

THE CUCKOO'S NEST

By

CHRISTINE JOPE SLADE





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THE CUCKOO'S NEST

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE KEYS OF HEAVEN
WEDDING RINGS FOR THREE
MONTY'S GIRL
LETTERS TO MY UNBORN SON

THE CUCKOO'S NEST

BY
CHRISTINE JOPE-SLADE



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TO
MY MOTHER

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THE CUCKOO'S NEST

I

ZURIEL MAKES HER MIND UP

ON an ugly January afternoon a girl with silvery-gold hair and strange, big mouse-coloured eyes fringed with unbelievable lashes sat looking at the sea from the windows of a trim, pretentious little bungalow and cursing in silence. Amazing words for a convent-bred maiden welled in her hectic imagination and broke like bubbles without relieving the tumultuous whirlpool of her passionate indignation against life and fate.

Behind her, entrenched by a silver teatray, sat a little elderly woman ; everything about her was round, the shape of her fat limbs and her small fat features, even her tightly buttoned apprehensive mouth and her wide, childish apprehensive eyes. This rotundity found culmination in an enormous

circular Norwegian brooch fixed in the exact centre of her curved figure ; its hanging spangles of gold were the only visible moving things in the room.

She also stared at the frothed edge of the sea, but a little apologetically and sadly, as if mentally defending it. Her thoughts, like her little body, grew in soft round curves, too ; she cradled her gentle ideas and hated to have them disturbed or replenished.

“ I'm sure,” she said deprecatingly and nervously, “ this place is very nice, Zuriel, with Margate only just round the corner as you might say ; and the actress's children that live down here in the summer ! Dozens of mornings I've taken up the *Mirror* or the *Daily Sketch* and seen them in just the same waterproof paddling drawers that I saw the nurse put on. It gives you a nice feeling when the house is your own and everything ; and we can always go to town for a *matinée* ; I'm sure that eleven o'clock does us beautifully.”

“ What on earth has father gone to Cannes for, Mother ? ”

Two fat, round tears gathered in Poppy Whistler's round mouse-coloured eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

“ I’ve been thinking about the way we’ve been discussing father lately, Zuriel, and I feel dreadful, perfectly dreadful. Of course if you marry before you’re thirty you’re never quite loyal to your husband ; up till then you’ve always a close woman friend ; but I hadn’t one . . . so I’ve started discussing him now I’ve turned fifty and he’s bald and everything, and with his own daughter ! There’s something very dreadful about thinking things about a bald man, *any* bald man—it’s almost indecent.”

The fire danced and crackled, Mrs. Whistler’s Norwegian brooch danced also and twinkled in its convulsive heavings ; the room with its rich rose du Barri carpet from Hamptons and its rich rose du Barri curtains from Maples grew richer and rosier, and the light outside greyer and thinner and colder in contrast ; the figure of the girl, her whole personality swayed by a restless agony of impatience and revolt, belonged neither to the cheer of the room nor the bleakness of the outer world ; she was transient, incidental to both.

“ He’s a wonderful husband and a wonderful father. You should know some, Zuriel ! Married women talk, you should have heard

some of those poor things at the hotels . . . and even down here, though we don't know a soul . . . well, no *real* woman wants to stop her charwoman talking some days, and you do learn, my goodness ! He's so generous, look at the way you've been educated, the way we've gone abroad every year—always stalls, and every concert ; and the clothes . . . always the best."

"That's what I say, you've no right to equip people and not let them practise. I speak French and Italian, I've travelled, I think, I feel, I *know*, I *want* things . . . and here am I stuck down here forbidden to know people."

"Not forbidden, Zuriel, . . . only he hasn't wanted us to ; we've always had everything else except people."

The girl swung round, everywhere that the mother achieved sphericity this girl betrayed delicious, tiny-boned angularities ; there was something puck-like in the slimness of her little wrists and ankles, the tiny column of her neck ; her toes, her hands, her nose were absurdly, deliciously pointed, her hair hid wee pointed ears ; the fire flickered in her queer eyes, not brown, not grey, but like mole velvet.

“Everything else except people!” she echoed. “As if anything else mattered ever . . . except people! All day long, if we’re normal, we’re thinking, dreaming, watching, reading about, wondering about . . . people, our relation to them and theirs to us, speculating, hoping. When you read books you skip out all the descriptions of scenery or atmosphere . . . you know you do . . . you can’t bother your mind about anything that isn’t people. Women can’t. They always want to mean something to someone or someone to mean something to them. We’re father’s harem, that’s what we are!”

A faint pink came into Poppy Whistler’s face.

“Daughters don’t remember that their fathers are their mothers’ husbands nowadays,” she said; “I know you think I’m soft never to have plagued your father to know what he was. When you’ve got everything it’s easy to get used to anything. He asked me to trust him. He said one day he’d be worthy of us.”

“And you don’t wonder what he does coming down on the midnight train every night and going up at ten the next morning ;

you don't question his going to Cannes for six months . . . it . . . it's medieval. . . ."

"If I went ferreting round, Zuriel, I might find something I didn't want to."

"I should think he's a particularly lucky burglar or else he keeps a gambling-hell."

Mrs. Whistler rose to her feet. Against the glow of the fire her outlines were vague and billowy. There was real distress in her voice.

"I've told you before, I won't have it. I wake at night and remember . . . and he doesn't feel at all like a burglar. The other night he got up . . . gentle and good like he always is . . . and boiled me some milk on the electric stove and then refilled my hot-water bottle . . . and what woke me was wondering if he really was a forger. Can you *think* what I felt like!"

The thin screech of seagulls filled in the silence.

"What do you want, Zuriel?"

"I want to *live*!"

"I believe if I'd called you Muriel it would have been all right; you'd have liked the same things I like, going up to see the shops, and making jumpers."

“ How much did father leave us ? ”

“ Fifteen pounds a week. I could have had more if I'd asked.”

“ It was a pity you didn't ; we shall need it all.”

“ I've told you, Zuriel . . . not that. I'm not cut out for deception . . . not my figure or anything.”

The tea-service was black covered with little pink rose-buds ; Zuriel crossed to the table, cut herself an enormous slice of Fuller's layer cake and resumed her seat. In the road outside a spinal carriage was trundled past, and a minute after another.

“ You expect me to live with those ! ”

“ I don't expect you to live with them ; you don't live with them, you only see them.” She got up agitatedly and stood in front of the fire waving one tiny foot in a strapped shoe that forced the instep up like a little round pincushion. “ If you'd been born in a nursing home, I'd never have believed you were our child,” she said, “ but there wasn't another house for two miles, and besides you've my mother's eyes. If you were romantic I could understand you better. It's good for a girl to be romantic, it makes her go on putting up with things in married

life till she's used to them. I don't know what you've told this Italian Marchesa of yours ; I don't know what you started talking to her for, you never do any good talking to anyone in a seaside shelter—regular beehives of symptoms and unreliable receipts and old crochet patterns they are. I'm not going to look after her house in London for her or anything, Zuriel ; I'm going to stay here at Birchington in this house and have Lizzie look after us until father comes back from Cannes. Go up to town and live in her house and pretend we are goodness knows what . . . why ! it would be a regular cuckoo's nest."

" Cuckoos don't make nests."

" That's just what I mean . . . they push in anywhere and settle down in places they're not entitled to . . . and that's what you want me to do and I'm not going to do it. I can't think why you don't make some undies with that pink *crêpe de Chine* we got at Bobby's. After all, Zuriel, if you make things you do know what you've got, but if you sit over the fire reading novels all day you only know what you haven't got. You aren't like other girls."

" Oh ! I am, Mother, that's just it, dear,

I want the very things they want . . . only I want more ! I can't stay rotting away my youth here just with you and father. If you loved me you wouldn't want me to. This is our chance ! This is ! Even if nothing happens in the months we're in town I shall have seen things and people . . . felt things and done things. Kisses and babies and hot toast in the winter aren't going to be enough for me. It isn't my fault. You must have had suppressed desires . . . and they've come out in me."

Mrs. Whistler flushed deeply.

" If it's that Freud I found in your room you're talking about, Zuriel, please don't. I'm a broad-minded woman, but you're not going to persuade me that if a good man with a family dreams of turnips or white mice it means he ought to go and have a good time. Religions telling people they ought to do what they want to are always popping up, but they aren't popular with women, and you can't make a religion go unless you've got the women."

The maid came in and drew the curtains, built up the fire and removed the tea-things ; mother and daughter were left in the glow of rose-shaded lamps. The mother sat down

and drew a jade silk jersey out of a black satin bag, but her hands trembled.

Zuriel said very quietly and steadily :

“ I’ve made up my mind you know, Mother, I’m going to London. If you don’t come with me I shall go alone. I’m sick of this convent life. You needn’t ever tell father if you don’t want to. We shall be here when he comes back. Of course it will be a tremendous joke to the Marchesa. One can see that, but I can’t see that it matters being a joke to anyone if you get something out of it.”

The mother lifted her head and looked at the girl, little and slim and pointed, with her queer, velvety, slanting faun’s eyes and her exquisite pale hair, silvery in the lamp-light ; and she said a little piteously : “ Oh ! Zuriel, what do you hope to get out of it ? ”

The girl’s voice was very level.

“ I don’t know quite, Mother. People will call . . . artistic people, interesting people. The Marchesa will say she is lending her house to friends of hers. Of course I know quite well why she’s doing it ; life’s a sort of play to her, and she wants to see what I make of my big chance and she wants to give me my big chance. I strike her as

romantic, not knowing what my own father does for his living ; and then she'd never met anyone with fair hair and dark eyes ; she said so. She always lends her house to someone every year when she goes to Italy. I've got to write to her once a week and tell her who calls and what happens. It's just a sort of romantic joke to her . . . foisting us on her friends, launching us and seeing where we land. She says I am wasted down here ; well, I am wasted. When father comes back life will go on just the same. I could break free—I could go up to town and be a governess or private secretary or go in a shop, but it only amounts to buying my own food and not such good food ; it doesn't lead anywhere, it doesn't teach me anything at all."

" You do have good food ; your father never would have anything but the very, very best from the very, very best places."

" I know, but food doesn't matter when you're young—it's people and clothes and feeling things that matter when you're young, even nasty things. Oh ! it's awful to go on waiting for something to happen ! "

" But . . . "

" Well, I haven't had a fair life, have I,

Mother? Educated abroad and only allowed to stay with the foreigners. . . . What good has anything I've ever had been to me yet? Did father pay a lump sum into the bank?"

"Yes."

"Then we can draw it all out and take it to town"—suddenly she flung herself on her knees. "Please . . . please come and see the Marchesa; she'll explain so much better than I . . . you haven't the right to hold me back when the door's opened, and she's holding open the door. We've only got to go through."

II

SECRET FIRES

“**A**H!” said the Marchesa di Schundo, “the mother.” She laughed and waved the manservant away. “Come in,” she said. “Come in. This is delightful. I was so unutterably bored.”

She spoke without a trace of accent, her voice, her bronze wig, were young; the rest of her seemed withdrawn from the world by the process of time, her twinkling brown eyes beneath her shaggy, penthouse brows, her teeth behind the thin sardonic line of her fallen mouth, her frail skinny hands beneath their absurd coruscation of gems, her shrunken body behind the stiff little pointed bodice, her very process of thought became a mystery behind the withered mask that time had made for her. Poppy Whistler faced this human conning-tower with embarrassment.

“Zuriel made me come,” she said, “but I couldn’t do it—really and truly I couldn’t, Marchesa.”

The Marchesa said, "There's a fire in the library, Zuriel, and 'Vogue' and 'Harper's Bazaar.' Ring for anything you want." Poppy Whistler had a queer feeling that the old lady was mentally settling in position to enjoy herself with the attitude of the country cousin who visits the theatre rarely and is prepared to absorb every second of it.

"Now tell me," she said, "I am utterly intrigued—don't you want that beautiful girl of yours to know or don't you *really* know yourself what your husband is?"

"I don't know," said Poppy Whistler.

"And you've never wondered?"

"If a woman's decently treated she gets used to anything."

"True," she laid her hand on Poppy Whistler's round arm; it was armoured in jewels, they blazed and twinkled in the light of the electric candles. "You and I are free women," she said; "we can talk honestly."

"Free?" stared Poppy, round-eyed.

"We neither of us need things or people for ourselves," said the Marchesa; "that is the only freedom a woman ever knows."

"Good gracious!" said Poppy Whistler.

The Marchesa smiled very faintly; there

was something remote and sequestered in her smile.

“ You and I understand each other,” she suggested.

“ I don't know,” was Mrs. Whistler's answer.

“ If I had had a daughter like Zuriel I should have moved heaven and earth to achieve things for her.”

“ I've heard dozens of women who weren't mothers talk like you.” Mrs. Whistler was uncompromising. “ Childless women are nearly as ignorant as spinsters about children and more cocksure. I get so irritated. You want to lend us your house for nothing and you want us to go and live there. I can quite understand that you've taken a fancy to Zuriel ; you've seen a lot of her since that wet day you talked in the shelter. I can't think myself what she wanted to tell you about everything for. I'm a candid sort of woman. I haven't had the education to be otherwise. Father had a hardware store at Bishop's Stortford. What I can't see and I do want to know is, what you get out of it ? ”

She glanced round the room. In her heart she thought it was like a play, one of those

modern things she didn't understand ; and there was something about the withered old witch, something impregnable and unreadable. She was like Geneviève Ward as an aristocrat ; one strained one's mind up and was conscious of the strain only, not of understanding. The electric lights glimmered on books one never read, pictures one never saw in shop windows. It was unreal, theatrical, a junk-shop of the past. She looked at the bulgy nymphs and goddesses in gold frames and felt vague discomfort at their creases and dimples. It was a good thing corsets had been invented since.

" I am seventy-six," said the Marchesa ;
" I live in the gloaming."

" There are a lot of wonderful old ladies about now," said Mrs. Whistler vaguely.

" I believe in romance," said the Marchesa, her voice was a little tired and sad.

Poppy Whistler hastened to cheer her up.
" I'm sure we all do. My charwoman told me of a maid who gave notice in December in case she wouldn't get the day off to see Princess Mary married. I'd like to see Chesterfield House myself."

" It is possibly much altered since I saw it," said the Marchesa.

“ There ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Whistler, “ and me running on about charwomen ! ” she paused. “ Now about Zuriel ? ”

“ I suppose you know she’s extraordinary ? ”

“ Well, you don’t think things like that about your own daughter, you can’t get far enough away if you know what I mean.”

“ The life she’s living down here isn’t right for her, Mrs. Whistler ; it’s a cruel life for a young girl with desires and ambitions and such unusual distinction. Imagine twenty-two living in a lotus land where it is always afternoon.”

“ As you put it,” said Mrs. Whistler, “ it doesn’t seem right, but I’ve always said it’s the hardest thing in the whole world for a mother to realise that lovely food and a sweet home and theatres and nice clothes aren’t all her daughter wants . . . and that’s because it’s all she wants her to want, because she knows she can’t supply the rest.”

“ You’re a shrewd woman.”

“ I’ve common sense,” said Poppy Whistler, “ and how the young do hate it ! ” The tears came into her round, velvety eyes. “ Of course I know her dad’s peculiar and

the situation is peculiar, but the situations you're in yourself never seem half as funny to you as they do to other people. It didn't really seem odd to me not knowing what Henry was until Zuriel left school and started to find it odd."

"Didn't you question him?"

"I did, but somehow . . . he's one of those lofty little men—they're very hard to question, you know. He's very gentle and noble and very clean. I never saw such tremendous half-moons as he's got, keeps his hands like a dentist's. There's something about a man like that . . . well, after all, unless we're clever, and I'm not, it's men's messy, tiresome little ways that put us on an equality with them."

"Artists will want to paint your daughter, Mrs. Whistler."

"I wanted to send her picture to the *Daily Mirror* beauty competition. It's the only time I've ever seen my husband what you might call really put out, but he went and bought me this afterwards, brought it back from town"—she held out her fat little sausage finger on which gleamed a diamond ring. "It's funny the way men give you presents to commemorate the nasty

things they say ; I never could understand it ; a woman always swears she never said them."

"Your daughter can't have a future down at Birchington, can she, Mrs. Whistler ?"

"What sort of future do you think she'll have in London, Marchesa ?"

"With her hair and eyes !"

"The streets are full of girls with hair and eyes, Marchesa."

"Oh ! can't you *see* your daughter ! !"

"Not like you do, Marchesa ; when you've nursed them and spanked them and stuffed them with paregoric and looked for measles, you don't."

The Marchesa suddenly gripped the arms of her chair with her jewelled talons. She was like some weird, emaciated little bird brooding over the little round-eyed, level-headed mother. Her shoulders came level with her ears, her neck craned forward, sinewy as an old plucked fowl.

"She might make a grand marriage, she might make a romantic marriage," she said. "She will probably make the only sort of marriage she has use for . . . a marriage that is a going on, not a settling down. She has immense capacity. She is an opportunist."

I offer you a charming little house, a unique setting, an unquestioned entry into Bohemian, pseudo-smart society, all that is fashionable. You ask me what I hope to get from it? It is a little difficult to say, even to such a woman of common sense; the aged warm themselves at secret fires, Mrs. Whistler; I warm myself at the fires of romance. I have a tiresome sense of humour; one can share a religion or a hatred but never a sense of humour; they are all different; it is an infinitely lonely possession. Zuriel has promised to write to me in Italy, to tell me faithfully how things and people strike her. I want to see my world mirrored in a virgin mind. I offer her the chance of a career, a husband, a future of her own choosing in return for a few letters, a peep behind the curtains. Is it so very understandable?"

"Well, I shouldn't do it myself, Marchesa," Poppy Whistler ceded frankly, "but then I've always had my little independent amusements, crocheting and knitting and Patience, and thankful I am for them."

"I believe with my whole soul that the world is for the young."

"They believe it too nowadays, right up from the Kindergarten. Of course it isn't

difficult, I could put Lizzie on board wages at her aunt's ; she lives within a stone's throw of where the Margate trams stop, and she could go in every day and give the bungalow a tidy up and send the letters on . . . it's Henry that worries me."

"Doesn't he love his daughter ?"

Poppy Whistler's round, honest eyes flickered over the room as if seeking actualities ; they travelled from golden mirrors to golden chairs ; worried, they rested on the colourful fantasy of priceless china ; perplexed they fell on a tortoiseshell cat on a green and brown tapestry chair and cleared a little ; here was something homely, something akin to her in this harlequin world in which she found no mental anchorage.

"He thinks the world of us both," she said, "Zuriel might be a princess and I his queen. Yes, I know, a funny old bunch like me, figure spread and everything—I can't get a pair of corsets in England to do it now, it's beyond them," she marshalled her words with difficulty, fumbling in her mind for them, stringing them together carefully that she might make that thing that lived mysteriously and hidden behind those twinkling brown eyes understand. "It's as if he's

always been building for us . . . keeping us shut away till the thing's completed and worthy of us ; that's the feeling I have with him sometimes. To him we're holy. He's a very possessive man, always has been—it's *my* God, *my* King, *my* country and *my* wife. I like it, it gives a woman a gripped feeling. He's very, very generous, doesn't question what we do or how we spend, but I know he's saved . . . for something. He's a very definite kind of man. He's got a secret surprise for us I feel sure . . . shall we be upsetting his plans if we go to London ? ”

“ If you don't know them you can't upset them.”

“ You can feel things you don't know about your husband when you've been married twenty-four years.”

“ It's nice to be only able to *feel* things about your husband after twenty-four years,” submitted the Marchesa ironically. “ I *knew* them about mine.”

“ I think everyone tries to be a good mother,” said Mrs. Whistler a little unsteadily, “ I do honestly, Marchesa. I do see things as you and Zuriel see them. I see she wouldn't have a chance down here,

and, as she says, father's never been away before and he may never go away again . . . and when he comes back it'll be the same old comfortable way we've always lived ; and if Zuriel breaks away from it she'll break alone. I couldn't leave Henry ; besides, I love the life, it suits me," she sighed a little. " Perhaps a glimpse of life will satisfy her, perhaps she won't like it," she did not look at the old woman, she looked stubbornly away and ranged her jerry-built hopes. " I shall have to tell Henry. You get used to telling them things after twenty-four years. I can't run the risk of writing and having it forbidden with Zuriel worked up like she is. I do think it's such rubbish to write of the man, the woman and child as the happy trinity. It always annoys me. For the mother it's a continual which—will—you—have ? I've found it so. Of course I know we could never hope to get into the society we're going into. I don't want to wipe out that hardware store at Bishop's Stortford. Suppose she find someone in London who's well connected . . . well, there's her father . . . who knows ? "

The Marchesa's eyes sparkled a little.

" It is impossible not to be intrigued,"

she murmured. "For myself a living novel unfolds . . . a play produces itself."

"Yes," said Mrs. Whistler hesitatingly. "I see *your* side of it."

"You climb on the knees of the gods?"

"Well, I wouldn't put it like that and I wouldn't do it if I saw any way out," she paused. "Of course we could shut up the bungalow and go to town and stay at the Regent Palace Hotel and go about a bit . . . but it would be only me and Zuriel, just as it has been before always; it wouldn't lead anywhere. If I could only see Henry." She clasped her little fat hands. "But there—he'd only refuse point-blank and Zuriel would go away . . . we wouldn't keep her. She's over twenty-one. She's in revolt. I've had maids like it and they've always gone no matter what you say or do or promise . . . I know it, I've had to cope. I've had an easy life up till now."

"And now you are going to have an exciting one. You take the loan of my house too seriously. I lend it every year. I hate caretakers. It's a tiny, tall place, only four bedrooms, a lounge that runs the entire length of the house, and there is a studio in the garden. My husband was a sculptor.

When we quarrelled he lived out there. He had it built so that he could quarrel more ; he did enjoy it so. There is a tiny bedroom and kitchenette. It is lent."

"Lent ?"

"To a brother and sister. She teaches rhythmic dancing. He is a painter. He designs the most adorable frocks. He'll want to design for Zuriel. He whistles like a blackbird, too."

Poppy Whistler looked at the Marchesa. She was very, very tired. Her brown eyes were like little unpolished brown stones beneath the protective eaves of her eyelids and brows. She was withdrawing slowly, like a tortoise into his shell, into the impregnable mask that time had made for her.

"Zuriel . . ." she began.

The door opened gently and Zuriel peeped round the corner. She came in, closed it softly, and stood gripping the heavy glass handle with her hands behind her.

"I waited and waited," she faltered, "it seemed like years."

She looked from the Marchesa to her mother, the eager, swift glances of a young imprisoned thing. With her hands behind her gripped on the glass door handle she

looked bound, she swayed a little in an agony of apprehension.

“ Marchesa ! ” she said.

The old woman's eyes were tightly closed, her over-jewelled claws hung loosely over the ends of her curved arm-chair ; she looked like some grotesque idol, yet behind her closed eyes she seemed to watch.

“ Mother ! ”

Mrs. Whistler saw her as a little captive bird, pinioned for strange flights, suddenly alien to her, suddenly unknown. She had a sudden vision of her soaring up in ways unknown, through ways unknown, and herself watching, helpless and heavy and old and in her loving heart secretly uncomprehending.

That moment of always unexpected loneliness that comes to all mothers came to her. It closed over her mind like a little black velvet bag. Her familiar commonplace mental machinery rocked and crashed in it frighteningly, unfamiliar as a machine-room in a factory where the light has momentarily failed. She struggled for known handles and levers.

She had a queer feeling that behind her closed lids the Marchesa knew all that was passing, that her impassivity was registering

the emotions in that room as invisibly and surely as a photographic plate.

“It’s all right, Zuriel,” she said. “We are going.”

Zuriel’s hands flew from the door handle, she seemed to skim across the room.

“Oh! Mummie!” she said. “Oh! Mummie!”

The word was alien to her, she used it as an alien would, but the mother knew it was a label, the old nomenclature of the old relationship that was dead and would never come again.

An immense and devastating loneliness filled her.

“We ought to go, Marchesa,” she said uncertainly. “I am afraid you are tired.”

For the answer the Marchesa inclined her head and put one finger on the bell without unclosing her eyes.

Zuriel knelt and kissed her hand before the same young manservant who had admitted them answered the bell.

“Good-bye,” Mrs. Whistler said to the apparently sleeping Marchesa.

She never stirred.

Mother and daughter went out into the cold January night.

Zuriel said, " I've been such a pig to you, Mother, so rude and nervy . . . you know I haven't been sleeping a bit lately. I'd like to dance to-night . . . dance or sing or something. I do realise about you and daddie, I am appreciative, honestly . . . only I want my chance. Oh! it's too wonderful! too wonderful! I can't believe!"

Poppy Whistler let her chatter on; she had her arm, tugging it unconsciously now and then in excitement, so she was free to stare up at the stars; beyond them there glimmered hopes. Women are humbler than men—they look up to their hopes while men look ahead so that they may draw level with them, therefore to men hopes realised become personal achievements, but to women they continue to remain blessings granted.

III

MRS. WHISTLER MAKES FRIENDS

THEY sat eating porridge without milk out of different-sized bowls. It was beautifully cooked porridge and they ate contentedly and satisfyingly.

An open, very modern anthracite stove cast a fan of rosy light that included them all; the tired, pretty girl with the large delf blue bowl, the dark, short-necked girl with the smaller Sussex ware bowl, and the young man with the smallest leadless glaze bowl.

“It’s just occurred to me,” he grinned, “we’re exactly like the three bears. ‘So the great big bear took the great big bowl, the middling sized bear took the middling sized bowl, and the teeny weeny bear took the teeny weeny bowl—and finished it all up.’” He went and put his bowl on a small gate-legged table, snicking on the light as he passed the switches. “Ann, you’re a

porridge princess, a priestess of the double saucepan. You oughtn't to be making exotic clothes in London. You ought to marry a brawny Highlander and have a heathered hill opposite your wee house so that you could watch your ten children against the skyline marching to school and know they carried round and richly furnished tummies beneath their kilts to battle with the cru-el world." He paused in front of an easel and stood back. "Now that is good, my gentle friends, and no one else will think so."

The girl with the short, camellia-white neck watched him absorbed, but the pretty girl contemplated him idly as if his presence came and went in her consciousness. She took a small tin of golden syrup and watched a golden worm unwind from the spoon on to the remainder of her porridge.

"The Marchesa has lent her house again," she observed casually. "Those socks of yours are sure to have dried on the stove by now ; if you change them to-night I'll wash and darn your other pair."

The man by the easel did not hear. She lifted the socks and held them a minute against her tired face to test their warmth,

then turned them ready to put on and rolled them up.

“ Isaacs was in the shop again to-day,” observed the girl he called Ann. “ He came in his white Rolls-Royce.”

“ It must have looked like a snowball in a coal-mine down our street.”

“ He would have me go out and see it. Of course it had a crowd of kids round it. One of them said, ‘ Hi ! mister ! where’s Mary Pickford ? ’ and fled. That’s what it looks like.”

“ Did he say anything about the contract ? ”

“ He always harps on it, you know, five hundred pounds down for each of us the day we sign a three years’ agreement with him. You know his slogan ‘ Make for Millions.’ He carolled it at me till he shut the canary up. I pointed out that beautiful things could never be duplicated in their original beauty nor created by the dozen. I instanced the Venus of Milo.”

“ What did he say ? ”

“ Said she was overrated. Personally he’d like to meet the man who’d give up his seat to her in a bus.” She paused. “ He’s waiting for us to fail. He wants us. He’s

opened another branch in Croydon, same idea, blue paint and aluminium lettering. He showed me a frock he'd had duplicated in fifteen different sizes. He made me try the hooks and eyes. They seemed welded on. He's instructed every saleswoman to point that out to the customer. He says loosely fixed hooks and eyes are a national failing. His great idea in business is to eradicate glaring home shortcomings and import unfamiliar successful foreign ones. He told me so."

The pretty girl carried the three bowls to the little sink and washed them up. As she reached for the check glass-cloth she observed that the people the Marchesa had given her house to hadn't any servants."

"How do you know, Stella?" her brother asked.

"I saw someone frying sausages in the kitchen. She's rather like a little sausage herself."

"When did they come?" Ann queried.

"They must have come last night," the man said unexpectedly. "When I went round quite early this morning for some anthracite the girl was leaning out of that diamond-paned window at the back. Her

hair was down. It was like a mantle. She looked like one of Rackham's fairy princesses—small and incredibly fine and pointed."

"Did she see you, Bim?" asked his sister putting away the three porridge bowls.

"She did. I was a romantic and imposing figure in my grey trousers and khaki cardigan; she probably thought I was an ex-officer dustman. You've got to know her, Stella, because I want to paint her more than I've ever wanted anything in my life."

The short, dark girl spread her small, creamy hands to the fire. There was a waiting stillness in the crouch of her figure, the steady stare of her beautiful brown eyes.

"Imagine her in mole velvet with those wonderful mole velvet eyes!"

"My goodness, Bim, you seem to have made a pretty complete inventory."

"I didn't. She flashed on me with all the delicious unexpectedness of a rainbow. No rainbow was ever expected yet, that's what makes them so fascinating. I always believe every rainbow is the last I shall see. I think everyone does. I drank her in with that sort of hunger."

"You didn't tell me anything about her at breakfast."

“Dearest sister, I wasn't there at breakfast.”

“You were. You ate the last sardine.”

“That proves I wasn't. I should never have done a thing like that.” He turned to the girl by the stove. “You must see her, Ann. She's extraordinary.”

“I expect I shall admire her,” she answered sweetly. “I generally do fair people, being dark.”

“Are you going to fall in love for the first time in your life, Bim?”

“I don't know, dear. If I do I shall have to change porridge bowls with Ann. I could not possibly ask the Goldilocks to share the teeny weeny one. Now look here, all ye children, gather round and I will play to you.”

“Play ‘The Harmonious Blacksmith,’ Bim.”

“I couldn't, old lady, I'm full of uplift, and oh! for-the-wings-of-a-dove business.”

Stella reached up and switched off the light. It was obviously part of a ritual; again the cheery fan of light from the stove spread itself across the floor. Stella curled on an old cushion in one rosy corner of it, but Ann Charlton moved back till her face

was in the shadow that she might turn her suddenly bruised and aching thoughts in the gentle flow of the music and find balm and healing.

The little shop in the shabby road, where she made the dresses Bim Redgold designed, seemed far away, the unending struggle to which the communion in the studio gave rich romance appeared suddenly drab and unending too. A lump came in her throat, but because of her utter self-control the little square creamy hands on her lap were quiet as the hands of a graven image. Like one of Rackham's fairy princesses. . . . A cloud of golden hair swept across her imagination, blistering it. Because of that her dreams must fall. The thing that she had been wont to drape them on was still there—but like a strong nail on a tottering and undermined wall. She dare not rely on it or even test it.

It seemed to her in her arid loneliness that in his music Bim sang . . . sang like a troubadour, beneath a latticed window. Was it Rapunzel, in the fairy story, who unbound her golden hair to let the knight climb up?

He ceased to play and the room fell quiet,

for Ann it was like the stillness of something newly dead.

There was a timid, but rather decided little knock at the door.

Bim did not move from the piano ; and his sister went to the door without turning on the lights.

A bunched figure stood there.

