The Tideway

by
John
Ayscough

H. O'LAUGHLIN

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Spiced Gooseberries

6 qts of gooseberries
9 lbs of sugar
1 pt vinegar
1 tblspoon each cinnamon
cloves & allspice

THE TIDEWAY

put berries in kettle with
half the sugar & a little water
boil 1½ hr. when nearly done
add the rest of sugar
set it off fire & add the
spices

THE TIDEWAY

BY

JOHN AYSCOUGH pseud.

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Author of "Faustula," "Saints and Places,"
"French Windows," etc.

New York, Cincinnati, Chicago
BENZIGER BROTHERS
PUBLISHERS OF BENZIGER'S MAGAZINE
1918

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THE TIDEWAY

THE SACRISTANS

I

THE two churches faced each other, with the open space of the Naumachia between them, in the midst of which was the stone ship, like the one in the Piazza de Spagna at Rome, that gave the place its name.

Santa Venera is a very old place, much older than its name, unless they are right who declare that no such Christian saint ever existed as Venera, and that the name is simply a variant of *venere,* and nothing more or less than the Italian form of the name of the goddess of love. These people maintain that the hill-town of Aphrodisia stood on this site, and that the church of Santa Venera, in the Naumachia, was a temple of Aphrodite seven hundred years before Christianity had any martyrs. Anyway, the place is admittedly an ancient Greek colony, founded from Colchis, a year or two later than Syracuse. And enthusiasts affirm that the people have Greek faces still, and that their speech is thickly strewn with Hellenisms. Throughout Sicily, we are constantly told, there are three strongly marked types: the Punic, the Greek, the Saracenic; and Santa Venera is in the heart of the Greek sphere.

In all the world no place can be more exquisitely hung between the mountains and the sea—the Ionian Sea, where gods sailed and heroes who were the sons of gods. It is not half a mile inland, but a thousand feet above the saffron belt of shore; and from the Naumachia all the mountain gorges of Calabria, across the strait, are mysteriously visible.

No one could believe those are real mountains, lying disclosed, yet veiled, in the light of which our poet sang, such a light, as surely, elsewhere, never was on sea or land.

Maso was the sacristan of Santa Venera, and Tito the sacristan of the Pietá; and their churches faced each other. Both had been temples, and in both the old heathen columns had been built into the Christian walls. Maso's church was much the bigger; it was, in fact, the cathedral, for Santa Venera has a bishop; all the same, it was quite a small building, much smaller than any church in all Northhamptonshire. But Tito's was more fashionable, and, as a consequence, much smarter. One side-altar in the Pietá possessed more artificial flowers than the whole of Santa Venera could boast of, including the high altar; and such facts as these Tito was studious to impress on Maso's recollection.

Tito was, naturally, much better off than Maso; and he liked to show it. Maso got very little beyond his wages, and they were only ten scudi a month—for the church in those parts still keeps its accounts in scudi, though such a coin has not existed for half a century. Only the priests belonging to the church ever said Mass at Santa Venera, and they simply looked on Maso as their own servant; of course, they never tipped him.

But several "congregations" were established in the Pietá, such as the *Figlie di Maria,* and the *Santissimi Cuori.* And Tito drew a pleasing revenue from each of them. Moreover, the Madonna of the Pietá was miraculous, and plenty of tourist priests who wished to give a pious touch of pilgrimage to their holiday would come and say Mass at her altar. Tito, on these occasions, so managed matters that no priest could get out of the sacristy without giving him at least a franc for the murky black coffee he would bring him in a thick tumbler. Added to all this, there were the candles that the faithful offered to the Madonna that was so notoriously miraculous, and which they had to buy of Tito. They were in four sizes: those at two soldi, which cost Tito two francs the hundred; those at five soldi, which cost him one franc a dozen; those at half a lira, for which he paid two and one-half lire the dozen; and very grand ones at a franc each (painted gilt or ornamented), for which Tito had to pay five lire the dozen.

As Tito always took care the candles should by no means burn out, he managed another very comfortable profit that way. But the correctness of his business instincts was sufficiently shown by his choosing the greatest proportion of profit should be on the cheapest candles, of which the sale would naturally be the most extensive.

Maso advertised his comparative poverty by a personal dirtiness that would have astounded any beholder whose ideas of Sicily were drawn from clever English or American novels. Not that Maso himself considered dirtiness any advertisement of anything; he merely regarded cleanliness as foppish.

All the same he liked to be thought poorer than he actually was; it made him feel a sort of credit-balance of possession.

Tito, on the other hand, was smart and rather clean to the naked eye; only the hands, face and neck after all are visible to it. These Tito not only washed, but he used scented, very highly scented soap to them. So that he smelt like a muskrat.

