you do with your life? If you want to be happy, give it away. If a woman asks for it, give it to her, even if she hurts you. Pain is the only garment Saint Peter will recognize at once.

Suffering is knowledge. It warps some people; it has warped me, but I'm a coward.

"Nearly all the people I know died either of assumed respectability or assumed vice. Grace Almirac, who is only a frame for other people's pictures, has got one hurt, the burning desire to be separated from the crowd if only by more paint on her lips than the world allows, or more leg than we agree to show. How it must hurt to be like that. And Flip, my daughter, who showed you heaven for a moment in a kiss, what is she like? We talk, she and I, in well-bred whispers—that's all. And something is making her miserable now, and she draws into her shell, and I, who carried her and bore her, know nothing. We are acquaintances, that's all.

"I don't feel like a mother or a sister to you, but like a woman, more than a friend and not like a lover—just a woman, and I'm getting on for fifty. Does that shock you? And we have only met once or twice. It isn't morbid or unpleasant, but just the need for love some people have.

"Don't mind this letter; burn it if you like, or keep it to think about. Only don't laugh at it; I couldn't bear that. And don't think it's a phase because the next you get will be merely flippant. How's my splendid counterpart, the cow? Stroke her wet nose for me and tell her I wouldn't dare to come within twenty yards of her. Do you want socks or soap, or anything, or are you fearfully self-reliant about those kind of things?

"I'm getting fat. Good-bye.

"AUGUSTA."

In the silence of the room it was as if a voice had stopped speaking. He put the letter down and stared out of the window at the cold, moonlit snow. The whole of him seemed not so much body as something floating, and she seemed to float by him, and he wondered if it was what people called thought-transference that made him know she was crying.

He roused himself and lit another pipe and put away the letter in a drawer. But he could not shut out the feelings it gave him every time he read it. That she should love him he could not understand, but all she said fitted in with the new sense of compassion he was acquiring. The poetry she had sent him had winged him along unfamiliar ways, and lifted him above familiar thoughts. There was no woman in his life but one, and she a dream-woman, wonderful, elusive, and her kisses were cool in his dreams, and sometimes they scorched him. He had not answered that letter: the words would not come. He had written to her of his plants and cows and daily life, and at the end he had put—

“I will write to you one day when I understand what is happening to me.”

But he would not say any more, for it seemed to him that it would be unfaithful to the woman of his dreams.

CHAPTER XVI

WOMAN

FERVENT reading for a lonely man, those poets. They sang wine and woman and high adventure by the crackling logs; golden galleons swam into that lamplit room, and strange faces peered over their bulwarks, and strange scented songs rose from their lips, and the full red roses of their mouths made mock at him. Green eyes and gray, blue eyes and brown looked out from the shadows of the room; pale hands like flowers seemed to play soft music.

“She held a little cithern by the strings,
Shaped heartwise, strung with subtle-colored hair
Of some dead lute-player
That in dead years had done delicious things.”

Sometimes Timothy would look up from his book, his face rapt as the face of one who comes wonderingly out of a dream and doubts the world, yet doubts the dream as well.

Outside the frosted stars burned in a purple mystery of sky, the river went complaining through her rocks, the snow-white mantle held the sleeping earth.

He would look as if for some evidence that the world was real and see the flickering shadow of his microscope, and the star of red firelight living in his glass of wine like a chained spirit or the genie of a ruby half alive. Things real would come out of the room and take their normal

shapes. That chair: surely Faustine sat there with her "shapely silver shoulder."

One night he leapt up, throwing down a book and rousing the great dog who slept by the fire. His head was light perhaps with reading, but his blood burned. His dream-woman, compound of all the poets' verses, had sat with him that night, with eyes like green-gray seas that looked at him, now veiled, now glowing, now pure and sweet, now awful with passion's secret. She said, "Go back to cities and your kind, love as men love; drink life. You were not born to live alone."

So he went out into the night and bade the dog keep watch, and found his skis and sticks and carried them along the footway to the village, his feet crunching the snow.

It was bright moonlight and the houses seemed huddled together for warmth, and the bridge was like a silver span across a black stream torn with starlit foam. On the bridge he strapped his skis firmly, then took the road.

Can a man fly from himself? It seemed impossible. Even as he went swiftly, looking like some strange, dark bird against the snow, questions rose into his mind, questions of the life he was living. On and on he sped, sweeping the corners in big curves, until by Gédre, where they were cutting the new road, he stopped to breathe.

He was sound now of wind and limb, and had been for two years; he knew it. Why then should he stay here like an anchorite and listen to the old mumbling

priest and the thrice-told tales of guides and hunters, and grub for plants and flowers, and milk great lazy-eyed cows? He was a man, and there were women in the world, strange women with limbs of silver and hair that held secrets and mocking eyes that lured him on.

He wiped the sweat from his eyes and looked about him. Night in her purple and silver, her sky set orderly with stars, her hushed velvet shadows, her robe of thrilling mystery, held him enchanted. The mountains pushed their shoulders into the stars as if to claim a place in the heavens; long shadows slanted from them and a little fitful wind stirred the snow dust into diamonds where the moonlight strayed.

The silence of the night spoke to him, and he looked up at the stars and wondered if those who believed in a God thought He dwelt beyond those shining spaces and held a golden court with soft music and the perfumed breath of saints ascending with songs of adoration.

He seemed a body all pulses, all throbbing, all torn with wild desires.

Then he sped on again and the houses of the village flew past him and the trees and rocks. Ten miles he went before he turned, the fever still on him. He went more painfully now, with stiffer limbs and slower strides for the climb home. He asked for cities and rows of lights and the look of a theater or a restaurant. He wanted rare wine and good food and company and the oft laughter of women and gold in his purse.

The climb back told on him: his knees and ankles felt the strain, and as he went, with his mouth dry and

open, his desire grew into the desire of an athlete and the rest went by. The last five miles cured him of his fever; he was all a man of sinew now, and wind. As he came past the Chaos where great rocks are piled fantastically, he drew his first breath as a free man, free of his horrors, and knew himself cured because he had become his own man again.

His dog scented him, a hundred yards from home, and barked a welcome and drummed the floor with his tail and fawned at him.

“Old chap,” said Timothy as he took off his boots, “we have been in Hell and it’s a rotten place. We’ll have a bite of something together and be sane.” Then he saw the overthrown books on the floor and smiled, for one page of a book had a great dog’s-paw print on it.

He threw open the window, and having fetched a bottle of wine and some bread and cheese, he sat waiting for the dawn by the open window, his dog happy beside him with his head on Timothy’s knee and his great sad eyes on his face.

“Peter,” said Timothy, “when the sun touches the top of those mountains it will not be just to-morrow, but a new year, a real new year.”

There is something exquisite in the birth of a day; it begins with such cold promise, gray, no light, with no beauty like a day’s death at twilight, but chill and almost mean. Then one can feel the world waiting, and by slow degrees the gray grows to a tender green, and then the roseate light grows on the snow like some wonderful flower of the sky unfolding.

March was a wild month—teasing winds and swirling snow, black skies torn with blood-red at sunset, and pale skies full of a watery gleam at sunrise, with the mountain tops clear and black. Mists came into the valley, and there were whole days when Timothy lived in a cloud.

Then April came with her green fingers and began her delicate work; the snow crept back and the white crocus bloomed.

One night the Curé and Henri and Victor Pic sat over the fire in Timothy's study and told stories, mountain sagas full of the minutest detail. It was toward the middle of the month, and the little white daffodils were out in the fields and gentian and grape-flowers made blue patches like fallen sky. Victor Pic had stories of smuggling and the Curé of strange things, such as the hill where the witches met near Saint Palais and where no one would feed cattle or let their children stray, until the Bishop blessed it and a big statue of Our Lady was placed there. And Henri was in the middle of a story of bear-shooting when he was a boy and lived over on the Spanish side.

The firelight filtered through the Curé's hands as he held them out to the blaze and made a crimson outline to his fingers, and Victor Pic leaned back in comfort with a cigar in his mouth, following the story he had heard twenty times. And Henri was describing with dramatic action the picture of himself behind a tree with his rifle ready for the moment the bear should break through the undergrowth. Nuts, raisins and wine and figs were on the table, and Henri was en-

trenched behind two bottles with a plate of almonds to represent the undergrowths before him. It was half-past nine in the evening.

Just as Henri raised an imaginary rifle to his shoulder, there came a knock at the out-door and he paused. Timothy looked round, and the Curé said, "Some one for me, I expect." There was the sound of voices in the hall, and all at once Timothy's heart leapt. Then the door was opened by Uranie, and a girl in dark furs stood there saying, "I'm not a ghost!"

"Flip!" said Timothy.

"And very tired," she answered. "What a funny room for you."

All the men were standing, and she looked the littlest thing beside them. She had some scent that seemed to faintly perfume the room, and she was flushed with cold.

Timothy, scarcely believing his senses, presented his friends.

"I am sure I am in the way, but I can't help it," she said, smiling at each of them in turn. "But here I am." And she began to take off her furs.

"We were just about to leave, Madame," said the Curé.

"Oh, please don't leave because of me. Pinch me, Tim. I'm real. Aren't you brown!"

"We must indeed go," said Victor Pic, who held his cigar behind his back.

Never until she came had Timothy noticed how rough and primitive they all looked. The Curé in his faded black, Victor Pic in a rough blue suit and a

brown shirt, Henri in his Sunday black, and he in an old Norfolk jacket and a shirt open at the neck and innocent of tie.

She gave a hand to each as they passed out, and as Timothy bade them good night Henri whispered in his ear, "I shot her clean through the heart."

"Was he whispering about me?" said Flip as soon as the door was closed.

"It was nothing," said Timothy, staring at her.

"Do tell. Did he say I was nice?"

"If you want to know, he said, 'I shot her clean through the heart.'"

"Is he a murderer?" she exclaimed.

"The she was a bear."

"How awfully exciting. Could I have something to eat?"

"I'll take you down to the hotel," he answered.

"I'm not going to the hotel," said Flip.

"But you mustn't stay here."

"I asked your servant if there was a room for me—in my brother's house, I said, and she said, 'Mais oui.' Could I have something to eat?"

How curious it was to be with her in his room, in the chair reserved for the dream-ladies, all sparkling with her youth, his dog, now certain of her, by her side. A tenderness for her leapt up in him at once. And she brought London into the room with her.

"Flip," he said, "I don't know what you are doing or why you are here, but I do know this—off you go to the hotel."

"Don't be cross," she said, and made a little

mouth at him. "And do, do, do get me something to eat."

He smiled as he opened the door and called to Uranie to bring some food and received for reply, "It's coming, Monsieur."

Flip had poured out a glass of wine for herself and was munching almonds with great composure. The dignified St. Bernard, Peter, had one carefully balanced on his nose.

"I've run away," she said, without looking at him.

It was on the tip of his tongue to ask, "Why to me?" but he refrained and said instead, "So it seems."

"I think you are very dull," said Flip. "You've grown stuffy. We had a beautiful drive in a sleigh."

"We!"

"I said I'd run away."

"Flip," he said seriously, "if you have run away, where is the young man? There is a young man, I suppose."

"Oh, it's Pinch," she said, and looked suddenly up at him with questioning eyes.

"Pinch? Who is Pinch, you little bundle of wickedness?"

Then, to his surprise, she got up, put her arms round his neck and began to cry. Uranie—awkward that—found them so when she brought in the soup.

"Darling Tim," Flip sobbed, "Pinch is Lord Almirac and we ran away the day before yesterday, and I'm very frightened and I made him bring me here. Don't be angry."

"My dear," said Timothy gently, "I'm not angry."

I'm angry with Almirac, but not with you. Come along and drink your soup and you'll feel better."

She sat down tearfully to her soup, with the dog again beside her. She looked like a naughty child more than the betrayer of homes. Despite himself, Timothy smiled at her.

"Tell me all about it," he said when she was eating hot chicken, miraculously produced by Uranie.

"He was lonely and I was lonely, and we used to meet, and then we used to meet more often, and then—then it happened. And now it's all very miserable."

"And Almirac is at the hotel. Does anyone know?"

"You see," she said, helping herself to more chicken, "we were frightened and excited, and so I thought we ought to leave notes—so I left one for Mother, and he left one for Grace. We didn't say where we were going or anything. We just said, 'Things have been too strong for us.' At least, I put that."

She came from her chair and seated herself at his feet by the fire and began picking at the rug with her fingers. "As soon as it happened I knew—will you be very angry?—I knew I had really loved you all the time. Tim dear, I've not been very good—do you understand?—since you have been away. I have tried—I promise I have tried. And in the boat as we came over—we were going to Paris—I made him promise to bring me here. Pinch is very kind, but it was all a mistake. I thought of you and what you wrote to me about the mountains, and I thought perhaps you'd be kind to me."

He found himself stroking her hair. He found himself with a deep tenderness for the little bruised kitten at his feet. "My dear," he said, "what about Almirac? Almirac has left everything for you, burned his boats too. I don't know what to say to you."

"Do you love me still—a little bit?"

He was silent. He had put aside women for so long, and here came this little soft thing creeping back to him because she was hurt. She came now and sat on his knee and put her head on his shoulder like a child.

"I do so want to be loved," she said. "And you are so different from other people, Tim dear. Don't scold me to-night, because I'm so tired. May I go to bed soon, and will you lend me some pajamas? I'm not bad really. It—happened. I think Pinch is really very fond of me."

What could he do with a little soft thing like this? She came to him with a sense of absolute trust, as a child might go to her nurse and say, "I've done something I oughtn't to have done." And it was very delicious to feel her warm body in his arms and to feel the gentle stirring in his heart. He knew what the world thought of women like Flip and he resented that feeling. As he thought this, remaining silent, he felt her give a comfortable snuggle in his arms, and looking down he saw that she had fallen asleep.

There were his cold stars looking at him and the dog asleep by the fire, and there was he with a woman, a girl rather, who had once meant all the world to him, asleep in his arms.

Then he began to think out the situation clearly,

and print seemed to start up before him, the cold, insistent vulgarity of newspaper headlines, "Eloping Couple," "Brewer's Daughter and Earl"—that sort of thing, and it sickened him. He thought of Almirac staying obediently at the hotel, and of the sort of interview he would have with him in the morning. Flip looked such a child, and it was in this way she launched on her career as a woman. Perhaps Mrs. Newberry and Grace would keep it very quiet until it must be known. If so, it would be wiser for the two of them, Almirac and Flip, to go back quietly. Mrs. Newberry could fetch them from Paris. Grace would forgive.

Would Grace Almirac forgive? Would he forgive under the circumstances? It was no easy matter to weigh coldly the hurt it might have done to the woman. It might be that she was the sort of woman who would say nothing and do nothing; there was that kind of woman.

She had said she loved him, had loved him all the time. He looked at the sleeping girl and smiled very tenderly at her. Was the flame flower in her that she could love at all? She and Almirac—he wouldn't think of it.

He woke her gently, and she stood up, pink with sleep, and rubbed her eyes and looked at him. "Oh, yes, I remember!" she said. "I was dreaming I was in the train. I'll go to bed now, please."

There was a little room he had prepared against the time when he should have a guest. He had thought George Weatherby would be the first, and now it

was, of all people, Flip who took the candle from his hand and murmured drowsily, "Pajamas."

He fetched the incongruous garments and gave them to her as she stood sleepily in the doorway, then, as he said "Good night" and turned to go, she came up to him and lifted her face. "I'll be good. I shall like being here." As he kissed her forehead, he felt suddenly as if he had a grown-up daughter who had come home.

Before he went to bed he thought out a solution very carefully. He would put the matter before Almirac and show him that the situation was impossible. He would get him to write to his wife saying that he was staying at the hotel and she at his house. Then he would write to Mrs. Newberry and ask her to come to him and to take her daughter back.

Out there, with the pure white silence about him, the affair seemed easy to settle, so that he went to bed in that superior frame of mind a man has who has complacently arranged the lives of several people.

[CHAPTER XVII]

PRESERVING THE PROPRIETIES

THE first sight that met Timothy's eyes in the morning was the amazing picture of a fashion plate looking at a cow. Almirac, in perfect-fitting Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, a green soft hat, and his inevitable cigarette in its long holder, was standing regarding Augusta the cow. Somehow the sight made Timothy laugh, and he was annoyed, as he had intended to be very serious and masterful.

Almirac heard the laugh and turned languidly toward the house, greeting Timothy with a touch of his finger to his hat and the words "Bally early."

"Have you had any breakfast?" said Timothy, holding out his hand.

"Never breakfast," said Almirac, stepping on to the veranda, "I think it's an overrated meal."

"This is a nice mess," said Timothy. "What are we going to do about it?"

Almirac sat down very slowly and comfortably, threw away his cigarette, and said, "Nothin'."

"What do you mean by nothing?" said Timothy hotly. "I can't keep Flip here."

"I don't want you to."

“You’ve done a stupid—well, you’ve done a wicked thing, bringing this girl out here. She’s going home, Almirac. I’m going to see that she goes home.”

Almirac drew a telegram from his pocket and silently handed it to Timothy. It read: “I will never see or speak you again.—GRACE.”

“How did she know your address?” said Timothy.

“I wired from Paris.”

“You wired?” said Timothy. “Why? Good Lord, man, can’t you see you had a chance to square things up for Flip, and you have deliberately smashed everything.”

“I meant to,” he answered.

“You know what you have done,” said Timothy, very deliberately, “you have ruined this girl’s life as well as your own. Flip can’t go back into society.”

“I’m fed up with society,” said Almirac.

“Perhaps she isn’t.”

“I don’t think you know very much about either of us,” said Almirac with his peculiar drawl. “I never thought you knew much about anybody. I mean, you’re a bit up in the air, old chap, and we are a bit down in the mud. I didn’t bolt with Flip for fun.”

“Then why in the name of all that’s wonderful did you bolt with her?”

“I had to.”

He said it firmly and finally, leaving Timothy perplexed and exasperated.

“It isn’t the straight thing,” he said at last.

Almirac looked him full in the face for the first

time during the talk. "We are neither of us exactly saints. You haven't lived with Grace—I have."

"You could have left her by some—some arrangement, surely, without ruining this child."

"Flip and I," said Almirac, lighting another cigarette, "met at the time we had to meet. I was at a breakin' point and so was she, and here we are."

It was difficult to look at the perfect rest and ease of Lord Almirac and to imagine that he could ever have a crisis in his life. He was as calm and unruffled as his hair, and this very calmness nearly drove Timothy mad with annoyance. If it was a question of a great passion—well and good, it was done and over, and one must do the best with the affair. But this level, calm, Club way of doing it, with no romance, it seemed awful to him. And he said so.

"You talk a lot of footle," said Almirac.

"Your attitude makes the whole affair disgusting," said Timothy.

Almirac stretched himself comfortably before he spoke. "I've been livin' in a kind of hell. I never knew Grace month by month, changin' her face and her hair and her pals. She married me because she was in a fix. I'm not very easily moved or shocked, but she was disgustin', absolutely disgustin'. I've paid other men's bills, and saved her from goodness knows what fixes time and time again, and it bored me, old chap, bored me stiff. I got fed up. She's all right for money, I've seen to that. I knew she'd send that telegram. She's mad now because I didn't come

creeping back to her. I was rather fond of her once in my way."

"All this doesn't explain Flip," said Timothy.

"She can explain herself if she likes; I'm not going to."

"Why bring me into it?"

"Ask her," said Almirac.

"Look here, Almirac," said Timothy, "are you in love with her?"

"You've absolutely hit it," said Almirac.

Timothy got up from his chair and began to pace the veranda. The whole thing puzzled him; it lacked the heat and wonder of a romance, and yet here was a situation romantic in itself. It wasn't part of his character that he should think at all of romance. It was his winter diet of the poets that played him false. He felt as if he was beating air when he thought. Almirac would go into no solution he put before himself; it was altogether outside his range. If one loved enough to break all the rules of society, surely it would not be in this calm, almost insolent manner that Almirac displayed. The only thing he could think of saying was, "Well, what are you going to do?"

"Ask her," said Almirac.

"Don't you see that the situation's impossible? I can't have her here with me. Why doesn't she stay at the hotel with you?"

"My dear feller," said Almirac, slowly rising, "ask me another. She thinks you are a marvel, and she went like a bird to see you. That's all about it. She didn't want to stay at the hotel, so she didn't. I never

argue with a woman; I just wait. I'm goin' down now to find a paper; I wired for an English paper. There'll be the deuce of a row. You'd better come and lunch at the hotel and bring Flip. So long. Sorry to be so much bother."

Timothy watched the departing figure out of sight. Almirac, with his lounging walk of the pavements of London, with his gold-topped stick and air of gorgeous languidness, was a figure quite out of the landscape of snow and mountains. When Almirac had turned a corner and vanished, Timothy heard a voice behind him say, "So that's over." And looking round he saw Flip. She was wrapped up in one of his big coats, below which he saw the pink ends of pajamas and her bare feet thrust into a pair of his slippers.

"I heard you talking," she explained, "so I jumped out of bed and found these things and listened."

"So you listened," he said, looking at her and noting how charming and quaint she looked in her odd attire.

"It wasn't mean, because it was about me," she answered. "And now I want my coffee."

"Go and dress," he ordered.

"I'm perfectly respectable, Tim dear."

"You musn't call me Tim dear."

"Musn't I call you Tim dear, Tim darling?"

"That is just naughtiness," said Timothy. "I don't know what to do with you. It's impossible to treat this seriously, because of you, and yet, just because of you, I must treat it seriously."

"The awkward part of it is I'm in love with you."

He groaned. "Be sensible," he said.

"You didn't mind last night," said Flip, looking the most innocent child in the world.

"Go in and I'll get you your coffee."

She smiled in a bewitching way and obeyed him, shuffling along in his slippers, a preposterous, attractive figure, not at all the figure of a tragedy. And as he looked at her that warm tenderness crept into his heart again, and he murmured to himself, "What a baby!"