“ I do hope I haven't interrupted anyone,” said Mrs. Whistler apologetically, “ but I would be so grateful if you'd lend me a pinch of tea. The shops are closed and would you believe it ! they've sent cocoa ! I can't bear it ! The Marchesa di Schundo has lent us the house while she's in Italy.”

Stella switched on the light.

“ Of course we can,” she said. “ Do come in out of the cold. My name is Stella Redgold and this is my brother Bim. His real name is James Austin but he can't stand it, and this is our friend Miss Charlton. She makes all the things Bim designs.”

Mrs. Whistler came in cheerfully and shook hands all round, her chief interest was the stove.

“ Well, I never ! ” she said. “ I'd never have believed the heat ; lovely, isn't it, all open too. I call that splendid ! ” She

beamed on them with round-eyed friendliness. "It will be nice for Zuriel having young people in the garden, as you might say. I've never been in a studio before. I always thought they were uncomfortable places, cushions and busts and things. A divan's a fine idea, isn't it? That's a box mattress on four casters, I suppose."

"I sleep on it," said Bim. "Stella sleeps in the little room." He waved his hand vaguely.

To Mrs. Whistler he seemed a reassuringly ordinary man for an artist. He wore nothing that flopped; even his shoe-laces were tucked in in a particularly neat way. True his clothes were rather a vivid shade of brown, but then so was he. His skin was a warm, healthy seaside colour, and the rather untidy tobacco-coloured shag of hair was a deeper shade of the same tone. The electric light varnished his brownness. She liked the contrast of his vivid, laughing blue eyes and his heavy, but very flexible voice.

"Suppose I make you a cup?" suggested Stella.

Poppy Whistler shook her head decidedly. "Now why not come in, the three of you, and have a cup with us? We've got the fire

lit in the lounge and we feel like the only two people in a large hotel. It's so depressing. Zuriel's started a jumper. I've never known her do a thing like that before. It makes me feel quite funny to see her sitting there digging the crochet hook into her finger . . . as if she were sickening for something. She was like that as a child—I think most children are—first she'd be as tiresome as tiresome, then she'd be very repentant and start making something useful, and then I'd find the rash." She looked at Ann, decided that her hair was permanently waved and that she looked rather a bilious subject.

"We'd like to," said Bim.

"I must be getting back," said Ann.

Poppy Whistler decided that she was a bilious subject; she had a yellowy creamy look. Her eyes were magnificent. She had probably been the sort of little girl you sent to parties with vague misgivings that were always justified.

"Oh! Ann! Come!" Bim broke in impetuously.

Ann nodded and smiled. It was a queer smile, it lit her face and then suddenly went out leaving it dark and dull and a little sullen.

“ I got some real Scotch shortbread,” Mrs. Whistler said cheerily. “ I never can resist it, it’s the lovely rich buttery taste. Of course I never ought to touch it. Funny how if you know you love a thing and it’s bad for you you’re always seeing it in shop windows. I used to cure myself by weighing myself on those tube station weighing machines. It was easier to be harsh with yourself when the tight skirts were in, but with the present fashions, and your clothes drooping and dropping all over you, sleeves like wind screens and everything, there does seem room for the things you fancy.”

Bim was looking in the mirror intently. Ann, always alert to him, saw him shake down one trouser-leg and tweak his brown tie. She had never seen him betray the least interest in anything but cleanliness before. For her it had the significance of secret preparation.

Stella was chatting easily as to an old friend. Her words bubbled rather formlessly because they came from no particular depth and sought no conscious entry into her hearer’s intelligence. She responded instantly, as youthful shallowness always will, to the uncritical and unanalytical listener, and she

deemed Poppy Whistler, with her funny round body and eyes, to be both.

"I teach rhythmic dancing. I'm only a pupil teacher. One doesn't get much. If it were not for the Marchesa it would not be possible for me to stay in London. She's a perfect old dear. Of course we amuse her, Bim amuses her. She's always expecting him to do wonderful things."

"What is rhythmic dancing?" Mrs. Whistler smiled.

"It is the powerful expression of the beautiful in the individual," said Stella a little self-consciously.

Mrs. Whistler dismissed it with an understanding nod. "I see, not for ballroom dancing."

Bim looked at Ann, his eyes twinkled.

"Well, Zuriel will think I've got lost. That's the damper is it? Fancy, your pushing it in will reduce the consumption of anthracite till you come back. It's very economical, isn't it? I call it a wonderful thing. You won't need your hat, Miss Charlton, it's only just across the garden."

"Well, I thought I could go out through your front door, I mustn't stay more than a minute or two."

As they crossed the tiny dark garden under the stars together Mrs. Whistler said genially, "Of course, some people can't touch shortbread, it's so rich ; we've got some very nice biscuits we brought from Margate."

"I love shortbread," said Ann.

"Ever try a pinch of bicarbonate of soda?"

"I am never bilious," said Ann.

Mrs. Whistler sounded a little disappointed.

"Well, that's a good thing, isn't it?"

At that moment, roofed in by the same glittering arrangement of stars, Henry Whistler in Cannes was looking at a photo of her taken twenty years before—much the same Poppy, hovering round-eyed between buxomness and sheer adipose.

His eyes were very worshipful.

A smooth, good, honest little gentleman this Henry Whistler, with his neat pink face and spruce white whiskers, his steady, unimaginative blue eyes, a little fellow who walked circumspectly and steadily between high hedges towards a certain objective, who never felt the lure of tangled byways or the need for wide horizons, a steady little fellow to whom had been vouchsafed a temperamental incapacity for adventure.

When he was in his neat, perfect-fitting white silk pyjamas he took his immaculate evening clothes and shook first the coat and then the trousers over the ornate scarlet silk eiderdown.

A sheaf of French notes, some English silver, English pound notes and a half-sovereign fell out.

He fondled them absentmindedly as one might do the ears of a dog, his eyes on his wife—then he smiled a rather quaint, twisted little smile not unlike that of his daughter Zuriel. Then he swept the money, uncounted, into a little green bag and put it away and drew the red rep curtains across the window.

Below him lay the enchanted mystery of a foreign city at night, but he never glanced at it. It lay beyond the mental hedges through which he took his tranquil and untroubled way.

In bed he had a little homely chat with the God he had learnt to know at St. Columb Minor Sunday School, Cornwall. His prayers went up with the assurance of carrier pigeons. He released them from the same little mental cages each night. He felt they knew the way.

Down in the elaborate, stuffy parlour his landlord grumbled.

“ Always yesterday’s egg for me and to-day’s for him. One grows tired of it. He is a little, simple man and you are afraid of him.”

His wife patted the flat hennaed loops of hair over her ears, lit a cigarette, and shrugged her narrow, stooping shoulders.

“ Eh bien ? ” she said. “ Does one not know what he is ! ”

IV

A BUSINESS PROPOSITION

SOME people are physically subservient to surroundings, they are sucked into the court drawing-room or the crowd in the fat lady's booth with the same completeness; they would be equally indefinite launching a battleship or securing a cup of tea at a station buffet.

Zuriel was saved from this chameleon propensity; she stood out from her surroundings with the clarity and distinction of a light in a fog.

Therefore, as Bim first saw her in the Marchesa's hall she appeared with the surprising vividness of a living figure against a rich and fantastic tapestry. The charming, harmonious room seemed woven behind and round her.

Rugs and skins covered the red-tiled floor, faded rugs that could gleam unexpectedly in the sunlight with the brilliance of discovered

jewels. Heals had brought ultra-modern fantasy with white-vellum lampshades, and candle shields on which danced delicious little black figures, little dumpy, dully-beaded Victorian footstools were dotted about, an exquisite gold mirror reflected a fire screen exquisitely embroidered, some of the creased and dimpled goddesses that Mrs. Whistler detested so were works of a master hand—all ages, all phases of decorative expression were jumbled in that pleasant room, yet they were grouped with such charm that they achieved an almost sentimental harmony. It was like the gathering of a clan comprising many generations under the roof of a proud and sympathetic hostess.

“ You were such ages, Mother. I took my hair down, every beastly hairpin was glued in. Oh ! ” she sprang to her feet. Her extraordinarily fair hair shrouded her.

“ Well, ” said her mother easily. “ They can’t think you did it purposely, because you didn’t know they were coming in. My daughter, Miss Reddald. . . . It was Reddald ? ”

“ Redgold, ” smiled Stella. She thought Zuriel the most attractive thing she’d ever seen. She was as frankly delighted and

intrigued with her as a child with a beautiful doll.

“Miss Charlton,” chattered on Mrs. Whistler. “She makes dresses.” The vague infelicity of that struck her and she sought to modify it tactfully. “Not the ordinary sort you buy,” she added.

Ann’s involuntary smile was devoid of resentment or pique.

“You’re up here for the winter season?” said Ann.

Zuriel nodded. She had made a long, shining plait of her hair. It made her look incredibly young and lovely and innocent. She did not twist any of her remarks or glances in Bim’s direction as women usually did.

“I’ll go and put the kettle on,” said Mrs. Whistler. “We haven’t any maids. Are there any maids to be got? I think I shall have a man. They look nice and you get about fifty applications to an advertisement. If a man opens the door people always think you’ve got a large staff downstairs. I shall do the cooking and Zuriel can do the dusting. I hate more than one, I always say the day you can’t go into your own kitchen and make a good cup of tea any time your home

life's all over and you might as well be in an hotel."

"Have you been living abroad?" asked Stella.

Mrs. Whistler glanced over her shoulder as she went out of the door; "Margate," she vouchsafed.

Bim had moved near Zuriel.

"I wonder," he said, "if you are going to like town."

"I am if I get all the things I want out of it," said Zuriel. "I've only six months to get them in, you know, and if I've failed I must go back."

"To Margate?"

"To everything," said Zuriel.

Mrs. Whistler pattered back with the shortbread and the biscuits.

"Not quite boiling yet," she murmured.

Stella crossed over to Ann, and they stood looking down at the burning logs together and speaking in low voices.

"She's awfully unusual, Ann."

"Yes, she is."

"It's that very fair, almost silvery hair and those dark eyes."

"Yes."

"Are you tired to-night, Ann?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I wish you and Bim could make enough money so that you needn't do everything yourself."

"Perhaps we shall some day."

"You don't seem very hopeful."

"Not to-night," said Ann.

"I often feel like that myself about the dancing," said Stella.

Mrs. Whistler came in with the tea. She had the rare gift of not only being but seeming abundantly hospitable. There was an obvious childish gladness and pride in sharing whether it was her food or her thoughts. She was the type of woman who rather relishes a borrowing neighbour.

"Now there!" she said, "absolutely fresh brewed. Sugar, Miss Charlton? Miss Reddald, do cut the shortbread. Zuriel, take the lid off the biscuit box, dear, and pass them round."

The mellowness of the pleasant room with its strangely harmonious lack of period encompassed them, the soft, uninsistent lights, the leap and glow of the log fire made a peaceful, happy atmosphere. Actually there is far more conscious restraint among old friends than new acquaintances, they spoke

with freedom and the dawning feeling of genuine liking.

“Sugar, Miss Reddald? Fancy! the Marchesa told us you taught dancing. She’s a wonderful old lady, not that I want to get as old myself. I’d like to pop off while I’m still spry.”

“She dopes,” said Bim.

Mrs. Whistler stared at him with her round eyes like soft velvet buttons.

“Good gracious! Sugar, Mr. Reddald?”

“Romance is her dope,” said Bim.

“Second-hand romance.”

“Zuriel met her in a shelter,” said Mrs. Whistler.

“She’s easy to talk to,” said Stella. “You find yourself going on and on. I don’t know what it is.”

“Well, she never interrupts with bits about herself,” said Poppy Whistler; “that’s what stops older people knowing everything younger people have to tell—the little bits they keep popping in about themselves.”

Bim chuckled. Ann by the fire smiled faintly. Stella said:

“Didn’t you know her before you talked in the seaside shelter, and yet she lent you this house? She must have lent it to you to

watch you get something that she thought it would be amusing to watch you get. Did she ask you to write to her ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Yes, she always does. She’s an amazing old lady. I’m rather scared of her. It’s Bim she’s interested in, not me. I always feel she’s watching me think.”

“ I was very fed up one day,” said Zuriel with her eyes on the fire. “ It was bitterly cold and I had a chilblain and father had just told us he was going to Cannes for six months and leaving us at Margate. I’m not the sort of person who talks to people, not even on long railway journeys ; mother is, but I’m not. I can’t understand it now. I found myself telling her all sorts of things and then she asked me to come and see her.”

“ And then she found out Zuriel didn’t know what her own father did for his living and never had done, and then she fairly loved her,” said Mrs. Whistler.

“ She would ! ” said Bim.

“ And don’t you know ? ” said Stella, frankly and unashamedly intrigued.

“ No,” said Zuriel.

A little silence fell ; then Mrs. Whistler’s murmuring voice. “ Any more tea for any-

one? Now if we only had some chestnuts to roast."

Bim spoke to Zuriel.

"So you chose a chance to adventure. You persuaded your mother to accept the offer?"

"It was an awful job," said Zuriel. "But it's my only chance. When father comes back, life will go on at Margate just the same—luxury and empty days crowded with little things, making and buying dresses with an awful lot of discussion, dresses that no one will see, ordering food and books in the same spirit."

"So you broke away and you're never going back!"

"Not if I can help it," said Zuriel. "Father's funny. He wouldn't come to town to live or anything; sometimes I feel he's got a scheme, sometimes I honestly believe he thinks we've got everything we want. Mother has, but then I'm not like mother. If I broke away from them it would mean earning my own living."

"And you wouldn't like that?"

"No," said Zuriel frankly. "So I took this chance. At least I shall see people and go about a bit. How would you like to be

shut in a cage, even if it were a very comfortable cage ? ”

“ I should hate it.”

“ You would,” said Zuriel. “ I can assure you of that.”

Bim said, “ I should think the Marchesa would enjoy very amusing letters.”

Zuriel looked at him.

“ Of course, you'd think it finer if I hewed a career for myself. I can quite see that. I haven't got anything to hew it with but a nursery-governess equipment, and that's no good. There is nothing I could do where I could meet the people who are going to call here.”

“ You are extraordinarily honest,” he said. “ I don't know what I think. I haven't met anyone like you before.”

“ I'm not dishonest. I want certain things, and I'm prepared to pay the price for them. I'm not speaking as an adventuress or a cynic ; it's a cold business proposition really, an exchange.”

“ But aren't there joys in life, the richest and gayest joys that no one gives you, Miss Whistler, that come from being what you are, seeing how you see, hearing how you hear.”

“ I see what you mean,” said Zuriel, “ but then you see there isn’t a picture in the world that can make me feel like quite a lot of pictures probably make you feel. I haven’t a book that opens naturally in certain places because it’s been opened so often there. You’re an artist, I’m an ordinary girl. The joys you speak of are just as selfish joys as mine really.”

“ When I came in and saw you in the lamplight with your hair in a golden veil round you you became for me an undeniably beautiful picture. I was so grateful to you for being so unusual.”

“ Then I am unusual ? ” queried Zuriel.

“ Intensely.”

“ I’m glad about that.”

He looked at her, puzzled and fascinated, blind by natural desire and inclination to the aspects of herself that she presented so uncompromisingly, grateful with a sort of glowing gratitude for her great physical charm, the rarity of her colouring.

Ann rose to her feet.

“ I must be getting back,” she said. “ No, please everyone ! I know the front-door catch so well.”

Generally Bim walked back with her,

talking animatedly, fantastically, charmingly of a hundred and one things ; now he said cheerfully from his seat by Zuriel, " Good night, good old Ann."

She carried that with her through the streets, making a little heavy cross of it and hugging it as women will. " Good night, good old Ann."

V

IN THE NEST

THE tall violinist placed her hands all pointing and projecting beyond her knee, so that they might show to the best advantage and continued the discussion.

“If you want to achieve financial success you must understand the popular imagination and never go above or below it—that is the success of *Chu Chin Chow* and *Cairo*. It is the East as man yearns for it. Satisfy the Englishman’s conventional yearnings and he will pay good red gold for his dope.”

There was a little party in the delightful lounge.

The new manservant came and went among the guests with cakes and sandwiches and the silent solicitude of the well-trained curate. He was a great success. Mrs. Whistler followed him with a round and beaming eye.

She would like to have told everyone his father had been an Oxford professor.

There were yellow roses and lilies of the valley and a large flat bouquet of Parma violets scattered about the room, tributes from young men who had called at the Marchesa's request and come again and yet again.

There was no doubt that Zuriel intrigued them and that they amused her like the portion of a rapid entertainment from which she was fiercely resolved to extract every moment of distraction and excitement.

One of her chief charms was that every time they called they felt they knew her less and desired to know her more.

There was no doubt that Poppy Whistler enjoyed each day ; carnival it certainly was, blatant masquerade, but it satisfied her hitherto suppressed desire to be hospitable. She liked to make people comfortable and happy ; and they sat and talked about themselves and so her shrewd estimate judged them to be both.

Almost every night in the privacy of her charming green and white bedroom, with its daffodil chintz and daffodil-coloured eiderdowns, she questioned Zuriel. To have

a fire every night in your room and shaded lights and a daughter of twenty-two with no confidences is rather a waste.

She'd say pensively :

“ You haven't met him yet ? ” and Zuriel would reply with crisp and uncompromising directness, “ Met what ? ” to which her mother secretly dashed would reply, “ *The man, darling.* ” Once Zuriel admitted in a burst of candour, “ All the men who come here are settled in business or art and making comfortable little incomes. They tell me of all the wonderful things they have seen. I am not one of those women who can live second-hand, not even through the honeymoon. I want a man who will open doors for me, not slam them in my face. When I find him I shall marry him and be exactly the sort of wife he thinks he wants.”

“ It all sounds very dangerous,” said Mrs. Whistler.

“ Life goes on after the honeymoon and the first year of marriage . . . that's what English girls are trained to forget and that's why they're always coming such secret muckers,” said Zuriel, with a sudden flash of her mother's shrewdness.

Mrs. Whistler felt the fire was indeed wasted.

They did not light the candles that afternoon, they sat in the flicker of firelight and talked, lit discussion as children light Roman candles, for the fun of seeing them flare.

There was the violinist, a successful woman poster-artist in the black gown of an archdeacon's wife, a tall dramatic critic with the largest Adam's apple in London, and a little woman who reared "better babies" somewhere in the slums and answered mothers' letters in a large woman's paper to enable her to buy clothes for them.

Zuriel sat on a hassock looking like a brooding Madonna and thinking of the dress she was to wear that evening at a first night with the critic.

Bim Redgold let himself into the house by the garden door and found them sitting there. They all knew him. They all respected his work. None of them expected him to make money. He was eulogised in the little magazines that never live long because they understand art but not make-up. They knew of the little tiny shop where Ann with the help of a hook-and-eye girl created the wonderful dresses he evolved. There flickered

in all of them that spark of absurd idealism that is unquenchable in the creative artist, however low his form of creation. At the sight of him, lean and brown and grinning, it strengthened.

“Signed on with your Jew yet, Red-gold?”

“Good Lord! No!”

“Still the little lonely, unrequited way to glory?”

“That’s the idea.”

“Making anything?”

“We’re making the things we love to make.”

The critic swallowed his Adam’s apple twice. “That’s everything.”

The violinist said, “I always feel superstitious about the man who is making a fortune by doing what he loves. I feel as if every motor-bus is a menace. I know one or two men who have audiences who crowd to hear them play the things they love to play, and I never hear of them having a cold without a dread they’re going to die. It seems to me the height of ecstasy, to be paid magnificently for what you love doing.”

“One must be true to oneself.” It was an involuntary statement Bim made.

“Oneself changes,” said the critic cynically.

Mrs. Whistler said to the little woman, “Now tell me about your babies,” and they began to talk in low voices.

Bim looked across at Zuriel. The fire had licked her pale hair to warm gold, her eyes brooded blackly in her little pointed pixyish face. He felt the familiar, exultant rush of gratitude for the joy that she gave him, her exquisite elfin angularities, and the charm of her unusual colouring. She seemed to him a questing fairy, a dryad perhaps. His imagination, assigning to her a place no one else had ever held, absolved her simultaneously from all necessity to conform to standards in anything. It seemed to him in keeping that she should know so thoroughly what she wanted out of life. She was for him as devoid of crudity and vulgarity as an elf in search of cream or a mermaid in search of sea . . . these were her natural perquisites—these things she sought so frankly and candidly.

He did not know he loved her, or if he did it seemed to him a state so natural he had no need to go shrimping in his soul to find out how it had arisen or where he stood with her. He knew that he stood nowhere.

They smiled at each other in the firelight like friendly children.

Poppy Whistler saw the smile and knew it had no secret significance and that it implied nothing and her kind, worried old heart contracted a little. The shadow of the ultimate Prince Charming oppressed her. Probably he would be one of those trying people who collected old things other people discarded (she had seen a collection of old jar lids worth three thousand pounds the previous day) and didn't know how many under vests he had. Bim was so simple. For elderly women the baby is never quite dead in the blue-eyed man. Bim would have let her do little things for him and she was never at home with people unless she could do little things for them. If Bim and Zuriel married they wouldn't have much money and they'd be glad of an old grandmother to have the baby by the sea sometimes. She saw a fat baby toddling about the garden of the bungalow in the summer sunlight . . . and her old man, she saw him, white whiskers and quiet blue eyes . . . all of them pattering, pattering in the sunshine in the old garden.

The woman who made better babies in

the slums stopped her recital and looked at her shrewdly. "I know just what you're feeling," she said inaccurately.

The violinist was talking again. Poppy Whistler thought with a sudden rush of irritation that none of these clever London people talked normally, they all talked as if they were signalling someone in a crowd and expected to attract their notice.

Bim said to Zuriel, "Somehow you shouldn't wear grey. Oh, child! You don't know how to dress a bit!"

Poppy Whistler with her half-knowledge of psychology thought, "Then he's not in love or he'd never have seen that."

"I know I don't," said Zuriel. "My clothes are only pretty."

"That's it," Bim agreed.

She could only stare physically and mentally. "What else did women want of their clothes than prettiness?" In their hearts both she and her husband held the traditional middle-class belief that a girl looks nicest of all in a navy blue coat and skirt and a white blouse.

"Do you think you could make me look arresting?"

"I am sure of it."

“Then I shall come to you when I want to.”

The manservant, with his faultless accent, announced: “Mr. Nicholas Timothy.”

His name conveyed nothing to them, and yet it fell like a stone thrown at the quiet of their firelight talk. Bim reached up and switched on the electric light. It was an unconscious acceptance of a suddenly created situation.

Mr. Nicholas Timothy blinked rapidly in the sudden light, blinked funny little camels' eyes, full of good humour.

“Well, I must be going,” the little baby expert said.

He seemed to have broken them up; they ceased to be a chattering community and became separate individuals of divers callings.

The new-comer was shaking hands with Mrs. Whistler and telling her the Marchesa had asked him to call.

His well-bred, twinkling little camels' eyes paid appreciative tribute to Zuriel.

The dramatic critic whispered to Bim, “That's the son of old Timothy of the Tiny Tea-Tables, Limited. What on earth did she ask him to call for?”

“ Her reasons are always obscure and her results amazing,” said Bim.

The heir to Sir Terence Timothy of the Tiny Tea-Tables, Limited, sat down beside Zuriel and began to chat animatedly. He had a small, neat head covered with wavy brown hair very closely cropped, and a fierce, small toothbrush moustache.

“ So you love dancing,” he was saying cheerfully. “ I liked it during the war, eve of Waterloo and all that sort of thing. I’m not so keen now. We’ve got a little affair on to-night, though. I wonder if you could come. There’s a Bridge table, so your mother wouldn’t feel dull. Mater likes mothers. She’s a funny old dear. Rather models herself on Queen Mary. I think you can overdo the convention business myself, you keep the cheerios away. Do come. It would be great sport. We’ve got the White Warblers quartette, awfully smart crowd, white face-cloth and facings. I always think it would be so jolly if we could go round dressed as we like. I should wear my pink . . . junior John Peel.”

“ You’d look splendid.”

“ D’you really think so ? ” he beamed.

“ It’s jolly of you if you do.”

Zuriel did not make the mistake everyone else made about him. She did not sum him up as a pleasant fool ; she ceded pleasantness, but recognised shrewdness and exceeding common sense.

He was vague about his job. She gathered that it was in the diplomatic service and that it embodied extremely jolly times with extremely jolly people. He was at present home on leave from Japan. As he talked she saw the wind tossing in cherry branches—millions of paper lanterns against a clear dark sky—all the traditional things she had learnt to know long ago through the medium of those pink penny books of fairy tales for children. Yet he talked neither as an artist nor a keen observer. It was all part of the jolliness.

“ One gets banged about a bit, you know. I heard something about Copenhagen. Never know, may not go back. All very amusing.”

“ Do you speak many languages ? ”

“ Oh ! I get along.”

Yet she was not deceived, and he knew she was not deceived and relished her exceedingly for it ; behind his casual, rather pronounced, stolidity she divined the same hidden hunger that possessed her, the hunger

to know different things, to see things, different things, to lead a crowded life of interest—to fall asleep with the savour of to-morrow in her mind.

“ You’ve travelled ? ”

“ Oh, Switzerland, France, Italy . . . the beaten track, you know.”

“ A—ah.” He was surprised to find he liked to think of her walking serenely along hedged and patrolled ways while he dashed into jungles and across prairies.

“ I say,” he said, “ I’m no end thrilled about to-night.”

“ To-night ? ” she echoed blankly, and then suddenly her cool, sweet smile broke over him. “ Ah, yes ! ”

When all the guests had gone, he last and most loth, Mrs. Whistler surveyed her inexplicable daughter.

“ My goodness, Zuriel ! ” she said. “ If your father knew the son of that man had been here ! The times I’ve diverted his mind from what you might call a dull meal, especially on the maids’ Sunday night out, by just mentioning Sir Timothy.”

Zuriel folded her charmingly kept hands and chanted in her charmingly modulated voice :

“ A little, but of the very best. Lock’s for hats—Simpson’s for a good English dinner . . . Scott Adie’s for tartans . . . Box’s for shoes . . . Buszard’s for wedding cake. A little, but of the *very* best. The best will advertise itself. England has become the dumping-ground for the trash of Europe, Asia, Wasia and Masia. Pom-pom ! ” she paused. “ Daddie *is* like that. In a way it’s awfully nice. But the people who can afford things the way he wants them are few and get fewer every year, and the people who’ve got money don’t want things that last, they want things that look attractive and want constantly renewing.”

“ Apart from all that you are going to that first night.”

“ Not now,” said Zuriel.

Her mother brushed this away.

“ You know how Sir Terence Timothy made his millions, Zuriel—pink satin panels and rose-shaded lights, good orchestras and terrible food. That’s what the Tiny Tea-Tables Company is built on. His old mother used to go to Farringdon market and choose her own things until she died.”

She paused. “ Oh ! how I have heard your father talk ! ”

“ Well, this boy hasn't got anything to do with it ! ”

“ He's of the brood. ”

“ It sounds like the cinema. ”

She sat down on the floor tilting her charming head back and laughing.

“ I've got such a headache. I'm going to lie down. ”

“ What can I do for it, dear ? ”

“ Go and telephone the sad news to the very excellent man who expects to take me to the theatre to-night. ”

Mrs. Whistler looked at her dispassionately.

“ Well, no one would think you hadn't been used to London life, ” she submitted.

VI

ZURIEL STANDS ALONE

MRS. WHISTLER wrote to the Marchesa in Italy.

“ I said it was a regular cuckoo’s nest and that’s what it feels like. I don’t say I don’t enjoy bits of it. I’d enjoy it better if Lizzie didn’t send me on my husband’s letters asking me if the first snowdrops are up and goodness knows what. I can’t really see what fun you get out of it, but I expect you’ve your own way of enjoying a joke. Quite a lot of people have called. Many of them have got such poses. They never take them off even for a minute. They seem to find me a bit of a joke sometimes. They must get tired of their poses sometimes, but I suppose they get used to them like a woman I knew who wore a pearl dog collar to hide cut glands. She spoilt the gems getting into a hot bath with them on. I don’t find my £15 a week goes very far. We have

a morning woman and an awfully good man and I do the cooking myself. I'm not casting any aspersions when I say the white paint looks cleaner than when we came. I believe Mr. Redgold in the garden is in love with Zuriel, but I don't think he knows it. Miss Ann Charlton does! I feel rather sorry for that girl. Zuriel says she could be beautiful. I can't see it. Stella says she's got temperament, but I can't see that's much good either, if you keep it all buttoned up tight and wear low heels. Zuriel seems to like Nicholas Timothy best, only it's not what you and I would call like. He's travelled. I never could see anything in sailors and travellers, they always go off somewhere just as you're going to have a baby and then come home and litter up the hall with tusks and elephant-hide umbrella-stands when there's barely room for the pram. It seems a pity Bim Redgold and Ann don't sign on with that Jew. I can't see why not. It's no good walking round full of individuality when you can't afford to buy a clean collar to put round it. I went in and found them all eating porridge the other night. He's designing a dress for Zuriel to wear to the Three Arts Ball. It's a funny affair, all silvery

gold tissue ; he's been to the British Museum studying up something or other. She's going with Nicholas Timothy, that's what makes it so odd. Ann is to make the dress. You can't tell anything from Ann's face. Zuriel doesn't like any of her clothes now. Oh ! she's taken to London all right ! ”

The Marchesa derived much amusement from the excellent Poppy's letters.

Bim also wrote of Zuriel.

“ She is perfectly wonderful, Marchesa ; yes, of course you knew. She's dramatic, too, that would appeal to you with your tremendous *flair* for the dramatic. One does not feel what she wants out of life so much as the fact that whatever it is she will ultimately obtain it. We all serve her. I design her frocks. Ann makes them. She looks wonderful in them. We are utterly incidental to her. Lots of young men come to the house. Mrs. Whistler will tell you who they are. She cons them over and counts them with the romanticism of a young girl pulling off daisy petals, but Zuriel is utterly cool and tranquil. Their brains are hot with her, you can see it in their eyes, but there is something remorseless in her unconsciousness of all this. I don't understand

her at all, but I think about her all day and sometimes wake to think of her. You'll say she's Beatrice to my Dante. Yes, I know the acidity of your cynicism! Perhaps she is. I like to see her decorated, surrounded with adorers. It seems fitting to me. Isaacs still persuades us, but we remain adamant. Ann even more fiercely than I. He has bought a house at Maidenhead. He has ordered two thousand pink geraniums for the beds and two hundred yards of pink net for the window curtains. He is going to entertain. Ann and I are asked down. The lure is the pink geraniums. You have never seen two thousand gathered in one place. Ann can't see he's a good fellow, but he is, there's something almost impressive in the honesty of his greed for all the good things of this life."

So, in the South, the Marchesa put her human jigsaw together, waiting eagerly and hungrily for new bits, wrote to her elderly cousin in Cannes and received letters which set her shaking with elfin mirth, that set her old brown eyes gleaming beneath their penthouse brows, and her ivory claws tapping the arms of her chair.

In London, Spring settled on a Hyde Park

snowdrop during a snowstorm, and went forth to buy mimosa in fur coats and wraps.