Tito saw no use in opulence, unless one looked affluent; and he endeavored, with some local success, to appear more affluent than he really was. No one had ever seen Maso on the day he shaved, though he was not understood to grow a beard, any more than the other ecclesiastical persons of Santa Venera. Tito, no doubt, was far from being shaved daily; for even *his* extravagance had its limits, and daily shaving would have seemed a profligate extravagance indeed to the Sicilians of the province of Catania. But on his unshaved days Tito never seemed to be in evidence. Moreover, he always wore a coat, whereas Maso only wore his when he happened to be serving Mass; he had a pair, too, of celluloid cuffs with immense solitaire studs (representing the King and Queen of Italy, a good deal flushed by their regalia), and he wore collars and a blood-colored necktie; shoes also, with intensely pointed toes, while Maso's ragged stockings were very little concealed by a pair of raw hide sandals.

Finally, Maso was eighty-three, though quite unaware of the fact, and had a wife nearly as old, quite as dirty, more ill-tempered and miserly and ignorant than himself. Tito was a bachelor, and considered himself about seven and twenty.

"Four priests from Malta said Mass at the 'Miraculous' to-day," observed Tito with detachment. He had nothing to do. Maso was cobbling a boot, and Tito liked watching him; it emphasized his own leisure. For Tito had no trade, outside his sacristanship, though he often earned some francs by waiting at one of the hotels, or at the bar in the Teatro Elena.

So now he leaned against the doorpost with his fine eyes bent on the mustard-colored boot, with high top for the trousers to button into, at which the old man was working.

"That's where England begins," observed Maso; and Tito nodded.

"But these were not English," he explained. "Maltese."

Maso raised his head and spat far out into the sunlight; it was his only recreation, and cost nothing.

Tito made a cigarette and lighted it.

"That makes eleven this month," he remarked, "and to-day we have the seventeenth only."

"Eleven francs?"

"No. But fifteen francs fifty. One gave me five francs; he was English, and another two francs fifty. It should have been twenty-five francs fifty, but the ten franc note the American gave me was a bad one."

Maso began to look pleasanter; a friend's dissappointment is exhilarating. "The money is all bad in America," he asserted with a fine independence of data.

"The note was Italian," observed Tito.

Maso smacked the sole of the boot with a flat mallet, as though he were a Prince of Wales declaring that it was well and truly laid. Tito stared over his head into the house, whence came the sound of slipshod feet moving about. He knew it was not Pippa—she was not at all slipshod—without seeing her, for it seemed quite dark in there from where he stood in the hot sunlight: he knew it was her grandmother. All the same he called out, "It goes well, Pippa?"

Old Lucia was as deaf as a post. There came no answer from her; but Maso muttered:

"She is not. She is gone to Giardini. This one is the old she." He did not look up; nor did he speak very plainly, for he had a piece of waxed thread in his mouth. But Tito heard him.

"She is getting very deaf," he observed; as though he were not thinking of Pippa.

"When they become old they are like that," snapped Maso.

He spoke with impatient tolerance, as if he himself were a young fellow still.

"Is it not bad to suck that?" inquired Tito. "Bad for the stomach?"—with a slight tap on his own chest.

"I do it," replied Maso. "It is my custom." He went on with his boot; and Tito looked across the Naumachia to a gap between the houses in which all Calabria was framed. He had not the least idea that it was beautiful.

"To bite the wax thread—that is my custom," continued Maso. "Others smoke paper with minced tobacco inside. The wax thread tastes also bitter. I prefer it."

Suddenly he withdrew the thread from his teeth and hospitably offered it to his visitor. "Taste!" he said. "It is bitter like the wet end of cigars."

But Tito waved a refusal, politely.

"I believe," he declared gravely.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, and the sun was very hot. He stepped in over Maso's legs; and presently could see Lucia plainly enough as she slopped about the floor. There was a smell of wood smoke and onions and leather, especially the two latter. Tito remembered complacently how much more comfortable his own house was, though he was a bachelor.

All the same, old Lucia considered that she was having a rather special clean-up to-day. She pulled things out of their places and presently pushed them back again; and she turned a few things out of drawers into cupboards. One cupboard opened with some difficulty; inside were a few jars of the common glazed ware made in the place; jars of perfect shapes and satisfying tone of color.

Lucia was short, and the cupboard rather high up; she had to stretch on tip-toe to grope in it. Presently she pulled a jar down altogether; it fell to the birch floor and was smashed there. In a moment the uneven, broken flooring was strewn with gold coins.

II

Tito strolled across the Naumachia to his own church. He had nothing to do there; but he had observed casually to Maso that the ladies (i.e., of the Santissimi Cuori) had a conference this afternoon, and he must prepare for it. As a matter of fact he had prepared already. Not that he had any very particular object in lying. It was, as Maso had said, his custom; he did it. Nor would he have been at all affected by the knowledge that the old man never believed him. His custom would have remained unaltered.