As she sat at the table eating her roll and drinking her café au lait, Flip did not look a day older than sixteen. She had done her hair in a plait and tied it with a big bow of blue ribbon, and she looked so small in the man's coat that it seemed incongruous to begin talking to her as to a woman who had run away with another woman's husband and who then calmly had gone to another man and said, "I love you." Yet there she was, and there were many things to say.

"It seems a muddle," said Flip, "and it is a muddle. Now, don't look so severe; you're not the judge. I'll explain. You see, I can't feel I've done fearfully wrong, and that makes it more difficult, doesn't it? I don't feel so very wicked, but I suppose I am. Pinch used to come to me and tell me things; poor old Pinch, he did have a rotten time. Grace was always about with the newest thing: first it was Mackay, the man who does those funny black-and-white drawings, and then it was Kroszek, the dancer, and so on, you understand—and poor old Pinch was utterly miserable, like a dog, and he came to me. I did flirt with him a little bit, just to get rid of his wretched face and to make

him buck up. Tim dear, I wasn't being awfully good myself, but that's nothing. You know Pinch's expression—"driftin' about, dear gal, driftin' about"—well, we both drifted a bit. He had rooms in Saint James's Street, and I went there one day and—well, I was tremendously in love with a married man then and very unhappy about it, and we talked a bit. It was about four o'clock, and we didn't turn on the lights. Did firelight and tea ever get into your head on a November day? We kind of melted to each other, I think. Are you angry? Grace got worse and worse. I mean she got so conspicuous. Then she took to drugs and became rather unpleasant. You see how bad it was for poor old Pinch. Then we thought we'd run away. Tim dear, I got so sick of intrigue and London and the house and not being married. I could have married heaps of times, but I didn't want to and now I only know for the first time that it was because of you. You are the only person I am ever really honest with. I was sorry for Pinch. Oh, it is so difficult to say, because it all sounds so horrid; I suppose to strict people it is horrid. I can't help being myself, can I?

"So we arranged everything, and when it really came to going away you seemed to be calling to me all the time. I don't know why. You seemed to be out of fussing things here, and I thought if I came to you I could straighten things out a bit—but there's poor old Pinch, isn't there?"

"There very distinctly is," said Timothy.

"He is in love with me," said Flip.

“I wonder quite what I think of you,” said Timothy. “I don’t know if you have any heart at all. You have broken up this man’s home——”

“Oh, I didn’t do that,” she said quickly. “He had no home; he had only two houses, and they always full of strangers. I am real to you, really and truly real. I can’t live with him. My feelings are all gone for him, now he’s away from Grace. He was so lonely, don’t you understand? If you’d been a woman and seen him in his rooms—alone! I don’t know if you know what I mean, but it seems so much more pitiful for a well-dressed man with an eyeglass to have a great sorrow than for ordinary people. And I am so weak. You wouldn’t expect me to live with him for ever just because—well, just because we didn’t turn up the lights, would you? We can all be great friends.”

Timothy got up and put his hand on her shoulder. “What are you?” he said. “A devil, a witch, a woman, or a child—I don’t know. You don’t love me. You only want to be petted, and it’s very difficult not to pet you. Are you going to throw over that poor devil? Do you think you can throw him over and bring your beautiful poison into my house? What do you expect me to do? Do you expect me to ask you to marry me and ask Almirac to be best man? Because I’m not going to do it. You must go home. I’ll see to Almirac.”

“He’d only follow me.”

“Yes,” said Timothy in despair, “I suppose he would.”

“I would be very good here; I could be good in

this quiet place. I wouldn't be in your way, I promise. Tim dearest, I've knocked about and I'm bruised. Pinch is only an incident. I've been through the mill of society and not come out very well; my sort don't. We aren't bad; we are weak. All the emotional things you do kill you—the dances and suppers and flirtations, and the awfully easy slack way you live, and the loose way people talk, and the little they think of things. I know that what little heart I have has always been yours. You are different from the ordinary man, Tim. I know all about my father. I'm like him, but men can do those things and keep their place in the world, and women can't. I can't go back now, and I can't live with Pinch. When he isn't sad and doesn't want comforting, he bores me, dear, he bores me horribly. Is that a dreadful thing to say? You have to pay for the kiss too many, but what can a girl like me do? You used to think me like a fairy once. Perhaps I am like one: they have no souls."

"Go and dress," said Timothy. "I've got to think this thing out."

She got up, her eyes fixed on his face, then she took three cigarettes from a box on the table and went quickly out of the room.

Timothy stood with his head in his hands for a moment, trying to fix his thoughts, and his mind went round and round and he became more perplexed at every turn. Just as he was staring blankly out of the window she stole back into the room and said, with a sweet apologetic smile, "I am so sorry, but I haven't any matches."

What was he to do with a girl like that?

He felt that he must arrive at some conclusion before lunch and then go to Almirac with a settled plan. If Flip refused to go home and refused to live with Almirac until they could be married, then there seemed no way out of it. There was no one who could help him, not a soul to whom he could turn. What would Mrs. Newberry have done, he wondered; he felt that she would have had some clear-headed plan for putting things straight.

With Spring in the air and in his blood he walked with Flip from his house to the hotel. She stole quick glances at him by the way and saw his face set and stern. Come what might, he was thinking; he would not allow any outside influence to spoil the severity he felt bound to exercise. So, when she put her hand into his and said, "Isn't it jolly, you and me walking like this?" he answered, "No," and took his hand away.

Almirac was sitting outside the hotel, sipping an absinthe. They could see his long, neat figure from a long way off. He was just the figure the hotel liked to put in its picture advertisements. He waved his cigarette-holder in welcome.

"I've ordered a special lunch," he said.

"How you can think of food with this hanging over your head, I don't know," said Timothy.

"Must eat, dear boy, must eat. Why not eat well? Have one of these?" He pointed to the absinthe.

"Very well, I will," said Timothy. "And we'll go into this affair before food."

"I'm not going to argue," said Almirac quietly.

"I will tell you what I have decided," said Flip. "It is very simple. I admit I made a mistake in running away with Pinch, and I can't go home now, so Pinch can go home if he likes, but I'm going to stay here with Timothy. You see, it's quite simple."

"You won't stay with me," said Timothy grimly.

"I will be a sister to you."

"I don't require a sister," said he.

"Somebody has got to look after me," said Flip. "I have never tasted absinthe; may I sip?"

"What do you say, Almirac?" said Timothy.

"I've got nothin' to say except that where Flip is I shall be there too. And if it's here, all the better. I'm sick of driftin' about, sick of it. As soon as the thing can be done, we'll be married."

"Never," said Flip.

"The whole thing is indecent," said Timothy.

"If you won't have me and I won't go to the hotel, where am I to go? Because I won't go home," said Flip. "Do you think it is more proper for me to be here with Pinch than with you?"

"You've run away with him."

"Yes, but I know now that was a mistake. I've done with that. Pinch dear, I'll always be awfully fond of you, but you know how careless I am."

"Good Lord!" said Timothy.

"You'll come round when you get bored," said Almirac.

"Flip," said Timothy, "you want smacking."

"I daresay it would be awfully good for me, dear," she said, smiling up into his face.

“You must take rooms in another hotel,” said Timothy. “What do you think your mother will say if I tell her you are with me? I’ve got a reputation to keep up.”

“Nobody need know; they can’t find out.”

“What about luggage labels?” said Timothy quickly.

She blushed a little and said, “Would you mind very much if I told you I’d altered mine in Paris when I knew I was coming here? If you look in the hall you’ll see them.”

He jumped up and went up the steps into the hall and saw three huge trunks bearing labels, on which was written in a large round hand, “P. Swift.”

“And how did you manage to procure all this luggage?” said Timothy, coming back to her with a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

“Mother thought I was going away for a week-end,” said Flip simply.

“I suppose the mere act of running away is compromising,” said Timothy, “otherwise——”

“Don’t bother about otherwise,” said Almirac. “I took pains to make it as compromisin’ as possible. I left a compromisin’ letter for Grace, and a compromisin’ letter for my solicitor. I took jolly good care to see that I should never go back to my wife. I’m fed up, dear boy, fed absolutely up. Deuce of a time they take gettin’ grub ready.”

“So you see, Tim dear, what I said is best,” said Flip. “Now I’m going to wash.”

When he was left alone with Almirac, Timothy

said, "I'm done. I don't know what I ought to do. What do you feel about it?"

Almirac roused himself with a mighty effort and fixed his eyeglass more firmly in his eye. "I'll tell you all about it," he said. "I know her and so do you. She'll come and stay with you and she'll make you in love with her, I'll bet you seven to four. I'll make it ten to one, and it's a gift. No good shakin' your head, dear boy, she'll do it. She must have people in love with her, and that's all about it. Then when you are in love with her she'll get fed up with you and want to try it on somebody else. It's her nature. I'm goin' to be the somebody else. I'm always goin' to be the somebody else. I don't mind because I'm in love with her myself—always shall be, and I've got to stick the other affairs. She's born like it, dear boy, and bred like it, and you can't change 'em. Full of go, full of spirit. I'm not one to talk of morals, but there you are—she ain't got any. It's been left out of her, clean out. She's a kitten, dear boy, a kitten, but I don't mind. She's perfectly honest in her way. She knows she can't help it. I'll bet you she'll be with you a couple of months and then—off. How in thunder I'm going to stick this place for eight hairy great weeks I don't know. I do know it'll finish her. She'll want to go and dance the Tango or go to a theater, or some tommyrot, and she'll go. And so shall I. I shall miss the racin' and the evenin' paper, and I shall miss a heap of things, but I shall be about all the time. I'm not arguing; I'm statin' a fact."

"Déjeuner is ready," said a waiter.

“Come along,” said Flip from a window, “I’ve begun.”

That afternoon two mules bore strange burdens on their backs—three huge trunks with labels in round handwriting—to the door of Timothy’s house.

That night Timothy wrote a long letter to Mrs. Newberry, beginning—

“I am trying to preserve the proprieties”

CHAPTER XVIII

SOLO FOR PAN PIPES

STERN moralists would have shaken their heads over Mrs. Newberry's letter. Stern moralists indeed would have, and did, shake their heads over the whole affair. It was denounced as heartless, destructive to all British decency, and the newspapers had their usual joyous task of handling the muck-rake. But the affair Philippina-Almirac refused to become high tragedy.

In the first place, the surroundings were Greek in conception. One had the mountains, the eternal snow, a valley fantastically strewn with rocks and torn by rushing streams. One had the lonely house where lived a man once engaged to the woman in the case. One had a man of noble birth, a girl of exquisite loveliness; one had behind this an outraged and beautiful woman. What more is possible? It is the very scenery for a saga, it is set to the haunting discords of passion, it is the story of wrecked and maimed lives and loves, a great and inspiring subject. Take the people—you have admirable contrast: Grace the mould of modernity with the artistic temperament artificially developed, quivering with the emotion of the moment; Philippina the luxurious, of no age or date, type of the flirt of all time; Almirac, wife-crushed, dogged; Timothy, a man whom circumstances had developed into a reasoning

being touched by nature and the poets. These should be passionate puppets and stalk with dignity the world's stage. But no, these were not saga-built people, where muffled drums ought to have replied to the wail of piccolos and the plucked strings of violins. There persisted instead the butterfly air with a comedian's touch of Pan Pipes, and a solo at that, not a full band.

Here comes your moralist full-blooded at the situation—back goes the erring husband to the weeping wife; back goes the young woman to her home, or, better, "Get thee to a nunnery," and your young man, "Charles, his friend," of the story remains dignified and uncontaminated.

And what does the seeker for high tragedy find? A long, flannel-suited, smooth-haired man, with an eyeglass, and a cigarette stuck in his mouth, helping a most attractive young woman to make a snowman in the valley, the proceedings personally directed by another young man with much light laughter. He finds the deserted wife making quite a cult of deserted wifedom, arrayed in a dress intended to convey the same, purple and black, with dull gold roses at her bosom. And the mother of the wicked daughter writing after this fashion:

"What can one do with such situations but let them arrange themselves? What can one do to such people as Flip but be kind to them, as one is kind to kittens? She is like those fairies who do as much good as harm and all without moral or immoral purpose. Of course, I am pestered by people who have the impudence to

thrust their opinions on me and give me their so-called sympathy. Some hold a brief for Flip and others for Grace, and a very few for Almirac. Do you know, my friend, that it is you I am sorry for. Flip has a touch of vampire in her nature, and she'll draw blood out of you, and though you want experience, that is a hard way to come by it. Put on your armor and keep guard over yourself, the self I mean that is dormant in you.

"The affair is sordid, but only sordid as might mud be on a butterfly's wing. You and perhaps Almirac are the only real feeling people in this. Grace is a pose made more or less human. Personally I believe she is glad he has gone. She is a dreadful woman, whose mind is so thin it casts no shadow because it can give no light. She is now only to be seen at exclusive first-nights of those plays that are bound to be failures, and she lunches very obviously alone at Almirac's old table at the Carlton. I could tell you who she will marry when the decree is made absolute, but I won't. Isn't ours a horrid slice of the world?

"Flip, you know, is one of a long, long series of women who have made men madly in love with them all through history and have left a trail of broken hearts in a path of roses—a primrose path stained with blood. Sometimes such women are shot or stabbed in the back in more reasonable countries; sometimes they grow old and very much more respectable than quite nice people, and then they publish very prudish Memoirs, spend their time, in fact, manufacturing a special whitewash for their private sar-

cophagi. They even deceive children, which is the most difficult thing in the world to do, into really caring for them.

“If Flip had a baby she’d be mad about it, really and truly mad about it, and hide her adoration jealously, but she would neglect it when it grew up. I know because that is her father in her. Children love him because he spares no pains to make them worship him, but when they do, he has done with them.

“These people don’t belong to our world. They have some strain of elfin blood in them and live on the borderland, and just because of that, and because they are misunderstood, they should be tenderly treated. The moral code as we know it was made for you and me; they don’t know what we are talking about if we draw their attention to it.

“We have all agreed to say she is in Egypt with Almirac, so your name has never come up. Take care. Bless you.

“Augusta.”

So Flip came to breakfast in a simple sixteen-guinea frock and her hair done demurely, and was so terrifically good that any wise man would have known she was up to mischief. With the air of an innocent child she exhibited the nails on her absurd shoes, just as if nails in shoes were a sign of sanctity. And one could almost hear her brushing her halo in the early morning.

For the first time in his life Timothy heard a girl’s voice singing about the house, little odd French songs, all about nothing—about a Marquise and a fan, or a

gentle lover and a piece of blue ribbon. And he would be greeted by laughter when he went to attend to his rock garden, and by noises of fear when he went to look after the cows.

Almirac peppered the landscape day after day. Timothy would look up at the great island of rock between his garden and the Cirque, and there would be Almirac, apparently smoking to the mountains. He would turn a corner in the wood, and there would be an immaculate figure lounging against a tree; or pass the hotel in the evening and there in the semi-darkness would shine the white front of Almirac's dress shirt and glow the end of his cigarette. On bypaths and tracks and by the roadside, by rocks and house doors lay the corpses of Almirac's cigarettes.

The aspect of the village was changed by the two figures of Flip and Almirac, for whereas he might be said to pose for a figure of languid elegance, Flip was certainly the embodiment of Spring. She ran down the hill paths with the faithful and adoring St. Bernard. If cigarette ends showed where he had been, wild-flowers strewed her path. Timothy would see her lying down in a field teasing the great dog with a cowslip, or racing up to the house with an armful of flowers like the figure in Botticelli's "Spring." And she chattered like a magpie and sang and romped, and even acquired courage to stroke the nose of a calf, who nozzled at her and sucked her finger, to her terror and delight.

If there could be such a contradiction, she would be Saint Flirt, for she reduced M. Coumely of the hotel to abject adoration and so obtained the finest

of chocolates, and Henri Gozast worshipped her from afar, and Victor Pic always brought her of his choicest flowers. And to the Curé she was "mon enfant." But then the Curé was using the most delicate of his nets to catch her butterfly soul.

The music of Spring played round them. It was as if some solitary little faun had been caught there and lost and played a wistful air about lambs and young buds and flowers, hoping his companions would come back and play with him. The Faun is a Springtime fantasy, who seems to vanish with the sweet-smelling hot breath of June. The Curé, walking in the mountains, heard everywhere the voice of God, and stooped sometimes to pluck a daisy and to wonder and to adore. And sometimes he stooped to pat a child's hair and to wonder and to adore. And often when he was alone and kneeling at the altar, he would pray for guidance in the matter of Philippina that her merry, mocking soul might come into his net, for he saw in her an enormous unguided power for good and evil, and he loved her. She was at her best with him and would gather him flowers for the church and stand watching while he told her very simple stories of his people. Peter the dog would lie in the little nave, seeming to fill it, with his great eyes on Flip and his tail ready to wag if she gave him a look, and the spring sun would light the dusky corners and glow on the tarnished gold of the statues of the saints and show this dark-eyed girl who held men in the hollow of her small hand and the old priest in his rusty soutane, and if those who read the newspapers had passed that way and had been told,

“That is the notorious Miss Newberry, who ran away with Lord Almirac,” they would have answered, “You must be wrong; I see a child and an old priest doing the altar vases.”

Clever as M. le Berade was with people, he did not understand Flip. He did not understand why she agreed so readily that Lord Almirac ought to go back to his wife, or why she was so anxious to stay with Timothy. “I want a rest,” she would say. And he who knew the need some people have for a quiet harbor out of the world’s traffic, was content to leave the affair at that. He had also a feeling that this charming butterfly who had flown into his village would fly away just as suddenly, and leave him with his dearest secret wish for Timothy.

One day Almirac announced that some English people had arrived at the hotel, and Timothy said, “The season has begun. What a pity! Now we shan’t have our paths to ourselves.” But Flip said, “Oh? What kind of people? Pinch, I’ll have tea with you to-day and look at them.”

“My dear child,” said Timothy, “it might be rather awkward.”

“If Miss Swift, who is your sister, meets a few stupid tourists? I only want to stare at them.”

Now Timothy had calculated that something of the sort must happen as soon as the tourist season began, and he thought that he would have to deal with an indignant and hurt Flip and a cold-mannered Almirac, so he spoke out his mind. “You two,” he said, “had far better keep very low. People are beasts and they

might make it very unpleasant for Almirac in the hotel. Of course, the papers have had photographs of both of you and some one is sure to recognize you, so for goodness' sake keep up here with me and don't go rushing about with Almirac and upsetting everything."

"I'm not going to stand in a corner all my life," she answered.

"The situation, say what you like, is a little unusual," said Timothy. "And I refuse to see my house marked with a cross in *The Daily Photo* as the spot where you are hiding. Don't do it, my dear."

"Got to face the music one day," said Almirac. "Better get over the shock."

"Don't blame me," said Timothy, and out he went to look after his garden, where there was so much to do at this season.

At déjeuner he noticed that Flip had altered the manner of her hair and changed to one of her most dainty frocks.

"So you are going to tea at the hotel," he said.

"If I am going to be stared at, I'd rather be stared at in nice clothes. Oh, don't look so glum, Tim darling. I shan't mind if they say nasty things, if only you are kind. And I do, I do, I do want to see some human beings again. And I do want to hear English chatter. Do I look nice?"

Of course she looked nice, the prettiest thing imaginable, and Timothy said, "You'll do." And she jumped up and went behind his chair and kissed the top of his head and said, "I'll tell you all about it at dinner."

"You are not to do that," said Timothy.

"Won't you want to hear?"

"You are not to kiss me."

"Don't you like it?"

"I wish you would remember," said Timothy, "that you are a dreadful person with a past."

"You know I'm going to be frightfully good."

"You can begin now, by coming down the rock garden and helping me to weed," he answered.

"That is simply mean," said Flip. "I get one little excitement and you want me not to have it."

"Look here, Flip," he said, suddenly serious, "you know this can't go on for ever."

"Are you tired of me?" she asked.

"And I wish you'd give up that horrible trick of twisting ribbon round and round when I try to talk seriously to you."

"Now you are in a bad temper," said Flip joyfully.

"I am only serious. You will have to marry Almirac. It isn't fair."

"Who to?" said Flip.

"To anybody, your mother, or—or anybody."

"I can't marry him yet," she answered.

"But you can let him know that you will. He's miserable."

"Poor old Pinch!" she sighed. "He knows I never shall. Would you miss me if I went away?"

He thought suddenly of his house emptied of her laughter and her song. "I have plenty to do," he answered

"Are you quite, quite happy, Tim?"

“Go down to your tea and don’t bother me,” he said, rising. “I only hope the people in the hotel won’t guess who you are.”

“Crosspatch!” said Flip, smiling. Then she called the dog and took her way daintily down the hill path. And Timothy did an hour’s unnecessary hard digging in his field.

Later, when he had recovered from the feeling that had swept over him, he went to his rock garden and began to set in order those parts that had been broken away by the ravages of winter. He was picking over the damp moss bed where his best primulas grew, bending over them tenderly and clearing the ground of pieces of stick and dead leaves, when he heard voices, and turned to see Flip coming down the field with a stranger.

“Mr. Varley insisted on seeing me home,” said Flip as she introduced the boy.

“Very kind of you,” said Timothy ungraciously.

“Wasn’t it!” said Flip, beaming on the boy who stood filling his eyes with her.

“Jolly little flowers,” said Varley.

“Are you staying here long?” asked Timothy.

“I was going to be here a couple of days,” he answered, “but I think I shall stay on. I’m reading for an exam. Jolly place this.” And all the time his eyes followed Flip who was bending over the flowers in bewitching attitudes.

“I suppose that takes up nearly all your time?” said Timothy.

“Rather not!” he exclaimed.

He was a nice, fresh English boy, with fair hair and brown eyes and good country clothes. And Timothy looked at him as if he were an enemy, a rake, an awful species of cad, and he bit the stem of his pipe savagely.

"May I show Mr. Varley the cows, Tim darling?" said Flip in her most innocent voice.