Lizzie, sworn to secrecy, came up to spend the day with Mrs. Whistler and report on the Birchington bungalow. They spent the morning at Selfridge's, lunched at Lyons', and passed the afternoon at the Stoll Picture House.

"D'you like it, Lizzie?" said Mrs. Whistler when the two branches of coloured lights rose from the bowels of the earth before their enraptured gaze.

"My!" said Lizzie.

A warmth stole over Poppy Whistler's heart; Lizzie was shrewd but she was simple; simple enough to be shown things. Zuriel had never been, she *looked* at things, that was different. London became an exhibition by her to Lizzie. There was something comforting about the sort of person you could still show things to. Mrs. Whistler was beginning to forget that she gave Lizzie aprons every Christmas and conscientiously bought a tablet of cheaper toilet soap once a month regularly for her use. She pulled herself up sharply.

"This was built by a German as an opera-house," she said. "There was a lot

in the papers at the time about our not understanding music and Covent Garden being a poky hole."

"Cheek!" snorted Lizzie.

"So they turned it into a picture house."

"If he knew what he'd done for England I expect he'd turn in his grave," said Lizzie reverently, looking round her with shining eyes.

It was a shock after seeing Lizzie off at Victoria to find Zuriel sitting over the fire with young Nicholas Timothy. Warm from the pleasurable, but quite unconscious, exercise of her patronage Mrs. Whistler greeted him genially. She would have liked to sit a little before the fire chatting and furtively tweeking her petticoat up under her black skirt so that she might warm her legs, but the young man was up and off.

Mrs. Whistler turned up both skirt and petticoat and comforted her small balloon-like limbs.

"Nicholas Timothy is the only young man that worries me," she said.

"He's the only young man that worries me," said Zuriel. "I don't know whether I amuse him, whether I please him or anything."

“D’you want to?”

“Well,” said Zuriel, “that’s the only sort of man a girl is interested in.” She looked at her mother reflectively. “How was Lizzie and how did she say the Bungalow was looking?”

Mrs. Whistler put down her skirts. She stood peering down and trying to read her daughter’s face in the firelight.

“Zuriel,” she said, “if it’s Nicholas Timothy, your father’ll go off the deep end”; the phrase was foreign to her and served to deepen her sudden apprehension and dismay. “They stand for all he hates most . . . show and shoddiness. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I would regret this crazy escapade if that’s what came of it. It would break father’s heart. All men have their prejudices and they’re stronger than most women’s religions.”

The tears gathered in her eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks; through them she peered anxiously at Zuriel’s enigmatical face.

“You know what he is . . . no adulteration, the best simply, perfectly served and honestly named.”

“Yes, I know; it’s a fetish with father.”

“Don’t let him come here so much. I

couldn't ever say to your father, 'Zuriel's engaged to the son of the man who's running the Tiny Tea-Tables, Limited.' It would be worse than telling him you'd changed your religion. I shall never forget how he went on that day he took me into their place for an experiment; 't isn't an experiment I want to repeat! A fly could have eaten the shilling ice in half a minute, and it was no more cream than my hat. He said to the girl, 'Why don't you serve an honest firm?' Oh! I felt awful. She was one of those hippy young females. She put her hands on them and stared. It's very hard to rise with hips; you're bound to make use of them sooner or later."

Zuriel rose to her feet.

"We're presupposing a great deal," she said. "Nicholas Timothy has everything. He's a sort of Prince Charming. He's got pots of money, he sees the world, he has friends everywhere. A man who has everything doesn't give up anything unless . . ."

She broke off. "Besides, there are his people. You don't know the aristocracy of the new rich. I wish I knew what father was! I wish I knew. I don't stand the chance other girls stand. A girl thinks a man's

people must be nice because he's nice, but a man believes a girl's nice if her people are nice."

"Your father," said Mrs. Whistler, "is one of the nicest men living."

Zuriel gazed into the fire. "If I catch a man," she said, "I've got to catch him *all by myself*. There aren't any new ways, so I've got to be clever with the old ways."

"Are you in love with Nicholas Timothy?"

"No," said Zuriel, "but he's the type of man I should like to live with after marriage."

"I suppose he knows you've got a father?"

"Yes, I was vague. What else could I be? I said he was retired. I hinted at the Civil Service."

"My goodness!"

"You think him a fool?"

"Well, I couldn't say he was brainy."

Zuriel nodded.

"No," she said, "that's just where he's clever." She paused. "Mother, I simply must have more clothes."

"You've lots of clothes."

"No, I've dresses."

"Isn't it the same thing?"

"No, dear, it isn't."

"Sometimes I could just pack up and go back to Margate."

"I shouldn't come with you."

Mrs. Whistler bent her head.

"Lizzie says the almond blossom is nearly out," she said. "Oh, Zuriel! how I wish we were there to watch it."

VII

LIFE'S PHILOSOPHY

A FLOWER woman strolled down the road with a heaped basket of flowers, the sun slid over and between the shabby houses so unevenly that it patterned her as if it shone through fretwork. Her attitude was an advertisement to the poverty of the neighbourhood ; she ate bread and cheese without even a flickering glance for customers ; shop girls, typists and manicurists hurried home from snack lunches, tapping along on high, slightly turned heels ; a girl in the pretentious near-hospital uniform affected by the small shopkeeper-employer trundled a large pram ; a mongrel hunted joyously for fleas.

Over these grimy realities threaded the azure blue of a peerless day ; the dirty little windows of the National Insurance druggists at the corner winked in the sunshine with the joyous fantasy of an

Aladdin's lamp and made mammoth jewels of the great bottles filled with coloured water.

A dull lozenge of spring sunshine lay at Ann Charlton's feet as she worked in her little shop ; it revealed the canvas backing of the cheap, worn oilcloth, and the age of Ann's shoes.

Finding the pallid footstool of sunshine gone she looked up to discover that the tall, bulky figure of Isaacs the Jew blocked it out.

" Good morning, mad one," he greeted her gently and ironically.

His neck, his wrists, his ankles were thick ; his black hair curled crisply. He was clean, with the perfect, immaculate cleanliness of the true Jew.

He sat down and the pale sunshine settled again at her feet.

She was creating a garment out of crimson velvet ; where the same sunshine flecked it it glowed like blood. Her strong cream-coloured face was bent ; he could not see her eyes, only her compressed mouth and something stubborn and yet appealing in the curve of her short, thick, exquisitely white neck.

“An order from the Vatican, I see,” he commented. “We’re getting on.”

She said in a muffled voice:

“I don’t know quite why you come here to rag. It doesn’t help. It doesn’t hinder.”

He nodded to himself as if she had answered a question. His little brown eyes, like highly polished pebbles, twinkled at her kindly.

“I’ve just come from Redgold’s studio,” he said.

“Did you see Bim?”

“He wasn’t there. He was in the house. I’ll own she’s a looker. All Jews like fair women. It’s the Oriental in them.”

“You mean Zuriel Whistler?”

“Why pretend with me, Ann Charlton? I’m not worth it. My life’s job is undermining woman’s strength of mind. It’s become as easy as stealing chocolates from a sleeping orphan. You don’t suppose I didn’t know why you stayed on in this filthy little mouse-trap. Women don’t do things for the love of the things, they do it for the love of someone.”

She sat there un-selfconscious but withdrawn from him. He knew that her thoughts

were not whirling about her like a swarm of bluebottles as women's thoughts were wont to do. She was marshalling them steadily and in sequence.

"Why," she said suddenly, "when I've always loved him, should it be Zuriel Whistler?"

"Because you've always been there."

"Perhaps so," she ceded.

He had a tremendous respect for her, the respect of the physician for the patient who is motionless and unrevealing under suffering.

"There are other things in life you know, Ann Charlton," he said; "the luxurious animal things I'm always telling you about—good food, nice clothes and the things you like about you, money to buy the things you fancy . . . things you can get hold of. We may have souls. I don't know, I'm sure. I've met good men and women who are positive they're fitted with an out size in 'em, but souls are dull. I don't understand 'em. You feed 'em on a Queen's Hall Promenade concert or a shillingsworth of art exhibition, or a cuddle on the stairs at a subscription dance; they can stand low fare all right, and all the time it's like shoving stuff into a dark

cage, you don't know what's growing there or whether it likes it. You can't buy your soul a new hat or give it a blow out at the Savoy. There's no satisfaction in souls. I like things you can feed and dress up."

"And where does all this lead?"

"Back to me, my dear, everything leads back to me," he smiled at her genially.

"Why not join my show?"

"Because your show doesn't appeal to me."

"It's the same work you're doing now," he submitted patiently. "You make up Redgold's sketches. You're wonderful at it. You'd make up my artist's sketches and hundreds of girls would duplicate them for thousands of delighted women. There's romance in that surely? Five hundred down the day you sign a three years' contract; why you could buy a little car and run it! Why, you might go on carrying out Redgold's own designs"—his little eyes suddenly sparkled. "If Redgold wants that Whistler girl he might sign for the money. I'll try and hog-tie him while he's batty."

Ann's sweet and very generous mouth contracted a little.

“ Bim wouldn't be untrue to his ideals for anyone.”

“ Ideals be damned ! All you miserable art people talk about the uplift of art and then go and sit on it so hard that it doesn't get a chance to lift anything but your own little bunch. You've done that through the ages. Mass production of beauty—that's your only chance of real uplift. If you artists had your way there wouldn't be a duplicate butterfly in the world. There'd be one in a museum nowhere near a tube or a bus route. It's the cinema, paper patterns and the shop windows that keep beauty alive in women and sell the face creams, not the British Museum and the Wallace Collection. I'm a true uplift merchant. I can make Mrs. Jones of the Nest, Streatham, look prettier than any of your tight-skinned bacchantes and a lot more respectable, in a wrapper costing one guinea, and every press-stud true to type.”

He got up and paced the tiny room ; spirals of dust rose in the silvery sunlight wherever his foot pressed. Little beads of perspiration bedewed his broad, low forehead. As he hewed at his ideas he had the air of a man who uses unaccustomed tools.

“ You’re hypocrites, that’s what you are, and the tightest trades union in the world ! I ask you and Redgold to come and make beauty for the million, the millions that need it, and you won’t do it. It’s snobbery. That’s what it is. I tell you the beauty hunger in women is higher at this moment than it ever has been in history, and I’m going to feed it. You go into raptures over a picture of some titled Tommy Tucker that looks like a moth-eaten mattress, but you don’t realise that every jumper book published is helping culture,” he broke off abruptly. “ Well ? ” he shot at her.

“ Well ? ” said Ann.

“ You don’t see things my way ? ”

“ No,” said Ann, “ I don’t.”

“ Well, there’s five hundred pound down for you the day you wake up. I want you, Ann, and I want Redgold more. He’d make my business.”

“ And you’d control his inspiration ? ”

“ Well, he’d have to design pretty things. Now that Russian blouse affair with the braces you had in the window, that would suggest Saturday afternoon clearing out the hencoop to my customers. I shouldn’t sell two models. Red’s not much good to my

people either, really," he waved his hand towards her work. "Suppose Redgold marries this girl now, Ann Charlton, what about it?"

"She won't," said Ann, "but what about it?"

"Well, you won't want to sit about, I suppose?"

Ann lifted her magnificent eyes. He had a momentary feeling of walking through them into an immensely high, sunlit, orderly place. It had the loftiness of a cathedral, but none of the conventional equipment. In the dimness he divined Ann's drilled thoughts waiting to come forward into the sunlight. This was the sudden impression her quiet, sterling honesty gave him. It remained with him even when he knew himself back on the threadbare oilcloth in the shabby little shop.

"I *shall* want to sit about," said Ann. "Not with the idea of benefiting or serving Bim, though I'd do both if it were in my power, but I'm too honest to kid myself that's why I want to be about. It's just because ever since we started this little shop together, ever since I first knew Bim, there hasn't seemed any other

place in the world for me but where Bim is."

"It's a pity."

"It *is* a pity," echoed Ann.

"You know, Ann Charlton, I'd give anything if you were the type of girl I could feel sentimental about. Working together we'd have a shop in every town in the United Kingdom. I don't want a girl who'll make me think, I want a girl who'll make me feel. I can talk to you and forget you're a woman, but I don't want to marry that. Take it how it's meant, Ann Charlton."

"I do," said Ann simply. "I don't know why I disliked you so."

"Because I'm a Jew," said Isaacs. "We've always got to wear it down at the beginning, but once we've got the nose through we follow quickly. It's the nose that's the trouble." He laughed without rancour. "I saw that golden dress Redgold made for that girl's fancy dress. Why don't you go too, Ann? I'll take you. You'd look lovely as a Madonna."

"Does a Madonna stand a chance beside a golden Egyptian? Besides, Bim isn't going. She's going with young Timothy, the son of the Tiny Tea-Tables Company."

“ Who is she ? ”

“ She doesn't know. The whole affair is romantic. The Marchesa lent them the house. She met Zuriel in a shelter in Margate. They both have bungalows down there. Zuriel had had a dull life, not allowed to know anyone, very comfortably off, mysterious father. I'll tell you the whole story as I know it.”

He sat staring at her with his bright, piercing brown eyes ; a little wind woke in the narrow, shabby street, tossed bits of paper high in the air, twirled sticks of straw, moaned and lisped and fluted sentimentally to itself among the chimney-pots as if it had mislaid the country and sought it fitfully in the pale spring sunshine.

“ Well,” said Isaacs, “ it's a rum go. You think she'll make every effort to get fixed up in the months that are left ? ”

“ Not with Bim,” said Ann.

“ He's infatuated.”

“ She's so lovely, and what artist could refuse to serve beauty and make it more beautiful ? It's a mission, besides it has an irresistible fascination.”

“ And you ? ”

“ Whatever happens I shan't be any

nearer to him than I've ever been or any farther away than I am at this minute"; the swift, sweet, sudden smile came to her face transforming it. "It doesn't seem to me that being loved makes any difference to one's own love for a person, it only sort of rounds it off. I can't quite express what I mean. I know Bim's faults. He's like a child in many, many things."

"He's a damn fool," said Isaacs.

"Yes," said Ann. "I know," and laughed.

"I suppose he talks to you about this girl?"

"Nearly all the time."

"My God! are you human?"

"Very," said Ann. "Not so human now in the sunlight talking to you, but when I wake in the night or making cocoa and waiting for the kettle to boil just before I go to bed—then I'm terribly human."

A man went up the road with a basket of draught excluders; they were covered in scarlet bunting, and as he walked they wriggled like skinned snakes. The fresh, warm wind blew the ends of his neck scarf and he looked up at all the open windows and went on dispiritedly without crying his wares.

“ I came really to ask you to motor down to Maidenhead with me and see my place. I'd like to show it to you. There are ten thousand snowdrops out. Figures don't fascinate you ? ”

“ Not personally,” said Ann. “ I'd feel rich with two of everything.”

“ You talk about freedom and the right to live your own life,” grinned Isaacs. “ Redgold has only two pairs of socks. Miss Redgold told me so. They were drying over a toast-rack on the top of the anthracite stove. That's not freedom, that's slavery ; why, he daren't get his feet wet. He hasn't the freedom of the London cat. Now get your coat on and come along. We'll drive through Burnham Beeches and see whether the trees are out. The Pope can wait for his dinner jacket.”

“ It's an order, my poor blind friend. Bim has designed two of the pages' dresses for ' Lingerin' Love.' ”

“ Is his name to appear on the programme as a dress designer ? ”

“ No, but it's a beginning.”

“ And it'll stop there.” He paused. “ Ann Charlton, do you make on an average two pounds a week ? ”

“No.”

“It is beautiful, but infinitely sad.”

A crowd of children had gathered round the car. One of them blew the horn. It spat out such a vicious, unexpected note that they scattered hastily like a crowd of disturbed flies.

“Everything about this place gives me the pip,” said Isaacs. “What made you take it?”

“When Everton Wryley made that little tea-shop at the end of Burchett’s Row famous, this was the thoroughfare for everyone. You know the book had the same sort of success as ‘Sonia.’ Everyone came to tea to get ‘the atmosphere’ and then some Duchess opened a little artcraft place almost next to it . . . and then it all fizzled out and no one came. It seemed as if it was going to be a fashionable art quarter at one time. We sold quite a lot of original models at fairly high prices. Then something else came along.”

“With the people you cater for something else will always come along.”

“Are you going to lecture me all the way to Maidenhead?”

“No, I am going to exhibit to you some

of the things that five hundred pounds down and a decent income would provide for you."

"I have been looking at them for twenty-five years," mentioned Ann lightly.

VIII

AN ORDER TO VIEW

IT takes a strong woman to resist the rôle of fairy godmother, but it takes an even stronger man to resist the part of fairy godfather ; to the least imaginative it is so crowded with possibilities and so ripe for that gratification of the ego for which the psycho-analysts assure us even the finest of us live.

Bim was not the temperament to refrain from pleasure-giving acts on the grounds that they had their basis in love of self. He was rarely reflective. He absorbed life as it were in chunks, finding each full of spice, lively in design and intriguing in colour.

Zuriel became perhaps the most serious preoccupation of his zestful life, and it was through her that he first discovered himself to be a conscious and not an unconscious idealist.

He could not walk around all Zuriel ; there

were bits that jarred him and disturbed him. He therefore absorbed her only from the front, as it were ; she became for him a beautiful picture, a symbol. To him there was something almost wistful in her honest selfishness that woke him to tenderness. The more steadfastly she strove to show him the tinsel in her lovely panoply, the more steadfastly he gazed at the beautiful and more obvious actuality. It was so well worth gazing at.

He was thinking of her one evening as she came in. He was thinking of her as Joan of Arc riding in silver ; he saw her slim and straight in her armour, with her strange dark eyes and her silvery hair. Her eyes would have been for the king, the ultimate possibility, and the throne of France in actuality, and no less fine for that.

“ Bim,” she said, “ money’s giving out.”

She left the studio door open. Against the coarse grass in the tiny garden he could see the stinging gold of crocuses and the tremulous shaking of single snowdrops. A little wind stirred the pale, clenched buds and shook the rusty, dirty curtain of ivy on the walls.

“ Whose money ? ” he said.

“Mother’s,” she said. “There’s enough to see us through the next two months if I have no more clothes. Nicholas Timothy’s leave is up in seven weeks. There was a woman to-day at the Savoy. He pointed her out to me appreciatively. You know what she was like, Bim . . . nothing, and yet . . . You could do it. It was black. All men like black. Mother’s never let me have a black frock. She says it’s the hardest thing a shop-girl has to fight when she leaves business, the feeling of being conspicuous in colours. You know what women like mother say, ‘Time enough when you’re my age.’ It’s too late then, that’s what they never realise.”

Bim’s brilliant blue eyes twinkled. He lit his pipe and the grey haze of smoke rose between that strip of gold-dusted spring outside and the girl who sat on his old divan. He had a sudden arid consciousness of lack of participation in both ; the haze between them and his eyes re-established their impersonality.

“Well ? ” he said, “and how are things getting on ? ”

“Nicholas ? Just where they always were, just where they always have been. I don’t

know any more than you. Oh! Bim, I'm getting so nervy. I met his cousin last night. Not beautiful—but you know, Bim, something I haven't got. Hair slicked back and eyes like a Japanese, and a golden shawl—a thing José Collins might have worn and a huge comb of golden pheasant feathers. Yet, it was *right*. I can't explain. I felt like a child sent to a party in cotton gloves. Horrid! I cried in the car coming back."

"What did young Timothy do?"

"Gave me an aspirin." She paused. "Any other man now . . ."

"I would myself," said Bim.

He ceased to smoke, again he saw the crocuses and the girl, and the spring outside and youth on the divan, but now he saw it reluctantly as one who peeps almost against his will. He rose and stood leaning on the back of an arm-chair. Now he could no longer see the golden flowers or the snowdrop-flecked grass, only the rusty ivy mantling the walls.

"What are we going to do about it?" he mused.

She looked at him gravely.

"Nicholas Timothy has the only sort of career I've ever wanted to share. It's so

near my secret dreams I sometimes feel it is a dream. He can give me almost everything I've ever wanted. I like him too, Bim. We see things from the same angle. We want the same things, we'd work for the same things and enjoy them the same way when we got them ; surely it should be a happy marriage ? ”

“ I don't know,” said Bim, “ about marriage. One sees things differently. I think to me it would come suddenly like golden gates. They would be suddenly there and one would go through because there would be nothing else to do, because all around one would be wilderness and there the peace and glory that passeth all understanding.” His eyes twinkled. “ But I quite see that you would want an order to view.”

“ It would be safer.”

“ Safety and marriage . . . it's like thinking of fireguards for angels.” He paused. “ So it's clothes that's bothering you ? ”

“ Well,” said Zuriel, “ I've tried being myself and I've tried not being myself. I can't learn to play emotionally or sing emotionally in seven weeks. It's only left to me to look things.”

“ You could look anything, child.”

“ All my clothes,” she cried despairfully, “ are pretty.”

“ That’s true,” he admitted.

“ Oh ! Bim ! can’t you do something for me ? I want to be chic. I want to be unusual. I want the life Nicholas Timothy can give me. It’ll last till I’m quite old. I know that nothing else will last with me. Nicholas will last with me too. This is my chance and perhaps my only chance. This path of life isn’t ours. I shan’t meet men like Nicholas when father comes back from Cannes. Please help me ! I’ll pay for the stuff if you and Ann . . . oh ! Bim, I’ll make it up to you and Ann. . . . Mother can’t see ! She just can’t see ; and then of course, at the back, she doesn’t really want me to marry, Bim. It will mean my living abroad. Mother’s quite well educated, but she likes to think the whole world is peopled with blacks who smell and steal, lots of women do. She hates the life I want, and oh ! Bim ! I do want it ! I can’t bear Margate after this. Westgate when I might be in Tokio or Simla . . . it would be hell. I’ll play the game with Nicholas too. I’ll look what he wants and I’ll be what he wants. It’s easier to guarantee that when you don’t adore a man than when you do.”

“ Suppose, out there, under some Southern moon, you meet another man ? ”

“ I won't. I know one can't say things like that definitely, but I've always been able to stand back and look at things and people as if they didn't belong to me and I didn't belong to them. I did it when I was quite a little girl about mother and father, and it used to frighten me sometimes because I thought I'd go to hell. I had a nurse who was strong on hell. It seemed wicked to be able to see exactly where poor mother and father were stupid and middle class when they'd just given you a Christmas treat, just where they spoilt things for themselves as well as you.”

“ It doesn't sound comfortable,” Bim agreed. “ You think if between Ann and me you are dressed like a young enchantress you will enchant ? ”

“ Clothes do make a difference. Nicholas is sophisticated.”

“ The white muslins and blue sashes are not for him, Zuriel ? ”

“ Yes, because he'd appreciate perfect laundrying ; there are many things that wouldn't do as well and most of them are in my wardrobe. Clothes do make a difference

to men, Bim ; they do to you. I put myself in your hands. I'll wear just what you decree. Bim . . . please help me. Mother can't see. I don't suppose Ann can see or Stella, but I know. Clothes would make a difference to you ? ”

“ Yes, they would.”

“ Well, you're an ordinary man.”

“ Yes, I suppose I am.”

He looked out into the tiny garden. He looked challenging. The absurd shag of sunburnt hair stood upright. Twilight had trailed forlornly across the garden as they talked, the crocuses seemed no longer the fairy chalices of spring, but lay wistfully like neglected beads of a broken amber necklace, the unclenching buds of the trees had lost their pallor and frailty against the fading sky—they garnished the tree with gnarled knots like some fantastic and devouring fungus.

“ Perhaps,” he said stumbingly, “ you're after the real things after all, Zuriel, I . . . ”

The dumpy figure of Ann blocked out the garden. She nodded cheerfully and waved her hand.

“ I thought you'd like to know, Bim,” she said. “ I found a customer for that red gown.”

“ Was she dark and beautiful ? ”

Ann shook her head. “ I’m sorry, Bim, she had red hair.”

“ Good God ! Ann, you sold it to her ! ”

“ She paid twelve pounds. She was going to wear it with a brown wig.”

“ A brown wig ? ”

Ann twisted her square, capable, cream-coloured hands.

“ She was going to a fancy dress dance in it somewhere in Gunnersbury as Flora Macdonald . . . wasn’t she the girl who saved Bonnie Prince Charlie ? ”

“ She didn’t think. . . .”

“ Yes,” said Ann slowly. “ That’s why she paid me twelve pounds. She thought it was fancy dress.”

Bim laughed and waved his hand towards Zuriel.

“ Hordes and cohorts of customers await us on the horizon. Here is one, she demands the accoutrement of a young enchantress, spells, witcheries and all.”

“ I want to marry Nicholas Timothy,” said Zuriel. “ I haven’t any money to pay for the making of things now, Miss Charlton, but I’ll buy the materials and I’ll pay later. I know you’re the business partner.”

“Yes, I’m the business partner,” Ann said.

“It doesn’t sound a very businesslike proposition.”

“Oh yes, it does, Miss Whistler.”

“Then you think . . .” said Zuriel.

“I think you’ll get him,” said Ann; she shivered suddenly. “I don’t know why you have the door open. It isn’t summer.”

Bim had not heard. He was looking at Zuriel. He turned to Ann, his eyes half shut. “Oh! Ann! can you see her in green—petalled. I don’t care whether petals are out or in, beauty has no fashion, it *is* just beauty; here and there a touch of tarnished silver so that her hair shall glow the brighter—and on her feet dull silver shoes,” he paused. “Ann—she’s wonderful.”

“Yes,” said Ann.

Once, in the days before the war and the days before she met Bim, Ann had gone on a Cook’s tour to Belgium. She was eighteen, impressionable. In a tiny chapel in Westpelaer they had found an old sacristan polishing the jewels on the Virgin Mary’s crown. Ann saw him again reverently gloating over the bits of gleaming polished glass. He begged them to admire her. He

had a little rosary of rough-hewn words with which to catalogue her praises.

“ She didn’t always have a glass cover over her,” he said. “ I got the priest to order one. She’s wonderful.”

“ Yes, because the rats have gnawed her nearly hollow at the back,” whispered the sacristan’s wife. “ He knows it, but he can’t bear it mentioned.”

“ Isn’t she wonderful ? ” cried Bim ; and Ann, as she had answered the old sacristan in the kindness of her big heart, answered him.

IX

THE NEW BRANCH

“**I** KNOW when a man goes about with a girl morning, afternoon and evening it doesn't mean anything nowadays,” said Sir Timothy to his son. “You can't run fifty-three tea-shops full of cosy corners without getting the modern idea.”

“No, sir,” said young Nicholas. “I suppose not.”

Father and son had the same tawny brown camel's eyes, astute and twinkling. Lady Timothy suddenly raised herself from the sofa. Her large grey eyes were neither astute nor twinkling, but they had a certain dull solidity of purpose. She did not speak, but her son addressed himself to her as if answering a question.

“You want to know what are my inten-

tions with regard to Zuriel Whistler. So far I haven't any ; I've merely desires."

"Aren't they the same thing, Nick ?"

"Would I be in the diplomatic service if they were, Dad ?"

Lady Timothy brushed this airy persiflage aside with the air of a grown-up dealing with littering toys.

"Who is her father, Nicholas ?"

"You've met her mother."

"You can't tell anything from mothers nowadays."

"Well, he's retired."

Timothy senior struck in grinning. "How far, Nick, and from what ?"

"I believe he was a civil servant."

"Is he dead ?"

"No, abroad for his health."

"Then why aren't his wife and daughter with him ?"

"Mrs. Whistler can't stand the foreign cooking, mater."

"Lord !" marvelled old Timothy. "She should pay an Italian chef three pounds a week to think a boiled egg's naked and indecent like ours does" ; his false teeth were white and perfect, he flashed them genially at his son. "Well, she's a lovely girl. I

don't know when I've seen a lovelier, and she'll have to be presented at Court. Think of that, Mother! Think of the excitement you'll get out of it! Smarter than a grandchild, old lady, and don't date you so."

She looked at her husband without resentment.

"You'd welcome anyone into the family if they were good-looking."

"I should, Mother. Pedigree looks nice on a tombstone, but it isn't nearly as smart as good looks about the house; and I shan't be here to see the tombstone and no more will you."

"I wish," mourned his wife; she rose to her feet a large, dignified, perfectly corseted elderly lady; "I wish you wouldn't be so facetious."

She paused behind her son's chair and rested a white, perfectly manicured hand on his shoulder. "If you *do* discover you've got intentions, Nicholas, you'll tell us?"

"Sure I will, Mother, you know that."

"She's remarkable-looking, as long as she's not remarkable in other ways. . . . Good night, my dear, good night."

He kissed her dutifully, he held the door opened for her and noticed appreciatively how perfectly her white hair was dressed ; then he sauntered back and lit a cigarette.

The fire glinted everywhere on things the most expensive of their kind, bowls of primroses and jonquils gave out a faint, elusive perfume, but the most glistening thing in the room was the merry brown eye Sir Timothy cocked at his son.

“ They’ve all got their foibles, bless ’em ! ” he said genially. “ My old woman’s one of the best, though she’d have a fit if she heard me call her that. If Princess Mary would have had you, Nicky, she’d have been pleased but not surprised. Prettiness counts more than pedigree, my boy, you take my word for it. All the people your mother thinks worth knowing have been living at Madame Tussaud’s for years.”

Nicholas said ruefully and honestly, “ See here, Dad, I don’t know and that’s the truth. I can see what you gain by marriage, but I can see what a lot you give up.”

“ Everyone does unless he’s a damned fool, Nicky.”

“ Did you ? ” said Nicky.

The old man smiled and clicked his false teeth a little. He bridged the span of years between them easily because he had never allowed it to grow ; always he was measuring it in little unerring, secret, sentimental ways, gauging it so that when his son needed him he could get across.

“ Did I ! ” he echoed. “ Did I ! I proposed to your mother thirty years ago because I’d chilblains due to under-nourishment. Marriage cured *them* anyway. I was travelling in vaselines and pomades for Withers and Deacons. Her father was a chemist at Wigan. Ever been to Wigan ? You could do anything there. I saw a good bit of her. They’d six daughters all unmarried. I saw the old boy expected something. Your mother was the eldest. She’d got a good figure and neck. The next, Ada, had filbert nails and a soprano. I liked her, but I wouldn’t knuckle under to the death do us part bit. I’d decided to hedge off. Well, it was a filthy night in January. You don’t know Wigan and you don’t know a commercial room ! There wasn’t a soul to play poker with. I went down to the old boy’s. It was a hell of a night. They’d got a red blind to the parlour window and Ada was

singing. Anything can look like Heaven in Wigan. I stood outside making up my mind to beat it . . . and then my chilblains started. My feet were swollen with them. I'd a bunch on the soles of the feet. I can remember them now. I went in! I was as dry as bottled sage in front and my back was soaking, that's how the rain slanted. Ada was gone by the time I got in, and your mother was sitting alone by the fire with her neck bent. She's got a pretty neck now, but by Jove in those days it was lovely! I kissed it. I didn't mean to. It was the red blind and the fire and everything. Then she kissed me. I lay awake figuring out how many clean collars I could have a week, and what chance there was of a summer holiday all that night. Feelings are muddled up like that with most men unless they've so little money it don't matter or so much it don't either."

He reached out a hand and tapped his son's knee, his eyes were very earnest.