"I go," he had said, "to make ready for the Jesuit, the Jesuit of the ladies. He comes from Acireale to-day."

Maso grunted. He did not like Jesuits, though he did not know why; he thought it right. So Tito walked off; and disappeared into the Pietá. He had not taken any notice at all of the gold pieces. Only he had said when the jar smashed, "It will be said I have the 'evil eye'!" And he pretended to make horns against himself. "I go or Maso will want me to buy him a new jar, and that one I saw had no spout, and was cracked already."

Thus, as he felt, with infinite tact did he cover his immediate retreat, and leave Maso to gather up his money.

Would Lucia get a beating? he wondered. He did not care in the least whether she did or no. He had no grudge against her, and no fancy for her. He was quite indifferent. That his enemies should be hurt would please him; that his friends should get good luck did not annoy him, so long as their luck was not better than his own. For the rest he thought only of himself.

He let himself out of the sacristy door of the church, having first locked the big door towards the Naumachia from inside. As he passed the high altar he did not genuflect; there was no one to see him, and he was bored by all the observances of religion. That was the worst of being a sacristan. He had no religion at all, and it was tiresome to have to pretend to any. He liked his occasional duties at the Teatro Elena much better. For that one thing he had been sorry when his military service was over; during that time he had certainly made no show of religion or morality.

The sacristy door opened on to a narrow, steep path, descending between garden walls to the road down to Giardini. Tito intended to go to meet Pippa as she came back. There was no hurry, and it was shady here between the high walls. Tito enjoyed his leisure, and he was thinking of other pleasant things besides Maso's handsome granddaughter; of those gold pieces, for instance; of the fact that Pippa was the old sacristan's only descendant or relative; and of that trick he had of chewing the wax thread, piece after piece, all day long. After nearly a quarter of a mile the descent ends in steps, and the steps end in the broad, winding carriage road. Tito lay on the bank and continued to enjoy his leisure. After all, it was unquestionably less trouble to be sacristan of the Pietá than a soldier, and much more remunerative. Over against him Etna hung in the sky; but all her beauties were invisible to him. Beauty is in the eyes. And yet Tito's own eyes were beautiful enough; he was well used to the undisguised admiration artists betrayed for him; and had often earned easy money as a model. Perhaps in him the pure Greek type was uppermost, but the

Saracenic strain that struggled with it only bettered it.

It would be hard to find a more opulent example of physical beauty than Tito—but that he should be a Christian! His very beauty belied his superficial Christianity; it was pagan; classical, with just suspicions of the Arabic, the Oriental. Oddly enough, the man, worthless in fifty ways, had scarcely any personal vanity. He was much vainer of his clothes. He had bought those for himself, and they had cost much; and Tito deeply respected what was expensive. His beauty had been given him, and Tito hardly ever valued a free gift, unless it were money, and even then he cared less for it than for money he had acquired by his own scheming and unscrupulosity.

Besides, there were other young men in Santa Venera nearly as handsome as himself, but there were none of his class so smartly dressed. Nevertheless, Tito consciously valued his appearance as an asset, for to be vain of a possession and to be aware of it are two different things. And Tito knew that his assets were not so many that the most obvious of them could be left out of calculation.

For Tito was desperately in want of money. He knew very well that the appearance, rather than the reality, of affluence had all along been his; to a reputation for wealth he had sedulously lived up, than which no process is more hopelessly expensive. And now he was inextricably in debt.

III

Pippa came up from Giardini, in the blazing noon, unembarrassed by the sun's stare, and unvexed by the the fury of his caresses. She neither loitered nor hurried, her limbs moving, as it seemed, of themselves, without her taking any thought of them. And she held herself finely erect, as though a water-vessel were balanced on her head, as indeed it often was. The road winds north and south, along the face of the steep, but, whichever way she faced, there was always one of the loveliest views in the world before her. But she noticed it all as little as Tito.

Presently, however, she came close to someone whose trade it was to notice such things, one of the artists who abound here, to whose presence everyone had long grown accustomed. They had come long before the tourists, and now, before the horrible tidal wave of tourists, they were beginning to recede. This one was a Sicilian, like Pippa herself, but come hither from a Roman studio, up ninety-three steps, in the Capo le Case, not far from where it runs sideways into the Via Sistina.

He sat in the bend of the road that jutted out a little, as on a sort of rock bracket, and had a view of Etna that was incomparable. Scores of people passed up and down every day, but he had been the only one to discover just that particular view, and he was proud of it. A dozen paces up or down, and the picture was quite different.

"Buon giorno, signorina!"

Pippa had slowed down perceptibly from the turn of the road whence she caught sight of him. He had seen her long before as she came up the twisting road—she was close to him now and almost stood still.

"Giorno!"