Now if Timothy had spoken from his heart he would have said, "You may show Mr. Varley any—— thing in the whole—— place, and then you may take him away and drown him." Instead he spoke from the veneer of breeding and said, "Do you care to see the cows?"

"Rather!" said the enthusiastic Varley. "Jolly things, cows."

At this moment Almirac appeared, having walked, by the careless swaying of him, only just across St. James's Street. And he said, "Weedin'?" in the most natural manner.

"Yes," snapped Timothy.

"We are going to look at the cows," said Flip.

"Can't you find anything better to look at than cows?" said Almirac, and he said it so pointedly that the youth turned red.

"We shan't be long, Tim darling," said Flip. And off they went.

Timothy bent over his work again, and Almirac, having placed a silk handkerchief on a rock, sat down carefully.

"Jolly little things, those flowers," he said.

"So the other idiot said," murmured Timothy.

"By the way," drawled Almirac, "did you take that bet?"

"What bet?" said Timothy, straightening his back.

"Ten to one."

"Ten to one?" said Timothy. "I never made any bet."

"Pity," said Almirac to the air. "I should have won."

"What are you driving at?" said Timothy.

"I offered to bet you Flip would make you fall in love with her and she has."

For a moment Timothy did not speak. The truth hit him full in the face, and he knew it. For days his heart had been whispering the words to him, "I love her."

"It's a lie," said Timothy.

"Rum thing," said Almirac, ignoring him. "Can't help it—nature. I'm sorry, old chap, because she'll get over it, and now she knows she'll get bored, and we shall move on. See her with that boy?"

"I am fond of her," said Timothy.

"Don't let her mess up your life," said Almirac earnestly. "It doesn't matter about me. I don't count. You can't help it, of course. But it'll get very difficult for you, dear boy, deuced difficult."

"It may," Timothy admitted.

"She saw that boy," said Almirac, "and bowled him out in about five minutes. Apologized for the room the dog took up to start with. Poor devil. I bet he'll leave here in three days."

"What's to be done?" said Timothy.

“Nothin’,” said Almirac. “But if you go in and win, here’s luck. She told me you were a chap she could always make certain would be the same whatever she was. If I find she intends to stick to you, I’m off. Understand? I can say that because I’m fairly certain she won’t stick to you. I’m a bit of a limpet, you know, once I’m fixed on a spot where I intend to remain, there I’m glued. But if it’s you—well, there’s a difference. I’ll go now and take the boy back to his grandmother—his grandmother’s one of those irritatin’ tutors like an old woman, knows the names of everything, burstin’ with unnecessary information.”

He folded his handkerchief carefully and strolled away, leaving Timothy reeling with the thing that had come to him. If he had ever had any doubt as to the purpose of his life it was dispelled now; his life was about this soulless, joyous child, this fascinating pixie who lived on love. He would give it to her heaped up. In his heart he dismissed Almirac, his generosity and his cynicism, his air of owning Flip and his air of disposing of her. She was for him. The mountains, the snows, and the streams and flowers were but a shrine for her. If she wearied of them, he had money in plenty. If she wished for the life of cities, cities should find them there. In the tempestuous hour he spent among the rocks and their wonderful confiding flowers he vowed his life to her, body and soul. His love should drown all pettiness in him and her. He would always be her lover, with a love so great that it should satisfy her.

When the time came, they would be married some-

where and come back to his mountain home. Life spread out one long pastoral, long days of milk and honey, long hours of sunshine. And even as he thought and the thoughts surged round his heart like waves and seemed to drown him in ecstasy, the sun went behind clouds and the place grew dark and forbidding.

He would speak to her that very night when they were alone. High-hearted he went up to the house to see that an especial dinner was provided and some good claret warmed. On the table in his study he found a note—

“Mr. Varley insisted that Pinch and I should dine with him, and you too. Do come. We’ve gone on. I’m only teasing you. “FLIP.””

Go down there to the hotel, with his joyous mantle of love on, never. He would wait for her until she came in, away from the atmosphere of the boy and Almirac and the prying eyes of waiters, and then—and then—His thoughts could go no further. He would not even go to meet her; better that she should come to him. The boy, poor devil, would see her to the door. Then he would take his lonely way to the hotel and out of her life. He ate his dinner and sat waiting, glowing with the thought of her.

CHAPTER XIX

THE STORM

IN those hours of waiting the hot flame that burned in Timothy wrought many changes in his mind. From a passionate tenderness so great that the tears started in his eyes, there came a great sensation of violence, of uncontrollable anger. The fire fed the primitive man in him, that old Adam men have had since unwritten time that has made them seize and carry off women at the saddle bow or over their shoulders, to take them to solitary caves or lonely castles and there placing them defy all men to take them away. He scorned Almirac's spirit of toleration and of waiting; he scorned the bashful ardor of the young boy who was ready to go on bended knee. And when he thought of Flip the hot blood rushed to his face and his hands gripped the arms of his chair so that his knuckles stood out suddenly white.

He would take her to himself and bar the door against the world. Did she dare look at another man, that man must first answer to him and then go for ever from her sight. As a man caught up on the high waves of religious emotion will see and fight with evil spirits, so will a man burning in the flames of eager love see and fight the evil spirits of his mind.

He threw open the window and leaned out. The night was black, a sullen, unfriendly black, and no stars showed, and the mountains were hard against the sky. And it was hot and airless and there was a slight smell as of something burning. He knew there was a thunderstorm ready to break, and the knowledge wiped away the fever of his mind and caused him to become at once practical. They are fierce, these mountain storms, like great combats between evil powers and the mountains, and the more the fires crackle on the summits the more the bellowing thunder seems to come as a voice of giants fighting. And gray rain like the cloak of filthy witches obscures the combat and drowns the voice of the protesting rivers.

One could imagine some old, old, quarrel between giants had blazed up again, and that one side used huge rocks to crash down on the other side, who used blue flames that tore hill-sides in pieces and split and burned old trees. And in the beginning an evil wind whispered messages of insult from one camp to another, until the full fury began, and then the wind would go mad and shriek over the din of the fight and yell with unearthly laughter in the hollows of the valley. Small wonder that peasants crossed themselves and women shivered in bed and children hid their faces and cried.

When the wind came up like this it was dangerous walking on the hill paths from the village to his house, especially so for women, for the wind caught in their skirts and sometimes threw them over steep places. Anna Gozast had been killed that way.

Timothy found his lantern and lit it and put on a thick

coat and went out, stick in hand, to bring Flip home; and just as he opened the door a great gust of wind caught it and slammed it behind him, smashing the lantern and narrowly escaped smashing his hand with it. The wind caught his breath so that he gasped, and then the rain came down. Before he had taken ten steps his dog bounded out of the darkness and a flash of lightning showed him the figure of Flip struggling toward him. She put out her arms and fell toward him, gasping as he caught her, "I'm so frightened."

When they were inside, the pathos of her struck him so that he became gentle from the fierce thing he had been, as fierce and passionate as the storm. In those few moments her delicate dress had been drenched, so that it clung about her and showed all the contours of her body, and her hat was a shapeless beaten pulp and her hair clogged with rain. And her face, all rain-wet, was like the face of a magnolia, and distressed with terror. The St. Bernard shook himself and the water sprayed over them and on to the walls.

"Go and change quickly," said Timothy. "Then come down and dry your hair."

"I'm too frightened to go to my room," she said. And then she clung to him, for a furious wind shook the house and a blast of thunder tore the air, so that her voice was drowned.

"I'll stand outside the door," he said, gently leading her upstairs. "It is only a thunderstorm and it'll be over in a minute. Hurry, my dear."

"I'm wet through."

"Then change everything, only be quick."

"I'm not so frightened now," she said. "You needn't wait."

He went downstairs and made up the fire, and brought out some wine and cakes, and then saw to the fastenings of the windows and outer doors, and sat down and waited. Raindrops splashed down the chimney and hissed in the flames, and the wind moaned now like a trapped prisoner.

She came in with a dressing-gown all fluffy with lace that billowed about her; her feet were bare and thrust into a pair of old slippers, and her hair was down and about her shoulders, hanging wet and limp and shining like ebony. And the sight of her caught at the breath in his throat and made him speechless for a moment.

"You don't mind, Tim dear?" she said.

"Sit down and get warm," he said roughly.

As she sat on the rug by the fire a branch was flung furiously at one of the windows and the voice of the wind rose, howling dismally.

"Why did you come back alone?" said Timothy.

"Are you angry?" said Flip.

"I want to know."

"The boy became silly, and I didn't know there was going to be a storm, and Pinch wasn't there."

"Why not?"

"You do sound angry."

"I'm not in the least angry," said Timothy.

"Pinch left me alone with the boy because he said he had something he wanted to say." She laughed, a little low laugh, at the thought. And Timothy bit his lip.

"Did he say it?" he asked.

"Men are funny," said Flip.

"Most humorous," he said sarcastically.

"It was awfully dark and he took my hand, Tim dear, and he began, and I laughed because a hair was tickling my nose."

"Poor devil."

"He has a hundred and fifty a year of his own, and expectations," she said laughing. "I did want to see his face, but it was too dark. And then he tried to kiss me."

A crash of thunder drowned Timothy's exclamation.

"Tim dear, you look at me so hard, don't you like me with my hair down?"

She looked like a girl of fifteen, and she put her face up and smiled at him, and he took a step forward and then changed his mind and went to the table and poured out some wine and handed it to her.

"You have got a shaking hand," she said. "See, you've spilt some on my foot."

He looked down and saw a drop of wine blazing like a ruby in the firelight on the smallest, whitest of feet, and he longed to kneel down and drink it. And the longing overcame him so that he knelt down and kissed her bare foot, and for a moment the world swung in dizzy space and her head touched his shoulder and her hair was across his eyes.

He got up slowly and stood away from her, and their eyes met and melted into each other.

"I hate you," he said thickly. "You're a devil. You tempt men beyond all bounds. I can't bear it."

In the silence that followed, the storm surged round

the house and the trees outside kept up a roaring conversation, and leaves and sticks cracked suddenly against the shutters.

"You love me," she whispered.

"I don't know. You are the type of woman I detest. A flirt, a breaker of hearts, with no depth and no heart of your own."

"Tim darling!"

"You impose yourself on me with your helplessness, and then you expect me to be a sort of plaster saint. It isn't fair."

"I love you better than anyone else," she said in a pleading voice. "There isn't any harm in your kissing me. Kiss me."

He trembled as she spoke. "What about Almirac? What about the others? Don't move, or I shall hurt you. Are kisses nothing to you? When I went away because I was ill, you could have stopped me by holding up your finger. Did you? I went away hating women. I cured myself of you in three years. I was free of all thought of women for a whole year after that, and now you come back into my life and—and I'm mad about you. It wasn't love the first time; I was too young. I don't know that it is now. It is as much hate as love. If I let myself go, what should I suffer afterward? Almirac is right, you would get tired of me and find a new sensation."

All the time she had been looking at him with half-frightened eyes, just as she had looked at him when she came in from the storm, and the blood had left her face and it was like a magnolia set in ebony again.

"Tim," she said, "are you quite kind?"

"Kind?" he cried. "Go to bed, for heaven's sake, and leave me."

"I can't help myself," she said, looking at the fire now. "I'm me. I suppose I am very wicked, but I always want to be loved. You are the best man I have ever met, and I could never make you happy. I don't think I was supposed to make people happy, and yet they love me. I can't help wanting to be loved. I don't want to hurt you, Tim; I don't really. Will you believe it?"

"Go to bed," he said, "or I think I shall kill you."

"I'm not in love with Pinch," she said slowly. Then she raised her face to his. "I'll go away with you if you'll marry me," she said. "Anywhere where there aren't any people. I'll learn to be good if you will teach me. I'll try awfully hard, dear, I really will. Only I'm never really certain of myself. I did make that boy fall in love with me on purpose, and I did make him hold my hand. It's awful, isn't it? But if you'll teach me, I'll try, Tim dear. I'm rather frightened of myself. I don't know what I might do."

He longed to hold her in his arms and knew he must steel himself against it, and with his teeth set he turned away from her and poured out a glass of wine and drank it off in a gulp. The house quivered in the storm and the wind mocked at them in the room as if evil spirits raced round the house and fought for entry.

Then he turned again and she stood up, her head a little back, her arms limp at her sides. He was breathing heavily, like a man who has run far, and his eyes were

fastened on her, while hers were nearly closed. And as he stepped toward her with a moan on his lips there came a furious battering upon the door. His eyes cleared and he brushed past her, but she swayed and fell into his arms, and then, the world lost to him, he crushed her to him and kissed her on the mouth. She lay for a second against him, like a dead thing. A shiver ran through her body and it seemed to race through his blood. Then the battering began again.

With a sigh like a man coming out of a dream, he put her away from him and went to the door, opened it and went into the passage. Holding the front door firmly, so that the force of the wind should not tear it open, he undid the fastenings and opened the door. A yell of wind came through the door and a hustling eddy of leaves. Almirac stood there with a sodden end of a cigarette hanging from a corner of his mouth. He came in without a word, for he had no breath left, threw his mackintosh into a corner and went into the room.

He stood for a moment looking from Flip to Timothy, removed the wet cigarette end from his mouth and threw it into the fire. "Beastly night," he said. "Got any brandy, Swift?"

At once Flip rattled away. "Tim has everything, haven't you, Tim? Do give poor Pinch some brandy. Look at your shirt. Did you think I was lost?"

"I did rather," he said. "Dress-clothes—rotten things in a storm. Lightnin' be George, never saw anythin' like it. I thought I'd nip up here to see if you were safe. Here's luck."

He swallowed his brandy. "Asked the young feller

if he'd seen you home, but he was drunk or somethin', just glared at me. Glared, dear boy, as if I'd trodden on his foot."

"You'd better change those things," said Timothy.

"Good idea. I'll put up with you to-night, if you don't mind—any old chair and a rug, what? No good goin' through that riot outside again. Awful night. I'll have another peg to keep the cold out."

"You do look funny," said Flip. "Do look at your hair; it's all over the place.

"Yours ain't so very neat," said Almirac, "though it looks stunnin'."

"I'll go to bed now," said she. "I got wet through too, as you can see. Good night, Pinch dear. Good night, Tim." And she went quickly out of the room.

"Did you come here to see if she was safe?" said Timothy.

"Yes," drawled Almirac, looking him full in the face. "Exactly."

"She is perfectly—safe," said Timothy.

"Glad to hear it, dear old feller, glad. Encore un cognac, as they say. I'm beastly chilly."

"I have to leave here for a couple of days in the morn-
ing," said Timothy.

"Well, bon voyage, as they say. I think I'll get out of these sappy things now."

The wind had dropped as suddenly as it had risen, and when Almirac was changing in Timothy's bedroom, Timothy opened the front door again and looked out. In a flood of starlight the mountains showed white, calm, serene against a cloudless sky.

CHAPTER XX

TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED

WHEN Flip came down the next morning she found Almirac devouring a large breakfast, a most unusual thing for him and she looked round the room for the dog.

"Swift has gone off for a couple of days," said Almirac.

"Rather sudden," said Flip.

"Coffee?" said Almirac pleasantly.

She sat down opposite to him, with her elbows on the table, and said sharply, "Pinch, why did you come here last night?"

"Just for a lark," he answered.

"I didn't think you were given to walking two miles in a thunderstorm for a lark," she said.

"Bored at the hotel," he answered, looking blank at her.

"And has Tim left at five o'clock in the morning for a lark?" she said.

"Couldn't tell you," said Almirac.

"I can tell you," said Flip, with a rising color. "You came here to spy on me."

"Don't get dramatic," sighed Almirac. "I was only just mouchin' about, and I drifted in, dear girl, drifted in on the chance."

"I hate you," she said savagely.

“Right O!” he said. “Drink your coffee.”

Her hand went to the cup swiftly as if she might have thrown the coffee in his face, and then, as suddenly, she put her head down and began to cry.

“Oh, damn!” said Almirac. “I say, don’t blub; it’s all right. I understand, don’t you know.”

“But I do love him,” she sobbed. “Pinch, dear, I really and truly do, and he loves me, and I’m awfully sorry for you.”

“And for the boy at the hotel——”

Up came her head quickly. “That’s mean,” she said. “I couldn’t help that. Am I always to be followed about by you and watched and scolded if I have a little fun?”

“Fun!” said Almirac.

“You know what I mean. If silly boys choose to fall in love with me, can I help it?”

“Swift isn’t a boy.”

“And you know that’s different.”

“Look here,” said Almirac, “this is a very difficult position, ain’t it? Here am I and here are you, and by the ordinary rules we oughtn’t to be here. Now, take old Swift—he’s a man, he can’t stand it; it isn’t the game, dear girl, it isn’t the game. He’ll get hurt, and you can hurt, you know—not that I say you always do it on purpose, but a man’s a man. I haven’t got the words, but you know what I mean.”

“Don’t you think,” she said, “that Tim can look after himself?”

“I don’t think any man can look after himself when there’s a woman lookin’ after him.”

“You are simply inhuman,” she said.

“Wrong, dear girl, wrong,” said Almirac, lighting a cigarette. “It’s because I’m so deuced human that I’m here.”

“If you interfere——”

“Look here,” said Almirac, “in the words of Society, we’ve come a mucker. We’ve got to live our own lives until we wear down the rotten look of the thing. It happens so often that the thing has conventions of its own, and we’ve got to stick to ’em. We don’t want to mess up Swift’s life, do we? I’ve let you have a long rope and you’ve pulled it up now as far as it’ll go. If you were a bee you could go round from flower to flower, as the chaps say, but you’re not; you’re an immoral little animal who wants clothes and food and a roof over you, and you’ve got a couple of hundred from your mother. I’ve got to pay the rest, and I want to.”

“I’m perfectly happy here,” she said.

“Well, I ain’t, and that’s the long and the short of it.”

“Am I very bad?” said Flip, suddenly melting.

Almirac got up and stood with his hands in his trousers pockets, leaning slightly forward. He looked neither knight nor lover; he looked, if anything, a little comic, except that his expression was as serious as an eyeglass would allow it to be. “Can you understand you are everything in the world to me?” he said. “I’m not a feller for talkin’ as a rule, but I’ve got to get this off my chest somehow. I may be dumb, but I’m not blind. That chap kissed you last night. I had an idea somethin’ was goin’ to happen and that’s why I

dropped in. It's a trifle more than a chap can bear. I want you to be happy and I'll do my level best to make you, but I want a corner for myself, old girl—just a crumb or two now and again, you know. It sounds old-fashioned, but I say, if you love this other feller, then leave him. You'd never make him happy. If he's crazy about you, well, so am I, and that's a fact. I sit about and think about you. Now I'll slope off and leave you to think it over. So long."

Without paying any attention to her as she sat watching him, he lounged out of the room, lighting another cigarette as he went.

He had impressed her. She sat for a long time trying to work out the problem of her life, and she felt, as children feel, a grievance that she could not be left alone to be happy in her own way. But at the same time a vista of years came into her thoughts, and she knew that unless she pulled up now she would flutter along from man to man until she died. And the thought sickened her. A footstep made her look up, and she saw the Curé on the veranda.

He saw her through the open window and greeted her affectionately with "Bon jour, mon enfant."

Her face immediately lit up at the sight of the old man, as it lit up for every man.

"I will come out," she said, "and you shall talk to me as I am very sad."

He patted her hand affectionately and said, "So the little one is sad, and Sir Swift is away—eh? And life is very hard—eh?"

"What am I to do?" she asked simply.

“The play part is over,” he said gently, “and what was a game—eh—has become all at once a situation.”

“Am I to blame?”

“My dear child,” said the Curé, “I have thought over this affair very, very often. It is new to me. I have prayed for light. If you were a Catholic it would be so very simple. I should have given you into the charge of some good Sisters for a while, and then in time the good God would have arranged your life for you. So I must take what you would call, I think, your cricket code, your fair play. First, I shall say you know those notices in your country, ‘Trespassers will be prosecuted,’ and I shall say this to you, for you have arrived in a strange country and travelled far, and behold you come to this notice. You cannot break the laws, my dear child, and if you try, they will break you. And one of the laws is this: you shall not hurt your friend.”

“I love him,” she said.

“So you see what I mean,” he answered. “Yes, it is dear Sir Swift. I have been watching. And it has come now, and so you must go.”

“Where can I go?” she cried.

The Curé took a pinch of snuff before he answered. “God has given you a great charm and I think you have not used it well—eh? You say always to men and women and children and animals, ‘You shall love me,’ and then you trample with your small feet on their hearts and go away laughing. My child, if only you could go back to your home and give your charm to the poor and to those no one loves—eh?”

“This is very ideal,” said Flip, “but ideals are impossible.”

“God has revealed to us that ideals are the only realities.”

“I don’t believe in God.”

The Curé smiled, as if his face caught a gleam from the Courts of Heaven. “God believes in you,” he said. “Look at what is before us, the mountains, the clear sky, the green fields and little flowers; it is a fringe of His garment. Would you go to some very dear women I know and live quietly with them for a little while? They would not talk of religion to you; they are Sisters, and they are very good and simple, like these flowers, and they teach children. When I have been to see them I come away feeling at peace with the world. You hear children’s voices and the voices of the Sisters who mother them, and it is all white. Will you go?”

“Monsieur le Berade,” she said impatiently, “do you realize what I am? I am a woman who has broken the moral code: who has gone away with another woman’s husband, who has been away with him for weeks—and you talk to me of little children as if I were a child. I will do my best to keep to my man, though I know now I do not care for him. I will not hurt Sir Swift, as you call him, and will do my best not to hurt poor old Pinch—Lord Almirac. Is that enough?”

The Curé looked at her and sighed. “I only ask you to ask your heart; I can do no more, my child. And to think of the day when all secrets shall be revealed. And to pray for a belief in Heaven.”

"Why do you try to make me miserable?" she asked.