"No man can help another man about a woman unless he's disloyal to a woman, son. I want you to understand beginnings don't matter in marriage. These chilblains didn't make me love your mother any the less for

giving me you, didn't make me grieve any the less for her when little Lily died. We've been married for thirty years and I've got a sentimental feeling for chilblains now, though I've never seen one since."

Nicholas patted the hand on his knee quickly and lightly.

"Thanks," was all he said. "I've an idea if she bends her neck . . . but I'll lie awake thinking the hell of a lot too?" He paused. "How did the opening of the Balham branch go off?"

"First rate. We gave 'em pink balloons. The place looked grand, pink watered silk panels and grey paint. There's nothing like pink for making the middle classes think they're in high life. All the girls in pink and pink carnations on the tables. I believe in going off with a splash. It means advertisement. Of course we don't give 'em their money's worth. We give 'em what they want. There's a few professions, like the medical and the police force, that can run on giving people what's good for 'em, but you'll run a business straight into the bankruptcy court that way. I give 'em cheap trash. Well, that's what they like; they wouldn't pay me for it if they didn't! I'm honest

about it, the hot toast is margarine and the Swiss roll is stuffed with fruit pulp . . . but they lap it up, and if I wasn't giving it to them some other fellow would be. The class of girl that comes to the Tiny Tea-Tables would sooner eat mud off a pink tablecloth than caviare off a marble slab. I cater for people's weaknesses. You can't cure 'em, so you might as well cater for 'em. I'm proud of the Tiny Tea-Tables Company. I've had the Brighton branch all redecorated. I wouldn't have a dirty panel or a bit of rubbed paint in my business for anything. One of the directors was quite nasty at the Board meeting, said it was unnecessary expense. I just looked at him. 'Sir,' I said, 'do you go out in order to feel at home?' That had him! 'Neither do my customers,' said I."

"You're splendid, Dad!"

"Oh! I don't know." The old man paused. "Whichever way you decide, Nicholas, I like her. She's fair. My little Lily was fair. If you ever had a little girl . . . They say marriage gives you someone to remember happiness with. I don't know. It gives you someone to share regrets with. They come oftener and they're heavier to

carry. I knew a young fool once who was always figuring out how he'd save his girl from fire and nurse her through illness; when he got married he couldn't keep his feet off the rungs of their new chairs—that's marriage. It's these novelists and playwrights cause all the trouble, making a song out of an everyday affair. That's what marriage is, Nicky, an everyday affair."

"Yes," said Nicholas drily. "That's just what daunts me, old Dad."

When he, Sir Terence, went upstairs his wife unclosed her eyes.

"You've been a long time coming to bed, dear."

"I had a smoke."

"Did Nicholas have a smoke?"

"Yes, Nicholas had a smoke."

"Did he talk much?"

"No, he didn't talk much," said old Timothy truthfully.

"My! it is funny how you men stick together."

Old Timothy came and sat rather gingerly on the edge of her blue satin eiderdown and reached for her hand.

"I'd rather he married a fair girl," he said,

a little inconsequently. "Their little girl would be fair, like our Lily."

His wife closed her eyes resignedly.

"I *knew* you'd been talking," she said.

X

FINE FEATHERS

POPPY WHISTLER wrote the Marchesa :

“ Things are waxing fast and furious, though to tell the truth I can't see they're waxing towards anything but a sudden slow up when young Timothy's leave is up, after which I shall have to go on living with Zuriel ; *that's* what worries me. Even if we never tell her father, he'll see by Zuriel some sort of an earthquake's taken place. Men aren't half so blind as would be convenient sometimes. The house is still cluttered up with people and Zuriel takes as much interest in them as if they were groceries. They sit and make a three-course dinner off your cakes and talk about a lot of dead people and dead things, as if they'd all happened yesterday. My brain's so full of worries I feel I could choke them sometimes. That shows I'm getting nervy. I don't think

Nicholas wants to marry my girl ; that's my reading of it. That's breeding ; of course you can't read breeding ; there's safety in it for a man. I've never seen a single natural emotion struggle through Nicholas Timothy's breeding ; in fact, if I didn't know different, I'd think he was a perfect fool. He's very nice to me, but no nicer than he is to Zuriel, which I think is a bad sign. In my young days a man gave himself away, and very useful it was for mothers. I know mine had thanked God for the blessing of having a hardware store and being able to take the wedding breakfast crockery out of stock, before I'd even thought of Whistler as Henry.

“ I can't say I care much for Lady Timothy. She expects your family tree to grow out of your mouth, so I keep mine shut. I don't fancy telling her mine started in a pudding basin at Bishop's Stortford. I've been to a little dance there and to tea once, and I admire the way she speaks to her servants. I must say that it's something about having a gentleman that you don't have to be always watching how you speak to him, but I mustn't get into the way because of going back to Lizzie. Lady Timothy's been

fishing to know about Henry. I discovered he was supposed to be in Cannes for his health. Henry! whose worst trouble has been shingles, and *they* never met! I gathered that he was supposed to be a retired civil servant, so I kept quiet; I don't even know what a civil servant does, except that they go bald early and generally put their affairs into the hands of the Public Trustee because they die soon after they retire. I've met a lot of their widows at hotels when Zuriel and I travelled. They always have little rooms and keep an electric iron hidden in the trunk. I don't wonder fashionable people go bankrupt so often. What it costs to run this little place, and me doing all the cooking, too!

“My goodness, Marchesa, you really ought to have a good housekeeper with all your lot of maids. I've put my foot down. Either we go home now or Zuriel stops having clothes. She's clothes mad. I believe she's pawned her seed-pearl necklace to buy stuff. I just don't know what her father would say. He's one of those men who feel almost religious about avoiding a pawnbroker and a moneylender. Bim and Ann Charlton are making her clothes for nothing. Ann was

up till three the other morning sewing a green tissue frock in time for Zuriel to wear to some countess's party. Lady Timothy chaperoned her. You can't tell anything from Ann's face either ; she's got a lot of natural breeding, too. I often wonder how it will end. It's fun to you but I'm in it and I sometimes think I'm in it for longer than I think, and deeper."

The Marchesa read it and was delighted. She chuckled and her old eyes gleamed. She even took a little walk alone and stared at the flowers that surrounded her villa and touched some with her stick-like fingers as if they held hidden magic. Her staff were amazed ; it was as if for a moment she had been touched with the elixir of youth. They watched a smile flicker on her lips. The butler summed it up.

" She's living in the past, that's what it is. They do that when they get that old, and then you can do anything with them, just anything."

Zuriel wrote : " I almost wish with mother that we'd never met you and never left the bungalow. I promised to tell you in exchange for the loan of this house what I did and what I felt. I can't tell you what I feel.

I don't know. I can't settle to anything. I'm not even sleeping. Nicholas Timothy comes and goes, and I am always waiting for him to come or go and that is my life. I don't feel his mother would welcome me if Nicholas did marry, but I don't think she expects him to and I don't think I expect him to either. We are together very often. It is terrible, Marchesa, to know so clearly what you want and be unable to obtain it. Bim Redgold is dear to me. He makes me the most wonderful garments. Of course I can't pay him anything, but it seems to make him really happy to see me in them and I buy the material myself. I pawned my seed-pearl necklace and I have since sold my pearl brooch. I haven't dared tell mother. I haven't much jewellery. Father didn't like it; he hates show. Money soon goes in London. Men of Nicholas Timothy's type are so particular about your feet. MacAfees of Dover Street are making all my shoes; they're beautiful, but they cost more than I ought to afford, and I have my nails manicured twice a week by a very expensive girl Lady Timothy recommended me to who doesn't make them very shiny—shininess is wrong. Such a lot of things are wrong.

Nicholas goes to Copenhagen and then to Tahiti for the Government. I don't quite know what for. Oh! I'd give the world to go! Think of the adventure and the excitement and the knowledge one would gain, Marchesa. All I've wanted, even my wildest dreams, under my hand as it were, and I don't know whether it won't escape for ever beyond my reach. Ann laughs at you. She says you like to skin people's souls as bald as bananas and make a meal off them. She doesn't seem to mind making my clothes for nothing. I didn't tell you that six men have proposed to me. I hated it. I like the restraint of Nicholas. I loathe people who let their emotions jump them about. Penn Lewis is painting me and Norah Cornraiker has taken innumerable photographs as a Bacchante and a Madonna and all with my hair down. If Nicholas Timothy thought me beautiful I should begin to appreciate myself very much. The photographs are to appear in the *Sketch*. One thing, father never looks at illustrated papers, only *Punch*."

The Marchesa rang the bell violently; her ancient eyes were gleaming and shining and grinning beneath their ancient eaves; there was something bizarre in their drollery

and naked gloating, as if venerable lanterns had been masked for Carnival.

"Order me two copies of the *Sketch* every week," she said.

"Now, Madame?"

"Immediately," snapped the Marchesa, "and bring me the current issue."

In twenty minutes the anxious maid was back watching the old lady pounce through the pages. When it was ultimately consigned to the waste-paper basket she fished it out with care, but there was nothing to explain the brilliant patchwork of emotions that had lain on her mistress's face, still less explain her enigmatical remark, "Would you like to see a Cuckoo's Nest, Josephine?"

Josephine, black eyes moist with devouring curiosity, assured the Marchesa ardently that she would.

"Naturalists tell us there is no such thing," chuckled the Marchesa. "You are an ignorant girl not to know that, but I shall see one nevertheless."

Eventually she gave Josephine twenty francs and a cable addressed to her old cousin in Cannes. It read, "Am sending you the English *Sketch* every week."

To the kitchen Josephine explained the

phenomena. "It is as if she has found suddenly a new interest in life. She is like one with a new love."

They laughed at her because her Latin mind turned naturally to love for similes.

Stella Redgold wrote. For three hours the Marchesa left the letter unopened while she dozed. Stella with her rhythmic dancing and her small, hard, unclenched mind frankly bored her.

Stella wrote on drawing paper at unusual length.

"Dear Marchesa, I do find it so difficult to keep my promise and write to you. I know the others all write the same things and much more interestingly. I hate letter-writing and I always hated essays worst of all at school. Everything goes on here at the studio the same. The house looks awfully clean. Mrs. Whistler has got a gentleman as housemaid. It does seem a shame; he's a B.A. and everything! I often see him sitting in the kitchen reading most difficult books. I talk to him sometimes. I do think it's awfully hard when a man's fought for his country and everything. Of course, Bim's in love with Zuriel Whistler, you know, but she's in love with old Sir Timothy's

son, Nicholas. She looks too gorgeous for anything in the things Bim designs and Ann makes. The shop isn't doing much. Bim has just sold a statue he made out of papier mâché for five pounds. It does seem a pity he doesn't do better when he's so clever and everything. I am going to meet Mr. Ferris on his afternoon out, he's the gentleman who works for Mrs. Whistler. I can't help being sorry for him. I'm not saying anything about it; after all, I don't see whose business it is. You couldn't meet a nicer man. Of course his experiences have made him a little humble and a little lacking in confidence. He wants bucking up. He could go out to an uncle in South Africa, who's got a huge ostrich farm in Graaf Reinet and he wants someone to do all the books and arrange the business side, but Mr. Ferris doesn't think he'd be sufficiently good or experienced. That's just the trouble, he doesn't think half enough of himself. His uncle is a bachelor with a large house. He's got a perfect beast of an old Dutch housekeeper, but he's afraid to get rid of her because he can't get anyone better. It all seems very sad. We're going to the National Gallery on Wednesday and

then to that nice little tea-shop near the something or other theatre ; it doesn't cost much and one can talk. I feel it's a help for him to talk to someone. I don't want you to misunderstand, there's absolutely nothing in it except a natural desire to help a fellow human being. Everybody does better if someone believes in them. We're getting a lot of plump old ladies in who think rhythmic dancing will reduce their hips. Miss Summerthwaite forgot the other day and told them to imagine they were a row of young poplars swaying in the wind. Oh ! it was terrible ! What they really want is Swedish exercises in private. They wear sandals and Grecian tunics and look like a lot of bolsters. It's terribly depressing. Sometimes I wish I'd taken up something else, but it is too late now. I don't think Bim is very happy either. Ann Charlton is the only happy one, she goes quietly about her work, just as she always did. I know that Jew with the dozens of shops has been after her again. She motored down to see his place the other day, it must have been awfully nice. He is going to give a pink dance. Ann says his home is mostly pink. He's millions of pink geraniums and pink

roses and pink curtains, and he's going to have millions of pink fairy lights. It is to be for a hospital. He knows quite a lot of titled people and people on the stage and they like to meet each other. He met Lady Timothy and Nicholas the other day. I believe she and some big pot at Maidenhead are to be the hostesses if it comes off. Of course he'll get a lot of newspaper publicity, because he spends thousands on advertising with them."

The Marchesa clapped her dry, stick-like hands and rang the bell. Josephine came, running.

The Marchesa waved one hand towards the window and the exquisite blue and gold day outside.

"Josephine," she demanded, "for whom was God's good sunshine ordained?"

"For everyone, Madame," was Josephine's adroit reply.

"I feel like everyone this morning," said the Marchesa. "Order the car, Josephine, and we will enjoy our share."

XI

CONVENTIONS

NICHOLAS TIMOTHY reached for the marmalade and surveyed the back of *The Times* that barricaded his father.

His suit was brown, his tie was brown, a corn-coloured silk handkerchief tipped his coat pocket; he was fresh, immaculate, debonair, his humorous, tawny camel's eyes were wide-awake and brilliant.

"Why hasn't the mater shown up these last two mornings?"

"She's worried."

"About the pink dance," Nicholas chuckled. "That man's *flair* for advertisement is simply magnificent. What's he trying for, a title?"

"I think he'd refuse it loudly in every newspaper in London."

"Well, what's the mater's trouble?"

"She's waiting and wondering."

“ Well,” said Nicholas, “ so am I,” and went on eating marmalade.

“ Your mother found a Henry J. Whistler in the list of retired civil servants. He’s been retired a good many years.”

“ That so ? ” said Nicholas.

The old man laid down his newspaper.

“ See here, Nicky,” he said, “ life’s hard on a mother with an only son ; over and over again she’s got to learn he’s a man and be surprised and hurt at it.”

“ I feel so damned inadequate,” said Nick ruefully.

“ She really didn’t sleep last night,” said Sir Timothy.

“ I haven’t got a thing to tell her.”

“ They don’t mind that a bit so long as you talk to them,” his father assured him cheerfully.

Nicholas got up and strolled to the window, he stood looking through the yellow net curtains at the empty, sun-swept street. His father surveyed his square, brown-covered shoulders, his brown head with affectionate pride.

“ It’s so difficult to know what to say to her.”

“ She’ll say it for you. They always do

if you're not quick enough to please them. Between ourselves, Nicky, she's bitterly disappointed. She'd looked higher for you. She'll try not to show it; it'll come out, but you mustn't mind. She feels you're shutting her out."

"I know," said Nicky.

"There never was a husband who didn't fail as a husband, or a son who didn't fail as a son, since the relationship began," said Sir Timothy. "You see they have to behave according to the secret and unknown tradition that exists in the minds of women. You catch glimpses of it sometimes too in novels by women and it appals you by its impossibility."

"Then I ought to go and murmur at twilight by her blue eiderdown," grinned Nicholas ruefully.

"That's rather the idea," said his father.

"And the awful part of it that all I've got to say can be said by the pitiless light day."

"Quite."

"Did you know she's chaperoning Zuriel to Isaacs's Pink Dance?"

"Yes, she told me."

"Isaacs is clever. He knows men detest

fancy dress. Men in white flannels and the girls in fancy dress. Tickets three guineas. They've got a notice twenty feet long outside the hospital and they're selling tickets at Keith Prowse and all the big stores. Zuriel won't tell me what she's going as and she won't drive down with us. She says she doesn't know whether she's going at all."

"I wonder how many thousands it'll cost our friend Isaacs?"

"He's clever enough not to count them." Nicholas sighed. "I wish I were the sort of fellow to be lifted off my feet. I suppose they're too big or something."

He went up to his mother's bedroom.

He found her with the efficient secretary she had acquired to deal with the Pink Dance. At a nod and smile from her the young woman went away. Nicholas took her place and looked down at the blue eiderdown.

"I know," he said without beating about the bush, "you've been waiting for me to tell you whether I'm engaged to Zuriel Whistler."

"We've always been good friends, Nicky, not like some mothers and sons."

He looked at her ruefully; that was how he had always found it all his life with

women who cared ; when you spoke to them of the future they immediately looked back into the past ; for a man the two have no connection. Then they obscured one's clearness of vision by little wistful, irrelevant comparisons that had the effect of making one feel an inconsiderate brute.

" I'm not engaged," said Nicky baldly.

" But you feel . . ."

" I feel a whole lot of things," said Nicky, " but then I have before."

A sudden feeling of hopelessness came to him, of painful inadequacy. That handsome, well-preserved, autocratic old lady lying there in the blue *crêpe de Chine* dressing-jacket was his mother and he, the young man, was her son. He could not leap the years that lay between them ; he tried to do so by insistence on their relationship.

" You've been a topping mother to me," he said. " You mustn't think I don't know that. One does not always say what one feels"—he stopped, because he realised he was not feeling what he was saying, so many, many years he had been away and all the while it was not only he who was growing up, but she also. Why did one think of mothers as stationary, only to find that when

one came to look for them in their own familiar place they had moved ?

“ I am trying to be honest, but it's damned hard,” said Nicky. “ The hardest thing I ever did, because I'm letting people down over it. I'm not behaving as you have a right to expect, or Zuriel. She appeals to me tremendously. I think her beautiful. It's a bad luck you can never be honest in personal relationships without being an infernal cad. I am in love with Zuriel Whistler, Mother, but marriage has always seemed to me such a long business. I get so tired of things that last a long time. I'm not always thinking of myself, I swear. I'd be unbearable, however hard I tried, if I had to go on with a thing after I was sick and tired of it.”

“ By that time you'd be so used to it that you wouldn't question it,” said his mother.

He looked at her. She was smiling at him, her grey eyes, so unlike his own, were soft and amused. He realised that up till then he had been throwing his words doggedly like a man throws crumbs into the snow for starving but invisible birds ; now he had the rather unexpected satisfaction of seeing them picked up and appreciated.

“Nobody who isn’t married would ever believe how natural it all seems after a week or two,” she said. “That’s the funny part of it. You won’t mind my saying it, dear boy,” her pleasant voice was a little chagrined, “but I would have been pleased if it had been someone a little more . . . important. Of course the Civil Service is very respectable, but it’s very, very ordinary, and then Mrs. Whistler, well . . . she’s a nice little body, but I shouldn’t say . . .”

“No,” said Nicholas, “I quite see what you mean, Mother, but in any case my wife wouldn’t see much of her people. We should live abroad. Personally I like Mrs. Whistler very much; she amuses me tremendously.”

“Zuriel could behave exactly as she likes,” said Lady Timothy, with a sudden flash of insight, “because she doesn’t conform to any type. A girl is very lucky to be born like that. It leaves her so nice and free. You never seemed to care for quite ordinary things, Nicky, even when you were quite a little boy. It used to worry me dreadfully. I’ve often cried about it to your father. When we used to take you to the toy-shop to choose something at Christmas

you'd always dig something odd out of the corner."

"And you were afraid I'd dig something out of the corner matrimonially."

"Oh! I was. That's why the Civil Service has been a relief to me, though it's a disappointment in a way. Your father's been nervous, too."

"Dad? Rubbish!"

"He wouldn't have liked trade. He'd have hated it, Nicky. I know when Laura Kenlock, that sewing-machine millionairess, used to come here he used to worry."

"But he always sticks up for anyone in trade. He's so fiery about it."

"Of course he is; that's a man all over. If you'd married into trade it would have been a bitterer blow to him than to me." She patted his hand with her perfectly manicured one. "Now don't you worry, dear boy, or analyse your feelings; it's a shocking waste of time. Just you wait for the moment." She touched the bell. "That Pink Dance is worrying me to death. I wish I'd never touched it."

Nicholas Timothy's attractive camel's eyes wandered all round the luxurious blue and white silk-panelled walls, and over the white

bear rugs. His eyes lingered on a bowl of love-in-the-mist on the dressing-table.

“The moment?” he repeated uncertainly.

The secretary came in and stood quietly waiting; Lady Timothy motioned her to be seated and smiled at her tall son.

“The moment,” she repeated reassuringly.

XII

BREAKING-POINT

POPPY WHISTLER wrote to the Marchesa :

“ Here we are dingle-dangling on. The day I went down to see if the gardener was doing his duty by the garden was the happiest I’ve had for a long time.

“ I don’t know what we’re dingle-dangling for either. I wake up with a horrible feeling every morning, as if it’s the day fixed for the dentist.

“ I’m down to my last ten pounds and that’s the honest truth. If you asked me to believe it has cost what it has and me doing the cooking I *couldn’t* have believed you.

“ After Mr. Isaacs’s Pink Dance at Maidenhead I’m going home, with or without Zuriel.

“ You must have seen about it in the papers. How the editors can spare him all that space with the interesting divorces and

bits of trouble there are everywhere, I don't know, I'm sure.

“ I'm terribly, terribly worried. Whatever happens to Zuriel she'll never be the same again ; she's not the same. I wish to goodness I'd been firm and never left my home. It was the silliest thing I ever did in my life.

“ I find Bim a great comfort. I never knew a more understanding man ; you can talk to him as if he wasn't a man.

“ Zuriel wants a pink dress for this dance. She wants me to pawn my ruby ring. I don't say I'd sooner die, but I'd sooner go home. You get like the thing you live with ; that's why some women shouldn't live with Pekinese and chows. There's one woman who comes here, paints miniatures ; she's perfect but for the fur ; anyway, I've acquired Henry's views on pawnbrokers. I don't think my knees would ever take me into Attenborough's and that's the truth.

“ Henry writes that he might be home a bit earlier than he expected. It was a lovely letter. I felt him looking up to me all the time in it. I wrote and told him we might go away for a bit.

“ One thing I’ve got Zuriel to promise— she’ll come away after the dance. I don’t know what she’ll do for a dress. I’m going to keep my ring. I’d give her anything of mine, but I won’t give her a bit of Henry, and that’s what my jewellery is.

“ I shall tell Henry everything when he comes back ; I’ve made up my mind to that. The more angry he is the better I shall feel.

“ I am perfectly certain Nicholas Timothy isn’t going to marry Zuriel ; to begin with he’s not a domesticated man ; he’s one of those who’d let the fire go out under his nose and leave the electric on all night. I can’t say I’m sorry, it would have been a terrible blow to Henry, holding the strong views he does about the Tiny Tea-Tables, Limited. Henry says they’re immoral. He means the food, not the way they’re managed. Henry’s one of those men that feels every real new-laid egg comes straight from God.

“ Zuriel means to have a dress for the Maidenhead affair. I don’t know what she’ll do. I haven’t seen her seed-pearls lately or her pearl brooch, but I daren’t ask in case I get the truth. I’d rather not know it.

“ The man who said no mother knew her daughter after she was two was no fool. I

can no more believe Zuriel's the girl who used to go down to Margate with me and have a cake at Bobby's and a look at the people and the shops than I can fly.

"Zuriel tells me that Lady Timothy has found a Henry Whistler in the Civil Service lists. She's welcome. I don't suppose it'll ever come to anything. I hope not. It haunts me. Now that woman is a snob. If a woman's really good class you like her to be a snob and the more snobby she is the more pleased you are at her knowing you, but considering who Sir Terence Timothy is and how he made his pile I've no patience with it. I don't think she wants Zuriel in the family, but she feels better about it since she thought she found poor Henry's profession.

"I think Stella Redgold is in love with my manservant. I told you he was a B.A. and all the rest of it. She's got a lot of books by Gertrude Page and she's reading them all day. I love her books, but they're no true guide; all those people put in the sunsets and leave out the washing up. As far as I can make out life's mostly washing up in those parts; the more successful your husband gets the more farm hands he has

and the more washing up there is. You own millions of acres and live at the sink. Stella's got hands that get all pappy with water, too, but, as I said before, the young hate common sense. She read me a bit the other day with tears in her eyes, all lonely horizons and things ; I hadn't the heart to point out it wasn't any fun having a baby in a landscape like that."

After she had finished writing this Poppy went up to Zuriel's bedroom ; the moonlight came through the curtains and made a white shining jazz pattern in the black room. Zuriel lay in a gleaming pool of light in the queer little carved and canopied bed. Her hair was loose and shining, too ; as she lay there she seemed to be floating. Struggling as usual with a sense of unreality Mrs. Whistler perched on the edge of the bed and sat there in the shadow like an unquiet pouter pigeon.

"Zuriel," she said baldly, "do you think you'll get Nicholas Timothy?"

The whiteness and the blackness and the shining hair and Zuriel's enigmatical face floating on it like a mask on water. The poor little woman had a sudden stinging sense of coarseness, of crudeness. It was

as if she had cried aloud the price of Cinderella's shoe, as if she stood unexpectedly in a harlequinade, not knowing her cue, only the grotesque inadequacy of her own commonplaceness.

"I mean it can't go on," she said quivering. "It's breaking me up, and now your father talks of coming home. It's altogether too much. Live on credit I won't; it's like living on charity. Where are your pearls?"

"Pawned," said Zuriel.

"And your brooch?"

"Sold," said Zuriel.

Mrs. Whistler made queer little clucking noises with her tongue.

"That things should come to such a pass," she said.

The scent of white jasmine crept through the window; through the curtains gleamed the stars. She gazed up at them with the intentness of one who sees a friendly face in alien surroundings.

"We could go home to-morrow morning," she whispered. "Just send a telegram to Lizzie and pack up and go."

"Would you like to run away and leave the most important thing in your life un-

finished? Know all your life that you'd left it unfinished?"

"How you do put things!" said her mother.

"I put things as they are," said Zuriel. "I want to wait for the Pink Dance. After that I'll go home. You talk as if things had crashed. Nothing's even happened."

"Sometimes that's worse to bear! Oh! we seem to have been up here years and years. Henry will wonder why the blankets smell of camphor. I can't possibly give you a pink fancy dress, Zuriel. If you like to make a paper one . . ."

"I am going to ask Bim Redgold," said Zuriel.

Mrs. Whistler rose to her feet and stood looking down at her daughter. Strange and fantastic thoughts flashed through her mind, so that she was bewildered; it was like lightning playing over surroundings that had always been familiar and sunlit. She did not know how to take her bearings. It seemed to her that Zuriel was an idol. She saw that they all served her beauty, Bim, Ann, the Marchesa, Stella, and she used them all, gracefully, charmingly, making it seem a privilege.

Zuriel smiled—it was a wonderful smile ; it woke her out of her silver-white remoteness to radiant life.

“ Kiss me good night, honey,” she said ;
“ I’m so tired.”

Mrs. Whistler said heavily, “ Why do you all grow up ? Why do you ? ” and Zuriel answered :

“ Because we want to live, too.”

XIII

THE INCENSE AND THE IDOL

BIM REDGOLD saw Zuriel by deliberately ignoring the actuality and concentrating on her reflexion in his own idealism ; Stella saw her as something unbelievably pretty and gay, a domestic butterfly of hitherto unknown species ; Ann Charlton alone perceived the rankness and crudeness of her egotism, the immovable soil from which her witcheries and spells reared themselves.

In common fairness she acknowledged that Zuriel did not ask half what the people around her were prepared to give. She accepted with the impersonal joyousness and un-selfconsciousness of a baby ; it was that that made it so impossible to dislike her altogether, that and her appealing loveliness.

She seemed as incapable of visioning or feeling the self-sacrifice she demanded as a young child who unconsciously takes its

mother's last crumb, but she was sustained by the firm conviction that she would ultimately be able to pay back everything in kind.

"Even if I don't marry Nicholas Timothy, I can pay you and Bim back out of my dress allowance when father comes back from Cannes ; you'll only have to wait a bit," she said to Ann. "And I'll never, never forget."

"You don't remember now," said Ann, smiling.

"Suppose you wanted something, wouldn't you try and take it ? "

"No," said Ann ; " I'd wait for it to come to me. Even when I knew it had quite gone I'd still be waiting."

"Well, wouldn't that be silly ? "

"Yes," said Ann, " it would."

"But if you knew it was ! "

"Sometimes it's so much easier to go on being silly."

The two girls sat in the studio waiting for Bim. Great sheaves of lilac, for which no vases had been empty in the house, gave out a rich perfume. The little garden was dim with summer twilight ; beyond it stretched the dim shrouded immensity of London

already pricking out its familiar contours with primrose pin-points of light.

“Why aren't you going to this Pink Dance too, Miss Charlton? I thought you knew Mr. Isaacs?”

“Not in that way,” said Ann without resentment. “Mr. Isaacs knows different people in different ways. Jews do.”

“Bim isn't going either.”

“We don't dance,” said Ann; the little pronoun crept over her consciousness like sunlight.

“I found a wonderful fancy dress in an old book of the Marchesa's,” said Zuriel suddenly. “With the most wonderful head-dress. It was all made of those big pearl beads—you can get them in pink, you know, Ann—a lovely pink, like firelight; they're about fourpence each. The skirt is just strands of pink ribbon and strands of pearls over them. . . . That's what I've come to see Bim about. I've got the illustration here. I should wear my hair down. You would, wouldn't you?”

“Yes,” said Ann, “if I had your hair.” Her voice sounded dry and reedy.

Footsteps came and went on the other side of the high wall, ghost footsteps in a world

too remote to matter ; by and by stars would glimmer and the feet of the people she heard would carry them backwards and forwards beneath them, but she and the girl would be apart in this little dark studio that shut out all stars, two of them waiting for a man who would only see one of them. She had a sudden desire to speak large, harsh ugly truths to Zuriel. Things she couldn't get away from or airily ignore. To tell her Bim had no money for frocks or pink pearls. To shoot at her the plain, stark questions she had come to ask Bim, the questions that had to be asked and somehow answered.

“ I don't think Bim has the money,” she said, and Zuriel answered easily, confidently. “ He said he'd help me, and this is the last thing I shall want.”

“ I came here to see Bim because . . .”

“ I won't keep him long,” said Zuriel lightly.

It was as if she raised a little silver gossamer veil between herself and the things she did not want to know and Ann Charlton, who dwelt amid realities, and was overburdened with them at the moment, dared not rend it, because her own simplicity understood neither its texture nor its actual

purpose. What use to tell her she and Bim had no money for necessities let alone luxuries, that she was there to tell him that the little shop where their artistic dreams had died stillborn must be closed. Zuriel, gifted by the gods in that particular, would only see what she desired, not what others lacked.

Her love ran turgidly in her, her mind was dark and heavy with its load in the little room enmeshed in twilight, shut in with this yellow-haired idol that she must watch Bim worship with blind eyes. The scent of the lilac, overpoweringly sweet, seemed like incense.

“If Bim had capital and could start elsewhere he could do awfully well,” said Zuriel. “He has real talent.”

“Yes.” Ann’s voice was arid.

“Of course he makes a mistake to ignore money.”

“One can’t ignore money if it ignores you,” said Ann; “that isn’t possible. You can only try to pretend.”