She glanced at his picture; it would not have interested her, but that she knew it would be bought by someone. Anything that brought money was, naturally, important. Signor Enrico Longo quite understood her point of view.

"I shall put it in the *Esposizione dei Belli Arti,*" he said, "and sell it for four hundred lire."

Pippa made a polite little noise, expressive of not too much surprise, absolute belief and appropriate congratulation. But she did not really suppose he would get so much. She had a sort of scale of exaggerations in her mind, and assessed the selling value of the picture at about two hundred and fifty, which was, alas! about the real figure.

Signor Enrico took a fairly long look at her, and then looked back at his view. He quite felt that it was his, and liked it especially for that reason. But he liked the picture on the canvas best. He only cared for the actual view as it was capable of becoming a picture. His appreciation of the magnificence of beauty in mountain and sea and sky, and Pippa's and Tito's lack of it, were not really very wide apart. To be alive to such beauties was his trade, and it was not theirs, that was all.

They were all three Sicilians, and all three materialists.

Pippa looked at Signor Enrico. He was very handsome, too, for the present, and his eyes would always be divine. But no other feature was perfect, as every feature in Tito was. The artist was thin, and his nose, owing to his thinness, appeared too long; so did his neck. But he was a gentleman, and Pippa balanced it all accurately. And she was quite right in counting Longo a gentleman, though as a matter of fact his father was only a small innkeeper at Noto. They had known each other some weeks, and Pippa was certain that Signor Enrico admired her, though, oddly enough, he had never made love to her. Had he attempted to do so, she would have been extremely capable of taking care of herself.

He was looking at his canvas with a quiet satisfaction that was entirely unlike vanity. Except of a certain walking stick he had, he was not in the least vain of anything. It had a watch and a musical box in the top, and must have been extremely expensive; an American who had bought one of his pictures had given it to him. Yet his picture was really beautiful, and he was serenely conscious of his complete achievement. It was exactly what he had intended it to be.

"Signorina!"

Pippa attended.

"I would like to paint your portrait."

She laughed. "Why?" she asked, with more coquetry than was habitual to her.

"Because it would be a beautiful picture, and I should sell it instantly."

"For how much?"

"For six hundred francs," he replied with undisguised flattery.

And Pippa was flattered. "Six hundred francs!" Say he even got half of it. For one's portrait to fetch three hundred francs and perhaps go to Rome and be seen by all the world in the *Esposizione!*

"If there is an opportunity," she observed, with a doubtfulness that was not intended to discourage; merely to enhance the concession.

IV

It was just then Tito came round the corner and found them. He had grown tired of waiting, and had found that the bank whereon he lay was overstocked with big blank ants, like minute dumb-bells. He was not at all pleased at finding Pippa talking to Signor Longo, so smiled broadly, and they both, being compatriots of his, understood perfectly.

"The signorina," observed the artist, "has promised to let me paint her portrait."

The noon-day *Ave Maria* was just ringing from the convent above them, and Longo began to put his things together; it was time to go up to the inn for dinner.

Tito remarked: "What an honor!" without specifying to whom.

"Why should not I have your portrait, too? Will you also be painted?" asked the painter.

"Why?" inquired Tito, just as Pippa had done, but with less coquetry.

He was really uncertain why Longo should wish to paint him; and, being uncertain, inclined to be suspicious. Perhaps the artist would manage that the portrait should be ugly, and at the same time very like him. Tito did not like that idea and could not see where it might lead to.

"Oh," said Longo quietly, "I have always wished to paint you. You are the handsomest man I have ever seen."

Tito was taken aback. It was not that his modesty was disconcerted; he was wholly unassailed by any. But he was a very primary person, sure to be diconcerted at first by the unusual. And the direct, obviously sincere, praise of his beauty expressed by the artist was a first experience. To compliments from other artists he was well inured; but they had always been deftly insinuated, only half expressed, and yet had always conveyed a note of exaggeration. He knew nothing yet of this Northern directness.

As for Longo, he was not at all ignorant of the effect of his speech; he quite understood it. He, too, was Southern, and used to the stale compliment of convention; but he had been startled once by receiving from an Englishman a tribute of which his own to Tito had been the paraphrase. He had been at once so conscious of the effect, that he had resolved, when occasion offered, to try the simple weapon himself. In his way Longo was very clever; and he made some use out of everybody.

"I go to school to everyone," he said, "and they all teach me something. Even the very stupid ones teach me not to be stupid." But this avowal was to himself; he had no other confidant.

"Will you paint us together? Pippa and me together—you mean that?" demanded Tito.

"If the signorina prefers it thus."

But the signorina was very far from preferring it; that she and Tito should be painted together would, she thought, be equivalent to the most public announcement of their betrothal.