"My child, I think it is good that you should know what you are doing. You are slipping away even from your own loose code. You are killing your soul so that it cannot speak to you. You are killing the soul of that man with whom you have run away. Go back, child, go back, and face your world as a penitent; go back and glory in it that you shall be scorned and thought a fool, as you have returned to the paths of goodness. Leave these men and go to your mother or to some kind woman and start again. It will be hard at first, but God helps those who are trying to come to Him."

"And the man?" she said angrily.

"The man has a wife," said the Curé.

"She is divorcing him."

Suddenly the Curé clasped his hands and bent his head. "Oh, God forgive me, I am very old," he said.

"I am sorry," said Flip, rising and speaking very coldly. "But I do not think you understand the way in which we live."

The Curé rose to a weary old figure in his shabby clothes, and the light from an inner fire shone from his eyes. "If I were not so old," he said, "I would go into your Society and I would shatter its inanities and blasphemies and foul living, as God shattered the evil cities. You have been brought up in a pool of filth, my child, and you are a flower in the sight of God. You have breathed the poison of loose living and loose thinking and it has polluted you. May He bless and guard you and lead you to the light."

She faced him with her hands clenched and her eyes blazing. "You may go," she said.

"Oh, my child!" he said, in a broken voice. Then, finding his hat and old umbrella, he went slowly away.

Flip watched him out of sight—a little, dry-eyed, passionate figure. Her tongue was dry and her hands hot, and she felt as if she had been whipped. And when he had gone she went into the house and sat thinking. "I wish I was dead," she kept saying. "No one wants me; I wish I was dead."

Déjeuner was brought in, and she ate mechanically. Her mind was set now on doing some great thing. The words of Almirac, the words of the old priest had made her mad with desire to show them she could do some great thing. To sacrifice herself, she thought, would be a fine, noble action: to take herself away quietly out of their lives. Of what use was she to them, or to anybody? And as she looked out of the window at the great, calm mountains, it seemed the snow spoke to her. "I will give you rest and peace," it said. "I will soothe you to sleep. You will go so quietly to sleep in my white arms, and it will be warm and you will feel nothing, and you shall live with me always up here, away from the world."

She went once round the house, but in a dazed way, touching things listlessly, her mind made up.

At four o'clock she went out, and up the hill to the track at the top that wound over the mountains and into the snow.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SNOW

TIMOTHY had ridden down to Pierrefitte in a desperate frame of mind, not knowing what he was going to do. The conflict between honor and desire waged their ancient war in him all that morning as they had during the night. He had half an idea of leaving everything to the Curé, of going to England, and again plunging himself in the world he had once known. But the feel of her arms was round him and her kiss stayed on his lips.

By twelve o'clock he found himself at Argélés and very hungry, having forgotten to eat anything in the morning, and going into the hotel he sat down and waited for his déjeuner to be served. At the next table to him sat a round, comfortable man of about forty-five, who smiled at Timothy as soon as he saw him.

"Wonderful good food here," said the stranger.

"I believe so," Timothy answered.

"Nothing like good food," said the comfortable man.

"So they say."

"Does a man good to live in a place like this," said the stranger, leaning back in his chair the better to talk to Timothy.

"This is my first holiday for twenty years," said the stranger.

"Indeed!" said Timothy. (How wonderful her eyes were, how wonderful her lips were.)

"Twenty years," said the stranger. "It's a long time."

"It is," Timothy answered. (And her hands were like lilies. And there was Almirac to think of.)

"Twenty years and never a week off. Hard work, sir."

"Marvellous," said Timothy. (Marvellous lights in her hair, marvellous shadows in her eyes.)

"Not that I'm afraid of a bit of work, sir, not me. I'm all for it, as the saying is. Ah, here come the flipperty bits, as I call these hors d'œuvre—kickshaws. Now I can eat."

"Thank God!" said Timothy aloud.

The stranger turned red. "I beg your pardon," he said icily.

Timothy saw his mistake, smiled, and said, "Merely a form of grace."

"Oh, I see," said the stranger affably. "Don't mind my butting in, but it's a relief to talk to a man. I'm a grocer by trade."

"Indeed," said Timothy. (Should he leave her to Almirac—would it be fair?)

"I should say I was a grocer—ha! ha!"

"Was a grocer," said Timothy politely.

"Ever heard the story of the rich uncle from Australia?" asked the stranger, chuckling.

"I don't think so," said Timothy.

“Well, it’s a fact. You know, sir, father’s brother emigrates, father dies, son goes into a shop—and a very small business when I started—rich but unheard-of uncle pops off—and—well, sir, I come into a bit. I’m limited now, sir, Castle & Co., Ltd.”

“Most fortunate.” (Shall I go back and claim her and take her away, and tell her how I love her?)

“See this, sir?” said the happy, fat man, passing a piece of rough gold across the table, “a nugget, the first he struck before he struck the lot. A mascot—that’s what I call it. Very good, this way of messing hot egg about, isn’t it?”

Timothy answered both observations with the word “Remarkable.” Nothing, however, daunted the communicative grocer, and his naïve and lively conversation presently forced Timothy to come out of his dreams and to take an intelligent interest in the man. He inquired what had made Mr. Castle come to such a quiet spot as Argélés—which, moreover, he pronounced Ah Jellies—and Mr. Castle rapturously explained.

“A bit of sentiment, sir, that’s what did it. When I was a boy I used to do the rounds, leaving our small goods at back doors and what not. Well, sir, one day a lady called me in for a Christmas box, and I was struck dumb by a picture. I’d never seen a picture of snow mountains before, sir, never, and I stood there like a stuck pig until she asked me what I thought of it. I said, ‘Ma’am,’ I said, ‘Ma’am, I’m going there if it takes me a hundred years.’ And when I was twenty she sent for me. ‘I’m dying,’ she said, ‘and I want to know if your mind’s still set on going to Argélés?’ I

told her it was, and I'd never forgotten my word. And would you believe it, sir, she left me twenty pounds and that picture, and I am here, though it took me another twenty years to do it."

"Faithful to an idea," said Timothy, and his mind went back to Flip.

"My motto has always been, 'Think what you want to do and then do it,'" said the grocer. "And I've done it, and, what's more, sir, I'm not disappointed. I like this spot. I don't care for the wine, but the biscuits are English, and the food's fine. And the air! Do you know this part?"

After lunch, for the reason that he longed to tell some one, that the grocer was such a cheery, straightforward little man and a stranger, Timothy told him the situation he was in. He put it that he had to advise the man who was wishing to be faithful to his friend and yet was in love with the woman. He gave no names.

"You wouldn't think I'd thought much about love, would you now?" said the grocer. "But I have. I've thought a lot about it, one way and another, I've been in and out of love twenty and more times and liked it every time. I didn't fall in love, but I found I just wanted one woman more than I can say. I don't know if I asked her to marry me; I know I just married her and we spent exactly eleven months in Heaven, and then Kitty, my daughter, came, and she died. If I were your friend, sir, and I wanted that woman, I'd just go and take her. You can only do those things once in a lifetime. I'd go straight to the lady and I'd say, 'This is a question for me and you, and only for me and

you,' and I'd take her straight away and have done with it. And he might have years of Heaven, instead of only eleven months."

"I think you are right," said Timothy.

"Are you going to do it?" said the little grocer quietly.

"Me!" said Timothy, feeling the blood rush to his face.

"A man doesn't tell a story like that as you told it, sir, not unless it's about himself. You'd make a bad actor, sir. Why, you had the lady, if I may put it that way, sitting in your eyes. I haven't served people over a counter for thirty years without knowing something about human nature."

"I'm going now," said Timothy, holding out his hand. "I don't know what made me tell you——"

"I do," said the grocer. "That's the fruit of my eleven months in Heaven. Good luck to you, sir, proud to have met you."

And as Timothy left the place he knew that Mr. Castle had become one of those real people in the blurred picture of life who stood out like rocks, like his uncle Oliver, like Augusta Newberry.

As he rode upward slowly, the dog running ahead, he noticed that the mountains were covered with clouds and that the sky was darkening. He knew by weather-wise experience that it was going to snow, and he urged on his mare, since he had no wish to ride through a snowstorm in the dark. At Gedre it was snowing heavily, coming down the valley in great gusts and eddies. Already the road was white and the snow was

drifting into corners under the rocks. It was nearly seven when he reached Gavarnie, now blotted out under the soft, hurrying flakes, and so engrossed was he in his thoughts of Flip and of the joy that was to be his he never noticed anything unusual until he came across Henri Gozast, the guide, coming from his house with staff, rope and lantern.

“What has happened?” Timothy called.

“Ah! Monsieur,” said Henri, “do you bring the little lady?”

“What little lady?” said Timothy, and all at once his heart began to beat wildly and an awful fear made him numb.

“*Mon Dieu*, that is the last hope,” said the guide.

Timothy leapt from his mare and stood in the whirling snow facing the man. His voice came with difficulty. “Quick, tell me, where is she? What has happened?”

They were close by his house, and the guide began to walk there with Timothy, talking as he went.

“Your friend Milor Almirac went at five o’clock to your house and could not find the lady. And later came Père Berade, and they could not find her; and they went up the hill to seek for her, and it began to snow. Milor ran down to the village, and no one had seen her go that way, and the snow has covered all traces. She will be lost, unless she is in the hotel at the Cirque. Victor Pic has gone to the hotel below to telephone to find out.”

At the door of his house Timothy found the Curé, three guides, Almirac, and the young man from the hotel. They were discussing a plan of action and wait-

ing for news from Victor. Two guides had lanterns and were equipped with rope.

“Swift,” said Almirac, “you’ve heard?”

“Yes,” said Timothy shortly. “If she isn’t at the hotel by the Cirque, she must have wandered up here behind the house on the Spanish track, or else across on the other side. When Victor comes we shall be able to arrange what to do.”

“Ghastly business, this waiting,” said the young man.

The snow whirled round them and could only be seen in the lantern-light. It came down like a dance of ghosts, so noiseless, so threatening. The guides spoke in whispers. The Curé prayed silently. Almirac walked up and down. Round each man a cloud of breath hovered.

Timothy went into the house and changed into his big climbing-boots, put brandy into a flask, and got his ice-axe out of its case. Then Victor Pic came.

“She is not there. They have not seen her.”

Instantly every man was alert.

“I go with Henri,” said Timothy, “up the road to the Port d’Espagne. We take the dog. It is the most likely way for her to have gone. You, Jacques, will go with Lord Almirac across the river and search that side. You, Charles, will take this young gentleman through the lower part of the valley, while we take the upper track. I think Paul Benoit had better go with you and Jacques, Almirac.”

“I am coming with you,” said Almirac.

“Very well, then Paul and Jacques take the left

bank and the wood across the river. Take brandy, all of you. Monsieur de Berade, will you stay here and arrange for our home-coming?"

"God go with you," said the priest.

At first they could hear voices calling, "This way," "Take care," but these sounds were soon swallowed up by the snow and the wind.

First, Henri went with a lantern, then Almirac and then Timothy, but first of all, Peter the St. Bernard went. They toiled up without speaking, every man white with snow, the steel points of their sticks ringing now on rock, now sunk deep in a drift. Their going was slow, as Henri went cautiously in the darkness, and stopped once quite at fault and listened for the sound of water to guide him. Then Timothy called "Peter!" and a bark came from ahead.

After an hour of climbing they came to a place where the track was completely obliterated and swept away by the fall of a huge piece of rock, and they were forced to rope up and go with the uttermost caution. When they had reached a place of comparative safety, again Henri stopped. "Monsieur," he said, "she could not have come further than this, I think. There should be a long snow slope not far away, which is the part of that avalanche that broke away the road. It is very dangerous there now, with this fresh snow. Our weight is too much. I shall go on alone."

They were about to discuss this when Peter appeared in the lantern-light. He carried a white woolen glove in his mouth and brought it to Timothy. In the circle of light the three men looked silently at that

little glove. Almirac turned away, and Timothy looked at Henri with his face agonized and his lips trembling. "She may be quite safe," said Henri. "I see we must trust to the dog."

Feeling every step of the way, they went slowly on, passing the place where the dog had pawed the ground and found the glove. Then Almirac said to Timothy, "I'm jolly nearly done, dear boy, out of trainin', damn cigarettes. Go on without me."

At that moment Henri's lantern showed a great pile of snow and rock straight before them. "This is the place," he said. "If she went further, she must have meant—"

"Quiet!" said Timothy.

Then far ahead the dog barked loudly and continued to bark.

"Good God, he's found her!" cried Timothy.

Out of the darkness came the insistent barking.

"We must cross this," said Henri. "One at a time. I will go first, and you shall pay out rope for me until I whistle. I shall fix the rope firmly. Then you must follow. After Monsieur Swift is across I will come back for you, Milor. I must do that as you are not used to this. Get a firm place and brace yourself well in case I fall. Hold the rope so, and if I fall, do not move at first. I shall whistle if I am all right, if not, one of you must haul on the rope, while the other puts all his weight on the end. I must take the lantern."

For a moment they saw the lantern and then it vanished and they were in darkness. Out of the darkness came the dog's insistent barking.

The rope ran slowly out of Timothy's hands as he paid it out. It would go and stop and go and stop, until the time since Henri left them seemed an eternity. Neither of the men spoke. They could not see one another. Almirac, with his back against a rock, stood with set lips, his hands bitterly cold, his face streaming with sweat.

Then came a sharp, short whistle, and the rope ceased to run from Timothy's hands. He pulled it and found it taut, and then, without a word, he walked into the darkness, holding the rope and stooping to find Henri's track. As he crossed the slope and was, as far as he knew, on top of it, he heard a piece of rock part from the snow below him and begin to roll down, and finally he heard it crash against some rock far below; at the same time the snow began to slither away from his feet. Testing every step with his axe, and moving in Henri's tracks, he saw suddenly the lantern about five feet below him and Henri standing there by it.

"The snow is moving," said Henri.

Timothy whistled.

"No, no. *Mon Dieu*, it is too late! He will start. And no one can cross that place now; if they do, it will all move."

Timothy felt the rope tug a little in his hand. Almirac had started. Henri at once gave orders. "If the mass comes down it will smash him to pieces; it may kill us also. If he comes quickly he may possibly be in time. I will go and show him a light as near as I can. You are to stay here."

In the whirling snow and darkness, and with the

immediate danger of death before him, Timothy felt like a giant of strength. And all the time the dog barked loudly, not far away. To be so near to Flip and yet to be burdened with the chance of accident seemed a horrible, purposeless fate. More rocks fell and went crashing below. He could see Henri holding his lantern high up. Then Almirac appeared in the light, crawling over the snow and rocks. There was one appalling cry from Henri, the lantern waved, and then Timothy saw the mass of snow slowly move. Then the lantern went out in the crash that followed, and a tremendous sudden strain was put on the rope.

In the dark, and with the grinding of rocks in his ears and the thunder of snow falling below him, Timothy braced all his strength to holding himself firm. The awful strain made his shoulders seem like lead, blood started from his finger-nails, and sweat poured off him. The rope swung round, the strain ceased and then slacked. He heard Henri's voice: "Stand firm."

Hours seemed to pass as he stood there, his eyes straining to pierce the darkness and the dancing curtain of snow, and at last Henri appeared, a black mass near him, with Almirac across his shoulders.

"He is not dead," said Henri. "He was swept aside, thank God, but a rock hit him."

"And you?"

"I cannot tell. I bleed somewhere. I think his arm is broken. When I went to him he was moaning."

"We must get to her."

"We must wait for light," said Henri.

"I cannot wait."

"We must wait."

"I have candles," said Timothy. "We will leave him in a safe place here, under these rocks."

Between them they lifted Almirac's unconscious form and laid him under the rocks, and then Timothy lit a candle in the shelter of the guide's coat and they saw that Almirac's arm was twisted and broken and his face cut and pouring blood. Also his coat was torn into ribbons, and on the broken arm not a vestige of coat or shirt was left. The guide took off his coat and put it over him and they managed to pour some brandy between his teeth. And all the time the incessant barking went on.

They left Almirac and followed the track, which was easier now, and came suddenly upon Peter, who rushed at them and pawed furiously in the snow. It was not snowing so fast now and the wind had dropped, but the darkness could be felt and they could see nothing.

"Flip!" cried Timothy, but no answer came.

The dog pulled at his coat and drew him to the edge of the track.

"She has fallen here," said Timothy. "I must go down. How can we get a light?"

"We cannot get a light."

"Can you hold me on the rope?" said Timothy.

"I think not," said the guide. "I am not certain. I am covered with bruises. We must wait for the dawn."

"She will die of cold."

"Yes," said Henri, "she may die of cold. We must do something."

"She may be dead," said Timothy.

"She is dead," said the guide. "She cannot have lived through this."

They spoke in low tones, as if the tragedy had hushed them. Timothy had no sensations so strong as those of a suppressed excitement. Rather than rescuing the woman he loved, he felt that he was fighting Nature. He felt no sense of fatigue, but a sense of being uplifted for the fight, and he felt certain that Flip was not dead. As they stood wondering what to do, the wind died away and the snow began to cease falling. In five minutes it had stopped. It was as if something had died supernaturally, quietly.

Timothy had two candles in his pocket, and was now able to light one. As the quivering flame burned in the still air it seemed to make the darkness more awful. He saw Henri sitting on the snow behind him, very white and drawn in the face and his hand on his left side.

"I think I have broken a rib," said the guide. "I am very stiff, but I will try to hold the rope."

Then Timothy saw that a big rock was behind him that stuck out over the track away from the mountain side, and giving Henri the candle to hold, he fastened one end of the rope about the rock very firmly.

"Henri," he said, "I am going to find her. Pay out the rope to me. If I call, you will know she is alive."

All this time the dog had lain in the snow whining, but now that he saw what they were doing, he lifted his great head and howled.

Timothy took the candle and began to go slowly down the snow slope, the dog following him. Twenty

paces down he found the end of a cherry-colored scarf sticking out of the snow. There were tears in his eyes as he picked it up. And he kept calling, "We are coming. It is all right."

Then he found her. She was half-buried in the snow and held up by a little scrub of juniper growing on a rock. She was quite white and lay back limply as if she were dead. Her neck was bare and her hands were torn, as if in falling she had clutched feverishly at rocks to save herself, and from one hand a little pool of blood had run and it shone scarlet in the snow. The dog began to lick her face. Timothy knelt down beside her and having fixed his candle upright in the snow, he rubbed brandy on her face and tried to pour a few drops between her lips. Then he opened her dress and felt her heart. The shock of joy in finding the heart beat under his hand was so great that for a few moments he cried quietly. Then he called to Henri above, "She is alive!" And the answering shout came, "Thanks be to God and Our Lady!"

The task of bringing her back was no easy one, but he managed to lift her across his shoulder and by hauling on the rope, he arrived at the track, where he laid her down, propped up against the rock.

"We must wait for dawn," said Henri.

"Yes, we must wait."

He gave the guide a cigarette and lit one himself, and then wrapping Flip in his coat, began to chafe her arms until a little warmth came into them; then he took off her torn shoes and tried to get some warmth into her frozen feet.

The three of them huddled together for warmth and sat waiting.

The day broke a little after four, but the false dawn showed half an hour before. A cold gray light, ghastly pale, made itself felt; the shapes of things became apparent. Timothy could see Henri now, deep in sleep beside him; the rocks became visible. A flush so slight that it was only just noticeable came into the sky and he could see the mountains opposite to him towering up all steel-colored. At last the pink flush grew and the sun rose.

Timothy held Flip very close in his arms, almost crushing her, as he looked down and saw where she had lain in the snow. Another step, and she had been dashed to pieces on the rocks far below. The slope of grass, now snow-covered, ran for about thirty feet until a rock stuck slightly up, which was covered with a scrub of juniper; beyond that the rock went sheer down for fifty feet or more into the bed of the river below. It was only by a miracle that she was saved. It was only by a miracle that he had not gone over the edge when he was looking for her.

He found that he was so numb with cold that he could scarcely stir, and the arm that was round Flip was dead with cold and useless. It was some time before he could unscrew the top of his flask and manage to swallow a little brandy.

Then Flip stirred and moaned, and Timothy managed to get a little brandy down her throat and was relieved beyond words to see a little color come into her white lips.

On his left he could see where the avalanche had broken down the track and had piled rocks in fantastic ways down the mountain side, leaving a great scar in its passage. And he could see now how a great mass of snow had, in falling, swept Almirac and Henri out of the way of the falling rocks and had cast them into a safe place, just as a wave may wash a man to safety in a storm.

He was so cold and tired that his mind refused to work. He could only think in a dazed way that Flip was alive and he was alive, and it seemed to him to be part of a dream when he heard voices and saw figures round him, who spoke to him, it seemed, in a muzzy, drunken way, and he felt himself lifted up like a child, and then he came to his senses.

“Lord Almirac?” he said.

“He is all right,” said Victor Pic. “They are carrying him down. Now we shall carry the lady. Can you walk?”

Timothy rubbed his eyes and stretched himself. “It will do me good to walk. I am so cold.”

And so, going painfully and slowly, they came at last to his house.

CHAPTER XXII

THE STOOL OF REPENTANCE

“MY dear, delightful and utterly adorable person,” said Timothy, “you are a nuisance. You bother me. You persist in making a hideous jumble out of my life. You make a difficult situation seem like an extra chapter to *Alice in Wonderland*. When you ought to be on your dignity as a woman, you play with the dog and say, ‘Is I naughty?’ like a child of six.”

She smiled up at him from her deep chair on the veranda.

“I shall bear it no longer,” said Timothy. “I have stood your perfectly charming convalescence for three weeks and every time I have tried to scold you, you say, ‘The doctor said that I mustn’t be worried.’ I ask you in the name of Fortune, what am I to do with a young woman who sends an entire village crazy, breaks Almirac’s arm, nearly kills Henri, and finally sits up like a good kitten and begs for cream and forgiveness? It isn’t human.”

“I am a bother, aren’t I?” said Flip.