“I suppose Stella will go out to South Africa with mother’s butler when we leave . . . I put it like that because it amuses me so. Of course he’s quite a gentleman. It’s

a good thing, really ; there can't be much future in rhythmic dancing. If our coming has done nothing else we've helped Bim. He won't have his sister to bother about ; apparently the old uncle has a lovely home and will leave it to them when he dies. It's all rather like a fairy tale. I think life is. Fancy ! Stella in South Africa because of us."

Ann sat motionless. People coming and going . . . coming and going, the weaving of life before her eyes. She put her hand in her pocket and clutched her last pound note. No stock, no orders, no future, nothing but an unpaid rent and a pound note. There had been joy in the chequered road they had travelled towards a fascinating but unnamed destination ; there had been the joy of companionship, the exhilaration of shared laughter, the zest of shared success and failure robbed of its sting. She looked back at happiness with the piteous hopelessness of age looking back at youth—the last pound note and the end of the road. Not finality, not drama, just a dull plodding on somewhere and somehow in whatever lay beyond.

"Mother's worried to death," said Zuriel. "She fidgets me. All day long she's rubbing

silver and brass, and doesn't seem happy unless she's rubbing. Money has nearly given out and father's coming home soon. Nothing has happened. I keep telling her that. We haven't spent any more money than he gave us to spend or broken any actual laws he laid down. She's in a stew. I wish I could help her. I can't help her, because I can't see father as her husband, only my father, and I can't see anything to be afraid of in him. She isn't exactly afraid either, it's as if she doesn't want to tell him she's broken something, though she knows it's half his. He'll have to tell us what he is, because I'll have to tell Nicholas if anything comes of all this. They think he's a retired civil servant. It's funny when you get away from a person how clearly you see things. I simply cannot think what prevented me from asking father outright what he was before, yet there was something or I should have done it."

"Yes," said Ann vaguely.

"Then again," said Zuriel, "is there anything more absolutely personal, more individual, than marriage? Mother says she'll never dare tell Daddy I'm marrying the son of Sir Terence Timothy. Well, I

dare! You don't belong to your parents when you're old enough to belong to yourself. She knows that. She agrees with me."

"Yes," said Ann, unheeding.

"Stella and her young man have gone to the theatre," said Zuriel suddenly. "They'll hold hands. It's funny, I would never think of Nicholas as my young man and I should never want to hold hands, yet I love theatres and I should be glad to be with him, probably just as glad as Stella." She gave her quick, fascinating smile. "I *am* like that."

Ann noticed neither her absorbed in-looking nor her smile, she was looking forward, listening eagerly to the velvet footsteps that passed on the other side of the wall; they all sounded the same.

"I wonder if Bim will ever make a big artistic success."

"I don't know," said Ann.

In the darkness Ann shut her eyes and tried to shut her mind, to see only the last pound note and the reasons and arguments she had carefully marshalled for Bim's inspection on the way up. For days he had not been near the little shop and she had sat with idle hands and a last roll of grey

silk in the window. Someone had bought the grey silk. They did not want it made up, a fashion paper was under their arm. Ann had sold it for a pound, and still tarried because she had only bad news to take and dreaded the burden because she must pass it over without lightening herself. She would gladly have carried it in secret.

"I wish Bim would come," said Zuriel. "I want to get back to mother. She doesn't like being left alone. She thinks too much."

"I expect he'll come," said Ann.

"I know a shop where you can get those pink pearls; they're as large as small cherries."

"And fourpence each?" said Ann. "Why! you'd want thousands."

"Well, hundreds," said Zuriel. "But, Ann, it'll be the most marvellous dress and a wonderful advertisement for Bim; of course he'll have to alter it, there's only the bare idea on the sketch."

"I don't see how it can be managed."

"Bim will manage it," said Zuriel. "He promised."

Ann clutched her pound note. She had a feeling of being shut in for all eternity

with the incense and the idol. She struggled, as other people struggled, and poor Mrs. Whistler most of all, to establish contact with actuality. Her body was hot, it seemed almost that her mind was hot like a thing that has been suddenly spun into friction.

“It’ll be my last public appearance,” said Zuriel. “Cinderella will have to go back to the kitchen if it doesn’t come off. That never happened in the fairy tale.”

“Perhaps,” said Ann, “when they wrote it, they thought of all the other things Cinderella called into being . . . the rats that became horses, the pumpkin that became a golden carriage. I wonder if they all liked going back to just where they were.”

“They’d never have been anything else if it hadn’t been for Cinderella,” said Zuriel. “It’s only fair to remember that.”

Ann thought that Zuriel, though actual, was hard to believe.

Bim came swinging up the little path, whistling. He seemed to Ann to break up the bleakness; he had the air of bringing some of the stars in with him and the silken frou-frouing of the summer wind.

“Why! Mistress Zuriel!” he said, “I thought you would be out somewhere

dancing in the dawn or something. Here you are and Mistress Ann, too! I walked over Westminster Bridge and felt I owned the world. One day I'll paint it, lights and all, so that ratepayers coming to see it by daylight at the National Gallery (you perceive I aim high) shall be angry because the lights are not put out. Well, how's everybody and everything?"

Zuriel came to the point with the directness of a kingfisher after a fly. She thrust the illustration into his hand.

"For the Pink Dance!" she said. "Now, Bim, you just *look!*"

"For you?" said Bim.

"For me," echoed Zuriel, and her voice lilted.

"My dear," said Bim simply, "I don't see how we can do it."

"It'll cost money," said Ann.

Bim looked at Zuriel. "Have you any?" he asked starkly.

Zuriel switched on the electric light with an impatient hand. She was brilliant with excitement, she seemed to glow and gleam and shine with it, her velvety eyes, her silvery hair. Her dress was something Bim had designed, formless, the colour of a

peacock's neck, sheathing her weird brilliance in exoticism that seemed natural to her.

"Oh, listen!" she said. "You promised. Oh! Bim, I feel things will come right that night." She spun round on Ann—"I know quite what you're thinking sitting there so quietly, you're thinking horrid things of me, that I'm a parasite . . . that I'm a doll. It's all how you look at things. You wouldn't send a woman to prison if you could save her by making her a dress . . . you wouldn't send her to prison for a month, but you're sending me to prison in Margate and you could save me! You could! I'm not asking you to give me anything. I'm only asking you to lend me something."

"We haven't it to lend," said Ann stolidly.

"Very well," said Zuriel.

She rose forlornly and trailed towards the door.

"Ann," said Bim, "couldn't we manage it?"

She looked at it, she saw the eagerness and the anxiety in his eyes, the creases on his forehead.

She saw that Zuriel Whistler had brought

something into his life just by being in it, that she had created in him the desire to serve the beautiful in art that she embodied.

"No," said Ann.

Zuriel looked at her and went quietly away.

XIV

BIM PROPOSES

“ONE feels,” said Bim, “that it is churlish not to assist a princess to her prince and her kingdom round the corner. One feels that, Ann.”

“Does one?” said Ann.

“Zuriel’s right when she says life lasts a long time,” said Bim.

“It lasts for other people too, not only for her,” said Ann.

“She’s honest about wanting things,” said Bim. “I’ve never known anyone so utterly, so nakedly honest. The rest of us go about hugging our little secret desires, never mentioning them; but she calls high Heaven to bear witness to hers.”

“She does,” said Ann.

“I don’t know what there is about her . . .”

“There’s hair and eyes,” said Ann, “and her voice, and her tiny pointed hands and

feet, and the way her mouth turns up and the redness of it ; it doesn't much matter what else there is, does it ? ”

“ The Marchesa wouldn't only see those things.”

“ The Marchesa saw a joke. I haven't discovered it yet, but it will be there and the Marchesa will crack it with the more relish because of our blindness. I perceive that too.”

Bim sat down on the divan and clasped his hands round his knee, his shag of tobacco-coloured hair stood upright ; he bent his puzzled eyes on Ann, square and sturdy and sane, and she met his eyes with her own dark, far-seeing ones.

“ I found out something to-day, Ann,” he said. “ I'm growing old, too old for star-chasing and moon-raking, and some of my best dreams are past work, old Ann. I've been flying hither and thither while other men walked soberly to marked destinations and real goals, and now my wings are moulting and I don't know how to walk soberly and with decent mien. I've carved a bit and I've painted a bit, I've designed dresses, I've run a shop, I've published poems and even had them acclaimed . . . but it's made

a sort of fretwork round myself and obscured the big things of life. If I knew what the big things of life were I'd go after them. What are they ? ”

“ Sometimes,” said Ann, “ they're the things you don't want to do.”

She seemed to sit with hands clasped in the ineffable mellowness of understanding ; she knew that he did not know she was mentally there beside him.

“ I've been titivating life,” said he. “ A little while ago it began to seem rather a useless dissipation ; to-night it seems a crime against time. Ann, I want to make this dress for Zuriel Whistler. I've a superstitious feeling about it. I've a queer feeling it may be the beginning of things for me as well as for her. Odd how these things get hold of one. I want it more than I want anything ; and I haven't a sou or a thing to sell. Can you help me ? ”

“ How much would it cost ? ”

“ I'm afraid a lot,” said Bim ruefully. “ I've never been in a blind alley before. I don't like it. I think I've been there a long time, dreaming the hills and plains and the world lay beyond whenever I cared to move, and not really bothering to move. It's odd

how I feel that, helping Zuriel Whistler, Ann! I want to for her sake, and I want to for my own sake. I've an idea it spells deliverance for both of us, for her and me. It may be the gate for both of us. Imagine her going back to that bungalow with her mother—back to that life of silk matching and cushion covering and theatres."

"One supposes that Nicholas Timothy will be carried off his feet at the Pink Dance."

"Can you imagine Zuriel dressed for conquest mentally and physically, primed with the unbounded zest of the last chance and remaining unconquering. Her atmosphere, her mood, her charm will be irresistible."

"Perhaps," said Ann.

"She can't go unless we help her."

"No," said Ann.

"I shouldn't think anybody has ever had their earthly paradise mapped out with the exactitude and neatness Zuriel has. It's masterly. She's even left little spaces for the emotions and I honestly believe when they grow they'll fit in. There are no glorious, untidy horizons either. She does not want to go any further than she can see or see any further than she can go. She's

born without that insatiable longing for the thing hidden round the corner, that taste for the next bend and the bend beyond that," he smiled. "I feel it a duty to posterity to help her. Her type almost dispenses with the eternal and pathetic human need of an ultimate heaven. Ann, how much would that dress cost?"

"Forty or fifty pounds," cautioned Ann bleakly.

"I want to make it more than anything. Ann—have you anything to suggest? I have to manage it somehow."

Ann looked at him. Her eyes were soft and bright, the sudden sweetness of her smile flashed at him.

"It's all right, Bim," she said. "I have an idea I'll tell you to-morrow."

"Have you," said Bim, "ever had the feeling that you'd like to give someone the whole world as a present?" He grinned at her. "Of course," he admitted, "it would be a little difficult to wrap up. You'd be sure to think of that."

Ann looked away from him. "I have," she vouchsafed quietly.

They saw Zuriel running down the garden. She burst in upon them. Her queer faun's

eyes were brilliant with tears. She flung out her arms with a little gesture of desperation and abandon.

“Mother’s had a letter from father,” she wailed. “He’s coming home the day after the dance. She’s going home. She says she must have two days to air the bungalow and put up clean curtains. Can’t you . . . can’t you just go and talk to her, Ann?”

“What could I say?” said Ann. “Besides I’m not good at talking.”

“Oh, Bim, you!”

“I’ll try,” said Bim. “You stay here.”

XV

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL

POPPY WHISTLER sat crocheting fiercely. Spots of colour burnt furiously in her cheeks, her eyes seemed darker and harder ; she was like an old-fashioned, pleasant, rather too highly coloured little Dutch doll of the old type.

“ Young man,” she said to Bim, “ you can talk and talk. I knew just where Zuriel had gone when she flew out of the room. Cuckoo’s Nest or mare’s nest, this is where we get out of it. My mind’s made up and when it’s made up it’s made up, and that’s that.”

Bim sat down wordlessly at the piano and began to play.

“ You can stop that,” Poppy warned him irately. “ If that’s meant to soften me it’ll have about as much effect as a handful of oatmeal in a chalk pit. My mind’s made up. Home we go to the bungalow to make things

spick-and-span for Henry. I haven't done my duty by Henry."

"Or Zuriel," said Bim.

"If any woman could see beyond the cuddling and powdering stage there wouldn't be any population," snapped Mrs. Whistler. "I often think childless couples are the happiest, they've got a disappointment they can nurse together; it lasts even longer than a big family. You expect me to stay and get her married to a man I don't want her to marry and her father would simply hate her to marry. She's twisted everyone round her finger from the time she knew she'd got one. I shan't know one second's happiness till I'm back. I've given Zuriel her chance."

"And Nicholas Timothy hasn't taken it."

"Do you suppose he will?"

"Think of the Pink Dance. Think what Isaacs's money will achieve in the way of atmosphere. Think what Zuriel will look like. I always think a man should be married where he proposes."

"It would shift the church a bit; every pier its parson and every cinema its canon." Then she flustered again. "Zuriel says I haven't the right to go now! And why not, pray?"

"Because," said Bim soberly, "you haven't

the right to fix over the forty or fifty years she's got to live the shadow of regret that nothing will efface ; you've no right to fill an empty life with endless speculations as to how near or how far she missed the life she wanted ; you've no right to corrode her life with the acid of what-might-have-been. It isn't as if the possibility of it is removed from her by something there is no fighting against, like death, you are merely removing her from the possibility."

"He could come down to Margate if he's keen."

"You know he sails the evening after the dance. He's no Lochinvar, Mrs. Whistler, though he's a good fellow. He'll realise the truth if he's away from Zuriel for six months or a year."

"Which is ?"

"You know."

"That she isn't his class quite."

"That's it," said Bim. "And that he doesn't really want to get married ; his days are too full, too interesting."

"But Henry ?"

"Mr. Whistler won't be back till the day after the dance. You could go down next week and prepare . . ."

“ Now look here,” said Mrs. Whistler earnestly, “ let us dispense with all this talk of atmosphere and everything. Let’s have plain common sense for once in a way, even if it is a bit coarse. What do you think about it ? ”

“ I think,” said Bim, “ that your daughter would consider you had sacrificed her, that she’d visit it on you and her father, however much she might try to forget. I think that your lives would be miserable in that bungalow. If she has had her chance and misses it, she has only herself to blame. Nicholas will be out of England, out of her life. Suppose somebody made you miss the last train to what you considered Paradise . . . ”

“ I haven’t a brain that can think anything like it,” said Poppy Whistler, “ and I’m sure I’m very glad. Let’s come back to common sense again. I can’t afford a dress.”

“ Ann and I will see to that.”

“ Ann,” said Mrs. Whistler. “ Ann ! That girl has more sense in her little finger than the rest of you have in your whole bodies. I’ve come to feel she ought to marry and have lots of sons ; that’s the finest thing a woman can feel about another. She’s got brains, too, and she doesn’t twiddle them like

prongs, like the rest of you, she keeps them for use. If somebody with capital started Ann she'd be a second Lucile or Duff Gordon or whatever she is. I thought of asking Henry . . ."

"Do you think so?" said Bim; he stared at her.

"If I told you all I thought about Ann Charlton you'd be astonished," said Mrs. Whistler, looking at him very straight. "And if I told you all I knew you'd have a fit."

"Ann always manages things," said Bim. "She's marvellous. I'd like to design the frock. I'd like to feel I'd had a hand in putting Zuriel exactly where she wants to go; so few people even know where it is, far less how to get there. Of course it's personal vanity. It would be perhaps my one work of merit. I'm rather a failure, Mrs. Whistler."

Mrs. Whistler's dig was shrewd. "Then you ought to be grateful you belong to a profession where it's esteemed as much as success."

"Of course," he ceded, smiling, "there is that."

"What shall I say to Henry?"

“ Why say anything ? You will be there to say it when he comes.”

“ If I thought that.”

“ Why not think it ? ” said Bim earnestly. “ You’ve a hundred-per-cent chance that you’re right.”

“ People forget that a woman loves her husband after the first year,” said Mrs. Whistler ; “ if I could only see what was right.”

“ Is there any doubt ? ”

“ You don’t seem to think so.”

“ May I go back to Zuriel and tell her ? She’ll be anxious.”

“ Anxious, but planning,” said Mrs. Whistler. “ She’s always been like that.”

She rose to her feet, a little worried wife and mother ; the tears were not far from her velvety eyes.

“ I’m sure,” she said, “ I don’t know whether I’m standing on my head or my heels and I haven’t ever since we’ve been here. You can go and tell Zuriel I’ll stay till the morning after the dance, but not one minute longer. She thinks Lady Timothy will think it funny if I go back to Margate. Who on earth is that ? ”

“ The front-door bell,” said Bim stupidly.

“ I know, stupid. Who’s ringing it at this time of night ? Ferris is in bed. You go and see.”

Bim ushered in the Marchesa and her maid Josephine. The Marchesa carried a French novel, a nickel sandwich-box and a silver flask. Her maid carried a valise. She wore a brown bonnet that enmeshed her in shadow.

“ I know I’m a nuisance,” she said, “ dear Mrs. Whistler and dear Bim. And the place looking charming . . . charming. The flowers ! Delicious ! Josephine, n’est ce pas délicieux ? I have the appetite of a canary ; I shan’t worry anyone. Just a bed and a peck. I had a cable from an old cousin this morning . . . a cousin in Cannes ; very lovely there lately, perhaps your husband’s letters tell you, Mrs. Whistler. I couldn’t go to an hotel. I hate them.”

“ I’ll make up a bed in a minute. You’d better have my room.”

“ I wouldn’t hear of it.”

“ It’s your house.”

“ Forget it,” implored the Marchesa graciously ; “ and where is the lovely child ? ”

Mrs. Whistler gave a little shrug—it was as if she dismissed Zuriel, the Marchesa and

the whole atmosphere to the realms beyond her understanding.

The old lady sat down and the maid removed her cloak and bonnet. It seemed to Mrs. Whistler that she assumed her old rôle of spectator ; she was settling herself, waiting for something to happen with more than a mere expectation.

“ Travelling fatigues me,” she mentioned.

She seemed to gather the room round her like a beloved cloak she had lent and was pleased to regain.

“ One’s home is one’s home.”

“ No one realises it more than I do,” said Poppy Whistler.

“ Ah ! ” said the Marchesa. “ But since we met you have scaled heights, leapt chasms. It’s a comedy I shall never forget.”

“ Nor I,” said Mrs. Whistler.

Bim too divined her air of a queen for whom a masquerade is being arranged.

“ You are back on business, Marchesa ? ” he said.

The old lady motioned the maid to hand her a bunch of papers she had placed on the top of the valise. She extracted a copy of the *Sketch* and opened it at two full-page photographs of Zuriel, her name beneath.

“Does not your maternal pride surge?” she queried of Mrs. Whistler.

“No,” she answered, “not at the moment.”

She looked at Bim and answered his question; he perceived her ancient eyes to be flickering with laughter. It gave him a queer and not wholly pleasant sensation . . . they were treacherous little will-o'-the-wisps; they would lead in such ways as should please her antique and fantastic fancy.

“I am here on pleasure, my dear young man,” she said. “Not business, pleasure.”

XVI

THE MARCHESA SLEEPS

OVER the restlessness of the actors brooded the quiescent watchfulness of the Marchesa. As they came and went nervily about their tasks the mental image of the old lady went with them, sitting beside the fire they lighted at her request, a figure fantastic and a little ominous.

She had announced her visit to be one of pleasure on the evening of her arrival, but she did not go abroad to seek pleasure. She appeared to derive it in hidden and mysterious ways from her vigil beside the fire. When they spoke to her she woke suddenly from her torpor, alert and expectant; then she would fall into shrivelled immobility again like one who garners strength.

Stella talked endlessly about her Ferris ; he left Mrs. Whistler the day after the Marchesa's arrival to make a little round of farewell visits before sailing for South Africa,

where Stella would subsequently join him. All day long Stella's uninspired exuberance sketched her future mixed with a just meed of gratitude to the old lady, and the old lady seemed to slumber in it like a child to her mother's hushing. Stella and her Ferris bored her, so did the lingerie Stella waved delightedly before her sunken eyes, her uninspired lingerie with its little bits of real lace and its cold English blue ribbon.

She addressed her happiness and her gratitude to the Marchesa in the faithful, happy, inconsequent way of a child and the Marchesa was as impersonal a recipient as Father Christmas.

Zuriel avoided her. She was candid about her reasons as usual.

"She naturally feels thanks and explanations are due to her. I have none to make yet."

"Probably the poor old lady feels hurt at the way you're avoiding her," her mother suggested. "She's got that picture of you in the *Sketch* fixed up in her room."

"I don't think it's prompted by affection," said Zuriel.

"If she were a broker's man, she couldn't make me feel more at sixes and sevens,"

said Mrs. Whistler, busy making the beef tea for the old lady.

“ I'll go and talk to her,” said Zuriel.

But she found the Marchesa as usual fast asleep ; she might have been dead, so lifeless was the crumpled brownness of her face, so flabby the down hanging of her jewelled talons.

Zuriel looked at her closely, then walked to the window and stood tapping noiselessly with her fingers on the glass.

The Marchesa opened her surprisingly bright eyes and grinned at her back, but when Zuriel directed a sharp glance at her before she left the room, she was still asleep, nor had she moved.

She went back to the kitchen and sat on the table swinging her legs.

“ She's asleep,” she said.

“ Then it's no good my putting this beef tea into a cup. Oh, dear ! I miss Ferris.”

“ Isn't the woman any good ? ”

“ She's all right, but she's strange ; keeps asking me where everything is.” She paused. “ I wish you'd find something to do, Zuriel, wandering round like a cat in a strange house. Why don't you go down to the

studio and see how they're getting on with that pink frock of yours ? ”

“ It only worries me ; it doesn't look as if it ever could be done in time, and Bim doesn't seem able to do anything unless he's got his old pipe to suck at, and it keeps going out. They've boxes and boxes of those pink beads to thread yet.”

“ And everyone costing fourpence. Zuriel, where *has* the money come from ? ”

“ Ann,” said Zuriel.

Mrs. Whistler balled her fat little hands together in the convulsive acrobatics of her imagination.

“ But Bim . . .” she staggered ; “ do you both simply accept it ? Doesn't he ask . . .”

“ She said she'd sold something.”

“ But my goodness . . .”

“ She isn't doing it for me, Mother. She's doing it for Bim and she loves doing it. She loves sitting and threading beads beside him ; she loves the stink of his old pipe. He's awfully quiet ; I've never known him so quiet.”

“ My goodness ! how can you let them both . . .”

Zuriel walked about the little white-tiled

kitchen in the sunlight, her voice was fretful.

“Don't lecture, Mother dear. I'm all on edge! I can't help it. The day after to-morrow it'll be all over, or all beginning. If it's all beginning, it'll be all right for Bim and Ann. They shall make my trousseau. . . . Help me through to-day and to-morrow, they seem so long—you can't think how long!”

“They couldn't seem longer to you than they do to me. I sat up last night and wrote to your father. Four pages of scribbling block and an indelible pencil. How I licked it! This morning when I looked in the glass my mouth was all purple. I thought I'd got something. It gave me a shock. Oh! but it has eased me! I've always thought a confession-box something you oughtn't to share, just like a bathing-box, but they have their uses. I told Henry everything, all in black and white.”

“My heavens! You haven't sent it?”

“No, but I like to think I will.”

Mrs. Whistler began to cry, the round tears rolled down her round cheeks into the yellow basin in which she was mixing scones.

“ I feel all cold. Not sleeping always did make me cold. Oh dear ! I shall be glad when the next two days are over. I shan't want to leave the bungalow this summer ; home's good enough for me. I'm not cut out for adventure ; never was, never shall be.”

Zuriel took the wooden spoon from her mother and stirred the mixture.

“ I should like to know why the Marchesa came to London,” her mother meandered on. “ I've got the idea she's waiting for something to happen and I can't shake it. I wonder what that woman is doing. I didn't tell her I was coming down here to make cakes. I left her doing Josephine's room. It's all very worrying, to say the least of it, and if I'd known what I was letting myself in for, I wouldn't have come, not if you'd begged me to on your bended knees. I asked that good-for-nothing to listen for the bell ; you can't always hear it in here, not that one at the side. You're covering yourself in flour. You'd better let me take it over and go out to the studio, that's where your thoughts are. Fancy ! the woman's got to go at twelve ; got her husband's dinner to prepare. It's a quarter to now.

Josephine can get the tea, she's off for the Marchesa this morning, goodness knows where! Was that the bell?"

Zuriel, wiping her little pointed fingers on the roller towel, paused.

"No," she said, "I didn't hear it."

But the Marchesa did. She heard the charwoman trundling downstairs. She heard her open the front door. A good thing her front door had no knocker. Double knocks sounded through the house so. . . .

As the charwoman passed she became aware of a little figure standing very erect at the door of the tiny ante-room.

The figure stayed her with a motion of its jewelled fingers.

"A telegram?" she said. She spoke back into the room. "Mrs. Whistler, a telegram."

"For Mrs. Whistler," said the charwoman.

The Marchesa took it in stick-like fingers and took it into the room.

The charwoman went upstairs again, but the little clock in the room upstairs was twenty minutes slow; when she descended and discovered the fact by the aid of the kitchen clock she was so deeply annoyed that the telegram vanished from her memory.

XVII

ANN DISPOSES

THE morning after the unexpected arrival of the Marchesa, Ann Charlton presented herself at the Central London office from which Isaacs directed his many suburban and provincial branches. It was the power-house of their bright activities.

She was shown up immediately.

Crisp, unshielded sunshine burnished a red-headed mannequin in a totally undistinguished jade frock which she distinguished enormously. Isaacs waved a hand towards the highly lacquered creature.

“I’ve a dress show on at Birmingham to-morrow,” he explained. “I’m sending down this model on this girl. I expect to sell thousands, only six guineas. The combination of Theda Bara and a chapel social style. Could any woman resist it? Every woman buys a frock off a mannequin because

there's 'a something' about it; she never knows the something was the mannequin till she's got it home, and then she's too vain to admit it. Turn round, Miss, and let us see the back. Every hook and eye welded on, Miss Charlton; the women of Birmingham bring their elderly friends with them and their elderly friends tweak and pull and feel while they talk—they'll get no change out of our firm."

He rose and jerked down the blinds unexpectedly and a soft, champagne light filled the sumptuous room.

"You wanted to see the Milady matinée jacket," said the gorgeous mannequin in a careful voice.

Isaacs waved her away.

"Not now, thank you, and don't let me be disturbed till I ring." He explained to Ann animatedly, "The Milady matinée jacket! There's a mint in the name. Pale blue or rose pink, government silk dyed; I bought three miles of it—not three yards, three miles—faggoted on lace, fifteen shillings each. It'll be bought all over England by women who'll never wear it. There's magic in the very name, there's romance in it. There ain't many overworked women

in the middle years who don't dream of a little short, sharp, dangerous illness without pain and spots . . . an illness that shall bring back the family's love and interest—a romantic rest. There aren't many women who can't afford to furnish a dream, if it's only fifteen shillings. 'Milady!' . . . it suggests manicures, fires in bedrooms, flowers, trim parlourmaids showing in kind-faced visitors . . . all the things they know they can never really have, so they buy it."

"Deluding them."

"Bringing them nearer to their heart's desire," said the Jew. He sat down and the soft glow seemed to lap round them both. "Well, Ann Charlton," he said, "you never worried a busy man in the morning for nothing."

"Do you still want me in your business?"

"What's gone wrong?" said Isaacs.

"Bim wants money," said Ann Charlton in a quiet, unconcerned voice. "There isn't a penny in the coffers."

"*Bim* wants money. I didn't know he knew there was such a thing! It's marvellous how that lad's coming on. What's he want it for?"

"Zuriel Whistler."

Isaacs bent forward ; the pale light, banishing his shallowness, gave strength and dignity to his rather roughly hewn features, his lips were thrust out making runnels of shadow on either side of his big nose.

“ Ann Charlton,” he challenged, “ haven’t you any pride ? ”

“ I don’t think so,” said Ann, her hands, her pretty mouth, her voice—all were steady, steady as a rock. “ I’ve thought things out carefully,” she said. “ I never talk much. When you ask me if I haven’t any pride, what you really mean is that I ought to conform to recognised standards of egotism. It is more comfortable, I suppose. You see what I haven’t quite explained is that it isn’t for Zuriel I want the dress. Yes, I think my egotism would step in there. It’s for Bim I’m doing this thing. I don’t quite understand him these days, but I know he isn’t happy. You’re not superstitious, Mr. Isaacs ? ”

“ Superstition is fear ”—Isaacs’s voice was extremely robust and bracing. “ I am not afraid of anything or anybody.”

“ That’s nice,” said Ann ; her swift little smile glimmered at him. “ Bim is suddenly nonplussed by the past and doubtful of the future. He’s conceived the queer idea

that the making of this dress is an augury for the future, the commencement of something new. I don't say it, but I think that if he is prevented from making it he'll consider it an opportunity lost."

"If you married him, do you think you could keep his nose to the grindstone?"

"I would disguise the grindstone," said Ann. "That's all the cleverest woman can do. I haven't told you everything. There will be a lot of the five hundred left after the dress is made. . . . I thought that would start Bim somewhere better than where we are. . . ."

"Hell!" exploded Isaacs. "Where do *you* come in?"

"In the evenings as a friend to sit and talk things over," said Ann; "that's all I've ever been. It pleases me to do this thing. Bim has reached a stage in his career where he wants impetus, he wants jumping-off ground, and I think the making of this dress will provide it. I can't explain to you, because you're trying not to understand, and I feel that all the time. For Bim Redgold the making of this frock has spiritual significance. You may roar with laughter. He believes that his future rests on it . . . well,

that very belief has placed his future there. I want to do this thing!" said Ann Charlton, her hands suddenly clasped. "Perhaps it is a beginning for me, too. We're utterly broke; we've no stock, we owe the rent of our little shop. I owe the milkman and the baker. I want to give Bim his chance. Oh! he is worth it."

"I don't see him your way," said the Jew; "he's a charming fellow and damn clever. He wants organising. All cleverness wants organising. Anything that runs wild runs to seed—has since the old garden of Eden." He looked at Ann. "My!" he said, "good women are uncomfortable things to have about."

"I wasn't brought up to think doing what you want to was goodness," said Ann. "I want to do this thing more than I want to do anything in my life. It'll make Bim happy, it'll make him content. It will please him to serve beauty."

"Is he in love with Zuriel Whistler?"

"It doesn't go beyond her face," said Ann. "That's why he keeps before her face and never looks behind."

"Three years is a long time to tie yourself up for, Ann Charlton."

“ It will seem shorter because I did it for him.”

“ If I had you and Redgold doing team work I'd open in Bond Street under another name. I wouldn't curb you—I'd give you a run for my money, just to see. I believe in you, but I believe in Redgold if he's pruned and organised a bit. He's wonderful when he doesn't run amuck. Of course he'd hate the discipline of an organised business, but it would be the making of him. I'd have his name known in Paris under three years. There's enough snob in me to relish an artistic success.”

“ Bim would hate it.”

“ I dunno,” said Isaacs. “ There's peace in discipline . . . there's a clean feeling like some folks get out of religion, a feeling of being spruced up and polished ; fellows in the army found that. You don't know liberty till you've lost it. I could make Redgold if he'd knuckle under.” He paused and frowned at Ann. “ Have you thought this thing over ? ” he demanded.