They all three came up the steep road together, Pippa talking very little. Indeed, the Signor Enrico bore the weight of the conversation. Tito saw no use in talking to the girl with another man there. And he did not particularly want to talk to Longo. All the same, he did talk a little, otherwise he felt he should think too much, and he did not want the artist to guess what he was thinking about.

At his dinner, however, he gave way to it, thinking with a good deal of compressing and intensity. For Tito was capable of dogged effort and concentration of purpose. And, especially he was conscious that he must make haste. He had felt that already, before finding Pippa and Signor Longo together. But now he realized that it was, more than ever, necessary to be quick.

Less than two months ago he had been certain that Pippa was ready to marry him! so certain that there had seemed to him no instant necessity to ask her. And, on the other hand, he had not then at all made up his mind that Maso had any money worth considering to leave her. He knew that some people declared the old man had saved a fortune; but, then, they were sure to say that of an old man who was notoriously a miser; and until to-day Tito had much doubted the report. Pippa was so beautiful that he could not bear to think of her marrying any other man; but he wanted money so badly! If she had nothing but her beauty could he afford it?

Like all Southerners, Tito was practical. He had a keen appreciation of luxuries, and a whole-hearted inclination for pleasures and indulgences; but he was very conscious that there were undoubted pleasures and indulgences beyond his means. Now that it had come to his knowledge, through Lucia's accident, that Maso had plenty to leave his granddaughter, to marry her appeared to Tito no longer an extravagance, but a duty. But he felt no longer so sure of her. If she also were aware of her prospects, it is natural she should rate herself highly. And it suddenly seemed certain to Tito that she had been less favorable to him since the artist had turned up.

V

For more than four-score years Maso had lived and never had been ill. That he should be ill now, therefore, made him angry. He could not understand it. He remembered a good many people dying, and had generally attended their funerals, professionally walking beside the hearse in an astonishingly black suit, and carrying a big torch of dirty brown wax, to the Campo Santo on the spur of the hill just outside the Giardini gate, below the Cappucini. All that had appeared to him very natural. It had put four or five, sometimes ten francs in his pocket, and had always seemed to him a very sensible arrangement of Providence. But he did not at all see why he should be ill himself, as it had never happened before. And he had a disagreeable conviction that he should die; and that would upset all his habits.

Maso had never been anywhere else; not even to Messina or Catania or Acireale. He had never wanted to visit strange places. They were always, he understood, exceedingly expensive. About fifteen years ago, too, there had been a landslip, and part of the Campo Santo had gone violently down a steep place into the sea; that was just after the rainy spring and the earthquake of 1889. And now there had been another earthquake and the spring had been intolerably rainy. He could not bear the idea of being in the Campo Santo if a landslip were to send half of it jumping down the hillside to Capo Sant' Andrea again. Yet he felt sure he must be going to die. Otherwise why should he be ill? He felt confident that he was not a person to be ill just for nothing. All the same he went on as if nothing were going to happen. He continued doing his work in the church exactly as usual; though one or two of the priests noticed he was ill, and advised him to take a holiday.

"When their illustrious Reverences give me a pension!" he retorted, enjoying his own sarcasm sourly.

And Tito offered to do his work for him; but he only said sharply, "That you may get promoted to my place once you have pushed your toe into it!"

Tito made a face which the old man saw and chuckled over; it was pleasant to pretend that it would have been promotion for the smart young sacristan of the Pietá to be translated to Santa Venera. So he kept on in the church; and kept on at his cobbling in the dirty front room, with its open arch, unglazed level with the street. But his face grew more ghastly every day, so that, had he closed his eyes and leaned back against the wall, anyone would have said he was dead already; and his temples stuck out nearly as fleshless as a skeleton's. Nevertheless, he went on smacking the sole of the shoes with his wooden mallet, and sucking the bitter wax threads as, he had told Tito, was his custom.

Of Tito he thought almost constantly. Of his wife scarcely at all, and of Pippa not much, except in relation to Tito. Maso had never been romantic, and sixty years of wedded life had thrown no halo 'round Lucia's squalid old head. Her miserliness was the only endearing quality she retained for him. That she was dirty he would not have noticed, nor did he particularly mind her being ugly, as she had been for forty years and longer; but her deafness was inconvenient and uncalled for. Also he was exasperated with her for having smashed the jar in which he had hidden his beloved savings. As he sat cobbling he never thought of her, except with an occasional brief movement of jealous irritation at her surviving him. Nor, as has been said, was he much occupied about Pippa. He had never, after all, cared a great deal for the girl; and his only real interest in her had begun comparatively lately, when he had perceived that the idea of marrying her had come to Tito. For Maso adored Tito. In all his long dull life Maso had never cared for anyone else except Peppino, the girl's father, who had been born to him and Lucia after fifteen years of marriage. Peppino had been sickly, and had only plucked up strength to marry when he was nearly thirty. That was how Pippa came to be so young. Long before she could remember, her father had died; whereupon Maso had devoted himself to saving for the sake of the money itself, which he had at first begun to scrape together for Peppino.