“You are a consummate nuisance,” he answered airily. “I tell you this because the trouble is about to begin all over again. I have sent the young Romeo away with his entire career temporarily ruined.”

She grinned.

“Grin away, you heathen!” said Timothy. “What

sort of answer will that poor young man write in his examination papers? He will madly conjugate the verb *amo*, and will scribble Cupids all over the paper and sign his initials and yours as a heart with an arrow stuck through it. No more of that—he has gone. And now I ask myself—no, you needn't speak—what next? I have consulted the stars, the Nine Muses, the big and little Hills, the Dog, and my own private tribe of blue devils, and I have come to one fantastic, ridiculous conclusion, and that is that I have got to marry you.”

He reeled all this off in a reckless, lighthearted way, and stopped to await her answer. As she didn't speak but looked down and clasped her hands, he continued:

“Do not hesitate, bashful maiden. I admit I am perfectly mad to take the risk, but I shall buy a whip and a chain and I shall have your teeth blackened, and I shall insist on your wearing nothing but blue coats and skirts and varnished black straw hats, and I may be safe. You will admit I must be careful. But by my declaration you will see that I am not sane, you beautiful thing, and I have decided to renew my offer in the spirit in which we first met—Pierrot offers his heart to the Fairy Princess.”

“I don't know what to do,” she said, her face troubled.

“My child,” he answered, “I will give you the correct reply for a Fairy Princess: ‘Dearest Sir Timothy Swift, I have much pleasure in accepting your kind invitation to be your wife. I will be loving and dutiful, and will obey your every wish as if it were a command. Please excuse mistakes in spelling and

forgive me for this short note. Yours in haste and for ever—Flip.’ There! And I shall reply in the true way: ‘Sir Timothy Swift requests the pleasure of Miss Philippina Newberry’s company at the English Church in Pau on June the First, to meet the Reverend Mister Brown. Eleven-thirty, Marriage. Luncheon, Twelve o’clock for Twelve-thirty. R.S.V.P.’—Flip, you’re crying!”

“It isn’t fair to Pinch,” she said, the tears rolling down her face. “He was nearly killed trying to save me, and I’ve upset his life and I’m very unhappy.”

“I refuse to have Almirac turned into a hero; he hasn’t the proper figure. Besides, we were all nearly killed, Flip, you ridiculous person, when you ran away _____”

“I ran away,” she cried, “to make you all free of me. I’m in everybody’s way.”

“And we put out our arms to stop you,” said Timothy. “And you leapt straight into our hearts. Flip I am of rich but honest parents, and I can give you purple and fine linen.”

“I hate purple,” she said, smiling.

“There!” he threw out his hands. “Can anyone talk seriously to you? I will turn myself into a chocolate shop and a lap-dog carrier and you shall see the sights of the world. The daring recklessness of Pierrot is on me. I will hie me to the shop where they sell the very best of rose-colored spectacles and I will say to the confirmed optimist in charge, ‘Please make me graciously blind to all unpleasant things and give me of your very best spectacles of the deepest rose, for I have

become a sentimentalist and I am going to be married.' ”

“No, Tim,” she said. “No.”

“It is Spring,” he went on, in his extravagant mood, “and whole choirs of Cupids are singing in the trees and throngs of throbbing thrushes in the lanes. Oh, my dear, my dear, we are young, let us hug ourselves that we are young. Come, we will not live like other people. We will do mad, eccentric things—walk on rose-petals, the admired of everybody, and we will throw confetti at serious-minded people.”

“I should spoil your life.”

“This seriousness is not like you,” he said.

“I must be serious,” she said. “I owe Pinch all I can give him.”

“Give him an eyeglass for his other eye.”

“Tim,” she said, “I have told you what I am like.”

“Shall I tell you what you are like?” he said, laughing. “The poet’s fire is on me. You were born on the top of a sugar cake and you had wings of angelica, and you have no heart but an almond, and you had eight fairies for godmothers.”

She sat looking before her, only half-listening to him, and all the while wondering what to do. To marry him would settle many things, yet in her heart there stirred for the first time a maternal pity, and the pity was for Almirac. Ever since she had seen him with his arm in a sling, she had begun to notice how tenderly he watched her every movement; how, in his quiet way, he did little tender things for her; how, despite the way she had treated him, he remained the same, faithful and uncomplaining.

Timothy finished up his rhapsody by saying, "And so the young butterfly flew to that place where they sell special licenses dipped in honey and flew back, ready to carry the rainbow fairy to church. After which they made their home in an acorn cup lined with cobwebs and lived happily ever afterward."

She raised her eyes to his and shook her head.

"Darling," he said quickly, "you know I can't live without you."

The feeling in his voice was such that she turned her head away.

"Don't you worry," he said, "I'll do it all. It is better this way, and it is kinder too. There will be no problems, no bothers about Society. You can go anywhere as my wife, but not as Almirac's. You see that, don't you? It puts everything back into its proper place."

"Dear," said Flip, "I'm trying very hard to be good. I always cared for you more than for anybody. I don't know if that is love. But, you see, I do owe something to him. If I married you Pinch would be so lonely. And I might make you very unhappy."

For answer he bent over her and kissed her. "That settles it," he whispered. "I'll go at once and arrange things. You stay here and pack up your things and when I come back we'll get married and go anywhere—desert, sea, islands, tropics, anywhere. Life is going to be a dream of happiness. Before you came I was getting old and morbid and over-serious. Now! Oh, ye Gods, what a gift a woman is!"

He left her and went into the house and she could

hear him issuing orders for his things to be packed for the journey, and hear him singing as he wandered about collecting things, and all the while she wondered what she ought to do.

After déjeuner Timothy set out for Pau. It was like his sudden nature to go straight for the thing in hand and see it through. He kissed her farewell and gave his last instructions. "I'll do this," he said. "You're not to worry. We will make it all right for Almirac."

With a lover's selfishness he imagined that the sight of things settled and of two happy people would be balm to Almirac's eyes, and when he thought of going to the hotel to see him he thought better of it. "Let it come as a surprise."

An hour after he had gone, Philippina walked to a special seat of hers above the house. It was a grass-seated throne in a cleft on the rocks, and it was the home of sweet-smelling pinks and of many quaint rock mosses and flowers. She sat there a neat dainty figure, like some rare ornament from a drawing-room mantelpiece left out in the huge arms of Nature, an alien in the wonderful grandeur around her.

As she sat there one might have thought the elves and fairies were sitting about her on the grass, whispering to her, that the notes of Pan's flute were in her ears, that her eyes saw the majestic calm of the snows and the profound melancholy of the pines. It was not so.

As she sat, the voice of cities was in her ears and the troubled sounds of streets and of soft modulated Society gossiping, and she felt the press of crowds and longed

for the sex signal of a chance-caught eye. She saw the light of restaurants and the torrent of Piccadilly, and the crowded friendliness of the Paris Boulevards and the glittering shops of Vienna. Just as they say the man who has once been to the Arctic regions longs always to see the boundless expanse of ice again, so she hungered for fuss and fashion and the jargon of the moment and for theaters and all the backgrounds of the life she had left.

She began to draw a picture of her life with Timothy. She knew he would soon tire of towns and town life and long for the country which held him in loving grasp. She knew that, despite all he had said, he would be strict with her and try to mould her into being a different kind of woman. He would want her to bear him children. And as she thought of this, the flame of the other life seemed to flare up, inviting her to scorch her new wings, and she rose wearily as one who gave in. She felt she was breaking prison bars, though she was only making new ones. She thought she was breaking chains of bondage, while she was really holding out her wrists for new chains. And the bonds of the true love she might have had dropped away and the bonds of the lesser loves twined their first thin tendrils round her wrists.

"I'm not big enough, I'm not good enough, I'm not great enough," she said to herself. Then she went slowly down to the house and there did what was always a painful thing for her: she wrote a letter. And after that she went to the hotel, to Almirac.

"Take me away," she said, "I am ready."

When Timothy came home on the fourth day he rode up the mountain side feeling like a king. In his breast pocket he carried his special license. In another was a diamond engagement ring, and in his waistcoat pocket, over his heart, was a plain circle of gold.

He left his horse and ran into the house calling, "Flip," and was met by silence. This made him smile. She would be shy to meet him. Then taking out the box that held the engagement ring, he went upstairs to her room, knocked at the door and waited. And then he saw that two of her boxes that usually stood in the passage were gone. He turned the handle of the door, and saw the utter emptiness of the room. A bare-furnished place, without her ornaments, her dresses, without the flowers she always put there. And on the bed was a letter.

The little box dropped from his hand as he stood looking at the letter. The word "Tim" sprawled across the envelope.

He remained quite still for a moment, frozen, unthinking; and then he reached out his hand for the letter and turned it around in his fingers.

He went downstairs with the letter in his hand and called to his servant, who came at once to him.

"How long has mademoiselle been gone?"

"Since two days, monsieur."

"Thank you," he said, and dismissed her.

All of a sudden he felt very sick and dizzy as if he had been too long in the sun, and he sank down in a big chair with the letter still in his hand, but the word

“Tim” seemed to run about on the page and he could not focus it.

Not a moan or a cry escaped him, he was like a man turned to stone. Putting the letter down on the table he filled a pipe, lit it, and went out of doors. The valley below seemed almost ugly, and the mountains dull. There was no life in the place.

He tried to think that she might have gone to Pau to find him, but he knew it was not true. He knew in his heart she had gone away with Almirac. She had failed him a second time.

Then he said aloud, to convince himself, “I’m damn well rid of her.” But the words carried no conviction.

He finished his pipe, knocked out the ashes carefully, and then laid the license from his pocket beside the unopened letter and laughed dryly. And then he opened the letter.

“You will never forgive me. I’m not worth forgiving. You are too good, much too good for me. I should only spoil your life, and I don’t want to. I am really and truly trying to do the best thing; please try to think that. I should be a drag on you.

“Tim dear, you would only get tired of me. I am not clever or anything like that, and I love heaps of things you hate. Pinch has no one except me, and you have heaps of people who love you. I do hope you will meet some woman who is more worthy of you and who will make you happy. Perhaps one day you will be able to think better of me. You are the best man I have ever known, and I know I should

make you miserable. I can't write all I feel, Tim dear, but please try not to think too hardly of me. I ought never to have given you any hope. I didn't mean to. I wonder if you are hating me as you read this; perhaps it would be better if you could. I am not worth loving. I know I'm a beast. Good-bye."

Timothy read the letter twice, and then folded it up neatly and replaced it in the envelope and put it with the marriage license into his pocket. He had been standing all the time, and now he felt his knees shake. But holding a firm grip of himself and leaning with one hand on the table, he called again to the woman who looked after him, "Uranie!"

She came at once at his call and was about to speak, but he checked her.

"Did mademoiselle leave any message for me—any verbal message?"

"Mais non, monsieur."

"Nothing?"

"She cried a good deal, and she——"

"I don't want to hear anything about it. She left no actual message?"

"Mais non, monsieur."

"You may go."

"Monsieur?"

"Thank you. I need nothing. Wait—where is the dog?"

"Mademoiselle took the dog, monsieur."

He had to hold himself very firm to prevent crying out. He waved the woman away.

So even the dog had deserted him.

CHAPTER XXIII

MYSELF WHEN YOUNG

IT was Père Berade, the old priest, who found Timothy surrounded by packing-cases three days later.

The good father, after looking through the window, on a scene of desolation—books on the floor, walls without pictures—took his customary dose of snuff and blew upon his nose like a trumpet signal.

The sound caused Timothy to look up, nod, and go on with his work.

“You would appear to be packing,” said the Curé through the open window.

“Appearances have not deceived you,” said Timothy.

“You are going away?” said the Curé.

“For good,” Timothy answered.

“I hope it is for good,” said the Curé, using the word in another sense.

“I neither know nor care,” said Timothy.

The Curé sat for a while looking at the beautiful view before him and turned over in his mind the words he wished to speak, considering how he might best begin.

“I saw them go,” he said.

“To the Devil, I hope,” said Timothy in a calm voice.

The Curé smiled. It was always more easy to treat with a man who possessed a temper.

"You are wounded," he said.

"Not in the least," said Timothy cheerfully.

"Then you leave us because you are tired of the place?"

"I am tired of everything."

Now Père Berade had been waiting for this moment for two years. He loved the young man as a son, and he prayed that one day the emptiness of his life might come to him and then that he might drop into the void something of vital importance.

"And what are you going to do?" he inquired.

"I am going to raise Hell in my own particular way," said Timothy, hammering down the lid of a case.

"Chacun à son gout," said the Curé.

"Exactly."

"Do you know why the expression comes of a bear with a sore head?" said the Curé.

"I have never dived so deep," said Timothy, again hammering.

"It is because the poor bear tried to steal other people's honey and got badly stung."

Timothy put by the hammer and came out on to the veranda. "Mon père," he said, "I know what you are driving at, but you are wrong. I am very glad those people have gone. The very fact of their going to enjoy themselves has wakened me, and I am going to enjoy myself—after my own way."

"I understand," said the old priest, "I understand very well, as it repeats my own youth."

Now if an old man tells a young man that he once had a great love affair, it seems to the young man to be some perversion of Nature, as though elderly Cupids in spectacles and mufflers shot feebly with dull arrows. They bow in silence and return to the heat of their own affairs. Ashes seem to have so little to do with fires. To the young, old men are empty grates.

Timothy did not continue the subject except by an interval of respectful, incredulous silence. In the first place, he was too numb and heart-weary to take any interest, and in the second place, he did not intend there should be any interference in his own affairs.

But the priest was not to be put off. "I thought myself a very dashing fellow," he said.

To link this dried parchment with the idea of a dashing fellow was beyond Timothy's imagination, so he replied as politely as he could, "Really?"

"When I was a very young man," said the Curé, not to be beaten, "and long before I dreamed of becoming a priest, I was what you call, I think, a man about town——"

"Oh, yes," said Timothy.

"I had a small fortune, nearly all of which I spent in following a celebrated dancer about the cities of Europe. You may have heard of her. She was called Odette Velour."

"Odette Velour!" said Timothy, now roused. "Why she——"

The Curé held up a hand. "Mon ami, she did many things. She even died in my arms."

"She died in your arms!" said Timothy almost incredulously.

"It is an old story," said the priest musingly. "I wanted to marry her. I deserted my home, my mother, my friends. I spent my money on jewels for her and flowers and dresses. At last she promised to marry me and I was in the seventh heaven of delight. Everything was arranged, the day arrived, and I, with beating heart, drove up to her door. They told me she had left early that morning with a Banker from Frankfort. I followed her with madness in my heart. I arrived in Frankfort to find the place in an uproar. Odette had been shot by a former lover, just as she was going into the stage door of the theater.

"It was I who was with her at the last; she would admit no one else.

"Mon ami, I went mad. For six months I lived in expensive gutters with lost souls—God forgive me, I should not say that—and one day, I was only twenty-one, I stumbled half-drunk into a church, God guiding my footsteps. There I heard a sermon given by a good man on behalf of a Society of Missionaries to a Leper Colony. I sprang at the idea. I had nothing to live for, and here was an opportunity of death and repentance. I saw the good man and poured out my story. I told him I had a call."

There was a pause, while the Curé looked far away across the valley.

"And then?" said Timothy.

"When everything was ready and I was to go as a lay worker, I became a coward. I was cured of my

desire for death now that life once more opened her arms to me. I ran away, *mon ami*, and hid myself, and they sailed without me. I dared not face my fellow men. I went far into the country—into Italy—and threw myself on the hospitality of an old priest who had prepared my father for confirmation. He understood me. I became a priest.”

The old man stopped, and fixed his eyes on Timothy.

“Why do you tell me this?” he asked.

“I have waited,” said the *Curé*, “all these years, hoping to find some one brave enough to expiate my cowardice. I could die in peace.”

For an instant Timothy failed to see his meaning, then it struck him. “You tell me this,” he cried, “because my life is empty, because I do nothing for anybody, and am, you think, in danger of plunging into wild excesses. Me! Do you think I have the pluck or the desire to go to end my days in a Leper Island just because this woman has made the world black for me? You are very much mistaken, *monsieur*. I thank you very much for your confidence and”—in a gentler tone—“for your belief in me. But it is impossible, it is extravagant, absurd.”

“Perhaps!” sighed the *Curé*.

Timothy’s face was set and stern as he spoke. “If I see her again I shall meet her as if there had never been anything between us. She can end her days as she must end them, and I shall not care. Do you know what she has done for me, my friend? She has taught me the value of things. I will never open my heart to a living soul again. I know now why I have thought

some men hard. I know now why Club windows are full of bitter cynical faces. Some damned woman has poisoned those people. But they enjoy life better; they are free of sickly emotions."

"My son," said the priest, "if you take love out of your heart, you take God out also."

"God!" said the young man, with infinite contempt. "What has He done for me?"

The priest looked out across the beauty of the valley, and his lips sent out a prayer.

"Am I to turn the other cheek?" said Timothy bitterly.

"To be a Light in the Darkness," the Curé was whispering.

"I loved her," said Timothy. "I loved her, heart and soul and body. I gave up all myself to her—and she went away. May I be struck dead if I believe in a woman again."

"Love and Pain are exquisite sisters."

"My eyes are opened now," said Timothy. "I see now why I know of no happy marriage. I see now why people were amazed when they met a man who said he was happy—they were amazed at a man being such a great fool, or such a stupid liar. Thank you very much for your goodness and your help and interest. I am giving this house and land to you. I will give you also these for keepsakes." He took the marriage license from his pocket and her letter and threw them onto the Curé's knees.

Then, as if a sudden thought had struck him, he added, "Mon père, I have changed my mind. Why

should I trouble to pack all these senseless books? Everything is yours. I will go away from this place as I came into it, with a pack on my back and on the road. Half the rubbish you will find is written by people who call themselves poets. There is quite a lot of print about the stars and women's eyes, and roses and women's lips, and now and again you will find them treated with a little scourge of the naked truth."

He stopped short, out of breath with the vehemence with which he had spoken, and he saw that the Curé was reading Flip's letter.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of that effusion?"

"Poor child!" said the old man, shaking his head. "Poor child. She has a good heart. God will understand."

Timothy turned on his heel abruptly, and went into the house.

The Curé sat with the letter and the marriage license on his knees, and saw how in the valley below children were carrying food to their fathers who worked in the fields.

Timothy came out on to the veranda again. "Come, mon père, our last déjeuner together and a bottle of the best wine. While there's wine there's hope. And after dinner a good cigar, and then farewell."

They ate and drank and smoked together, while Timothy talked feverishly until it came to the time when he rose and held out his hand.

"Good-bye," he said.

“But this house, these things—you did not mean me to have them?”

“Everything is yours. I have no use for them. Uranie will remain. It is a poor gift, because it happens I do not want them. Thank you for everything. I will arrange with a solicitor in Pau about the transfer.”

He seized his pack, which stood ready in the hall, took a cap and stick, and took to the road without a glance back. And as the Curé watched him stride out of sight, he seemed to be watching a figure of himself when young.

Part III

CHAPTER XXIV

I. TANGO DE PICCADILLY

IT was just before the luncheon hour when Timothy Swift walked up Piccadilly. It was the hour when the young bloods were sipping cocktails and the older bloods were drinking glasses of brown sherry, and early lunchers were gazing with pursed lips at the cold table in the dining-room. And the backs of obsequious waiters were bowed, and people flowed into the big restaurants.

Piccadilly herself presented the appearance of a vast dancing academy. People with a certain sense of rhythm and propriety passed one another in a series of fantastic figures, threaded in and out in an orderly disorder, this way and that way came couples carefully dressed to represent the prevailing fashion, looking very glossy and well fed and elegant, and past them came couples and solitary pedestrians dressed anyhow to express contempt for the fashion, and through and through this writhing serpent of life came people with hungry faces and broken shoes. And here and there a policeman played a Master of Ceremonies and held back rich and poor at street corners with uplifted hand, as if one figure of the dance was finished and a pause should be made before the next began. So complete

was the order and so well did the people know every figure of the dance, that the ragged creature who sold newspapers opposite to a goldsmith's shop never thought of the gold purses and diamond rings there displayed, indeed his thoughts were fixed on a good murder or the racing finals as being sent by the Gods to help him sell his papers.

That the figures of the dance were intricate and various may be shown by the fact that two gentlemen, emerging fully buttonholed from the big flower shop, were discussing whether they would go to Monte Carlo or Mentone for the winter, while almost cheek by jowl with them two odd-looking characters were exchanging views as to the merits of Portland and Reading Gaols, and discussing them with interior knowledge.

Like perfect ball-room dancers, the crowd never seemed to get confused or entangled or to jostle more than was accidental, and if one of them was run over in crossing the street he was quickly put aside and forgotten by the rest, much as if he had been a dead gladiator in a Roman amphitheater, and in a little while the only signs of him would be a small knot of mildly gesticulating people, a cab drawn up to the curb, and a stolid policeman taking notes in a pocket-book.

The fullest expression of vitality this wonderful mile could have was when there struck above all other notes the insistent clanging of a bell, a fierce harsh note, upon which all heads would turn in one direction, the great omnibuses would huddle together, a way be forced through the traffic, and at a fine speed, with

the flash of brass helmets, the shouting of many voices, a fire engine would dash madly along. After it had vanished, the stalk-like progress of the dance would be carried on up and down as if nothing had happened.

It seemed that London's old, awful voice chanted her air to the woods of that other giant:

“Fa, Fi, Fo, Fum,
I smell the blood of an Englishman.
Be he alive or be he dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread.”

Taking his way out of what appeared to be a colored plait of human beings, Timothy walked up the steps of the Stag Club and passed through the glass doors.

Nothing was changed. The hall-porter glanced at him over his glasses, reached out a hand to the pigeon-hole marked S, thumbed through a pile of letters, and said, “Nothing to-day, Sir Timothy,” as if no years had intervened. The same waiter in the unaltered smoking-room said, “A dry Martini?” without the least effort of memory. A man looked up from a paper and said, “Hallo, Swift,” and dived into the paper again, his brains bent on solving a Cricket Acrostic. It was in a sense a humiliation; it had its comic side, and Timothy, steeled, starved and bitter with his sense of personal grief, could not help but smile grimly.