“ Yes.”

“ Quietly ? ”

“ Very quietly.”

“ You're sure ? ”

"I'm quite sure."

"Three years is a long time."

"I've reckoned it out."

He tapped his pen on his blotter.

"You women are so emotional."

"I never was less so," said Ann.

"The whole thing is a funny business."

"It must seem so to you."

"I deal in material things."

"They seem so to you," repeated Ann.

There was a knock at the door.

"Lady Timothy's secretary, Sir. She must see you and she can't wait." His secretary, bland, efficient, looked at Ann in her shabby coat and skirt. "She's in my room. You said you didn't wish to be disturbed."

Isaacs rose.

"I leave you, Ann Charlton," he said. "Now think it over. Three years is a long time. This Pink Dance has given me more trouble than the opening of a dozen new branches."

He left Ann in the room limpid with champagne light, apparently thinking.

She was there when he came back, quiet, impassive.

"Thought?"

“ I didn’t need to.”

“ You know,” he said, “ you ought to come to this affair of mine. It’ll be stupendous. We’re going to send up five hundred rockets at ten o’clock, the air will be thick with pink stars. Oh ! it’ll be quite stupendous. You ought to come, Ann.”

“ I’ll think of you,” said Ann.

“ I’m only giving one prize—a pink pearl and platinum ring. It doesn’t look pink to me, but that’s its nomenclature. I never could see anything in pearls myself.”

“ Zuriel Whistler’s dress will win it,” said Ann confidently.

“ It’ll be cute advertising for Bim if it does.”

“ You *see*,” said Ann, “ even you see that it may be the beginning.”

“ If I could put ‘ Designer of the prize-winning dress at the Pink Dance just signed a three years’ contract with . . . ’ Advertising can’t be too blatant, my dear girl.” He paused. “ Have you ever read about those revels at Versailles ? This’ll knock spots off ’em, spots off ’em. People don’t remember when Lady What-you-may-call gave her select dance for the Prince of Wales, but by Jove ! people remember those freak dinners

American millionaires gave before the war. Did you tell me the old Italian who lent the Whistlers her house has turned up again ? ”

“ Yes,” said Ann.

“ I wonder why. I’ll bet there’s an idea at the back of it. I’ll bet there is. My heavens, where’s everybody this morning ? That thing ought to have been ready moons ago.”

“ What thing ? ”

“ Your contract, my dear,” said Isaacs.

“ I’ll sign it now,” said Ann.

He put his hand on her shoulder, pressing a little, peering with his brilliant, kindly eyes.

“ What’s at the back of this really, Ann Charlton ? ”

“ Love, I suppose. We can’t both go on ; mental freedom and individuality have become mere shibboleths, one of us must knuckle under, or both of us. Life isn’t possible without money. That’s the stark truth. I’ve always known it. Don’t think I shall feel uplifted and resigned every day all through those three years. I shan’t. I shall have my days of peevish revolt at lack of freedom. I’ve had my dreams too.

They seemed so small and undemanding that I used to think they must come true because of their very littleness when all around I heard people asking and expecting and demanding such an awful lot of life. Bim can achieve all the things I've wanted to achieve for myself. I expect there's selfishness at the back of it all really. In my mind Bim Redgold is my man. There's the kernel of it all. No one knows it, he least of all, but women live in their minds and so my mind is peaceful and happy doing this thing, gratified and warmed because it is the recognition of a secret relationship that I alone have created. It pleases me that I should make it possible for him to make this dress because his heart is set on it. It is all feeding the hunger that I know can never be satisfied. I can't explain what he means to me. He is so joyous, so unbelieving of the prosaic side of life. He delights me and he always gives you the feeling in his star-chasing that he may pull one down yet and alter life for you. I suppose it is that, with all his fantastic notions, his rather selfish refusal to grow up; he understands why women are sad and why they are glad; he understands the little things that move them

deeply. Always, always he sees the other person's point of view. It makes people say he's unstable. He can always see what the other man thinks." She paused. "You won't tell Bim I've signed this contract, not till after the Pink Dance. I want it to be unalloyed pleasure."

"Not if you don't wish. Probably I shan't see him. The beastly thing eats away my hours."

"I have your word?"

"Certainly."

The secretary came in with the contract and withdrew after an incurious stare at Ann, who reached for a pen.

"Oh, no," said Isaacs; he took it from her fingers and put it back.

"I am going to read it to you first, Ann Charlton, and, because you are a woman, I am going to read it twice."

XVIII

AN IMPERSONAL SUBJECT

THEY lunched at the Savoy; they had a table which overlooked the Thames. As the meal progressed the prettiest eating-room in London became a mere curtain against which their glances lingered, flickered and crossed with increasing frankness, and the groups of other lunchers became unconsciously the crowd which London can always provide to produce privacy for lovers.

His twinkling, tawny little camel's eyes, heavy-lidded, appreciated the brightness of the burnished day.

“I say, you know,” he said, “it's very jolly being here with you and all that. A sunny summer morning in London always makes me feel bucked and romantic. I once told a fellow that out in Newfoundland. We'd just smashed the gramophone; you get like that, and we were both really con-

trite ; you get like that too. I've never seen anyone so shocked. He thought it was indecent, like feeling suddenly religious in a Turkish bath. Queer fellow, all his thoughts nicely hemmed and all that. I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't come. Home's terrible and Isaacs is lunching there. Quite a good fellow, Isaacs, a little too well tailored, but it's his only fault. Mater's only consolation was that it was summer and that otherwise they might have forgotten and had pork. I said, 'when in doubt serve with onion sauce,' and got fearfully snubbed. I'm looking forward to Isaacs's affair to-night. I always do look forward to things. I'm looking forward to this more than anything in my life."

"It will be fun."

"I feel you're snubbing me, Zuriel," said Nicholas, "but my natural vanity won't let me acknowledge it." They laughed together. "You know you're jolly, that's what's so awfully nice. Jolliness—that's what makes the world go round, jolliness and common sense. I should say you're absolutely packed with both."

"Oh, I don't know," said Zuriel.

"You must have it in the wilds, laughter

tons of laughter, quinine and a body belt, and you can treat a tarantula as a joke or a jaguar or any old thing. I hate fellows who get broody."

"Tell me," said Zuriel, "about some of the places you've been to, some of the things you've done."

He told her in his lazy, pleasant voice till her eyes glistened and her charming lips parted. He swept her enchanted down strange rivers and through stranger paths. His words were careless, commonplace; he created atmosphere by prosaic enumeration of the articles that went to make it. It was her imagination that lent them colour, shape, scent, that indefinable something that is the heart of romance.

"To live a life like that!" she said.

He said inconsequently, "I wonder if you know what you look like, sitting there glowing at me. I should like to paint you."

"Do you?"

"Oh! dabble, you know, but it keeps you from going batty. I like sunsets . . . you race 'em and slosh 'em on; there was a perfect sport once at Delhi . . . I used to try and catch it every night; there I was, splashing away like a baby in its bath, every

pore doing its duty, and before I caught it by its edge it would have popped into yesterday. I never once."

She said in a very still voice :

"And to-morrow night you'll be off again?"

"Yes, I go at midnight. I wish I were not going. I've never wished that before. It won't be for long—three months, but twelve months hasn't seemed long before."

"You'll have fun."

"I don't know," said Nicholas Timothy.

After lunch he took her into the sunshine ; they walked beside the river, everything sparkled ; men, like little flies, crawled over the impassive face of Big Ben, where they had crawled was white ; they walked through the little gardens where people on seats munched sandwiches and bananas and stared at sooty little roses and the velvet bravery of primulas, and dropped their sandwich-paper and banana-peel obediently into little boxes as if it were an act of grace.

"Let's go where there are hats," he said. "Spring isn't over yet. Spring means something different to everyone. To me spring in London means hats—hats in shops, hats on women's heads, rows of dead

hats waiting to be bought, rows of hats bobbing on women's heads. Do you get what I mean, Zuriel? You don't think I'm funny? Something is symbolic of spring to us all. For me it isn't hills or birds, or young leaves when I'm in London. . . . It's hats and the hat look in women's eyes. I'd love to wear a new toque in May. I wish men did."

Zuriel laughed, but she understood completely; they were alike in their zestful hunt for emotions and impressions; they were unepicurean.

"Let's go down Oxford Street and Regent Street," she said.

"Walk?"

"Why not?"

"It's such tremendous fun being with you."

"Is it?" said Zuriel.

A feeling of gaiety possessed them both, a consciousness of having suddenly become heritors of something vague but splendid, their youth surged deliciously in them, they laughed at nothing and it became something . . . something that stretched softly and shiningly between them.

He said, "I suppose it's effeminate liking

good clothes and pleasant things and all that. I suppose it's all a question of income ; to some people a daily bath is a sinful luxury."

"It's more a question of geysers," Zuriel laughed.

They walked down the Strand, everywhere were men with the dull little-income look lifted momentarily from their faces by the joyous dazzle of the day. The women outside Charing Cross Station sold country roses with the recent sousings in the water bucket clinging like dew to their ingenuous pink faces. It was a will-o'-the-wisp day of stirring hopes, a day when men bought Zane Grey and yet older men pulled Kipling from their shelves, a day when in thousands of suburban homes women held hopeful inquests on last year's clothes and tasted in the nuptial evening door-mat kiss an ancient flavour that could never revive.

"Everything feels so safe and sure and sane to-day," Nicholas told her. "And yet it isn't, it never has been, and we should hate it if it was . . . that's droll, isn't it? I don't feel at all a carnal and cloddish brute to-day, you know, but of course I am, only I'm enjoying it all so tremendously. I feel spiritual, positively spiritual. I feel we ought

to be able to walk along seeing ourselves think, not needing the dull conveyance of words. I'm full of uplift, you've got yourself to blame."

"Why?"

Nicholas Timothy shot a twinkling look at her, his tawny little eyes were gentle.

"Because you are adorable and utterly beautiful. I should like to go on, Zuriel, but the Strand isn't the place, and people keep bumping into us. To-night is the time and the hour. If you are going to marry me and my luck's in, I may be the last proposal you'll have and you should enjoy it. I'd like you to enjoy it, I should really. I love you terribly this morning, but I love you with a jolly old sunlight love; it's too jolly to be romantic. At the moment I can only tell you I love you, but to-night I will tell you how I love you and why I love you . . . it's all kneading itself inside me. Zuriel, you are going to want to hear?"

"Yes," said Zuriel. She knew that her voice shook, felt something else in her heart shake too, something surprisingly new and frail, but perfect like a just opened harebell.

"I think," said Nicholas a little unsteadily, "we could get a lot out of life and

I should adore to look at you always. That seems to me a fine thing to say to a woman and I say it with all my heart, my dear."

They were crossing Trafalgar Square. Zuriel turned suddenly and looked at him.

"I wanted you to ask me to marry you," she said, and had a feeling of tearing off something cheap and a little soiled that had spoilt her own effect for herself.

"I'm glad about that," said Nicholas.

"I tried to make you."

"I think I like that," he assured her.

"Yes, I'm quite *sure* I like it. It pleases me enormously."

"I wanted to live the life you live," said Zuriel. "To do the things you do, see the things and people you see. I want you to know these things, Nicholas."

He spoke slowly and reflectively, holding his trim, attractive figure upright.

"That all seems good to me, Zuriel; it seems to promise things, that's how I see it. It's better than blind passion. It's constructive. You see marriage as a vista, not a culmination. Nothing that culminates continues to live. I'm rather a believer in starting human relationships from the head.

I don't know that I'm expressing myself awfully well, but perhaps you get the gist."

"Why is one trained to think it is almost perverted to love with common sense?" said Zuriel.

"I dunno," said Nicholas, "but it is so." He grinned at her that queer, twisted, twinkling smile. "You're awfully impersonal for a woman," he complimented her. "That's another thing that's so splendid about you. Women make everything personal. That's what makes them so impossible in wars and politics . . . of course war and politics are personal—frightfully, shockingly personal—but the only way to give them the dignity necessary for their continuance is to maintain the magnificent semblance of aloof impersonality. Women will uncover their ravening self-interest. It simply won't do. It's one of the most solid pillars of hypocrisy on which civilisation has rested, the ancient fallacy that man can be impersonal in deciding politics and destinies," he chuckled. "And behold she walked abroad with *Hansard* and found him a dull dog. You are magnificent. Even though you know I love you, I can break away from you as a subject, even as a thought, and find no

puzzled reproach in your eyes. I even believe you'll let me read the papers at breakfast. I once knew a woman who did that. I decided I'd leave her my money when I died, but she died first . . . I'm not surprised."

In every window colour blazed in the limpid sunshine, exhilarating, alluring, subtle in its massed appeal to the senses, its individual, ticketed appeal to the purse.

"I don't think you quite understand what I am trying to tell you. I found life at home deadly. I tried to catch you."

"I'm so glad you did, you know. I've never met anyone I'd sooner fall to, it's a positive pleasure." He stopped in front of Liberty's window; "a poem spread for the unheeding," he called it and challenged her to heed.

"You don't mind?" Zuriel was puzzled. "It doesn't cheapen me?"

"Every woman catches every man . . . everything helps her, including her Creator. Is it astonishing that she wins? I'll be unconventional enough to say I always expected some woman would catch me, and I know you did . . . does that satisfy your passion for truth?"

"Yes," said Zuriel.

"I wonder," he mused, "what your father will say. I wonder what that Redgold chap will say. He's in love with you, you know."

"Not in that way. He's in love with something he can't have, and knows isn't really there."

"I shall have to advertise for a psychoanalyst."

"They'd find Bim awfully easy," said Zuriel. "In some things he's never grown up. He can't face realities and so he dresses them up. It isn't the mother-fixtured. I don't know quite what it is. He creates his own world because he finds discomfort in the actual world. There's only one person who'd suit him."

"Yes."

"Ann Charlton. He could let her rooms in his world, but she'd always be able to dart out in time to take the kettle off and get the rent money."

"By Jove! that's clever."

"She loves him so much she could believe anything she knew wasn't true."

"But he doesn't love Ann?"

"He doesn't know she's there. I fitted in

with his mental furnishing better, my dear boy ; I have the outfit physically and he made me over completely where I didn't fit in : my selfishness, my egotism, my utter materialism. He wants mental protection and Ann would rejoice to give it to him. It would be a passionate pleasure to her, and she could gambol in her free hours in his world. She'd be able to do that."

" I shouldn't have called Redgold a weak chap. I mean he's got lots of pep. I thought him frightfully amusing and original and all that, fascinating in fact—those fellows who go tilting at windmills always are ; it's so difficult to do it with an air these days. I mean it was all right to strike an attitude when fellows wore real lace frills round the bottom of their short plush pants."

" How absurd you are ! "

" Yes," said Nicholas. " Isn't it splendid ? "

" I'm afraid your mother will be awfully disappointed," said Zuriel.

" Of course she will," Nicky agreed cheerfully. " Mothers always are. If you touch the Mater correctly on the conventions you can do anything with her ; all her feelings are standard middle-class pattern, but her heart's all gold, bless her ! What would you

like me to tell her—that you're a pure, sweet girl, or a big-hearted, simple child?"

"Am I either?"

"I don't know, but she'll expect me to say one or the other, and she can't bear to be disappointed in the conventions. That's where the Pater annoys her."

"Tell her that I'll make you a good wife."

"She'd never forgive me. That's what she'll expect you to tell her." He smiled. "I laugh at the old Mater, but I think the devil of a lot of her really. She's been fine. You ask her advice, she'll love that. I failed her there. I've never been able to screw myself up to doing it because I always knew just exactly what it would be."

"And your father?"

"Pater loves you now because you're like little Lily."

"Your baby sister who died. Did you love her?"

"No, I rather resented her. Of course I never remember her. For years after she died she used to mess up the Christmas dinner and spoil parties by not being there. I hated little Lily when I was small. I always think second-hand sentimentalism is

so hard on children, really cruel. Of course now I see things. Parents would be awfully sick if they realised how long it took their children to begin to see things they always thought they understood instinctively. Shall you write and tell your Pater ? ”

“ He'll be home from Cannes . . . probably the day after to-morrow ; there won't be any need.”

“ That's splendid ! I want to meet him. You're like your mother in a way.”

“ Father's thin,” twinkled Zuriel.

“ I like your mother. She's so real.”

“ I could so easily have been the sort of daughter she wanted,” said Zuriel. “ The chances of my being born that sort were nearly ninety per cent in her favour. . . . I think it is a shame. Now I shall go abroad with you.”

“ People only hire their children, they never buy them,” said Nicky.

They wandered into the Park : fenced-off flowers and fenced-off sward, people fenced off by the fact that they sat on seats and ate bananas openly, other people fenced off by the fact that they rode in limousines, children fenced off in their prams, children fenced off in their rags . . . everyone fenced off . . .

segregated like eggs in an egg-box by the process of their upbringing and their secret mentality. Only the brief flashing play of the butterflies in the sunshine and the sequined glitter of the flies seemed free, but to the two who strolled the world was momentarily a carpet for their feet, a carnival for their seeing.

“ I feel I stand on the edge of things,” said Nicholas. “ It’s an adorable feeling. I want to propose most horribly, Zuriel. Had you made up your mind I should do it to-night ? ”

“ Yes,” said Zuriel.

“ That is a nuisance,” complained Nicholas with shining, laughing eyes. “ Of course you’ve grown accustomed to the idea of my proposing to you, because you knew I would ; but it’s all a novelty to me. Last night I saw you in a certain dress . . . your hair was down. That dress . . . ” He paused and stared intently at a child in blue tossing a blue balloon ; up it went, up went his thoughtful eyes. “ I was afraid in my dream,” he said, “ very afraid. It was awfully funny. Then I saw by your eyes that you expected me to come, that you had been expecting me quite a long time and my

fears died like those of a child at the sight of its mother. Awfully weird ; but you get the idea ? I knew where I'd seen the dress. I went with Mater to see her frock for to-night and Madame Zaviers had made it to the design of a girl who died of 'flu. She never even saw it. Pity. She showed it to us. Queer how your mind connects things, awfully queer. I say, are you getting tired ? Oughtn't you to lie down ? ” He blinked at the children playing or walking sedately with their nurses. “ I like children,” he said. “ They're such hopeful, jolly little beggars and there's something ghastly about a Christmas without kids and it's a toss up borrowing them . . . it really is. I once borrowed some piccaninnies in Guatemala ; they oiled themselves with the candles and then ate 'em off the Christmas-tree. Of course Christmas only comes once a year, but it always seems to be popping up somehow. I like children going to bed, too. They look so rosy and tired and clean. Of course there'd be days when I wouldn't want to see mine ; all real fathers have lots of days like that, but I'd always like to prop the door open and secretly watch them pass on their way to bed . . . a sort of jolly Gladys Peto

frieze one had managed oneself." He laughed.

"I like nice children," said Zuriel, "and I *hate* them in cheap boots."

"I couldn't bear it if I couldn't fit them up properly," agreed Nicholas promptly. "I'm *all* with you there. There's a sense of responsibility comes with years. I suppose it's good citizenship really. I'm broad-minded and all that. I mean if people choose to live together and all that sort of thing, well, I hope they'll have it fine. Lots of fellows try to impress one with their irregularities. I always say, 'Oh! are you? Well, I hope it'll be fine.' I do hope it'll be fine for them—I mean, I haven't any ideas beyond that; awfully slack morally, I know, but I do think one has a duty to kids. One owes such a lot to anyone you've simply made to do an irreparable thing like getting born. It must be a most curious feeling being a father. I don't believe in behaving like the silly devils in the patent food advertisements . . . going all to bits and being emotional just when everybody wants bucking up. I should go and increase my insurance premium or something real. I feel sure you'd understand."

“ I feel sure I should,” said Zuriel.

“ You’re so jolly full of common sense,” said Nicholas. “ So jolly full of it.” He paused. “ I’ve got a bit of a surprise for you at home.”

“ Really ! ” said Zuriel.

They looked at each other.

Nicholas looked away.

“ Another minute of that,” he murmured a little breathlessly, “ and I should have proposed before to-night.”

XIX

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

THE big insurance building opposite poured a river of girls into the late afternoon sunshine. It was as if some large, unseen hand pushed them and sent them scurrying and laughing down the stairs.

Isaacs watched them from his window as he watched them every night. He saw them neither as girls nor types; he saw them merely as a crowd of clients for whose imagination he strove to find the right diet. He surveyed their neat feet and reflected with wonder that in the lean years the retail boot business was the only one with a healthy array of figures.

Over his shoulder Bim Redgold watched them too for a minute before he observed politely that it was a pleasant evening and a lovely night for the Pink Dance.

“I thought you would be down there,” he added.

“ I’ve nothing to alter and everything to fuss about,” said the Jew, “ so I thought I’d stay here. Didn’t expect to see you either, exactly. Sit down.”

“ I’ve come about Ann Charlton,” said Bim, and sat wrinkling his forehead and blinking.

“ The hell you have ! ” said Isaacs.

“ Funny,” said Bim slowly, “ how you go on being a fool and then suddenly see things.”

“ You or me ? ” said Isaacs truculently.

“ Oh, me,” said Bim. “ It doesn’t seem the time to come to you . . . not from your point of view, but it does from mine. I couldn’t go on sitting beside Ann and not come.”

“ I suppose Ann told you ? ” said Isaacs.

“ I want Ann to have her chance.”

“ She’ll have it. Ann’s no lop-eared Lizzie from an Art School.” He was getting peeved with this brilliant-eyed young man who stared and did not listen. Soon he would be angry. He felt resentment against Ann, too ; she had asked him not to tell this clever fool about her contract and then told him herself. So like a woman !

“ If you still want me in the firm I’ll come,”

said Bim. "I'll sign the three years' contract. I want to start Ann in a place of her own. She's worth it. She's never had a chance mugging along with me. It's taken me years to see that. I want that five hundred pounds to give Ann Charlton the chance she deserves. I wouldn't design her models. I understand no contract would permit that, but the five hundred would buy a short lease in a decent shop."

"Why?" fired Isaacs.

"Do you always know why you do things?"

"Ever since I've been born."

"I think you're lucky," said Redgold non-committally. "It must simplify things so."

"Ann know of this?"

"No, and she mustn't till it's all settled and I've got the five hundred to give her."

Isaacs thought rapidly; his racing mental comments on the situation flickered in his brilliant brown eyes. Ann had not told him then? Isaacs had difficulty in handling a situation only partially defined. He had wanted Bim Redgold's co-operation for years. He felt his way blandly and delicately.

“ All this is rather unexpected, Redgold. How did you find your way up to begin with? The lift girl didn't bring me your name.”

“ I walked past her. The outer office was empty; your secretary had gone. Your name is on the door, you know. It was awfully simple.”

“ Apparently. How do I know you won't change your mind to-morrow? ”

“ You don't know,” Bim agreed, “ but *I* do.”

Isaacs stared at him heavily, queerly puzzled. The young man was betraying characteristics alien to his type; his speech, his outlook had suddenly solidified and crisped.

“ You'll hate it.”

“ I can't hate it more than I think I will and that hasn't stopped my coming to you. I can't see that that concerns you. I offer you my services for three years, and I shall do my best to give you every satisfaction. That is surely all that concerns you. I am not trying to be rude. It is merely that I have suddenly come into possession of a starting-point. I've never owned one before. I offer you myself at that starting-point,

knowing I shall be competent to advance from it."

"What is the starting-point?" said Isaacs in unguarded curiosity.

"I haven't examined it yet," fenced Redgold coolly. "It is so pleasant just to possess it. I designed this blouse in the tube coming along. I think it's rather neat."

Isaacs took it. After a minute he said quietly, "It is extremely neat. May I keep it?"

"Certainly," said Bim. He invited permission by the lift of an eyebrow and lit a cigarette. "One can't achieve anything without discipline," he said. "Usually one pays for discipline, but you are going to pay me for a discipline I should have received years ago. Do you think," his pleasant eyes twinkled, "it'll make a little man of me?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Isaacs. "Men don't do things for abstract reasons, Redgold. You didn't come to me for discipline."

"Perhaps you're right," agreed Redgold.

Isaacs rose and paced the room. They had closed the doors of the big insurance

office opposite. He was troubled by a question of business morality. Should he tell Redgold of Ann Charlton's visit and the contract she had signed with him? He wanted Redgold, he had wanted him ever since he had first seen and appreciated his work. He saw Redgold as the pinnacle long desired, almost despaired of. His business career crowned with it, how far might he not venture and how successfully? He realised with a start how resolutely he had put this possibility from his mind and so gauged the strength of his desire for it to happen. Here was Redgold under his hand for the tethering.

"I don't know what to do," Isaacs observed truthfully.

"It is I who am doing it," Redgold replied casually.

"It's a bigger thing than you think."

"I hope it is."

"You've had years to do big things."

"And I haven't done them. I've come to you not as a way out, but as a way in. I shall have my spare hours to paint and model in. It may be the making of me. I haven't made myself. There's Ann. I want Ann to have her chance. She's only had my rotten second-hand dreams to live on. I've sacri-

ficed her to them. That shop . . . it wasn't any good ; all child's play."

" Absolutely," acquiesced Isaacs heartily.

" The dress Zuriel Whistler is wearing to your dance to-night, Isaacs—Ann Charlton paid for it, because I wanted to make it. It'll take the first prize . . ."

" What an ad' !" Isaacs was suddenly virile, eager, grinning, but Redgold brushed it aside, unheeding.

" Chores," said Redgold. " Ann says that's the way to peace and salvation . . . hard chores. I've never done 'em ; I'm going to start in now. Sitting beside Ann threading those beads in the studio. . . . I've seen more of Ann these last few days than I've seen in my life. I didn't know Ann. No one knows Ann . . . and Zuriel fluttering in and out with her thoughts inblown and utterly personal, and Mrs. Whistler with her tears and her Henry, and Stella with her Ferris and her letters . . . and the Marchesa sitting and watching for something amusing to happen . . . all busy planning and perfecting their own little patches . . . and Ann outside it all . . . above it all, living for other people, not *in* other people, that's easy ; but for them and yet bravely carrying

on a quiet, grave, dignified inner life of her own. Everybody chucking temperament about and Ann carrying hers shyly, shielded, brilliant. Ann is modest. When people come to her, she is there, hands eager and busy on their behalf, cool brain, resource . . . and because she does not blow her candles in the wind they do not know her shrine."

"Ann," said Isaacs, drawing him sharply back to earth, "is a cute girl."

"What Ann is," pronounced Redgold, "no one has yet found out."

Isaacs looked at him and marvelled that a man could walk so rapidly in one direction and yet be blind to the way he went. He walked towards Ann, yet he could not see that she was there waiting for him and had been from the first, or even that he went that way. He saw the artistic temperament as an outfit made for the obscuring of plain issues and was irritated accordingly. Dealing with men of Redgold's type gave him a feeling of inadequacy, like a metal worker suddenly called upon to handle blown glass. The method was the same, but required a totally unnatural and unpractised delicacy of touch.

“Ann doesn’t enter into this,” he mentioned.

“She’s at the back of it,” said Redgold, worried. “Lord knows where she got the money for Zuriel Whistler’s dress. She’s at the end of things. The shop is gone phut. I let her do it. . . . Ever since I’ve known Ann I’ve been letting her do things for us . . . watching her do things for other people and never recognising it . . . that’s what’s so ghastly. Sitting beside her working on Zuriel’s dress . . . I suddenly saw her. If you can imagine sitting beside a very beautiful person in a train on a journey you’ve never been before and only noticing the scenery, and then just as the beautiful person gets out realising what you’ve missed.”

“Does Ann get out?”

“Yes,” said Redgold. “Ann gets out because I come to you and we shan’t work together any more. We shan’t see each other very much either. I am going to give up the studio. Everything has made it easy for me to play. I’m not going to play any more. I’m going to pay my way. I’m going to take a studio where I shall be responsible for the rent.”

“Be quiet,” said the Jew. “I must think things out.”

He saw things bluntly without scent, colour or romance. His summing was crude and kindly. Ann Charlton wanted Redgold and knew it. Redgold wanted Ann and did not know it. Unknown to each other they were prepared to sacrifice themselves for each other. The discovery of that would be a great light in the darkness that obscured for Redgold at least their vital need of each other. It was a piquant situation. He stole a look at Redgold and went on with his silent inventory. He was pulling strings . . . he felt suddenly as titanic as fate, mellow with gratification. He could take them both and give them to each other. Through their commercial fealty to him they would discover their sentimental fealty to each other. It was a splendid, intriguing, beguiling idea. Would Ann tell Redgold first, or Redgold Ann? He speculated, twinkling. Queer how one was born with a taste for self-sacrifice . . . queer. . . . He'd never noticed it himself . . . but all these blown-glass people with crinkled temperaments, they had it.

His voice sounded unctuous benison.

“ I’ll rough out the contract. There’s a three-year one in my desk. I’ll skim it over.”

He smiled as he reached for Ann Charlton’s contract.

XX

THE GREAT PINK DANCE

THE pink of the first rose, the pink of the latest bonbon, a pink pierrette, a blush rose, a powder-puff, a flamingo with the dainty legs of a chorus girl, thousands of pink lights everywhere . . . rosy, intimate, warm, cheering, beguiling . . . a corner of the world playing madly in a permanent sunset, the fantastic consciousness of having transfixed for a moment an hour that has been transitory and fleeting since the very beginning of the world. . . . Sometimes a vivid pink lime sweeping across the carnival and then vanishing as if it were a glowing ribbon snatched up again into the star-spangled romantic heavens, such was the delicious magic, the novelty of Isaacs's Pink Dance. . . . Sometimes the ribbon of lime-light trailed across the river, stung to life hundreds of close-packed punts and skiffs, flashed in hundreds of eager watching eyes

and yet more eyes in the dark, thick fringe of people on the opposite bank ; but when the light dropped these unheeded spectators into darkness that was the deeper for its sudden advent they ceased to exist for the rosy dancers in their rosy setting. Even for those with memories packed with Victory Balls and Three Art Balls this was something new ; even those whose life was a search devoted to novelty and new settings surrendered to this new fairyland, permitted this hour to close round them, to shut out yesterday and efface to-morrow.

Isaacs walked among the crowd and smiled. He was the Pied Piper of Hamelin in rose du Barri tights and doublet and a little pointed, scolloped cap. Twelve plush mice hung by their tails from his waistbelt. He carried his little silver flute. To those of the dancers he knew he nodded and said, " It goes. My word, it goes ! " and glided on in his long pink, pointed slippers.

High up in the trees, so high that magic hands must surely have placed them there, glinted little pink fairy lamps like fallen stars. Low on the earth like jewelled glow-worms glinted the little pink lamps. They festooned on the rose bushes like luminous fruit.

The imagination of Isaacs the Jew had made a fairy tale come true.

Nicholas Timothy said to Zuriel, "That sunset that ran away from me at Delhi . . . it's here to-night for you to walk on and play on. Isaacs put the wind up it, he had it surveyed and pinned down and fitted into his grounds just like oilcloth, before it had time to blink a sunbeam. Clever fellow, he caught it just as it slid into yesterday. Can't you feel there's no time here . . . it isn't to-day and it isn't yesterday . . . it's sunset time . . . it's any time . . . it's our time. Oh! I love you for wearing this dress! I love you for wearing this! All the way down I was coming towards you . . . for a lifetime of miles I have been coming towards you . . . (a car's the thing to take you into magic) and now I am parched and hungry and heartsore with my travelling. What are you going to do about it?"