It was all very simple and squalid. What was not simple, was the adoration the old man had gradually conceived for the young rival sacristan. To himself, Maso never acknowledged it, and could not in the least understand it. Perhaps no one could. To do him that much justice, Tito never suspected it, though it is not likely that, if he had, it would have made any difference to his needy selfishness. Maso always snubbed him, and belittled him as well to his face as behind his back. The very things for which the old man secretly admired him, he openly derided and scoffed at: Tito's fine clothes and smart ways, his schooling, and power of writing as well as speaking Italian, his conceited manners—alas! his lax morality, even his selfishness and self-indulgence. Maso sneered less at his scheming and unscrupulousness, but those also he admired slavishly; and the only person in the world who suspected it was Don Cenzo, the notary. For Don Cenzo was a wise old man and very silent, and he had made Maso's will for him and understood it.

VI

The day before Maso died, a thing happened which might have been of no ultimate importance had not Signor Enrico Longo, the artist, chanced to see it. He was standing by the wide arch-door of Maso's workshop, and undetected by the old man had been rapidly sketching him; his appearance had become so extraordinary that Longo thought it worth making into a rough study that might be useful. It had not taken long and he had finished and put the bit of paper away, when Tito came sauntering across the Naumachia, and presently leaned against the opposite doorpost. His nonchalance was so unstudied that it attracted Longo's attention, and made him discern under it a further excitement. Tito looked more dissipated than usual, which was one of fate's unfairnesses, for he had been lately much steadier. He was as handsome as ever, but his eyes seemed almost too big and brilliant, and there were deep shades of black under them, almost like bruises.

"He won't call the doctor," observed Longo, nodding towards Maso. "I've been telling him that I met Doctor Manchini just now, down the hill there by Castello a Mare; he had been to see someone at the convent, and I nearly told him he should come up here to see Maso."

Maso growled. He did not believe in doctors, and knew they were expensive. Tito was unable to repress entirely a certain relief at his obstinacy. It was not that, however, which Longo particularly noticed, but something that took place immediately afterwards.

Don Taddeo, the carpenter, who was also the undertaker, had a goat, and this animal came along the Naumachia tossing her head conceitedly. Now goats, especially the Sicilian goats, have many salient characteristics, but diffidence is never one of them. An inquisitive appetite is; and as she came close to Maso's wooden tray on short legs, that stood outside on the pavement close to his elbow, and at the same level, she thrust her nose into it in search of anything obviously edible that might be in it. A bundle of wax threads, cut into rather uneven lengths, seemed to satisfy every requirement, and she seized them hastily in her very prehensile mouth and made hurriedly off with all the exhilaration of conscious transgression. At that particular moment Signor Longo's eyes happened to be on Tito's face.

"She has taken them, Maso!" he called out. "Your bunch of wax threads."

The old man looked after her indifferently. With uplifted head she had paused, fifty yards away, to devour them hastily.

"I chew them, signor," he observed. "It is my custom as I told you, Tito. They taste bitter, like the wet end of a cigar; and they cost cheaper."

Presently Longo went away. But he lodged with Don Taddeo, and that evening he was informed of the goat's demise, which was the more trying to Taddeo that her condition was at the time most interesting. Half an hour later Maso himself heard of it. Pippa brought back the news, for she had been to see Assunta, Don Taddeo's wife, who had always been rather a friend of hers, and more markedly so during the last few weeks. Assunta was a good-natured woman and liked Signor Longo, whereas she detested Tito, who gave himself airs—as if a sacristan were much higher in ecclesiastical precedence than an undertaker—which Don Taddeo's wife resented vigorously, seeing that her husband had a couple of fields and the two black horses that drew most people on their last drive out of Santa Venera.

"They are tiresome things," observed Pippa, sympathetically, "and who knows what will poison them. Don Marsom, the *farmacista,* had a goat that ate a lot of yellow spurge and was no worse, only his bambino that drank the milk died. Whereas your goat eats some wax threads (that belonged, saving your honor, to my grandfather, for his cobbling) and she dies. *Ecco!*"

She thought it well to remind them that the original grievance had been Maso's. From Don Taddeo's Signor Enrico walked home with her; the first time she had definitely accepted his escort, though often enough they had met in the road and talked, or walked a bit of the way together. In the Corso they met Tito, and Pippa told him Don Taddeo's goat was dead.

"Don Taddeo, the undertaker, has he got a goat?"

His ignorance seemed to Longo rather elaborate.

"No," he said, "he has not; for it is dead, as Pippa is telling you."