II. SERIO-COMIC

He was seized by the shoulders, turned round, to find himself face to face with George Weatherby. Now, George Weatherby had something of the eternal

boy in him and something of the dog. He was gay, affectionate, and superficially theatrical, like all children. And his greeting was a mixture of all three.

"You silly old ass!" he cried. "Well, I'm simply dashed. And fatter. And stronger. And—by gosh, I'm glad to see you."

The man in the chair roused himself at this greeting and turning a solemn face to Weatherby, he asked, "Excuse me, George, but did a man called Ward play for England in '91?"

"Don't know," said Weatherby. "Swift, d'you know our lunatic, Quiller?"

"Did a man called Ward play for England in '91?" asked Quiller plaintively.

"Can't remember," said Timothy seriously.

"And don't care," said Weatherby. "Food, Tim? I've a heap to tell you."

So it was like this: one came back a new man full of experiences, with a broken heart, with no purpose, with a great hole in one's life, with a black future of despair, and lo and behold, in a few minutes one was treated like a schoolboy, and, marvel of all, for a few minutes all the bouncing schoolboy rose in one and responded.

"Grub," said Timothy, making for the dining-room.

They were strangely silent at the beginning of lunch; the gap dividing their interests needed some bridging. And when Weatherby spoke, he did so in an off-handed way as if a journey across Africa were a daily occurrence. "I'm off to-morrow," he said.

"Just as I've come back," said Timothy.

"Chucked the service," Weatherby announced.

"Resigned! Why?"

"Had to."

"Hard up?" said Timothy.

"No," said Weatherby. "Going to find a chap."

"Seems an odd thing to do."

"Things are odd."

Now, with two women these preliminaries would not have been necessary; they would have plunged shamelessly into the main argument. But with men, who are the really sensitive creatures and suffer from an abnormal fear of looking ridiculous, such fencing is always necessary. Here was a man about to set forth on an amazing quest as wild and splendid as any undertaken by Don Quixote, and he stumbled over the few words he needed to set out its purpose to his friend.

"Who's the man?" said Timothy innocently. Even with his bitter experience he had not the gumption to ask, "Who's the woman?"

The answer, "Dolly Sterne's husband," gave the clue.

"I'd forgotten she had one," said Timothy.

"He's forgotten he has a wife," said Weatherby frowning. "I say, would you mind coming across to my rooms, old chap? I'm dashed if I can talk here. That is, if you're not doing anything."

"Not a thing," said Timothy, hiding a fury of curiosity.

They finished lunch and strolled across to Weatherby's rooms in Half Moon Street, and there dumbness again descended upon them, dumbness only rendered

articulate by such sentences as, "What a stack of luggage!" "Decent rifle, what?" "Drop of old brandy?"

At last Weatherby, with his back to the fire-place and in an attitude of defence and defiance, stammered out his story.

"Of course the whole thing is rotten," he began, "rotten to the core. I don't say the man's a cad; I don't say he's not plucky, and I know he's a fine shot, but——"

"You are speaking of Sterne, of course," said Timothy from a cloud of cigar smoke.

"I am speaking of Sterne. I'm going to find the feller and bring him home if I have to bring him in a cage."

"I didn't know you knew him," said Timothy.

"I don't, my dear Tim. I don't know the feller from Adam. I wish the swine had never been born. I do really. Here he goes and leaves this sweet little woman languishing at home——"

"I never noticed she languished much," said Timothy.

"Well, you know what I mean. A dear generous natured child left alone in a house with only about twelve hundred a year and practically no relations——"

"Seems to me a blessing," said Timothy.

"But you see, you don't know her. You think of her as a kind of society butterfly gadding about and all that. My dear man, she's an angel. She loathes society, and—well, she'd like to have kids and a proper

home and all that. I tell you sometimes when I think of that man——”

“Are you in love with Mrs. Sterne?”

Weatherby turned almost purple. “Good heavens, man, haven’t I been saying so for the last hour?”

“And you propose crossing Africa in order to tell her husband this?”

“What else can a man do?” said Weatherby. “The chap’s disappeared. As I said to Dolly, I said, ‘I’ll find the chap if I have to search Africa, and I shall simply say to him, ‘Come home or get out.’ You see what I mean? You don’t know Dolly; she’s—well, she’s one of the best. We—in fact, we were absolutely made for one another, old man, and that’s all about it. So I’m off to-morrow. You agree it’s the only thing to do?”

(A scene in Darkest Africa. A man in tattered clothes, with the marks of starvation in his face, limps into a camp where a white man is seated on a packing-case skinning a bird. “Is your name Sterne?” “It is.” “Then mine is Weatherby, and I’m in love with your wife.” “Really?” “It’s as true as I live. You either come home and make life possible for her, or give her up by letter, and I’m here to take it.”)

“George,” said Timothy, “no woman is worth it.”

“That’s all very fine and large, old chap,” said Weatherby, “but you don’t know Dolly.”

“They are all the same,” said Timothy. “Every one of them. Give it up; come away with me. I’ll go anywhere. I’m sick of women. I hate women. You can’t trust them, they lie, they don’t care how they

treat a man. I've been hit, George, and I know. Take it from me, they're no good."

"I don't say there may not be some rotters, but you don't know Dolly."

"I know her well enough to know that she can only be caught in one way. What's the good of this fantastic chase in a dashed dreary climate in order to find a man you never want to see again? Absurd! Go in and ask her to marry you, and do it. The law has ways to fix it for you—desertion—all those things, and marry her if you love her. If you leave her, it's ten to one she'll go off with another man. They are all alike."

He said this so bitterly that Weatherby looked at him in amazement. "What's up?" he asked. "You've been chucked."

"I've been thrown aside like a dirty rag," said Timothy savagely, "Used and chucked away. I don't believe there's a decent woman in the world, anyhow not in our set. Twice she's done it, and I've finished with women now."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Weatherby, "but you see Dolly is different."

"You're a blind fool," said Timothy.

"I'm not going by any back ways to get her," said Weatherby. "The man must give her up to me himself. Of course I shall do a bit of shooting and all that before I find him. But I intend to have it out with him. It's the straight thing to do. I've thought the whole thing out, and I've decided with Dolly to give the chap a chance. For we all know, he may be a prisoner with

one of these tribes, and so can't come home; or he may be ill or anything, and we thought it only fair to give the feller the benefit of the chance."

"Babies."

"I daresay, old man, but I'm going. I'm sorry for you, but I hope you'll get over it."

Timothy got up and went to the window and looked down the street to the passing crowds of Piccadilly. "Twice," he said to himself. "I haven't a heart left. I'm done in that way. God knows what I shall do with myself. She was everything in life to me. Even now, if she came back, I believe I should be fool enough to go to her."

Weatherby said nothing. He realized that this man was undergoing some mental torture he had no arts to heal. Profoundly wrapped up as he was in his own affair, he felt an infinite pity for Timothy, the superior pity a man in love feels for one who had been forsaken.

"Look here," he said, "if I put this off for a month, would you think it over and come with me? It might take your mind off things for a bit."

"Very kind," said Timothy, turning round, "but please don't bother. I'm all right. If you are not doing anything to-night, dine with me at the *Savoy*, and let us go somewhere. I haven't seen a thing for years."

"All right."

"And—er—don't bother about me. It doesn't matter."

It was characteristic of Weatherby that he immediately took the case to Dolly Sterne. It was characteristic of the two perfectly child-like people that by dint of influence, persuasion and money Weatherby's berth was changed from the boat on which he was to have sailed to one that sailed a month later. Neither of them felt there was anything incongruous in their positions. They were innocent as the day. They were also totally ignorant of the cause that kept Sterne away. They did not know that it was an overpowering shyness. He had a passion for animals, and he was a silent, shy man with human beings. He had married Dolly in a vast wave of love which had obliterated his shyness for the moment, and had then felt his own unworthiness, so he had gone back to his animals and the wilds in an excess of humility and dumb agony. And he had only once returned in five years, to find himself in the possession of a beautiful wife who talked a language he did not understand, in surroundings that frightened him, with people who chattered all round him, and so he had gone back without saying all that he meant to say. And then George Weatherby had come into her life.

Weatherby said nothing of this at dinner, nor did he mention the change in his plans. They dined and went to a Musical Comedy, after the fashion of their youth. And they supped and smoked and condemned the early closing of the restaurant just as they had always done. And when they turned out at half-past twelve into a perfect night some fragrant memory

stirred in them like the scent of flowers and night, and without a word they began to walk home, just as they had walked years before on the night that Timothy first met Flip. They parted conventionally at nearly the same place and Timothy continued on his way alone.

By Kensington Gardens he stopped. By an odd coincidence a cab had broken down nearly in the same place that her cab had broken down. But no door opened to let out a Fairy Princess, and it was a cynical, bitter Pierrot who walked alone to his house.

The stars were but cold fires, the moon a mass of extinct volcanoes.

III. DREAMS

Dreams visited his pillow that night so that Hope blossomed again, and with it came a vision of Flip, sweet, loving, yielding. And the birds sang again, and a rainbow arched over his head. The voices of children that were to be his whispered in his ears, and glad fountains splashed. He held out his arms to take her to him and she changed to the expressionless Almirac, and he woke. The clock in his room struck six. Another day.

CHAPTER XXV

IN THE SWIM

FOR three days Timothy leant upon the resources of London. He lunched and dined and supped and stayed up until sunrise, and drank more champagne than was good for him, and went to three theaters, and was terribly bored with every single moment of it. The mountains had cured him of restaurants and late hours and hot rooms, and when he sat up in bed on the fourth day he decided that such a life was no panacea for his particular evil. Filling the stomach will not always satisfy the hunger of the heart.

London offers an infinity of means for killing Time, if one is anxious for the death of that venerable person. One can stand where Dryden stood, in the Piazza of Covent Garden, or sit in the room where Johnson sat when he made the Dictionary, or see the room where David Garrick's wife died, or visit the arches where lay one of Jack the Ripper's murdered ladies. One can stand over the immortal dust of Charles Dickens, and gaze up at the windows of the room where Thackeray wrote, climb the stairs of Boswell's house, or visit the grave of that cynical sentimentalist, Sterne. These offer days of dreams.

On the other hand, you can easily become acquainted with the leading lights of the Chorus and spend much money talking to semi-educated but very charming

people, who will sing into the small hours of the morning and then motor madly with you to some country inn for breakfast. These offer days of nightmare.

But if you are hungry for quietude and the peace of your soul, and the mistress of your heart, none of these things suffice: too much dusty history, or too many marrons glacés cause a surfeit.

So it came about that Timothy braved the day and set out at an unconventional hour to visit Mrs. Newberry, rather in the way that a murderer is said to be drawn to the scene of his crime. Fortune had it that Mrs. Newberry was in at half-past twelve, and Timothy was shown into a newly-decorated drawing-room, a little staggering in its color, but at least inspired by one idea. Then Mrs. Newberry came to him.

She said, "Well!" and held out her hands.

And he said "Well?" and took them.

"And wonderfully improved," she said.

He replied that he was as fit as a fiddle, and sat down. So far the conventions had not been stirred.

"You've done the room up," he remarked.

"We are all redecorated this season," said Mrs. Newberry. "I'm using a purple powder."

"So I see!" he replied bluntly. And the conventions became uneasy.

"This is the Futurist Room," she said blandly. "Grace, Almirac's wife, did it. She's gone in for decorating. Isn't it awful?"

"Awful!" said he.

"Primitive, that's what Grace calls it. She says our color sense needs shocking."

"She's done it," said Timothy, looking round.

"I think the purple ceiling is the worst effort," said Mrs. Newberry, smiling gently. "Or perhaps the emerald-green carpet beats it."

"Why do you do it?" he asked.

"What else have I to do?"

"So you still see Grace Almirac?" said Timothy.

"I did," she answered, "but now she's gone to America to startle New York, and incidentally to wait for her release. Then she says she's going to marry brains."

He was about to come direct to the reason of his visit when Newberry came into the room.

"My dear Swift!" he said, in his hearty way. "The very man. Augusta, old Finch can't come to lunch, and here comes Swift to take his place and save us from a boring party."

It turned out to be one of those unaccountable lunches where one meets an eye specialist, a lady who goes in for spiritualism, a horse breeder, an Academician, a bored Society beauty and a schoolgirl. And as far as Timothy could see, they none of them wanted to meet in the very least.

Newberry, however, had his very good reasons for the party. He had lent the artist money, borrowed it from the spiritualistic lady, was in love with the schoolgirl, had been entangled with the Beauty, and was going to get a prescription for nothing out of the eye specialist. In consequence of which he exerted all his very numerous charms and became a brilliant and fascinating host. And in consequence of that he got exactly what he wanted: that is, he got his free

advice about his eyes, got a tip from the horse breeder, the promise of a picture for nothing from the artist: ("I wonder if you could do me a little thing of my old place down in Devonshire—just a sketch, any old thing, at any old time?"), he flattered the spiritualistic lady by defending her views, vowed eternities to the Beauty as he saw her into her car; and drove the schoolgirl to the Carlton for tea.

This left Timothy alone with Mrs. Newberry.

"Isn't it a wonderful crust?" she said.

"He fascinates me," Timothy admitted.

"There's a lot of him in Flip," she answered. And the conventions bristled.

"She went away with Almirac," said Timothy, "and left me. She's left me absolutely broken. I thought I'd come and see you before I go away. I'm going somewhere; I don't know where."

"Everybody in love with everybody else's wives, and nobody happy," said Mrs. Newberry.

"What do people say?"

"My dear friend," she said, "I really don't remember. That was a seven-days' scandal many months ago; they have re-fronted Buckingham Palace since then, and there's been a change in the Government. Did she hurt you?"

"Need you ask?"

She came over to him and looked him straight in the face. "My dear," she said, "it's made a man of you; it would have made a fool of most men. Be a man. Don't think of the poor little thing any longer. We all love her, and we must all forgive her, or what's love for?"

"That is all very well," said Timothy, "but I am young; I feel these things. My life has no purpose. She was the purpose, and she's gone."

"I suppose," she said slowly, "that you are the kind of man who only falls in love once."

"It isn't any use talking, I know," he answered. "I came here because of those letters you wrote to me, and because you are a splendid friend. I wanted you to know how much I loved her. I want you to know that if ever you hear from her that she is unhappy or hard up or alone, I will come to her, even across the world. I am going away somewhere to try and get cured. I went once before and did get cured, but that was a physical disease. This is more. I may get used to the pain, but it will always be there to the end of my days. For the past three days I have been talking to women men seem to find attractive; I find nothing in them. My history of women begins and ends in Philippina. Tell her that if you like. Almirac's a good chap, but will she stick to him?"

"It isn't her fault," said Mrs. Newberry. "She makes me think of some hot-house flower, carefully grown and carefully plucked and then wired into a buttonhole and sold. It it worn one day and thrown away, and some valet picks it up and wears it and he throws it away into the gutter, and then some man who really cares for flowers finds it and keeps it, because, though it is withered, he sees the charm that once was there. And then it dies."

"You will give her my message?" he said quietly. "If she needs me, I will come."

"And break your heart again?"

"That is over," he answered. "I know I am a fool, but I can't help it. And she will need help."

"And you think I would sacrifice you?"

"There is no question of that," he said. "I am fool enough to want to be sacrificed. I will let you know where I am going when I know myself." And then the Curé of Gavarnic came into his thoughts. "There is only one place," he said, "that I might go to and from that place I could never come back." Then seeing the startled look in her face, he smiled and took her hand. "No, my dear, good, kind friend, I am not going to kill myself. I may be very young, but I'm not young enough for that."

"But what do you mean?" she asked, still not assured.

"An old priest suggested that I should take up the work he once failed to do, and I have only just remembered it. It is a way out, and should be very interesting, but it will wait."

"Tell me," she urged.

"There is a Leper Colony——" he began.

She covered her face with her hands for a moment.

"You cared as much as that?" she said.

"I have no life without her, no interests, no desires. You see, I was brought up to be idle and to think only of myself. I have tried your novels, your poetry; I have tried Nature, and I even took your advice and cultivated my garden. I am one of those modern products that are thrust out into the world with no particular reason for existence, unless it be to be a father to a family and live in their future. I think I have inherited my father's spirit of wander-

ing. He would have remained at home, except that he knew my mother loved another man. They cared deeply for one another and kept together always, but he died of collecting plants he didn't want, and she died of a broken heart."

"Promise me you won't go to this dreadful place," she implored him.

"I think it most unlikely," he said, smiling now. "You see, I am a coward. I don't want to die. I only want to bury myself. Good-bye. You shall hear from me."

"My daughter!" she said fiercely.

"That is my one great hope," he said gravely. "That in some great crisis of her life the goodness she inherits from you will crush the inheritance she has from her father. Wait until she knows pain. Good-bye."

She sat for some time after he had left her, a figure of pitiful remorse, accusing herself, going over the hundred and one things she might have done for her girl, and seeing with eyes that knew her world the awful, desperate life Flip might have to lead.

And round about her was the mockery of the ultra-fashionable room where the colors could almost be heard clashing.

Enter to the haggard, painted woman, Lady Ethel Merridew, perfectly gowned. "My *dear* Augusta," she says, with her well-known simper, "how perfectly *twee* you look. And *have* you heard? No? Billy Martin has run away with his wife's French maid. Isn't it *too* amusing?"

"Much too amusing," says Mrs. Newberry.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SUMMONS

THERE are few lives more lonely than those lived starving for sympathy among crowds. And all great cities are full of them. The faculty for companionship amounts to genius in some people, in others one finds the lack of that faculty gradually souring young men and young women to a premature middle age. Especially can one find the lonely ones in public places, where, by very reason of their lives, they are forced to air their failure. Here is a man who dines alone always, at his Club, giving off in some subtle way an air of desiring to be left alone duly respected by his fellow-members, and this very man sits longing for the power to join the common table and lose himself in the easy, natural conversations of strangers. Here, in the restaurant, is a man who is known to all the waiters, whose entrance is greeted with bows of deference, his solitary table is always kept for him, and here he sits pining for human love and comfort, surrounded by a crowd of human beings, many of them quite ready and willing to give of their full heart. But imagine then the young man of means, with everything at his command, the world at his feet and the price of the journey in his pocket, with theaters actually built to amuse him, flowers purposely grown for his buttonhole and smiles to be

bought and paid for awaiting him, and think of him bored, lonely, heart-sore, like a man arrived in a cul-de-sac, staring at a blank wall. To leap out of bed full of health and suddenly to discover there was nothing to do! To sail eagerly from the house on a beautiful morning and be forced to wonder where to go to! So it was with Timothy Swift, and with a thousand others also. He tried spending the evening alone in his house and there came a ghost and spent it with him, and the ghost was of himself, and the ghost said "You may have the flesh and blood and the purse, but I have the heart." The emptiness of the rooms would haunt him, for they were not rooms having any associations for him, and the lights shone on chairs he had never sat on and shone on pictures he had not bought but had inherited, and made little brilliant specks of light on china he scarcely knew by sight.

Several times on the three evenings he spent alone he had felt impelled to go to his own front door and stand by it open, to see the evening sky and the deserted street, and he wondered what would happen did he speak to the first passer-by and hailing him, cry, "Come in, for I must have somebody to talk to." Sure enough, when he felt like this, some tramp or late postman, or servant out with letters for the last mail, would swing into the island of the gas lamp and vanish like a moth. So he took to going on the second of those nights by by-ways of London in an old coat and a cap and to peering about at the doings of other and happier people, and to watching the amazing stream of London's broken people, until he was able, even in

his two nights of wandering, to sift the shoddy from the poor and the rich in rags and spirit to the poor in joy. He got an impression of streets that made the character of their inhabitants. There were dark, sinister streets, where all the blinds were down and only here and there lights showing behind them, and a musky smell pervading everything, as if the people there were hard at work studying to become undertakers, or to obtain degrees in some sour and grim profession. And other streets were streets of endless doorway argument, during which children, unmoved by oaths and blasphemy, played listlessly in the gutter with unwilling cats. And always there were broken men and women, as it were asking of Providence "Why?" standing alone at street corners, and these seemed to belong to no street and to no place, but to be a tribe in themselves, vowed to loneliness and obscurity and suicide. And he felt he was very near to the ranks of these.

Such a man having given once out of the fullness and joyousness of his nature, and having expanded and shown the extreme simplicity of himself in acts of love, is like some sensitive plant who has yielded her secret to the sun and has been unblushingly robbed. There was no chord in him but it had been touched and turned to discord, no simple secret but it had been plucked and thrown aside, and as a man keeps, as it were, his childhood in the inner fastness of his soul's fort and there cherishes the little, jolly, simple things he lives by, and his belief in God and his fear of death and his body's yearning for a mate, all ill-expressed but real, so if, when he brings his

treasures to the light, shyly, they are refused and scorned, he retreats into a shell of hardness not easy to break open again.

In a week he was no nearer to any solution as to what to do with his life. He was too young and vigorous to sink himself into a special arm-chair at his Club, too hurt to seek the society of women and too morose to make new friends. Often his mind wandered to the old priest's suggestion, but the idea made him shrink; he was not of the stuff of martyrs, nor did he relish the slow coming of death from a loathsome disease. The very thought of the Leper Colony made him bring his muscles taut and look at the delicate machinery of his hands, to watch how alive they were to every suggestion of his brain. Had he been religious there were a thousand things he might have done, for he had money, youth and health.

Money, youth and health, and he was stunned by this sickening blow!

At the end of the week, to his intense amazement, George Weatherby called on him, early in the morning. "You look like a bad oyster!" he exclaimed.

"What about Africa?" said Timothy listlessly.

"Had to wait for a month," said Weatherby. "And I routed you out on the chance that you'd do something for me."

"Anything in the world," said Timothy, without any show of interest.