"Oh! Nicky, you are silly!"

"I don't know what I am . . . but oh! I like it!"

Laughter in the trees among the pink lights, sighing in the trees below the pink lights, kisses blown by the little breeze back into yesterday, promises blown by the little

breeze into to-morrow ; everything transient, nothing real. Lady Terence Timothy, magnificent in hooped skirt and powdered wig with patches on her fat cheeks, sweeping along beside the Pied Piper of Hamelin and saying, " You have surpassed yourself," over and over again—and the best band in London playing in their pink gnome suits and sometimes glancing up as if they sought a sign from the fantastic figure with the plush mice tied to his waistbelt—and at a given moment they would cease their jazz and he would raise his little pipe and they would all dance . . . fat Lady Timothy, pierrot and pierrette, out into the darkness of the forgotten world.

" I've got pink fairies going round among the crowd outside . . ." said Isaacs ; " that ought to bring in something. Two will do the boats and two the banks. Half Bray and Cookham and Marlow and Bourne End are outside."

" You are wonderful," said Lady Timothy devoutly ; " I am proud to have been associated with this " ; and Sir Terence murmured in the apologetic whisper of a pugilist wandered into a Barrie play, " You've got 'em, Isaacs ; you understand the game.

Pink thrills 'em, blue chills 'em, and white makes 'em too refined."

The Scarlet Pimpernel dancing with a tulip, a marvellous pink butterfly dancing with a pink ice cream, fairy tale and legend and history, romance and fiction jostling each other like the dream of an imaginative child come true . . . and like strings pulling them, the purr and swirl and zip and croon of the modern music's fantastic measure.

"It's a wonderful scene," people said—those who danced, those who crouched in the hundreds of boats that shut down the cool glint of water, those who stood ten deep on the bank; sometimes an expert hand trained the pink lime on the dancing figures on the floor that covered the whole lawn and to those who watched and marvelled in the darkness they seemed like spun-glass figures whirling in a rosy mist on glass.

"Thank you," said Nicky to Zuriel, "for taking me off my hands, I should have worn my polka-dotted heart on my sleeve for pierrettes to peck at, but now I have no heart, you have it. Zuriel, take care of it, dear."

"Nicky, you'd laugh in heaven."

"I hope so," said Nicky. "I'd feel like a new boarder always if I couldn't laugh.

I daren't be solemn and passionate to-night, darling . . . not here and now in this atmosphere . . . so I'm stemming things. My heart's a cathedral, but if I opened the door here and let in the motley it would be desecration. To-morrow I shall go and choose rings . . . we will gaze at bookcases, and while I unpack my soul for you and spread it about the landscape you'll be secretly deciding whether you'll have ruchings or gussets. To-morrow I am in broadcloth, but to-night I am in shining armour. We live in a mad and inspiring world," said Nicky. "I never knew before how mad or how inspiring. When are you going to marry me?"

"I do not know," mused Zuriel.

"But you like to think," flashed the exultant Nicky.

He hugged the consciousness of her pale, shining beauty to him like a hidden crown, knowing that it all gave him secret kingship in this carnival crowd. It gave him also a queer, delicious strength and power, so that he moved among the other dancers titanically with Zuriel in his arms, as if they were real people moving through shallow water full of fishes.

He found time to tell his mother while Zuriel danced with a pink Dick Whittington.

“ I want you to be glad,” he said. He knew instinctively her mind was open for this like a child’s mouth for an expected delicacy. He was too happy to fail her by feeding her with the unexpected. He saw in her eyes the satisfied closing of her mind on this morsel. She answered him just as he anticipated. “ I am glad if you are glad, dear boy.” He kissed her. To his father he said simply, “ I’ve done it ! ” It was like running up his flag on some summit he had conquered. His father understood his mental attitude, he seemed quietly to salute the new flag like an old warrior who has unfurled his own flags in the past. “ All the luck, lad, all of the way.”

They told Isaacs. Isaacs looked at them with his brilliant brown eyes like licked brandy balls. His look was light and amused, as if they were intriguing toys.

“ Well ! ” he said, “ well ! ” and dismissed them like a busy man, back to their world of toyland ; then he caught Zuriel by the sleeve. “ So this is the gown ? ” he said with consuming interest.

She became a model, a thing of lines ; as such he dismissed her with a little shrug.

“ Incredible ! Incredible ! ”

“ Good ? ” said Nicky.

“ Incredibly bad ! ” boomed Isaacs. “ I wanted you to take the prize.”

“ That was kind of you,” said Zuriel.

“ It’s worth having,” said Isaacs ; “ I know. I paid for it.”

“ Will she ? ” said Nicky.

“ Will she ? ” mimicked Isaacs peevishly. “ In that ! Good God ! Not a chance. I’d have taken the front page of the *Daily Mail*,” snorted Isaacs in their uncomprehending faces. “ I’d have gone the whole hog. Now they can keep it.”

Before he had vanished they dropped him out of their consciousness as lovers will all things that clutter the space of their togetherness.

“ The world was so full until you came,” said Nicky, “ and now if you were to walk across that lawn and speak to someone else it would be empty until you returned to me. That frightens me ! ”

Rosy figures whirling in a rosy world in a rosy mist, music plucking at their nerves, setting them tingling with delicious, un-

bearably sweet discomfort, the hot, exhilarating twinge when their eyes met.

“ Shall we dance ? ” said Zuriel.

“ You know you don't want to,” said Nicky. “ You know that this hour will never come again, beloved, you know that you and I will never be the same to each other or, what is more important to us, quite what we are to ourselves this night. You know it.”

XXI

WHERE THE MOONLIGHT ENDED

THEY sat on still in the studio. It seemed crowded with the stillness and the silence. Ann jostled among his thoughts in a queer way she had never done before. No one had ever seemed so near in all his life as Ann who sat ten yards away in silence and in shadow and did not speak. Bim did not move. To have moved would have been to break the sweet, foreign pressure of her image in his thoughts.

Outside the garden dreamed motionless under the moon, shadows and the shivering blue of the moonlight raising themselves in sort of fantastic, exquisite brushwork, even to the silhouetted scribble of roofs against the skyline.

“Everything seems so cold and lonely to-night,” said Bim. “I think of Zuriel dancing away, a live pink thing in a dead white world.”

Ann stirred. She seemed to stir in his secret thoughts too and create a faint warmth in their frightening coldness.

“Are you lonely because she is dancing and you are here?” said Ann. Her voice was quiet solicitude.

“Could you understand if I were?”

“Yes,” said Ann.

“Lately I have asked myself if there is anything you don't understand. Will you understand when I tell you that I am frightened by a new loneliness. I try to find myself in it and I am lost. I am a frightened man, Ann Charlton. It seems a poor thing to be.”

“No one can break into your loneliness,” said Ann. “But you will break out of it when the time comes”—her heart beat. “Break and I am here! Oh! break, and I am here!” She felt faint and sick with her awful tenderness and yearning over him, almost like a mother with a wounded child.

Bim could not see her, but the print of her face was in the darkness of the studio; it was in the dreaming magic of the garden; the print of her face was upon the world.

“When Zuriel comes back she will be gone,” said Ann.

“She was never there, not where you mean. She was a picture; all my life has been pictures. I thought of myself as one, too, and find I am a real man wanting real things . . . real people.”

“Why don’t you smoke?” soothed Ann.

He lit his pipe.

“Ann,” he said, “I’m going to pay you back the money you lent me for Zuriel’s dress. It was the beginning. I stand braced. I feel that. My muscles aren’t flabby. I’m going to spring, I know where and how. One dopes oneself with poetry and dreams, one goes to plays and one reads books that sweep away all the furniture you’ve arranged in your mind to live with, that make it comfortable to live. It isn’t any good. Do one’s own little job *hard, hard*—that’s healthy, that’s sane—find the joy in the super-polish you give your boots, the steady self-respect that lies behind paying your own rent. I’m sure of that. I’ve done with toys, Ann, except for my leisure hours. I’m going to work and all that it implies. I’m going to get the last ounce out of it and out of myself.” He paused. “I’m sick of backyards. I’m coming out into the world.”

"I think you're right," she approved quietly.

"I'm sure I am. What has shaken me up, Ann? It's something I can't see or define or name. I can only feel it, feel that I have been shaken."

There were ex-soldiers singing madrigals in the road beyond the high guarded walls, in the world beyond this world where he and Ann Charlton sat alone, and he tried to understand that something he could not define, but which was sweet and wonderful and which he feared alarmingly to lose.

"When Zuriel marries young Nicholas Timothy it will be like a lovely picture taken away; I shall miss it, but only with my eyes; besides, I shall be busy. I love the sound of that. I am going to give up this studio as soon as Stella joins Ferris. I believe they will go out together early next month, after all. I am going to be quite on my own."

"But, my dear, you haven't any money to start." She was hugging the thought of her contract with Isaacs like a gem . . . suddenly . . . suddenly she would flash it across the darkness and see the joy and relief in his eyes.

“You haven’t either, Ann.” He hugged the thought of his secret contract with Isaacs too; like a gem it was in his eyes, but he would not throw it to her, needing nothing for himself. He would take it to her . . . and himself; and the darkness between them would fade away and there would be himself and Ann face to face. He saw that suddenly, miraculously, like a vision vouchsafed and trembled before it. He was suddenly conscious, magnificently conscious, of a destination, whereas before there had only been halting-places for his aimless drifting.

“Ann,” he said. “You’ve always been poised . . . ready to jump straight to success, but you hadn’t any landing-ground. What would you do if you suddenly saw it below you?” He had a feeling of building it for her as he spoke, safe and tried and adequate.

“Jump,” said Ann, and he felt her smiling; it seemed to come to him like warmth and light in the darkness, that feeling of the invisible smile.

Someone was playing in one of the surrounding houses; it made a brushing butterfly sound in the still studio. In the dark faces of the London houses tiny yellow eyes

were lifted, myriads of tiny yellow eyes everywhere. The moon made a road on the earth; across the garden right up to the studio door she built it and walked there, silver shod and luminous.

He was arrayed in a great and shining gladness the like of which he had never guessed at and never known; he was panoplied with a peace and happiness that passed all understanding.

“Ann,” he said, “have you *really* been there all the time?”

He, who had made servants of his words all his life, abject slaves who at his bidding danced to stately measure or capered clownishly, found they had deserted him.

“Yes,” said Ann, misunderstanding, “but I didn’t speak because I thought you were thinking. What are you going to do when you give up this studio and Stella is married? What branch of work are you going to devote yourself to? Who will look after you when Stella goes, cook and so on?”

He was tenderly amused at her. He had the feeling of standing in the wings attired as Prince Charming, waiting for his cue, glittering bravely while he gave his mind to mundane things.

“ I’ll manage,” he said. “ It’s you I want to talk about, you and your future and what it holds for you. You could do big things.”

“ Never,” said Ann. “ But I could do little things well.”

She smiled happily to herself ; she was cosy and warm with the thought of the moment that was coming, the road that she had cleared for him by her contract revealed, straight and broad and happy, leading up into the promise of to-morrow. She waited for the moment of revelation as if she were a firefly or some bright phosphorescent thing waiting for the darkness to detach itself from its background and become a living entity.

They had both forgotten Zuriel. She had passed from a *raison d’être* for their actions into a mere peg on which they looped the wonders of the future they each carried secretly—supported them because they were too heavy with preciousness to bear alone. She had passed from actuality to symbolism.

“ Poor Mrs. Whistler,” said Ann. “ She’s like a cat on hot bricks.” Yet Mrs. Whistler was not real to either of them ; she was like a figure passing the windows of their little secret world.

“And the Marchesa watching,” said Bim; and he thought, “Shall I hug it or shall I tell her that her future is safe?” And he held it, because the feel of it was so good, the best thing his life had ever known, an emotion so real that all others lay about like open packing-cases suddenly proved empty.

“The Marchesa knows who her father is,” said Ann; “I feel that. It is the final surprise before the fall of the curtain and she waits for that. She sees it in the fire and smiles—you can watch her. It was the desire for the final thrill that brought her here.”

“I am curious myself,” said Bim. “It seems so funny for a woman not to know what her own husband is. One knows what the Timothys are, the little tight iron railings that surround their imaginations and keep back the memories of their own humble beginnings. There isn't room for anyone doubtful to creep in because they must let the acknowledgment of their own littleness come too . . . and they won't.” Then he brushed his stupid, littering speculations away and came back to the thoughts he had littered purposely for the joy of finding them again. “Ann, I'd have given the world to do something for you.”

"You have," said Ann very low. "You have . . . I was tight-clenched and blind and stupid when I met you, a thing living dully in a closed chamber, and you opened the doors and windows, you let the sunlight in. It doesn't matter that I must stay in my little closed chamber . . . I know there is a world outside . . . I see things go by, I hear the lilt of things, I catch the glint of them."

"Am I in the world outside?" he said huskily.

"You are, Bim." Her voice was level.

"Suppose I was as lonely outside as you were in?"

"You couldn't be, my dear; you find bebies of playmates, new ideas to toss about. When I see you you are always scurrying, laughing, busy."

Now she seemed to him like a hidden flower in the darkness, a grave white flower, somehow shy, not a flower to pluck, but a flower to stay near, a flower that did not die.

"Ann," he said, "why do you hide from me?"

"It is because it is dark," said Ann. "Let us have the lights on."

His love was running towards her. He was

not carrying it, as he always thought men did ; it carried him. His self-sacrifice was not something he was giving her. It was something she had given him, something precious and personal.

“ I ought to be going,” said Ann. “ I can't know what has happened to-night. Zuriel won't be home until early morning. I'll come in early . . . the Marchesa will tell me what has happened, she is sitting up to see the play out.”

“ Ann,” he said, “ you're new to me and I've new things to say. I want to say them now. This isn't the end, it's the beginning in lots of ways.”

“ But Bim . . . there's Zuriel ! ” She was brushing back water he offered her to quench an unbearable thirst because she could not believe it was anything but a mirage ; but how was he to know that ? “ This,” said Ann in a queer, suffering voice, “ is a fairy tale and it can't come true . . . it can't come true ! ”

“ It is true,” said Bim.

He gripped her hand. Mrs. Whistler came running down the path. They could hear her panting like the white rabbit in “ Alice.” “ Oh, dear ! Oh, dear ! ” They received

her, hands gripped. She was crying. Her mouth worked loosely. Butting in on their world she came with a sense of shock.

“Look!” she said. “After everything! After everything! Oh! my-goodness, look!”

She held up the pink pearl dress. In her unsteady hand it writhed in the moonlight as if it felt the holder’s shame.

“Nicholas Timothy sent her another . . . a pink pierrette’s dress, and asked her to wear it. I found his note. Oh! she’s got him, it was as soppy . . . you’d never think to look at him! The hours you’ve put into it . . . the hours. Oh! my dears, if there was anything I could do! I can’t tell you *how* I feel. How *could* she! How could she!”

Hands gripped they stared at it. It was a symbol outraged. They felt humiliated, as if a stake on which they had high-keyed themselves to sacrifice was cut down unused for clothes-pegs before their eyes.

“Ungrateful,” sobbed Mrs. Whistler, “not like her father! Oh! I can’t tell you how I feel . . . I can’t tell you. I could bury my head. Left on the bed . . . just like an odd glove . . . that’s Zuriel.”

They looked at the dress ; it seemed to palpitate and quiver on Mrs. Whistler's arm like a heap of jewels with something underneath that was ashamed and frightened and wished to hide.

“ If she'd stolen something I couldn't have felt as bad . . . but you, Ann, signing on with that Jew, so's Bim could make it . . . all for Zuriel and Bim . . . and then this . . . just left. Just like that. All laid out and only her pink shoes and stockings.”

Bim and Ann looked at each other's white faces in the moonlight. They stood where the moon finished her magic road, finished surely that all things might stand still in darkness just for one minute while they two found each other. Ann read his face as if it were music. Her voice was threaded with tears strung on laughter.

“ You signed too,” she said ; “ you signed too.”

“ For you, Ann,” he said. “ For you.”

“ Both of you ! ” sobbed Mrs. Whistler. “ Both of you ! Doesn't that make it awful ! Oh ! I could fly away to heathen parts for very shame. Only her pink shoes and stockings gone . . . why, I couldn't have felt worse if she'd gone in them alone. I couldn't

feel worse than I do this very minute, and this dress would have got the prize, and you'd have been in the *Daily Mirror* to-morrow and everything. It's too dreadful."

She was like a thin voice wailing in a cold wilderness without; they only heeded her because she made the warmth and compactness of their own little heaven more complete.

"You were at the back of it, Ann," said Bim, "and I did not know."

"You were at the back of it and I knew," said Ann.

"It comes like a divine revelation," said Bim. "Oh, Ann!"

Mrs. Whistler, blind to their blindness, babbled tearful suggestions. "It ought to take the first prize. Oh! it did ought to. If I get Josephine into it will you let her wear it? You can shove a Frenchwoman into anything. Will you, now! There's dears! and I shan't feel so bad. Nobody'll know she's the Marchesa's maid. Nobody knows what any Frenchwoman is! It ought to take the prize. You ought to have the credit. You really did. Josephine'll get into it. They're all stays, those girls, she'll compress. Do let me!"

They brushed her clamour away. She

could not see with her middle-aged eyes the world that lay where the moonlight ended, the world in which they had already turned their backs on her.

“ Oh, Ann ! ” said Bim, “ that you could do a thing like that. Three years, my love ! ”

“ Three years ! ” said Ann, as if it was a token of immortality.

In their new mental world they found freedom in the very thought of prison, they hugged their chains preciously lest they should break and condemn them to the vagueness and the emptiness and the purposelessness of a life where they had been free to do as they wished. So Discipline entered into Bim's life, not as Isaacs had prophesied, a physician of the soul marching brassily to martial music, but peace-giving, mind-healing as a respite from pain.

“ Shall I get Josephine ? ” said Mrs. Whistler, “ shall I ? ”

They looked at her. The dress was dead in her arms. It was not even a symbol, the deserted statue to a great deed. It was nothing. She was nothing. Bim looked back at her out of his new world—kindly, humorously, inexorably.

“ Oh, my dear ! ” he said ; “ can't you see ? ”

And Mrs. Whistler did see. She saw a door closed upon her. She did not beat her fists upon it or make any sign. She knew that she had once been a pilgrim there. She smiled. She stood outside the door in the moonlight as if it had been the grave of youth and beauty. Gravely and courteously she dropped her visiting card through the crack of memory . . . a little, mumbled, funny prayer . . . the visiting card of the middle-aged.

XXII

THE MARCHESA WAITS

FIDGET, fidget, fidget. The click of knitting needles, the crisping of the leaves of a library book, the swish of wind in the silk curtains at the open window, bellying them in like tipped crinolines, the crackle of the fire, the thin ping of a mosquito frantically wooing the covered electric light.

“ It’s so late, Marchesa, aren’t you going to bed ? ”

“ Dear Mrs. Whistler, I am not tired.”

She did not look it. Her eyes, her gems, the exquisite paste buckles on her square-toed shoes glinted and gleamed, even the cascade of particularly priceless lace at her throat seemed suddenly startled into quivering animation ; she had more than ever the absurd air of an ancient queen for whose especial diversion masquerade had been arranged. She even betrayed a royal impatience to be diverted.

“Do you wonder that I want to know how things have progressed with Zuriel? Is it so amazing? I had a hand in the affair. Had I not lent you this house she could never have met young Timothy. In your own maternal anxiety be patient, my good friend, with the vagaries of age.”

“I’m thinking what you’ll look and feel like to-morrow morning.”

The clock struck one, another clock struck, a church clock chimed it, another church clock farther away—it died like a whispered warning.

“I could no more be a burglar than I could fly,” said Mrs. Whistler. “Why I’m quite creepy sitting here with you quite lawfully and respectably. Oh, dear! I wish Zuriel would come.”

“Tell me again about Ann and Bim and how you found the pink dress?”

“They’re sure to come and see you themselves to-morrow morning, and the less said about the pink dress the better. Bim’ll tell you all about it. He’s got the special licence look. Funny, he and Nicholas and Ferris . . . they’re all a little bit on the ginger side. Well! anything’s better than a blue-chinned man who wants boiling shaving water twice

a day ; they're worse than a white dog in London. Every woman, no matter how romantically inclined she may be, knows homework lies behind marrying a man, but she doesn't want to have to keep kissing it and reminding herself. I know a girl who married a man with black eyes . . . they looked black at night. Oh, lovely ! Well, she'd have gone off with a blue-eyed man if he hadn't had a geyser put in."

"An entirely original point of view," chuckled the Marchesa.

"To-morrow," said Poppy Whistler, knitting furiously, "I shall be in Margate."

"It is inevitable if Nicholas and Zuriel have become engaged that he will want to arrange a luncheon party . . . his people and you. He sails to-morrow evening. Zuriel will want to see him off."

"No luncheon party for me. Zuriel can see young Timothy off. I'm going to see my Henry in and that's that. I wrote and told the girl to be there early. Now won't you go to bed, Marchesa ? I'll run up and tell you if they are or not the very minute they arrive. You'll feel a rag to-morrow."

"I'll stay," said the Marchesa.

Utter silence, then the measured tread of

a policeman's passing footsteps, the distant grunting rattle of an old taxi.

"Would you like a glass of hot milk?"

"I need no other stimulant than that which I am obtaining."

"Well, whatever it is, it suits you," said Poppy Whistler; "I've never seen you look better."

"One feels philosophical at this hour."

"And cold," said Mrs. Whistler; "cold about the feet and the ears and the backbone."

Utter silence, unbroken. A clock striking the half-hour. More silence. A clock striking the quarter to.

"Now, if you would have just a cup of Bovril. It wouldn't take a minute."

"I'll guarantee I am fresher than Lady Timothy."

"I never see her but what I feel a grudge against nature," said Poppy Whistler. "Look at the length some people have to carry their fat about on. We're the same size round, but people call me a podge and she's a fine woman, because she's run up a bit more. My goodness! I can't settle to anything to-night. I wish Zuriel would have married Bim Redgold. He's more my style than Nicholas Timothy, and he hasn't

got a mother. I could have been a mother to him."

"Well, you can be a mother to Nicholas."

"You know perfectly well I can't, Marchesa, not with the mother he's got. If the mother and mother-in-law are the same class it may be all right, but if they're as different as Lady Timothy and I one of them has got to be an institution . . . and it'll be me."

Another long, long silence.

"My goodness, what'll I say to Henry if she does marry him? It comes on me like the thought of an operation, truly it does."

"Very few daughters marry the men their fathers would have chosen, if that is any consolation."

"I don't know that it is, Marchesa."

"Can't you stand back and look at things?"

"I cannot. Every time I think of Henry I slip forward and hurt myself."

"You must remember that Mr. Whistler may even be pleased. It's an excellent marriage from the worldly point of view."

"Henry isn't worldly. He always gave me the bit of the morning paper with the financial news on every day."

"You'll have all the fun of choosing her

trousseau. She'll want lots and lots and lots of white things."

"She won't want me. Nicholas'll probably help her. That's what seems to happen nowadays. One thing, they could choose all the things girls used to blush and dream about off the wax figures in Regent Street windows inside five minutes. When I married Henry he thought heaven kept my stockings up."

They spoke little after that. Now and again Mrs. Whistler threw phrases after the interminable hours as if they were missiles by which she could speed them on their way. A thin light, like cold water, began to trickle into the room.

"It's like waiting for someone to be born or die," said Mrs. Whistler. "Oh! I wish you'd let me get you a cup of tea."

"It is a long time since I have seen a dawn."

"I can't bear them," mentioned Mrs. Whistler. "Nasty cold things."

The stars were fading, a chilly little early morning wind fluttered busily about the garden, shaking the curtains like a fussy housemaid . . . then suddenly in the awaking world there were footsteps on the gravel.

The Marchesa laughed.

Mrs. Whistler stared at her. It was young, incongruous laughter; coming from so venerable and enigmatic a source it seemed disembodied; it was malicious, delighted, anticipatory mirth. It roused a resentment in Poppy Whistler that surprised her by its strength. There came the crash of a hastily opened door.

“My goodness!” ejaculated Mrs. Whistler sharply. “I hope they save the pieces!”

They trooped in, Lady Timothy, Nicholas and Zuriel.

The Marchesa ceased to laugh. She watched them intently. The prologue had begun.

“Mother,” said Zuriel—she took her cue, flung her words high towards the gallery gods, one would have said she paused for the applause—“Nicholas and I are engaged.”

The Marchesa accepted it as a hardened playgoer might accept a threadbare situation and a well-worn *cliché*; her face merely registered recognition.

Lady Terence advanced and extended both hands to Poppy Whistler. It might have been and probably was rehearsed. Poppy Whistler upset the pose by ignoring

one hand and shaking the other like a sportsman. She had no *flair* for the dramatic situation.

“ Well, that’s nice now, I’m sure,” she said. “ We’ve been wondering and wondering, knowing Nicholas sails to-morrow. Now wouldn’t everyone like a nice hot cup of tea ? ”

Zuriel looked at her and felt her heart contract a little. It was in the little round bunch of a woman to be able to express her finest and deepest emotions only in the commonplace terms of service. She remembered her through the raids at Margate . . . just like this, riding her fears with a tight rein, practical in her expressions of sympathy. “ Won’t anyone have a cup of tea ? Now won’t anyone ? ”

The Marchesa, divining the disappointment to Lady Terence’s overgrown and carefully staked conventions said, “ My very, very best congratulations, Lady Timothy. Dear children ! ”

It was the voice from the throne, patronising, drawling.

Lady Timothy turned to her eagerly. She saw the Marchesa as a title with the old woman attached ; as such she venerated her.

The Marchesa's voice gave the engagement that Princess Mary-Lascelles' touch she felt had been so lamentably lacking.

"An only son!" said her ladyship to the Marchesa.

"An only daughter!" snapped Mrs. Whistler.

"Nobody," said Nicholas, "has kissed me or anything."

"Meaning me?" said Mrs. Whistler on her way to the kitchen.

"Meaning you," said Nicholas.

She put her warm little arms round his neck and kissed him heartily. Through her eyes he read her heart, all the kindly things, the homely kindly things that couldn't find the words to ride on.

"Good old Mother Bun!" he muttered. "Good old Mother Bun; I'll be good to her."

Zuriel followed her mother into the kitchen.

"You haven't said anything to me," she pointed out, smiling.

"I've only old-fashioned things to say," said her mother. "They'd sound funny about you. You're my girl. Zuriel . . . can't you know . . . can't you know how I

wish and what I wish . . . everything for you? I don't want to cry. It's been a trying evening . . . waiting with the Marchesa and finding that dress. My goodness! when I found that dress I thought I should have died."

"Nicholas sent me one he saw when his mother took him to see hers. He liked it. He asked me to wear it."

"Single-minded," said Mrs. Whistler, "that's what you are. Bim and Ann . . . they're engaged too."

"Oh! how splendid. We ought to have a lunch somewhere to-morrow. We've the ring to get and Nicky has got to call for some Shantung suits that didn't fit. I don't know how we'll get it in, but we've got to . . . we've simply got to!" She rushed out of the kitchen excitedly, her mother heard her gay voice dancing in the lounge. "Me for Margate," she muttered. "Me for Margate."

The Marchesa sat shrivelled and immobile by the fire when she brought the tea in. The others were chatting excitedly, throwing restaurant names at one another: the Ritz, the Carlton, Princes', the Savoy.

"We're going to," said Zuriel. "Lady

Terence and you, Sir Terence, Nicky and I, Bim and Ann."

"And I!" said the Marchesa. "Am I not invited?"

"You can go instead of me," said Mrs. Whistler; "me for Margate."

Lady Timothy said gently, "It is a lunch to celebrate your daughter's engagement." Mrs. Whistler felt as if she had pulled a scrubbing brush out of her pocket at a royal reception and Lady Timothy was trying to restore it for her.

"My husband gets back to-morrow."

"Then he can come to the lunch and we shall meet him. That will be enchanting."

"He doesn't get back till evening," said Mrs. Whistler hastily.

"Then you can go down after the lunch," said Lady Timothy.

"Of course," echoed Zuriel.

"You've got to come," admonished Nicky, "and the Marchesa too."

But his mother, delighted, was already chirruping away at the ancient title. It lent atmosphere to have an old Italian aristocrat at the little festival. It would look well in the papers. The Marchesa began gracefully to retract. She had spoken too hastily. She

was old, feeble, these great places with their noise, their crowds, disturbed and bewildered her ; they saddened her with the ghosts of her lost youth. " Dear Lady Timothy, forgive me . . . I spoke hastily. If there was some little quiet place where one could rejoice with these young people in their happiness."

Poppy Whistler felt the old lady was making planned moves in a planned game, and yet her reason derided the idea.

" There's Bampton's," reiterated Lady Timothy.

" Wonderfully good," murmured the Marchesa ; " no kickshaws . . . plain, good, the very best food. It is all I dare eat now. Not the atmosphere for this little affair . . . busy men . . . talk of sales and finance and business. No, no, I rescind."

" Dear Marchesa, if you hadn't lent Zuriel's mother this house she and my boy would never have met. Nicky . . . think of somewhere quiet and good."

" Besides," the Marchesa's voice was mellow, " dear Ann Charlton and Bim . . . not the clothes for those other places perhaps."

" There's Zane's," said Nicky. " There's

the Cupola . . . there's the Frivol, and there's Conrad's . . . Conrad's is the best."

The Marchesa's eyes were like little lights suddenly lit.

"My father," she said, "swore by Conrad's and his father before him; the best food and the best service in London, a house of great traditions, the meeting-ground of epicures."

"It isn't really a young man's place," said Nicky. "I've been there . . . it's full of generals and judges."

"My husband wanted to go there the other day," said Lady Timothy. "He's never been. He was particularly anxious to go. They have a European reputation. He says they have the best site in the West End."

"I know the head waiter," mumbled the Marchesa. "I could book a table; there are funny tables and chairs, carved oak of a real period and valuable. I could telephone. There is a horseshoe table . . . perhaps we would have that."

"Would you?" said Lady Timothy eagerly. "Nicky, wouldn't that be nice now?"

The room was vivid with daylight now. In it they looked garish stragglers in their

pink fancy dresses ; the atmosphere had died as Nicky had said it would.

“ The chauffeur will be cold,” said Lady Terence. “ Of course one needn’t be careful of them now, like one had to be in the war.”

Nicky put his arms round Zuriel and her mother and led them out into the crispness of the new day. Lady Timothy stayed to make final arrangements with the Marchesa about the lunch.

“ So good of you,” they heard her say, “ so good of you,” and the Marchesa’s polite drawl :

“ Not at all, dear Lady Timothy, not at all.”

XXIII

LIZZIE INTERVENES

PEOPLE outside hurrying in their spring clothes and their spring faces and their spring moods . . . hurrying in the hot sunshine that was heavy and gold as the fallen pollen of the early summer flowers . . . shooting gaily past the windows with the same jerkiness and meaninglessness as the tin animals in a cheap shooting gallery.