"But he had one; a blue one!" said the girl, who was certain Tito knew very well that the undertaker had a goat.

"It ate a bunch of *Nonno's* wax threads this morning," she explained in a tone of complaint, as though the result were vaguely discreditable to the family, "and soon after the *Ave Maria* it died."

"Altro! It was that goat? I saw it," said Tito.

They walked on, and Tito continued his way in the opposite direction. They were both thinking about his pretending not to know that Don Taddeo had a goat. So when they spoke it was of another matter.

"Why should it die?" complained Pippa, adhering to her grievance. "A few wax threads!"

"And your grandfather has always chewed them, as he told Tito." Signor Enrico's tone was innocence itself, and his face was as expressionless as he could make it. All the same, Pippa immediately knew what he was thinking of.

"Until now," she observed, "they never did him harm. He has chewed them all his life."

Longo looked more and more innocent.

"All his life, yes," he agreed, "they did him no mischief—until now."

"And now," the girl asked, "What do you think? He is very ill?"

"He will die very soon," the artist declared plainly.

VII

Maso was dead—yes, and buried, too; for in the hot south the great onward journey of one's soul is followed very quickly by the shorter last journey of one's body. Close by the cracked wall, on the side nearest the precipitous hill at whose foot lies Capo Sant' Andrea and the sea, lies his ugly new grave; in an inevitable position for the next landslip. For Maso had said nothing, and his repulsions on the subject were unconjectured.

Another old sacristan, belonging to the Cappucini, had borrowed his threadbare and greasy black suit to walk by his hearse, partly out of respect for the deceased, and partly to gain two francs fifty. Tito, of course, attended also in his newer black suit, the same he waited in at the restaurant of the Teatro Elena. And naturally Don Taddeo was there, for there is only one undertaker in Santa Venera, talking, as he walked to his neighbor, the chemist, Don Marco; they spoke a little of old Maso, but more of Don Taddeo's goat, as was natural. And under the big hibiscus tree in the corner of the Campo Santo stood Signor Longo, the artist, sketching the funeral, which he recognized as pictorial. His own country was not without honor to this prophet; and though a Sicilian, he was keenly alive to the scenic splendors of Sicily. That he loved its marvelous beauties I am not prepared to say, but he thoroughly recognized their utility for reproductive purposes. Up in the dim old house on the Naumachia, Pippa and old Lucia were receiving visits of condolence, and their visitors were bellowing well-aired fragments of philosophy into the widow's deaf ears.

The dead man's bench and tray and stool looked pathetic now their master of more than threescore years had gone from them; but it was not a pathos to appeal to Pippa nor the visitors. When the latter had all gone, the old woman began to move about aimlessly. She was quite lost without Maso.

For sixty years she had been used to his ill-tempers and scoldings, and their cessation for ever left her helpless. She had never had anything to do but to defend herself against them, and life had become suddenly silent.

She was as unromantic as Maso himself had been; but he had been her husband, a faithful one, if crabbed and untender; and her life had never been anything but the less significant half of his. You might as well try to cut a raw egg in halves as divide her existence from that of her lifelong companion. She could not have defined or explained her grief; indeed, she had never tried to define or explain anything in her life. Perhaps it was not grief in the common sense at all. But it would suffice to kill her. The habit of living, as it were, half a life, had so grown into her that it would not be possible for her to continue living a separate, independent life all to herself.

Don Cenzo, the notary, who was elderly and wise, perceived this when he came in, half an hour after the other visitors had gone away. He did not tell her about Maso's will; it seemed to him useless to trouble her. But he told Pippa. The old man had left everything to the man who should marry Pippa. He had always taken it for granted that he should himself survive Lucia. But no doubt, said Don Cenzo, Pippa and her husband would look after the old woman.

"But I have no husband!" said the girl, with a little laugh.

"Not to-day," replied the notary, "but that will be an affair of to-morrow."

He bowed politely. And he guessed already that Pippa would not marry Tito, as her grandfather had intended. This slightly shocked him, for he was a lawyer, and had a feeling that the wishes of a testator should be complied with. But when testators express their intentions thus vaguely, they have but themselves to thank if they are defeated. Being a lawyer, he felt that also. And Don Cenzo, like Assunta, disliked Tito.

As for Pippa, she had made up her mind that no power on earth would now make her marry the handsome young sacristan; not even the undeniable power of his beauty. For she had also made up her mind about something she had suddenly read in Signor Enrico's mind, a suspicion of his that, abruptly, had been born a robust certainty in her own. That Signor Longo wanted to marry her, she had also become certain.

At that moment, though she did not know it, the two men were together. Tito had taken off his evening suit, and put on his ordinary clothes, in which he looked much better. He was now in the sacristy of the Pietá, getting out the next day's vestments. To his displeasure and surprise the man he least desired to see of all men in the world had, uninvited, joined him there.