Now, this was a plot of Dolly Sterne's, who, being in love, was ready to mother any lost cause.

"I can't get any money together for this expedition,"

said Weatherby, who hated lying, but was doing it nobly.

“Oh, that’s perfectly simple,” said Timothy. “I haven’t spent my income for years, so I can do you anything up to six thousand pounds—more at a pinch.”

“My dear man,” said Weatherby, feeling very uncomfortable, “I’m not going to buy Africa. I’m only going to walk across it to find a man. I’ve got some, but if I knew I could have the call on say two thousand——”

“You can call on anything you like.”

“Look here,” said Weatherby, entirely forgetting his instructions. “I don’t want the money. I only want to see you buck up and take an interest in things. Come with me.”

To his intense surprise Timothy, after a moment’s hesitation, said, “Very well, I will.”

At this the simple romantic Weatherby began a grotesque dance. “Ripping!” he cried. “We’ll kill two birds with one stone: find this swine and do you all the good in the world. And you’ll forget the little beast.”

“George,” said Timothy, his eyes steeled with temper, “I will not have her spoken of like that. I will not have her name mentioned again.”

“Sorry,” said Weatherby, crestfallen.

“I’ll pay my share of everything,” said Timothy. “And you shall pay my funeral expenses.”

“You’ll be a lively companion.”

“If you want a pet dog, go and buy one!” Timothy snapped.

"I want a whisky and soda."

"Then you shall have one."

This was all said in that good bad temper such friends have. The least deviation and they would never have spoken to one another again.

They drank a silent toast, after which Weatherby brought himself to the second part of his arranged scene.

"Would you come and lunch with Dolly and me to-day, so that we can tell her?"

"I scarcely know Mrs. Sterne," said Timothy without enthusiasm.

"You'd love her; she's absolutely one of the very best. She'd——"

"I do not doubt a word of it," Timothy answered. "But I do not think it is part of the bargain."

"But she'll be so disappointed," said Weatherby.

Even Timothy smiled. "So she put you up to this?" he said.

"She! Not a bit of it!" said he stoutly. "I told her I might be coming in to see you and naturally, seeing you're a friend of mine——"

"She suggested lunch."

"She said something about lunch."

"May I ask why Mrs. Sterne takes this interest in me?"

"She's a woman," said Weatherby.

"And I am a man, and she would like to get all the details of my life first-hand, because you can tell her nothing. George, you are very transparent."

"You've turned into a very odd chap," said Weatherby.

"And you have become very simple. Kindly thank Mrs. Sterne and tell her that I am unavoidably unable to meet her at lunch. When do you start? I must get some things."

"I wonder if you would do me a favor?"

"Money?" said Timothy mischievously.

"Lunch," said George.

"Oh, very well," answered Timothy. "Anything to oblige an old friend. George, did anyone ever accuse you of subtlety, because if they did, they lied."

But George, triumphant, neither heard nor cared.

Dolly Sterne's house was one of those London houses so like another that one might easily think one had chanced upon the wrong one by mistake. There was the narrow hall and the lack of accommodation for hats and sticks, and the parlor-maid with her regular parlor-maid face, and the narrow stairs leading up and the hint of narrow stairs leading down. And there was the dining-room door on the right, a little open, and a den behind. In a married house a perambulator generally took up half the hall with an air of defiance, and in a single house one always expected that a dentist had the ground floor. The drawing-room was furnished in such a way that it looked like the case of the shop-lifting of an entire window—(this room twenty-eight guineas as it stands)—with prints of lovers saying "Goodbye," in Greek clothes, and other lovers saying "At last we meet," in Georgian clothes. A few bad water-color landscapes

by friends, and any number of military-looking people photographed in stiff attitudes and framed in embossed silver. The only remarkable thing about the room were the heads and horns of slaughtered animals which hung like hat-racks out of place all over the walls.

"Dolly has wonderful taste," whispered Weatherby as they were shown in to the empty room. "I often wonder what she thinks of me."

Timothy, who was looking about for any single sign of personality, remarked that he expected she thought the world of him.

"Marvellous girl," said Weatherby. "She can throw a bit of drapery over anything and it looks like home. Isn't it wonderful to think of my really having a romance after all these years?"

At this moment Mrs. Sterne came in, trying to compose herself after a struggle in the kitchen, where she had been ignorantly directing the cook over the warming of a bottle of claret. She looked deliciously pretty, and the slight flush of excitement became her.

"Sir Timothy," she cried, welcoming him.

"He's coming," cried Weatherby.

"You're going with him! How splendid! You two poor men with no woman to look after you."

"I'm afraid it would be a bit rough for a woman," said Timothy.

"I expect you are a woman-hater," she said smiling. "But we have our uses."

Weatherby made a face at her by way of diplomacy, and she blushed for a moment, the situation

being saved by the entrance of the serene parlor-maid bearing two full glasses on a tray, an acrobatic feat of no mean merit.

“Cocktails!” said Mrs. Sterne triumphantly. “I made them myself.”

Out of a spirit of loyalty to his friend, Timothy managed to swallow his, but Weatherby, after a sip, said he felt he was better without one. And then luncheon was announced.

“Men are so difficult,” said Mrs. Sterne, leading the way downstairs. “I never know what men eat. I generally give men lunch at a restaurant and let them choose for themselves, but George begged——”

Weatherby coughed too late.

“My dear Mrs. Sterne,” said Timothy, “don’t worry. Your charming plot would have been discovered at the door, since I saw three places already laid, if George had not given it away as soon as he spoke to me. I know quite well you are doing this out of kindness to me. Let me say how kind I think it is and let’s say no more.”

She bowed him into a chair, saying with a pretty gesture, “How changed you are!”

“Time only stands still for charming women,” he said.

“I wish you would tell me the truth,” said Mrs. Sterne, “What do men eat?”

“Oh, anything,” said Weatherby.

“When I ask him,” she said to Timothy, “he always says ‘Anything,’ or ‘A bit of cold meat and some cheese.’ I think the legend of the Club lunch is

amazing. If one believed it, Clubs never have anything but cold beef and pickles. At least, so husbands always tell their wives when they want to bring a friend to lunch, don't they? George does."

Timothy glanced round and seeing that the discreet maid had withdrawn, he said, "Will you forgive me, but it is all very curious to me. You say 'George does' so naturally, and yet I can scarcely credit it."

"Yes, isn't it difficult?" she answered serenely. "The servants think he's my brother."

"Do they?" said Timothy incredulously.

"They are supposed to," she answered.

"I do not wish to appear morbidly moral," said Timothy, "but are there any really respectable people left?"

She flushed under the remark, and Weatherby said, "My dear fellow!" in tones of great surprise.

"I mean ordinary men and women, married in the ordinary way, with ordinary homes and children."

The advent of the ritualistic parlor-maid, with a cheese soufflé, stopped the conversation. Mrs. Sterne looked at it in despair. "It's meant to be a soufflé," she said apologetically, "but my cook's mother is dead."

"Let us spare her feelings," said Timothy gravely. "I have had a most admirable lunch, and I want to smoke."

The maid having removed the dish, cigarettes were produced, coffee handed, and Mrs. Sterne,

leaning her elbows on the table, said, "Sir Timothy, you musn't blame me, we are trying to do our best."

"You are, I suppose, rich enough not to care for the conventions?" he replied.

"Tell him, George," she said.

"I have."

"I gather," said Timothy, "that we are going through a wild country, through warlike tribes, and dangerous savage animals, in order to find a husband you no longer care for."

"I don't know him," she said. "Let me tell you. I was a girl; we met at a house party and he was very, very shy. He used to wander away and talk to the animals, the dogs and horses and cows and things. And I was so sorry for him that I tried to make him unshy, and one day he became most fearfully interesting and told me all about his life, and how lonely he was and how terrified he was of people. And then"—she opened her hands with a little resigned gesture—"we got married. And I've seen him once since. We had a weird honeymoon, principally in the Zoo in Berlin, where he knew a sick tiger that used to fawn all over him and terrify me, and then he left me. And then, later, he came back once with a baby rhinoceros for somebody here and we spent a short but rather strenuous time giving it milk, and then he went away again."

"I understand," said Timothy. "Then arrived the romantic George. How long has this been going on?"

"Oh, it's perfectly proper!" she exclaimed. "And George is taking him a letter from me to say, 'If

you want me, come home, because I cannot bear it any longer, but if you don't want me, tell Mr. Weatherby, and he will arrange everything with you.' That's fair, isn't it?"

"Amazing!" said Timothy. "And what shall you do if he decides to come home and claim you?"

Weatherby twisted his moustache ferociously. "We have determined to go absolutely straight in this, old man, and if the—the man insists on coming home, we do everything in our power to help him."

"And I shall break my heart," said Mrs. Sterne.

"And my part in this?" said Timothy.

"You'll do the talking," said Weatherby. "You see, you'll be unbiased; you can argue with the chap if he suggests coming back."

"And," said Mrs. Sterne, touching his arm, "it will help you, won't it? George told me."

For a moment his face was set and steeled, his lips compressed. "We will say nothing about that," he said. Then, smiling, he said, "My dear, good babies in arms, I'll go, and be glad to. It's the maddest thing I ever heard of, but so much the better. Mrs. Sterne, I'm sorry for the man who loses you."

"Would you very much mind calling me Dolly?" she said prettily. "You see, it will be so very much easier for you and George to talk about me in jungles and places. You couldn't sit up at night in camps and places and he say, 'I wonder what Dolly is doing now,' and you say, 'I expect Mrs. Sterne is having her dinner,' could you?"

"I cannot picture it—Dolly," said Timothy.

"Thank you so much," she said. "You will be such a comfort to George and me."

Timothy walked to the Stag Club in a curious frame of mind. He wondered if, as Mrs. Newberry had said, "Everybody was in love with everybody else's wife and nobody happy."

But he had seen such beautiful happiness just now, and such simple-mindedness, that he could not believe that all Society was wrongly sorted and miserable. And yet he had before him the case of Flip and Grace and Almirac, of Mrs. Newberry herself, and he felt it would be a relief to go up once more to the ordered peace of his uncle Oliver's, out of the sea of confusion, before he went to Africa.

The hall porter gave him a note which he forgot to look at and placed in his pocket and only remembered in the middle of a game of billiards with the Club marker. He was feeling in his pocket for his cigarette-case and so drew the note out. His hands trembled as he opened it, and he told the marker he should not finish the game. It was in Flip's handwriting, her curious, sprawling, large characters.

"I am in awful trouble or I should not dare to write to you. Can you come to me, if only for a moment? It is all I ask. Do, do forgive me enough to help me. Do. I am in despair and at the *Savoy Hotel*. Do come, or I shall go mad.

"FLIP."

He went downstairs and having called a cab, drove at once to the *Savoy*.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE OLD FLAME

CURIOUSLY enough a jangle ran in his head while he drove to the hotel, one of those absurd ideas that fix themselves on the mind just before going into action. "Women and wine," he kept thinking, "Women and wine—and she has twelve hundred a year and drinks cooking claret." It all arose from the simple ways of Mrs. Sterne. It haunted him—goodness knows why—until he was in the lift at the hotel, being taken to Flip's rooms. As the man knocked at the door everything vanished except an awful void, which dully reminded him of terrible interviews with his Head master at school.

There she was, dressed a little in advance of the latest fashion, surrounded by roses, the faint smell of tobacco in the air. The door was closed; they were alone.

With a gesture of appeal, half-limp, she held out her hands, and he, suddenly hard, affected not to notice them.

"I am here," he said.

And her answer, "I knew you would come," made him angry.

"You said you were in trouble," he said stiffly.

"Please, please don't be angry, Tim dear," she

moaned. "I know what I have done, and I'm really and truly sorry."

"What do you want me for?"

"How can I tell you," she replied, "if you stand up as stiff as a poker. You are so strange, so different."

"Haven't I had something to make me different?"

She sank down wearily on a sofa and sighed. "I don't know how to say it."

He moved a step nearer to her, his eyes fixed on her eyes, as if to compel the truth.

"Where's Almirac?" he asked, almost brutally.

"I don't know," she answered, with her head down-cast.

Timothy took two steps and leaned against the mantelpiece. "You don't know?" he said.

"It would be so much easier if you sat down," said Flip.

"I intend to stand."

"You look so strict when you stand," said Flip.

"Why have you sent for me?"

"I have had such a terrible time," said Flip. "I know I treated you badly, but I didn't mean to. I felt so sorry for poor Pinch. I've had a row with Pinch."

"You have left him?"

She nodded.

"You came here alone?" he asked quietly, but with temper rising behind his calm.

"Nearly all the way."

"What do you mean by nearly all the way?"

"I'm not in the witness box!" she suddenly flared

at him. "I won't be cross-examined. I want sympathy, not this horrid questioning."

"Then you don't need me," he said, moving a step away.

"I'm sorry," said Flip.

"You do need me?"

"Tim dear," she begged, "do sit down, then I can talk to you. I'm not quite responsible to-day. I don't know what to do. I tried to think of everything before I came to you, and at last I swallowed my pride and wrote you a note."

He sat down on the far side of the room and watched her. No trouble seemed to have touched her; she was still the petulant, spoilt Princess, the wonderful child of their first meeting.

"Where is Almirac?" he repeated.

"I promise you I don't know," she said. "Tim, you know what Pinch is like, so bored, so tiresomely bored. We went to Paris. I had to buy things, and you know how buying things bores a man. Pinch found some men who all looked as if they belonged to dogs or horses—you know the kind I mean—and they went to Races, while I shopped. And then—oh, Tim, do you understand?"

"Not in the least," he said wilfully.

"You know I hate going about alone."

In the pause that followed he gripped the arms of his chair and started forward.

"I hate going about alone," she repeated.

"Some man?"

"Only a nice boy, Tim dear, and perfectly harm-

less—I swear that. He used to come with me to the shops and carry things.”

“Did Almirac know him?”

“How could he?” she said. “The boy only used to come to the door of the hotel. Sometimes we had tea at one of the shops, or I used to let Pinch dine out.”

“Did he want to dine out?”

“He didn’t seem to want to, but you see, Tim dear, I thought it was good for him not to be always tied to my apron strings.”

“And it was good for the boy, you think?”

“What funny questions you ask,” she said, brightening a little. “Of course it was good for the boy. I educated him in a week, just to do the right things. I thought it would make him so much more attractive to other women.”

“Of course he fell in love with you?”

She put up her arms and dropped them to her side. “I couldn’t help that, could I?”

“Perfectly easily,” said Timothy.

“I was most careful,” she pleaded. “But he was French, and he did fall awfully in love with me, and one day in the sitting-room——”

“I thought you said he only came to the door of the hotel,” said Timothy.

“Once he came into the sitting-room. I had to ask him; he begged so hard. And of course I didn’t know he was going to make a scene.”

“Oh, he made a scene, did he?” said Timothy grimly.

"It was terrible. He asked me to run away with him and I laughed. And then he swore he'd shoot himself, and he brought out a revolver——"

"Was it loaded?" asked Timothy sarcastically.

"It turned out not to be," she admitted, "but I didn't know that, and I was frightened. And then it appeared that the money he'd been spending——"

"On you?"

"Lunches and things—I never think about money—wasn't his."

"I see," said Timothy. "And after that?"

"After that he said his heart was broken and he wept, and I wept a little because he seemed so pitiful. And then—I didn't think it any harm, he was such a boy—he knelt by me with his head on my knees and I lectured him, and in the end he said he'd go if I kissed him."

"Of course."

"And when I was kissing him, Pinch came in, and wouldn't let me explain."

"I shouldn't think an explanation would quite cover the situation, even an explanation from you."

"After that," she said, in a low, trembling voice, "Pinch hit him. He has only one good arm still, but he thrashed him with it, and then kicked him out. It was awful."

"Good old Almirac," said Timothy glowing.

"I was furious. I tried to stop him. I told Pinch I loathed him, but that was the good, when he kept pushing me away with the bad arm and hitting the boy on the nose all the time with the other. When

he had finished, he seemed to be in an awfully good temper, and rang for a whisky and soda."

For the first time in the interview Timothy laughed.

"I went straight into my room, packed my dressing bag, and came here."

"You left him!"

"What would you have done?" she cried, eager now. "I did no harm. I didn't ask the ridiculous boy to weep. And then Pinch behaved like a brute and beast; I hated him. And I left word that I was coming here. And I waited. And he hasn't written or been or done anything."

"Failing him, you sent for me."

"I was so hungry, Tim dear."

He looked round the room, at the bowls of roses, the case of cigarettes, at her dress, and asked, "You are hungry? Flip, what the devil do you mean?"

"I only had eight pounds, and I must have flowers. And I gave some people I knew dinner here last night, and I dare not face the big room—I dare not face anyone—with only a few shillings. I knew you would be kind."

In her old, enchanting way she came across to him and took his hand. "Tim dear," she said, "I'm only a silly, stupid girl, and I'm frightened. I'm not bad, Tim, I'm only naughty, but I do do dreadful things. It isn't temper; it's just wilfulness. Do ring the bell and order something nice for you and me."

In a helpless, dazed way he patted her hand, and then got up and rang the bell.

"Oysters," said Flip.

“There’s no *r* in the month,” said Timothy. “Have caviare.”

“I wish they’d have *r*’s in all the months,” said Flip. “But I adore caviare.”

A man of steel could not have withstood her during that lunch, and Timothy was no man of steel. He had, or felt he had, a misunderstood woman—except by him—on his hands. The way was clear. Almirac had given her up as a bad job. And by the end of lunch he gave way.

“You have failed me twice,” he said seriously. “I’m going to risk everything and try again. This wandering life—Paris, Berlin, Rome—is no good to you. I’m a broken man; you broke me by your heartlessness. Make up for it, and I’ll help you. Flip, you’re no good as you are; you can’t go on. I’m not going behind Almirac’s back in this; he’s left you to look after yourself. Put yourself in my hands, and I’ll do all I can for you. This is purely selfish, because I find I can’t live without you. Somehow or another you have wound yourself round my life, and without you I am not alive. I know exactly what you are now, and I’m willing to risk you with my eyes open. You see, I don’t flatter you. I want to see Japan. It doesn’t much matter what you want to see, as long as you get plenty of attention, that I’ll promise you. This is a much more banal, much more selfish proposal than you have ever had, but you don’t mean romance to me now; you mean necessity. My dear, give yourself a chance. There, the murder’s out. We could help one another. I’m a bit of a prig, I

daresay, and you are—what shall I say?—too much wanting in self-respect. I could wear you into a fine woman, do you understand?”

She sat with her hands clasped, her eyes on his impassioned face. Not the driest of speeches to her could take the passion from his face. It uplifted her. It drew her, despite herself, into the thorny path of attempted righteousness. She was conscious of a desperate desire to free herself once and for all from the turbulent ways of easy life. She felt in this man a magnetism which drew out all the better part of herself, and in the agony of body and soul such decisions make, she felt the virtue in him steal into her and for one moment she knew the desire of good women to be good.

“I won’t, dear,” she said sadly. “I’m just a person who ought to flame up and out. I’d only hurt you. I must go my way. I’m born that way.”

He was quick to seize on a trifle. “Being born that way is an accident. I can help you, dear; I’ll give my life to it. I must, because it is my life. Listen, dear. I shall come to you to-morrow at lunch time with everything arranged. Don’t count on happiness, don’t count on anything, but that I shall be always with you. I wish I understood myself; I don’t. But I do know this: you and I are made to be happy. I’m going now. I have so much to do. No, I won’t kiss you, you funny child. And for heaven’s sake, don’t cry in front of the waiter—it’s not done.”

But Flip was crying bitterly. “I’m afraid,” she said.

“What are you afraid of?” he asked lightly.
“Afraid of me?”

All at once she seemed to him to become a real baby, something one must look after and care for, and every genuine impulse in his heart welled up at once. And as he kissed her he said, “There is always to-morrow.”

“Yes,” said Flip, “but there’s always the day after to-morrow.”

And so he left her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LAST DITCH

TIMOTHY felt that he owed it to Mrs. Sterne that he should call and tell her how it was with him. He realized that it would be a bitter disappointment both to her and Weatherby, but, when they saw that he had at last arranged his life, they would forgive him. So he sent her a telephone message, telling her that he was coming at twelve o'clock with important news.

How changed the streets were, now that his heart was light. Old London sang her most joyous air, lovers crowded the pavements, children smiled sweetly, the trees and sky wore their best colors, and the great motor buses became galleons of romance. He trod on air, borne up on the wings of love.

Mrs. Sterne saw the joy in his face as soon as he entered the room. "Who's been giving you a nice present?" she said, laughing at his obvious pleasure.

"I'm going to disappoint you," he said.

"Isn't it nice, then?" she asked.

"I'm not going to Africa."

"Not going!" she cried. "Oh, you can't mean that! George has booked your berth; it's all settled. He—he won't know what to do. Oh, you're joking."

Then Timothy told her the story of his meeting

with Flip. "So you see," he ended, "that all goes well with me. I'm a gay dog again. The world smiles at me; I smile back at the world."

"It's a mistake," she said gravely.

"I've blundered into happiness," he said. "Dare I refuse the gift of the Gods?"

"I think I would sooner you were dead."

"Dolly!" he exclaimed "That's not a very pleasant thing to say to a man who is beside himself with joy. You can understand. You see, I have always loved her. I know, of course, all about her failings and I forgive them freely if she will only come back to me. To think I might have lived alone a musty old bachelor without her!"

"I'm not a clever woman," she said, "but I know my own sex. I'm sorry for Flip. I don't think she can help herself; there are girls like that. She doesn't want love as much as she wants looking-glasses; she likes to see herself in men's eyes. There was a girl at school with me like that; she reduced all the choir boys to abject idiots about her—one after another—just for fun. And then she began on the curates. It isn't a nice story; and she was sent away. And she was sent away from the next school too. She loves what isn't her own, and when she has got it, she doesn't want it. Strange kisses—old compliments from new lips—that was all she cared for. And now——"

"Do you still see her?"