Dappled golden sunshine in the lounge, stippling Zuriel's hair under her grey hat with the curling ospreys. "Oh! Mother, the car is there!"

"My goodness! What it is to have fat wrists! This glove'll never fasten. Mind you, I'm going to catch the three o'clock to Margate."

"Of course, of course! Do hurry, darling."

Bim and Ann quite silent, standing to-

gether, untouched by the unquiet round them. Ann in a blue-grey stockinette, for which she had raided Marshall and Snelgrove's that morning, and an exquisite blue-grey hat trimmed with silver wheat, a model for which she had paid fifteen pounds. She was still thrilled, exhilarated and frightened by her own extravagance; these emotions gave her colour, animation and charm.

"You lovely thing," Bim kept whispering. "You lovely thing."

Mrs. Whistler swathed in biscuit colour rolled agitatedly, like some fat little chrysalis, about the lounge.

"Oh dear! Oh dear! I'm all of a dither. I shall sit next to old Timothy at lunch and I am sure I shall say something about his rotten food. When I'm nervous I generally find myself quoting Henry, most wives do."

"He never mentions the Tiny Tea-Tables when he's out with his wife," Zuriel reassured her. "Oh! where is the Marchesa?"

"Here," said the sprightly old lady, and descended on them in a dove-coloured bonnet and a dove-coloured cape edged with blue fox . . . the sunshine crept up her as if it were a child's timid exploring fingers.

There was a sharp knock at the door.

Josephine wheeled to open it.

On the doorstep in the sunshine stood a red-faced girl in a rust-red coat.

“Lizzie!” said Mrs. Whistler. “My goodness! Lizzie!”

Lizzie dragged her hostile eyes away from the short-skirted, high-heeled perkiness of the Marchesa's French maid.

“Didn't you get my telegram?” said Lizzie, goggling on the doorstep in the sunshine.

The Marchesa sat down and began to push on grey suède gloves in a tired way. The charwoman trundling downstairs . . . The feel of the smooth orange envelope in her hand. . . . The thin flicker of it burning in the fire. . . . Returned spelt with two e's. She looked at the sender.

“You must have got it,” said Lizzie. “It wasn't returned.”

“Come on, Mother! Oh, Mother, come on! We can't be late.”

“We shall be,” said the Marchesa; her upper lip lengthened thinly with controlled irritation. If she should she would be sorry to be baulked of the party, now she had taken such unusual trouble.

“What did you telegraph, Lizzie?”

“I telegraphed to say the master was home. He’s been home days. I thought you’d got the ’flu or something, so I came up.”

“I’m going back with you,” said Mrs. Whistler, sheet-white, and Zuriel, equally white, cried :

“You’re not!”

The Marchesa dragged Lizzie in, shut the door on the street, sent Josephine about her business, and snapped out, “Girl, you’re a fool.”

Lizzie looked her up and down and addressed herself to her mistress.

“He’s going up to town same as usual . . . ten o’clock in the morning and same time back. I haven’t split on you, mum, I said you’d gone away for a few days. I’ve been looking after him same as if you was there, and he hasn’t noticed the camphor or anything, and aunt’s hens is laying again and I’ve had her eggs for him.”

“I’m going back with you, Lizzie.”

“Father won’t be home till past midnight. What’s the good! Oh, please! please! Mother! What can I tell Lady Timothy! It’ll seem so extraordinary. If she knows

father's home, he ought to be there, he ought to meet them all."

"Zuriel's right," said the Marchesa.

"I think she is," said Ann.

"Oh, my goodness!" said Mrs. Whistler.

They closed round the little biscuit-coloured dumpling. Their logic, their common sense, their pleading boxed her in, an agitated, white-faced little figure.

Lizzie stared about the lounge, on to the stairs; out of sight, Josephine, with her little apron under her arm, so that it should not show white if anyone glanced up, listened. Lizzie without seeing her knew she was there. She wouldn't wear a cap either . . . You wait and see . . .

"I've got Wiltshire back, number five, for his breakfast and everything," said Lizzie. "There isn't anything for you to worry about, 'm."

From the middle of the little circle made by Zuriel, Ann, Bim and the Marchesa, came the droning voice of her mistress.

"You're a good girl, Lizzie."

Lizzie hoped the cocky one on the stairs heard that. Then the Marchesa thrust something into her hand. It crackled. It had a five on. It lit a flame in her heart.

“Go away,” said the Marchesa, very low.

They shoved her into the sunshine; they poured into the sunshine themselves. Zuriel was saying in a voice stemming back tears with difficulty, “So late! So late!”

There was a great car; they hustled Mrs. Whistler in almost as if they had just arrested her. She looked back at Lizzie. Lizzie gave her a dazzling five-pound smile; to Mrs. Whistler who knew nothing of the five pounds it had the quality of radiant optimism. She drank it in eagerly.

The car dashed off.

It twinkled its way down the sunlit road and Lizzie looked after it.

“No one,” she murmured, “said I won’t buy a hat before I go back to Margate.”

XXIV

PLAYING THE GAME

“**I** SHAN’T be able to eat a mouthful.”
“Nonsense! Think of Zuriel!”
“I can’t think of anything but Henry.”

An eye-aching dazzle of West End shops sweeping past the car windows, melting into each other, a crashing noise, a brain that could only think in little broken, startled bits. The Marchesa’s voice saying, “Conrad’s!”

A strip of pavement, a thick door, the street shut out, and in the pool of silence into which they were plunged Sir Terence, his wife and Nicky waiting on rose du Barri seats in a little mahogany lounge, hushed and important as a Harley Street consulting-room. A flurry of greetings and apologies. The Marchesa, “I was so excited that I got flurried.”

Conrad’s.

Bim and Ann smiling their thanks for congratulations, deep smiles with long, strong roots, not the quickly painted on smiles of the Marchesa and Lady Terence.

“I feel sick,” Poppy Whistler said.

“Sal volatile,” whispered the Marchesa, passing her a little flask.

Conrad’s.

Another door. A religious atmosphere. One instinctively hushed one’s voice. One lost the sound of one’s feet in deep carpets—herself and Sir Terence first, Lady Timothy and the Marchesa, Ann and Bim, Zuriel and Nicky. High windows, high ceilings, candles burning behind pale shades on the oak panelling. Sir Terence’s fat voice patting it all. “Quite an atmosphere! Quite an atmosphere!”

Conrad’s.

No music. Conversational restraint, almost like people praying under a high ceiling, under the high windows, the glitter of glass and silver ware and china, pale flowers in long-stemmed vases—and Henry Whistler advancing down the aisle to meet them.

Conrad’s.

The first thing she noticed was that he was in evening dress in the morning . . .

Henry who had never come down to breakfast without shaving first.

“ Ah ! ” boomed Sir Terence. “ Here’s the head waiter.”

His voice seemed to hit the walls and ceiling like a cathedral organ in a bathing box. Its dreadful echo beat down on her, numbing her. Her brain began to fumble a little shivering, shocked rosary of helpless “ My Gods ! ”

The Marchesa’s eyes were flickering, flickering, laughing, laughing. Fun ! fun, awful fun for the Marchesa ! How would the puppets behave ! How would the play go on ! Conrad’s ! Conrad’s !—the best show in town for the Marchesa. Stage-managed all by herself. The old lady’s eyes were sparkling. Poppy Whistler saw things in them . . . they were rooms with the blinds up. She peered into them. Should they caper for the Marchesa ?

There was Sir Terence treating Henry like dirt. Well—no—not like dirt, but like an old waiter in evening dress, as if he had poked his head obediently out of another world to take Sir Terence’s orders.

The Marchesa had known about Henry all the time . . . had been working up to this.

Poppy looked at Zuriel. Zuriel was numbed, dithering, her lower jaw was working, quivering. Zuriel was going to cry. Cry in front of the Marchesa. She wondered if her face was the same colour as Zuriel's . . . so different from Ann and Bim and the Timothys, who knew nothing, like Albinos at a niggers' festival . . . but Henry was fine, he carried his backbone, his eyes, the curve of his mouth . . . straight. "This way, Sir Terence."

Conrad's.

She had met Henry's eyes.

They were round the table. She gripped Zuriel's hand and swore for the first time in her life.

"Don't be a damn fool. Play the game!"

She did not know what game. She spoke blindly, she smiled blindly. *Noblesse oblige* meant nothing to her, a French name for a French dish. She swallowed her cocktail. Out of it flowered a smile that was as cool and remote as the Marchesa's own.

Henry was writing on his pad, young waiters hovered in the distance to do his bidding, acolytes. His wife thought—now he is writing dishes and it's the same hand,

the same writing that wrote " My dear wife " last week.

Henry could play the game. He was trim, immaculate . . . every inch a little gentleman in his evening dress-suit in the sunlight.

" To my new daughter, Zuriel ! " Sir Terence raised his glass.

Henry must have heard that ! He must have. She wondered if it burnt his mind like the wine burnt her throat . . . biting it all the way down. Henry's face was a mask.

Conrad's.

Nicholas sensing things, knowing there was something there he couldn't define, just like a blind man in a room with something unfamiliar and disquieting, Nicholas tactfully filling in the rather unnatural pauses with gay, kindly chatter. Sir Terence's voice booming away.

Other waiters served them, deferentially because the head waiter had bothered about them. Henry had suggested dishes adroitly, he had indicated expensive mellow wines, he had mentioned " bouquet " as flatteringly as if he held one in his tail coat ready to produce it like a conjuror for Sir Terence. His work was over. He stood in dark

corners of the funny little dark room and saw things, one felt he saw everything, he was in the position of the general on the knoll in old-fashioned war paintings who directed his entire army ; there was nothing modern about Henry or his setting. He did not greet everyone, he found few people tables, he sped only a few on their way with courteous gesture. There were some who tried to catch his eye, but Henry's eye was not one to be caught.

“What a position !” burred Sir Terence genially. “What a position. The thing wants opening out, popularising. There's too much space here, no one wants space except to fill. My class of customer thinks old oak means blackbeetles downstairs, and half the time they're right.”

“Need you, Terence ?” mourned her ladyship.

“I needn't,” grinned the spirit of the Tiny Tea-Tables, Limited, “but I like to.”

Only Bim and Ann were quite normal ; seeing everything only through each other they saw nothing out of perspective.

Poppy Whistler felt very cold, her fingers mechanically clutching knife and fork felt

alarmingly dry and brittle, like twigs, but under the Marchesa's eye she never quailed, only the smile nailed to her face dragged and felt sometimes as if it must slip.

"We hope you will spend Sunday with us at Margate and meet Henry," said she to Lady Terence, and Lady Terence answered that she would be delighted.

"A bungalow," said Poppy Whistler ; "small, but the garden rather nice."

"How nice to have a garden !"

Zuriel unthawed and began to talk. She took her cue from her mother, and the disappointment on the Marchesa's wrinkled face goaded her on and refreshed her. Zuriel did not think *noblesse oblige* a French dish. She knew the idea at the back of it, recognised her mother's exposition of it and strove to emulate it.

Conrad's.

Sir Terence said, "I hear old Charlie Conrad is retiring. He's over eighty-six, wonderful ! wonderful ! King Edward used to come here a lot. Old George Conrad never passed it over to Charlie till he was in his seventieth year. Tradition ! Tradition ! This place is built on 'em. Traditions keep you from doing the things the other fellow

are making money at. What Conrad's wants now is someone to blow its traditions off like dust and start again."

"A bungalow is easy to work," said Mrs. Whistler to her hostess.

"It's a pity your husband is so delicate."

"Why! Henry never . . ."

"Does he have to go to the Riviera every year?"

"I hear Charlie Conrad's bought a business in Cannes," said Sir Terence. "Ah! they can't keep out of it: doctor told him he'd have to retire and live there. They can't retire, that's the truth."

"It'll break his heart to sell this. Conrad of Cannes . . . rolls all right."

Then Poppy Whistler saw, Zuriel saw! Henry had gone to Cannes to put Conrad's house in order. . . .

Conrad of Cannes.

"And when are you two getting married?" said Nicky.

"A week to-day," said Ann.

"You'll let Zuriel spend the rest of the day with me, Mrs. Whistler?" pleaded Nicholas.

Poppy Whistler hoped her lips made some reply; anyway Nicholas looked pleased.

Henry had vanished.

They parted in the street; they were cordial, charming, they halted in the little mahogany ante-room to say nice things to each other.

Zuriel whispered to her mother, "Would you like me to come back with you?"

"It'll do no good."

"I can't tell Nicholas before he goes to-night. I can't!"

"Who's asking you to, my girl?"

"The best meal I've had for years," purred Sir Timothy.

Zuriel had a feeling of leaning mentally against her mother.

"What'll I do?"

"Do nothing."

They were all pairing off like the animals in the ark, two by two. Poppy wanted to laugh. That meant nerves. She must hold on tight, very tight, till she got out of range of the Marchesa's watchful eyes. Never, never do to give the old Marchesa her money's worth. She remembered something vaguely about the middle classes. In the war someone had called them the backbone of the Empire, someone in the upper classes who had realised they hadn't enough soldiers to

command . . . somehow they had to keep the command, they'd always been used to it. For the first time in her life class hatred fretted Poppy Whistler. She'd show that old Italian aristocrat a bit of backbone. To be middle class meant something more than a prehistoric belief in God, the editress's personal column and clean curtains.

Sir Terence and Lady Timothy climbed into their Daimler ; it spirited them away.

" We are going for a long, long ride on the top of a bus," said Ann with a little catch of the breath. Ann could not quite believe yet.

Poppy pulled her white-faced daughter to her, kissed her, patted her, smiled into her eyes before she sent her on her way with Nicholas.

She and the Marchesa were left alone.

" You will want to speak to your husband, Mrs. Whistler," said the Marchesa very quietly.

" I think," said Henry's wife, " you'll find him outside by the car."

" Possibly," said the Marchesa ; " shall we see ? "

Out on to the strip of gold pavement, jostled by the West End crowd gold dusted

by the sun, a flower woman thrusting wall-flowers in her face.

“ Fresh from the country, lady, fresh from the country.”

“ You were right,” said the Marchesa.

Henry standing beside Sir Terence's second car. Henry out of his magpie clothes, very neat in a double-breasted blue serge suit, a bowler, a black tie. He took off his hat and held open the door. His face was still paper-white.

“ Of course you must come home with us, Mr. Whistler,” said the Marchesa.

“ I was going to ask you, Madam.”

“ Come in. Why, of course.”

“ I would prefer,” said Henry, and got up beside the chauffeur.

“ My goodness ! ” said the Marchesa.

“ How will it all end ? ”

Once more the dazzle of shops leaping past the window like hastily unrolled ribbon of brilliant but chaotic design.

“ Of course you *knew*,” said Poppy.

“ Not at first, but I intercepted that telegram your maid sent. I had a cousin at Cannes. He . . . he leads rather an empty life. He is old too. In the old days people of our age were kept alive by gossip. It was

almost a profession to belong to Scandal's inner circle, it was a social honour. To-day there is no gossip . . . there is nothing. You can see tucked away in the corner of a newspaper all that we used to gossip about. Nothing is artificial. We lived most keenly through our artificiality."

"That cousin at Cannes?"

"He found out," said the Marchesa. "He found out quite a long time after you were in my house in town. I sent him the photographs of Zuriel to show your husband quite casually. He did."

She seemed old, shrunken, no longer a lichened and cobwebbed temple in which survived mysteriously and abnormally the laughter of youth. She was old and derelict, the tide of human thought and self-expression had been turned by time and left her mentally high and dry seeking point of contact, claiming mysteries and enchantments and secret charms for the things which the present day with its passion for reality, its own new pet hypocrisies, had turned brutally to the sun, dissected and classified as the abnormalities of idle minds in an idle and self-indulgent century.

"I've grown to like you," said the Marchesa.

“ You’ve your own way of showing it,” said Poppy. “ God forbid you should love me, then ! ”

Henry’s little round pudding of a head in front of her, with its thatching of soft, silky, silvery hair. His small ears, close set to the head, pointed a little like Zuriel’s. She had always been so proud of those ears. She mourned over them tenderly a moment before she turned to question the Marchesa again.

“ Will it make much difference to the Timothys ? ”

“ You know it will. Snobbery has been her dissipation for years. You don’t give up your dissipation after fifty years. She’s suffering from a sense of inferiority.”

“ If that’s Freud again I’d rather you didn’t go on. It’s like looking through a bathroom keyhole. Who’ll they take it out of when they know ? ”

“ Zuriel,” said the Marchesa, “ and Nicholas. Of course it touches Nicholas. He has ambitions. He’s marrying the daughter of a head waiter and he’s taking her into his career.”

“ Or the daughter of a retired civil servant. Don’t forget that.”

“That is for your husband to decide.”

“You’ve said it,” agreed Mrs. Whistler.

The Marchesa put her brown hand, with all the veins showing like the structure of a dried leaf, on Poppy Whistler’s arm.

“I can only live through other people’s vanities and weaknesses,” said the Marchesa gently. “They were my greatest indulgence all my life and when one nears the end only memories of and desires for old indulgences are left. One may say I staged this comedy. Zuriel intrigued me, her beauty and her history. I perceived her chances, and so I lent you the house ; the rest unfolded.”

“And is still unfolding.”

“Of course you’ll go back to Margate with your husband. Zuriel can spend the night with me after she has seen Nicholas Timothy off.”

“I don’t know that’ll he want me,” said Henry’s wife. “That would amuse you.”

“I don’t know that I *am* amused.”

“It seems a pity somebody shouldn’t get something out of it,” commented Poppy Whistler bitterly.

They were riding through the Park now ; the green was cool to her eyes, cool to her mind. It seemed to flow round Henry’s

ears. Henry's ears were the centre of her universe. She must hold on. She was getting nervy. . . .

The car drew up outside the Marchesa's house.

Henry helped the ladies out.

The car rolled away.

They stood on the doorstep waiting for Josephine to open the door.

"Your wife did it for the best, Mr. Whistler, I assure you," fumbled the Marchesa.

Henry bowed, and she received the impression of having impulsively given very small alms to quite the wrong person.

XXV

YOUTH AND AGE

THEY were alone.

The Marchesa had vanished, taking Josephine with her, Josephine who smelt them with her Latin imagination as if she were famished and they a savoury casserole whose contents she yearned to turn over.

Henry sat down.

“ I can hardly believe . . . anything,” he said.

Mrs. Whistler took off her hat. She seemed to take off her mind with it. She seemed to hunt for her mind and her handkerchief at the same time and find them simultaneously. She applied them at the same time. The one to Henry and the other to the beads of perspiration that bedewed her upper lip.

“ Oh, Henry ! ” she said. “ My dear, you *have* gone thin ! ”

She slipped off her patent shoes, rounding her lips in an expression of agony.

“There,” she said. “Now I’ll tell you everything right from the beginning . . . starting from the shelter. Oh! Henry dear, wouldn’t you like a nice hot cup of tea?”

“I don’t want anything, Poppy,” said the long-suffering Henry, “except to know what it is all about and what you are doing here.”

The sun shifted and Poppy had only got as far as Nicholas Timothy’s first call. Before she had found the wonderful dress that was never worn it had slipped out of the room. While she sketched Lady Timothy for her silent husband, it vanished. She expounded Zuriel’s point of view in the cool grey of early twilight.

Henry stirred himself, cramped in mind and body.

“Terence Timothy’s son,” he said. “Oh, God!”

His wife crept over to him and put a hot hand in his.

“I’ve got used to it,” she said. “You get used to it.”

Something warm and wet fell on her hand in the twilight. She knew it was a tear, and Henry’s. She sat still and tried to brush it

out of her consciousness, because she knew Henry would not wish it to be there. That tear made her agonisingly shy and awkward, because all the time she had known Henry she had never, never seen him without his equipment of masculine convention. Men did not cry. Men were brusque in the face of emotion, brave in the face of danger. Tears were women's affairs ; she felt as if she had caught Henry in mental undress. She wanted, not so much to apologise, as to get away before she realised she was there.

“ Are you sure you would not like a nice hot cup of tea, dear ? ”

“ Sure.”

He rose and paced the room. She drew a breath of intense relief. Men might pace the room, that was true to masculine convention. Men did it in books. Henry was like the men in books.

“ All . . . my . . . life . . . ” he said, “ I've . . . been . . . saving . . . to . . . buy Conrad's. Conrad's is for sale. Old Charlie is selling it to Sir Terence or me. Perhaps Sir Terence isn't telling people yet. He's negotiating for it, and so am I.”

“ My Lord ! ” moaned his wife.

She sat still trying to make a road through a thunderbolt.

“ Oh ! you don't understand ! ”

“ I'm trying to, Henry ! Oh, Henry, I'm trying to.”

Now he was demanding of her something that men demanded of women in books. Something she'd never understood, something she wondered at . . . soul stuff. She didn't really think there was soul stuff between men and women, only between men and God, or much more often, and it seemed to her more naturally, between women and God . . . but something in her was shining, shining towards Henry . . . soul stuff that had been there all the time.

“ Tell me,” she said.

He told her, quite simply, pacing the room ; when he stopped she knew it was because tears prevented his going on. His masculinity, her femininity, became blurred for the first time, and because they were blurred they merged. She had always tried to understand her husband as a man. He wasn't so very different from herself. He was easy to understand. In between his words wove her soft wonderment that she *could* understand.

“ There’s been God in my life,” he said. “ And you and Zuriel . . . all high up, just like that. I never told you what I was. You were so fine, so big in my life ; you were Henry Whistler’s belongings, not a head waiter’s wife and daughter. God wasn’t a waiter’s God, he was Henry Whistler’s God . . . it was the same idea. God and you were refined. I kept you for my private life. I hadn’t the proper accommodation for you in the other. I wanted to be a gentleman to my God and my wife and my child. Do you understand ? ”

“ As if it would have made any difference ! ”

“ It would. It has,” said Henry Whistler. “ Not as much to you, but it has to Zuriel. I saw it in her face to-day.”

“ That’s because of Nicholas and those snobby Timothy’s.”

“ It is always because of someone.” He paused. “ Ever since I went there years ago I’ve dreamed . . . I’ve longed . . . I’ve *waited* for the day when old Conrad should fail and I would come to you and say, ‘ I own Conrad’s. I own Conrad’s ! ’ Every man has an ideal in his life and personal service lies at the back of it. I wanted to be in the service of the public, to serve the best with

the best. I thought of Conrad's as something to bring you and Zuriel, the best thing I could bring . . . I never thought you and Zuriel mightn't want it if I brought it. I never thought."

"It's because you lived with me, not by yourself," said his wife. "That's what's been wrong, Henry dear."

"I wanted it for myself," said Henry slowly. "To make a hero of myself for you. Conrad's has become a tradition with me. It still seems to me wonderful and beautiful in these days of adulteration, of faked food-stuffs, or rubbish prettily served in dainty surroundings, to serve the very, very best, to make your name on that and stand by it, to uphold a promise your name stands for. I seem incorporated with Conrad's. The old man . . . he knew, he used to talk to me. He built Conrad's in me . . . he made it part of me. He knew you didn't know. He made me see Conrad's as a prize to gain. They've a book . . . all the wonderful receipts in it . . . larks' tongues and rare wines . . . he made that into a poem for me. In a book they've the names of some of the people who used to go there . . . in his father's time and his grandfather's time,

Disraeli, princes . . . poets . . . I felt as if I were carrying a banner . . . carrying it for people like that, a crusader against corruption and adulteration. I stood for the good old times, sometimes I think I even thought I could bring them back if I was true to Conrad ideals. I believe in pure food as people's right. I . . . I can't tell you *how* I believe in it. It was built up in me by old Conrad. I am proud of Conrad's and what it stood for . . . and Conrad's was going to accept me."

"The Timothys," said his wife, "would have broken their hearts if Nicholas was to marry the owner of Conrad's . . . let alone the head waiter. There's no getting away from it, is there? I mean if you had bought Conrad's I wouldn't have minded personally."

"Minded!"

"Well, dear, we've only just heard of Conrad's as you might say. It's been your life, but it hasn't been ours."

"But Conrad's!" He flung his hands in the air with a funny little gesture. "Conrad's is the crown I've been saving up all my life to buy for you."

"It wouldn't fit," said Poppy; "crowns

you've never heard of *can't* fit . . . you haven't grown for them. . . ." She was very quiet, her hands had ceased to flutter. "We've had sixty years of life. Sixty years is a long time."

"But to reach the top."

"And then get pushed down so that someone younger may go on. It's always happening, Henry dear. The world isn't for elderly people at all, but they're not strong enough to own it. We've had sixty years and Zuriel has sixty years to go . . . perhaps everything you've done has been to push her to where she stands now. I can't see God as a kind old personal friend like you do, Henry; I wish I could. To me he's something with funny ways. I feel that all this may be just funny ways."

"But you don't understand. If Sir Terence takes Conrad's he'll . . . he'll desecrate it. Old Charlie is too old . . . he doesn't really care, he's got the place at Cannes I've been fixing up for him to play with. I'm not a civil servant. Why should I be something to please Zuriel? Why *should* I give up?"

"It's life that's giving you up," said his wife. "Life's done with you and me, but

it hasn't done with Zuriel. Why should we send her into the new life with an apology. She's going abroad . . . she's going out of our lives. Our children aren't given to us, they're only lent. Nicholas says that. Nothing is given to us in life, it's only lent."

"Zuriel'll have to tell this young man."

"Zuriel won't. He doesn't have to know. It wouldn't make him any happier. Zuriel won't. I *know* Zuriel."

"There isn't anything beautiful to you in pure food beautifully cooked?"

"Oh, Henry!" protested his wife pitifully, "what's the good of walking round and round it? I've asked Sir Timothy and his wife down to lunch at the bungalow next Sunday."

"Is the young man a snob?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Whistler, "but he doesn't know it."

"All my life I've wanted Conrad's. We could have spent more, had a bigger home . . . but I saved for Conrad's."

"Nicholas is going away for six months to-night," said Mrs. Whistler. "If he knew who Zuriel's father was . . . I hesitate to say it because I don't know . . . but I think . . . Have you the right to slam the door on

her future, which may last a long time, to carry on your future for the little while that is left to you ? ”

“ But to own Conrad's ! ”

“ It depends how you look at Conrad's. ”

“ But to know that I could have had it . . . and that it is going into old Timothy's money-making hands. ”

“ It will only be *one* of Sir Terence's interests . . . there's the difference. Sir Terence is a merchant prince. I saw him described as that in the paper. His business is an organisation. You didn't want *us* to know you were head waiter. ”

“ No. No . . . I know. You mean what I felt they'll feel ? ”

“ If you buy Conrad's it will be bound to come out . . . it may even come out if Sir Terence buys it. ”

“ I worked there under the name of Squires. ”

“ Ah ! then you see ! ”

“ I shan't see Sir Terence . . . no one'll know, it isn't that. Oh, Poppy ! it's a blow . . . it's a blow ! ”

“ You like paddling about, ” said Mrs. Whistler. “ You always liked paddling about, dear, the garden and then down the town. ”

We could know people. I've always wanted to know a few people . . . a little game of Bridge . . . homely things . . . you like bulb catalogues . . . and Zuriel's letters . . . and I could knit all their little woollies if they came. I've never had evenings with you. It'll be just like being newly married."

"It's awful to give it up."

She said, "It isn't as if I've things to give, dear, things that would make it up, high spirits, kisses, all that sort of thing, but I could share . . . that's the big hunger in old age . . . someone to share the slowing up . . . the little things that don't seem important to anyone else. I'm a sharing kind of person, Henry dear. We'd share this sacrifice. Little plans . . . it doesn't matter so's you can go on planning . . . it's the planning that matters. I'm very near to you, Henry."

"My dear," he said, shaken. "My dear wife."

"I mean, Henry, it's been hard . . . you were so correct. I'm a cossety kind of woman, tucking up and fussing. Sometimes I've felt so lonely, dear, I've longed for you to have a bad cold . . . and then you never needed brushing and you ironed your own

ties. It's difficult to get near men like you. Crying now . . . Henry, dear . . . you don't mind my mentioning your crying . . . but if I'd known you could do it it would have altered all my married life. I've respected you all these years," said Poppy Whistler. "Oh! Henry dear, it would have been so much easier if I hadn't."

It was quite dark in the Marchesa's lounge. Poppy roused herself.

"There's that poor old lady shut up there with no tea. Henry dear, couldn't you manage a cup too? It's china . . . the best."

The telephone rang.

Poppy Whistler went to it. Her husband heard her voice.

"Come home! Certainly not, child! I've got your father. Hullo! is that you, Nicky? Yes, he had a lovely holiday and looks ever so fit. She's a silly child, make the most of the short time you've got together. You'd like us to? What! *both* of us? But your own people will be there. Wouldn't it be better . . . Oh! very well . . . Yes, certainly, if you wish it."

"Nicholas wants us both to go and see him off. Oh, Henry! did they look at you?"

“ Not as a person, only as a waiter. I look so different in these clothes.”

He crossed the room to her.

“ Oh, Henry, Henry ! You will ! You will ! ”

“ It’s all right, my dear. There ! it’s all right. I’ve been thinking . . . thinking.”

XXVI

HENRY SEES IT THROUGH

SUNSHINE.

In the garden the ruby of blood-red wallflower, the amber of the dwarf antirrhinum, the lapis lazuli of the delphinium, the amethyst of the viola, the turquoise of the forget-me-not, shifting, shifting under the sun like a tray of jewels under a jeweller's lamp.

“Wonderful wine, Whistler.”

“I fancy myself a little as a judge of wines, Sir Timothy.”

Lizzie coming and going in a new cap and apron, a little too noisily, breathing a little too heavily. Good old Lizzie dreaming of weddings, while she handed Lady Terence the sauce tartare.

“You have a charming home, child.” Zuriel in white, smiling back at her future mother-in-law.

A sea breeze coming through the open

window, brushing the heads of the flowers on the table, ruffling Zuriel's pale hair.

"So Mr. Redgold is married," said Lady Timothy. "I don't care for artists much, you have to be so careful who you sit them next to at dinner. They say such very upsetting things sometimes. I liked her hat that day at Conrad's. Wonderful sauce, Mrs. Whistler. You must have a good cook."

"Oh, I've only one girl."

Henry had made the sauce. Lizzie knew. Lizzie was goggling.

Sir Timothy said, "I've a bit of news for you, a bit of news. I'd never been inside Conrad's till that day . . . now I've bought it. It's mine. Took a fancy to it that day and went after it."

Only Lizzie did not know he was lying.

"I sold the panelling to an American. It'll be one of the Tiny Tea-Tables, Limited; they don't want a past, they want a future. I'm having pink lights put in everywhere."

"Were you sorry to leave the Civil Service, Mr. Whistler?" interrupted Lady Timothy firmly.

Sir Terence burbled on.

"White paint, pink satin panels . . . a jazz band."

Henry was standing by the sideboard. He had been standing there for hours surely. He was milky white.

“ Nothing like pink for making the middle classes feel abandoned. I’ve sacked most of the staff. Gave ’em six months’ money. I don’t want my name bandied about among the unemployed. I’ll have girls . . . girls in pink.”

“ Henry,” said Mrs. Whistler, “ Lady Timothy wants some wine.”

Henry said :

“ Certainly, Madame, certainly.”

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