"She's in the incurable-ward of a hospital, making love to the doctors."

Timothy smiled. "But has she really done any harm?" he asked.

"I don't know if you would call it harm. I don't know if the men came to any harm. But I was thinking of the women she has hurt—women whose husbands were in love with them before she came; girls whose lovers she has snatched away. And only for amusement," she said vehemently.

"Yet you still see her."

"She could charm you even now," said Mrs. Sterne. "She's like Flip; she has the fatal gift. Men are drawn to her like moths to a candle. And women—like her. And I love her."

"You know her very well, then?"

"She's my sister," said Mrs. Sterne.

It brought him up short; he had been about to treat the case lightly. "Dolly," he said earnestly, "it is very sweet of you to tell me this, but it can make no difference. Flip feels a difference between me and other men. I know that. I don't want to put it bluntly, but I am going into this with my eyes open. I know what the risk is, but I'm going to give her a chance. I'm going to devote my life to her. You see, I have nothing to devote my life to; my days are empty, and now I have something splendid to do. Forgive me for being so selfish. I know what a disappointment this will be to George and to you. But I think you understand. We are going to travel. I shall take her away."

Dolly Sterne turned from him for a moment and dabbed her eyes with a diminutive handkerchief,

and then she faced him gaily. "That's all over," she said. "Now tell me your plans."

"I sat up half the night," he said, "thinking of Flip with different backgrounds. She's too imper-
tinent pretty to suit the Sphinx, don't you think so? And I don't want to have the whole German army waiting for a glimpse of her outside an hotel. And I put Italy aside, as I think somebody might stab me for the sake of giving her a camelia. And a Turk would be sure to steal her. I thought of India, but I don't want her to upset the entire Civil Service, or drive young soldiers to distraction. And at last I thought of Japan. Isn't Japan the perfect setting? Plum blossom, paper houses, the little people, and the children like dolls."

"You laughed at us for being children the other day," she said.

"And now I'm laughing at myself, and that's one reason for my being so happy. You do forgive me, don't you? I shall think of old George ploughing through the jungle and of you waiting. I wish you all happiness from the bottom of my heart. Tell George, will you, that I'll see him before he goes, and tell him the extra cabin is a present from me. It will give him heaps of room, and he likes room. Don't look so serious; we shall all come out winners. It's a joy to know you. Good-bye."

After he had gone, she stood looking out of the window watching for Weatherby, and her heart was sore for the man who had left, but she did not trust Flip.

Timothy arrived at the *Savoy* with a big bunch of

flowers in his hand. The man opened the door of Flip's sitting-room, and there, deep in a chair, sat Almirac.

The two men looked at one another for almost a minute. Then Almirac said, "Well, old feller!"

Timothy sat down limply, putting his flowers on a table beside him.

"Didn't expect to see me here," said Almirac, lighting a cigarette. "Fact is, dear boy, I've been here all the time."

"What do you mean?" said Timothy.

"I gave her a one-boat start, dear boy, that's all. I've got an idea for dealing with her, awfully simple and very effective. I appear to be neglectin' her, do you see? Then, when I think things have gone far enough, up I turn."

"I don't understand you," said Timothy, nervously plucking at the flowers by his side.

"Very simple," said Almirac. "By the way, I think we'll have a drink. You look rotten ill, dear boy."

He rang the bell and ordered two large whiskys and sodas, and then, in his slow, drawling way, he sat down and lit another cigarette.

"Where is she?" said Timothy.

"She's gone out to lunch," said Almirac, gazing at him vacantly.

Timothy half-rose, but forced himself to sit down quietly.

"She had an appointment with me," he said hoarsely.

"Knew it, dear boy, knew it. But she's gone to

lunch with a tame aunt of mine. She's goin' to live with my aunt until we can be married. Keep still, here comes the waiter man."

When they were alone again, Timothy said, in a voice that he scarcely knew for his own, "She told me you had deserted her."

"My dear man," drawled Almirac, "I thrashed a puppy for her in Paris and she bolted. As I say, I gave her a one-boat start, and crossed by night. I came on here, and I thought she'd better not see me for a day or two, so I lay doggo until I saw you come in yesterday."

"She sent for me," he said, still nervously plucking at the flowers, so that a sheaf of petals covered the floor by his feet.

"She does send for people," said Almirac dryly.

"She had no money," said Timothy angrily.

"Much better without it, dear boy, much better without it. When she hasn't any, she spends it, and when she has, she gives it away in handfuls."

"And you think you are in love with her!" cried Timothy.

Almirac stretched his long legs comfortably before replying. "We needn't go into that."

"I must go into it," said Timothy.

"Fire away," said Almirac.

"She is everything in the world to me," he said. "I want her."

"She belongs to me," said Almirac.

"She is coming with me," said Timothy decisively.

"You'll find the door of her room behind you,"

said Almirac. "You'd better get your answer from that."

Timothy rose quickly from his chair, walked to the door and threw it open. It struck him with the chill of a grave. It was absolutely empty. It had that lack of personality hotel rooms have. There was no sign or trace of Flip's presence, or of her ever having been there. The emptiness mocked at him. He closed the door, and came back to his chair, by the side of which he remained standing.

"Where is she?" he demanded.

"She's in Norfolk," said Almirac, "with my tame aunt." He took out his watch. "Lunchin' by now."

"I could kill you for this," said Timothy, with a curious feeling of being strangled himself.

"Look here," Almirac said, "you may be awfully fond of her, but you don't understand her a bit. I do. She can do what she likes with you, but she can't with me, dear boy. And why? Because I'm a bit of a rotter myself. So I know. I give her so much rope, and then I pull. You give her the whole thing, and she bolts. I don't care how many times she bolts from me; I shall always turn up. And in the end I shall win."

"I asked her to come away with me," said Timothy slowly. "I honestly believed that you were sick of her and had gone away."

"So I understood."

"She told you?"

"She told me everything," said Almirac. "You see, I care for her in a different way from you. I never was a feller to flare up and all that. I'm not

that kind of chap. I am ready to wait all my life until she comes to me of her own free will, as she did once. It's worth it."

"I wonder if you know what she means to me?" said Timothy.

Almirac looked at him as he stood there, white, trembling. "It's a nasty knock," he said. "I've often wondered why you wanted to mess yourself up with people like us. You belong to another set, at least, I've always thought so. We're not clever or deep. I think you are."

"I wonder if you'll understand this," said Timothy, and his voice seemed to him to come from a long way off. "If a man gives the kind of feelings I've given to Flip to any woman, he takes something out of himself, something very precious, something of which the color of his life is made. It is given freely, for ever, and absolutely. If it is rejected, as she has rejected it, a man can never get it back. He is poorer by all that, a tremendous loss. He may even marry, not that I shall, but he can only give to his wife the poor thing that is left. I shall never see Flip again, but I should like to hear of her. If she—if she keeps straight with you it will help me to build up a better idea, not of her, but of women. You must forgive my saying this; I felt I had to. I suffer from her loss, and again I suffer the blow to my pride. I ought to have kept her from the first. I hope you will be happy. Will you tell her that? Tell her I don't feel bitter about her, and that I only want her to be happy. Please don't move; I can find my way out."

CHAPTER XXIX

CLAY AND RAINBOWS

IT occasioned no surprise when Timothy arrived at his uncle's house at six o'clock in the evening and demanded a hot bath, "one of my uncle's shirts, and a pair of slippers." He walked up the wide oak stairs to the room always kept in readiness for him, and sat down in an arm-chair, a comfortably tired man. It had taken him four days to walk there.

After he had left the hotel and Almirac, his first impulse had been to try and clear his mind by some form of exercise. He went home, changed his clothes, and set out at once, walking blindly through London. Night found him still walking in a lonely road in Essex, nearly twenty miles from home. London had been like something in a dream, lights, noise, smell, the sluggish suggestion of the river, then fewer people, fewer lights, the passage from town to country where the two merge, and at last the clean, sweet breath of open fields—all this he passed as it were some phantasmagoria.

He did not think; his brain was too tired for that. He had no visions, no hatred, no dreams. He walked mechanically, like a man in his sleep; his only impulse, the thing that drove him, was the desire to get away. All unconsciously he took the Northern road. All unconsciously his feet led him toward

that house and garden of his uncle's where Time stood still and Peace slept. He fled to Nature as the lesson the mountains had taught him. He needed the balm of her, the size of her, the lack of criticism, the wealth, the breadth, the calm dignity of her.

His senses returned to him as his body failed. He found himself standing on a canal bank, looking on a scene so calm and dignified that it soothed him at once. The long, straight stretch of water went away soundlessly into the distance, and the water bore stars on her bosom. On his right a purple mass of trees, rounded in sleep, guarded a lock-keeper's cottage, and the moonlight lit the white lock gates and sent their image into the steady water. On either side misty flats spread indefinitely a sleeping picture of purple and silver, with the moon for Queen. All at once some night bird wailed in the darkness, and it seemed to Timothy that the bird had in some way a connection with him, a soul crying in the dark. It was in this moment that the full tide of his grief swept over him. Life was as empty as the scene. And then his body reasserted itself and he shivered with the cold of fatigue. A little later he stumbled into a small town, and woke up the surprised boots of the hotel, and so got a bed and fell into a dreamless sleep.

On the second night it seemed that the old Curé of Gavarnic accompanied him and urged him to leave the world and its hollow joys and to go the Leper Colony and there merge his life in the service of God and his fellow-men. He shook off this fancy by quickening his pace until he became too tired to

think. And when other, wilder dreams came to him, as for instance that women followed him on the far sides of the hedges he became suddenly faint, and then realized that he had only eaten once of bread and cheese in forty hours.

He found a hotel that night where they gave him a good dinner in the Commercial Room, for it had been a Market Day, and there was ample over from the Farmers' Ordinary. And three old farmers and one commercial traveller ate with him. Their conversation lulled him pleasantly. It was that talk which begins, "I remember," and was full of anecdotes of ancient worthies, men who had never seen steam, or heard of motor-cars, or halfpenny papers, and the old room glowed with the wit of the dead and made the present day seem a very dull affair. The Inn stood next against the churchyard and was called *Church House Inn*, and looking through the windows Timothy could see the old grave stones, all at different angles, and the dark clump of yews about the churchyard gate, and it seemed a pleasant place to lie in, with daisies for a counterpane and wise rooks cawing overhead. It eased his hurt again.

On the third night his bedroom looked over a river and a timber ship lay there, waiting for the tide which was high at midnight. He opened his window and leaned out to see the men set sail, if there was a breeze, and a fussy tug get up steam. He could hear the rough farewells on the quay, and the creaking of cordage and the whine of the winches, and the rasp of the anchor chain weighing in. Men, it seemed, were orderly yet

adventurous; they took life as it came, and went down to the sea in ships. He seemed set by his sorrow above it all, and yet it eased his hurt again. And now, on the fourth night, as he came from his bath, he heard his uncle say, "You may take the cellar key and bring me a bottle of that Burgundy from the second bin on the left in the inner cellar."

They dined at seven, and he was pestered with no questions, no more ceremony than, "Well, my boy!"

Timothy gave an account of himself up to a point; spoke of his travels and the mountains, and of the old priest. His uncle appraised it all with bows and the acknowledgment of a hand in a courtly gesture. Dessert was laid in the garden, for it was a warm summer evening. The fine old port was brought in its cradle; the fruit, silver and glass gleamed in the warm sunset. The garden was bathed in peace.

Neither Timothy nor his uncle Oliver spoke. They watched the shadows gather softly. The yew hedge that had caught the last fire of the after-glow became gray-green again, and then, as the night painted out the detail of the day, the hedge became a velvet black against a purple sky. A warm breeze shook the perfume from tobacco flowers and mignonette, and the roses breathed their night message to the garden.

Not until the golden moon rose did Oliver speak. "A nightingale will sing directly." Then over the scented garden with its cloak of peace there broke the passionate throbbing of the nightingale, emblem

of lovers of all time, pleading, loving, despairing and in ecstasy.

The song finished as suddenly as it had begun; then Oliver spoke again. "You are young," he said, "and the pain is much worse. It will become a friend."

"You know?" said Timothy from the shadows.

"I have learnt to read pain," said the old man. "It is perhaps the only accomplishment I have acquired in a long life."

"It has smashed me," said Timothy.

"It is worth living for," said his uncle.

"It leaves me empty," said Timothy.

"It gives one a truer judgment," said his uncle.

"It leaves one nothing in life," said Timothy.

"There are other people."

"What can I do for other people?" asked Timothy.

"They will tell you that. They will come to you. Your heart will soon be full. The wounded go to the wounded, because only they understand. That is why you came to me. Untried youth fails you in these days. It is a world of great suffering, and a very beautiful world."

"You find it is?" he asked, knowing that the old man was never without pain.

"The older I get," said his uncle, "the more I find the amazing courage of people. It seems that a man must be utterly broken before he can understand the majesty of life and death. It is not until he is tortured that he can see the beauty of the lives of the men and women about him. There is no saying so true as, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.'"

"She was very dear to me."

"It will endure."

"You know that?"

"My boy," said his uncle, "you have your mother's face."

Timothy began to speak quickly out of the darkness. "It is so difficult. I am made for nothing in particular and I loved this girl. It gave me a reason in life. She seems so much part of my life that now she has gone out of it, it feels as if my right hand were cut off. She has come into my life three times, and each time she has gone out of it and left me in despair. And now she has gone for ever. I have no work to take up, and I don't know what to do. I suppose hundreds of men spend wasted lives wondering what to do. Now I have come to an end. My old life in town rejects me. I don't fit in; I've grown out of it. I tried to find my youth and to enjoy things I used to enjoy only a few years ago. Now I cannot imagine what I saw in them. I should feel the same if I went back to the mountains."

"Life is a series of beginnings; even death is a beginning."

"I would begin again to-morrow if I knew how."

"Take what lies directly in your path."

"The first thing?"

"It would be a beginning."

"I wonder!" said Timothy.

"I have always thought of people," said his uncle, "as a mixture of clay and rainbows. At one time one's feet seem so firm in the clay of the world, one's

eyes so fixed on ordinary things, and then something destroys them, the world seems futile, it does not seem worth while carrying on the drudgery and monotony of daily existence. Friends are false, wine is sour, women are faithless. And then, when the sky is most clouded, there comes the rainbow. It is in our nature, really, to hope, to look up for some sign from Heaven. Even the most unbelieving of us are full of faith when trouble comes. We look up. It is our tears and the sunshine of God's knowledge that make our rainbows. Give me my sticks; the dew is falling."

Timothy gave him the sticks, and put up a hand to pull the old man from his chair.

"I could go to Africa," he said.

"How like your father."

"It is rather a wild-goose chase," said Timothy.

"Tell me," said his uncle, with his grave smile.

"A man I know, a splendid chap, is in love with a woman whose husband never comes near her. He lives somewhere or other in Central Africa, at least, that is about as much as she knows. She has only seen the man twice. My friend proposes going to find him, and to demand his wife's freedom. Of course there is no need for that, but my friend insists that it is the honorable thing to do."

"I like your friend," said Oliver, chuckling.

"He wants me to go with him."

Oliver said no more. He was helped out of his chair and hobbled to the house, leaving Timothy alone. And the peace of the garden entered into

him, and he remembered Mrs. Newberry's words, "If you love her, forgive her, or what's love for?"

In the morning he went into his uncle's room, where the old man sat gray and haggard with his nightly tussle with death.

"I'm going," he said.

Oliver took a miniature in a case from the table by him. "I should like you to have this," he said. "It is a picture of your mother. Good-bye, my lad."

There was a pause. Timothy bent down and kissed the old man on the forehead.

"I will tell you all about it when I come back," he said.

And the old man smiled and shook his head. "I shall never hear that story," he said.

So it was that when Weatherby opened the door of his second cabin he found Timothy there, with his man stowing away cabin trunks.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he said. "Dolly, look here."

Mrs. Sterne, her eyes a little red from crying, came in. "Oh, you angel!" she cried. "You perfect angel!"

"I hope to be," said Timothy smiling. "But at present I am just the ordinary fool."

"You will look after each other, won't you?" she said. "George has given me heaps of books about the awful place, and the pictures frighten me to death. George, go away."

After he had gone, laughing, she turned to Timothy and whispered, "Send your man away."

When they were alone, she said rather breathlessly, "I don't want you to go away thinking all women are awful. Dear Sir Timothy, I am really a friend. I want to say I'm awfully fond of you. And please write to me about George. And please do write to me about yourself. I know I'm rather stupid. Isn't it difficult to say you have an affection for anybody? Will you do all I've asked, and I am so awfully sorry."

"You are a dear, sweet woman," he said, holding both her hands. "You have sweetened everything. Good-bye, and be brave."

"I mustn't cry, because George hates tears, so I think I'll go quickly. Good-bye."

As they sailed away and the little crowd on the quay grew smaller and smaller, Timothy put his arm through Weatherby's and led him below. "Thank God for women like that," he said.

"If I don't have a drink I shall make a fool of myself," said Weatherby. "I'm so jolly glad you are here, old man."

"By the way, what is my address?" said Timothy.

"Gnongo, British East Africa," said Weatherby. "That's where he was last heard of."

CHAPTER XXX

THE LAST LETTER

THE dawn crept up behind the elm trees, making their bare boughs look as if they were drawn in purple ink against the gray sky, and the rooks' nests were like smudges of brown ink and the rooks were blots of black. Oliver Swift sat by the window waiting for the day, his head was sunk on to his breast, his breath came with difficulty, and his face showed the long night's vigil. But he seemed possessed of a monumental calm, an unruffled dignity that was somehow enchanced by the wrappings round his swollen legs and the empty medicine glass by his side.

As the red winter sun rose and banished the night shadows from the room, lighting on the unslept-in bed, the pipe-covered table, and the proud face of the old man, it seemed to give him a new lease of life, and the color came slowly back into his cheeks.

He stretched out a hand and picked up a short quill that lay on his dressing-table, and drawing from it a tiny roll of thin paper covered with small pencil-writing, he began to read.

The romance of that quill and the paper it contained stirred this man of forced inaction. For a moment he lifted his head and smiled proudly.

“We expect to be attacked at daybreak,” it began, “so I am sending this by one of our runners with

other despatches, on the bare chance of his reaching our base at the coast. Though this may be the last letter I ever write, I regret nothing. Sterne has been kept here by one of the tribes, as they think he is a great magician, and they are attacking us because we tried to rescue him. We have a sporting chance, that is all. Weatherby is a great and good man and I have never met a better. In case of bad luck, good-bye, my dear Uncle, and thank you a thousand times for everything. I have left a large sum to be divided between Flip and Dolly Sterne. The boy is waiting.

“TIMOTHY.”

Oliver had received this the night before, seven months after Timothy's departure. Only one thing was clear, that the runner had reached the coast, and the quill and its contents had been sent on with a bare word from the Commissioner who received it—

“Expedition starting at once. Think we shall be in time. Runner died just after he had delivered letter in my office. Will wire news when possible.

“G. ARBELEW.”

The guarded peace of the house was at strange variance with the quill and its contents. It came from a place where Englishmen added great tracts of land to the Empire, where they died unthanked and forgotten very often. But its message brought a great calm to the heart of the old man; at least Timothy had won through well. He was a man to be proud of.

His breakfast was brought up to him as he sat at his window. For two months now the pain had kept him to his room, and it was obvious to his man that the end was not far away.

As he sat watching the chattering business of the rooks, he saw the outer door leading into the street open and an old man in the dress of a French priest enter and walk slowly toward the house. Oliver knew of no other French priest than the Curé of Gavarnie of whom Timothy had spoken so enthusiastically, and he blew upon the whistle that always hung around his neck.

“Ask the gentleman who has just rung the front door bell to be so kind as to step up here. Tell him I am sorry I am unable to move from this room. And when you have done that, you may take the cellar key and decant a bottle of the old sherry and bring it here.”

The man departed, and in a few moments announced, “Monsieur le Berade.”

An arm-chair was brought up and the Curé was bowed into it. For a minute he seemed unable to speak, and then his eyes caught sight of the quill on the table.

“Monsieur,” he said, “I very little speak English.”

“Je ne parle pas Français,” said Oliver with an effort.

The Curé sighed. “Also me,” he said, and produced another quill, which he handed to Oliver. “Permettez?” he said, producing his snuff-box.

“If you please,” said Oliver, taking the quill and

picking out its contents. He glanced at them and saw they were in French and shook his head. Then he handed his quill and letter to the Curé, who also shook his head. Both the old men smiled.

At this point the man arrived with the sherry and glasses.

“James,” said Oliver Swift, “do you understand French?”

“A little, sir,” said the servant cautiously.

“See if you are able to translate this note to this gentleman.”

Very painfully and with a red face, James gave a rough translation of Oliver’s letter, the old Curé assisting with grave politeness.

“Presque la même chose,” he said, pointing to his own letter.

“You may pour out the sherry and leave us,” said Oliver to his man.

He knew and appreciated the motive that had inspired the Curé to bring him the letter. He realized that he had brought it in case the other had failed to reach him. But he did not know what an effort the journey had cost the old man, and that it had cost him an entire quarter of his yearly stipend.

Oliver Swift raised his glass and bowed over it. The Curé did the same, and they drank a silent toast.

“The first glass of sherry I have tasted for fourteen years,” said Oliver to himself. “I shall pay for that to-night.”

The Curé smiled.

Without embarrassment these men of few words

passed two hours together without speaking: the Curé snuffed and Oliver smoked.

At the end of that time Oliver blew again upon his whistle.

“This gentleman,” he said to the servant, “is to have every attention. He will stay here if he cares to. See that there is a good lunch.”

The Curé understood the drift of the sentence, and he rose and answered in French. “I thank you, monsieur, but I shall return to my work after luncheon. Adieu, monsieur.”

With a tremendous effort Oliver rose to his feet, supporting himself by holding with one hand on to the dressing-table. The old men shook hands.

The world is full of heroes.

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