The front doors of the church opening on the Naumachia were locked, and Signor Enrico knew it. He, therefore, knocked at the sacristy door, and, without waiting for any reply, opened it quickly and went in. For a moment the two men looked at each other without speaking. Tito had not expected this visit; and his surprise gave the other that much initial advantage. On that Longo counted; and by a further advantage of surprise he intended to proceed. Taking from his pockets a small canvas bag he put it down, close to Tito, on the vesting table of antique polished mahogany, nearly black, but without saying anything.

"What is this?" asked the sacristan.

"Money," retorted the artist promptly. "Open and count it."

Almost mechanically Tito began to do so.

"But why should I?" he inquired presently, pausing with the notes in his hand.

"Because it concerns you."

Tito went on counting; the artist watching him, and chiefly occupied with the thought of the man's astonishing beauty. Just as he by no means desired to live in the houses that were best to paint, so was he quite free to recognize the beauty of this man who was altogether hateful. Tito did not count the money to an end; he could tell exactly how much it was without that. It was, to his standards, a good deal.

"How does it concern me, signor?" he asked, as though pausing, but feebly.

"It is yours."

"Mine? How; what for?"

"To take you to Argentina."

Tito did not drop the money; but he could scarcely hold it without betraying that his hand trembled. He let it rest on the time-smoothed wood. He wanted to look full into Longo's face, but for the life of him he could not though he felt the other man's eyes fixed on his own. And he wanted to say something; but he dared not; nothing seemed safe; he had no rôle, no programme.

Longo had thought him cleverer and more courageous, too, and began to despise him more and more. This gave his voice, as he went on, a confidence and sense of power, a certainty, that the wretched Tito felt intuitively, and that materially assisted Signor Enrico's success.

"To take you to Argentina. A number of Calabresi are going from Reggio this evening; they are crossing to Messina even now. In the Florio boat, *Empedocle,* they will start this evening at five o'clock. On Friday morning they will reach Naples, and re-ship; that same afternoon in the *Speranza* they will sail for Buenos Ayres. That is how you will go."

Still Tito could not turn his full face, nor lift his eyes nor ask "Why" as he was trying to. His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and his mouth itself felt dry. His desire and his inability to speak was exactly like what is experienced in a nightmare. He was always a coward, though no one had known it till now. Perhaps not himself, even. And how brave would he need to have been not to prove a coward now, with a conscience like his! He had two additional reasons for cowardice, that his tormentor, who had guessed so much, could not guess—one physical, one moral, and both added themselves to all the rest to demoralize him utterly.

There was something the matter with his heart besides its blackness. He had become certain of it only lately; more than ever certain since that quick knock had come just now on the door opening on the steep path. It was not that his heart was beating violently; after one horrible leap into his throat it had ceased, he thought, to beat at all. He longed to put his hand upon his breast and feel, but with those ruthless, untiring eyes upon him he could not.

The moral thing that weighed him down and demoralized him was worse. But of that presently, though he was thinking of it all the time; and its effect was so gatheringly apparent that Longo saw its paralyzing effect, and his pitiless voice hardened, and grew more masterful, more irresistible, so that the listening wretch felt all spirit of resistance oozing hopelessly out of him.

"That is how you will go," insisted the voice. "For Santa Venera is unhealthy for you; as it was for Maso, as it was for Don Taddeo's goat, ... and there are other unhealthy places, too; Pantalaria and Ponza, for instance. You never heard, perhaps, how unhealthy Pantalaria was for the Empress Messalina, the poisoner: . . . ."

Tito heard no more. The voice faded into immeasurable distances, and when he came to himself again, Tito was alone. Then he, too, went: *exivit et non erat;* he went out and it was night; like his prototype, the other traitor, but Tito's night was not the merciful darkness of nature. Down the hillside he staggered, in the blazing noon with the pitiless staring of the July sun blinding him; but with no sun of hope, no light of any saving love of God or man or woman; for this desire for Pippa had been no more than the mere jealous greed of possession; the vulgar avarice of beauty, as common and not much nobler than the vulgar avarice of money.

When Pippa told poor dying Maso how Taddeo's goat was dead that had eaten the wax threads, Signor Longo was still there, and the old man's eyes were on his face. And into the growing darkness of those eyes that looked so close on death, grew a wistful light, of sadness unspeakable, but nobler than any that had ever gleamed in them. For a time no one spoke. Then Maso bade the women begone, and beckoned Longo to stay by him. No sooner were they alone than the wistful look translated itself into speech, answering the suspicion in the young man's face.

"I did it. I myself," he said eagerly. "No one knows. . . . . No one must know. But I did it. I insured my life, long ago; I thought it could be only for a few years. But I lived and lived; and the money was all going, paying the money of the insurance. I could not bear it all to go. So I chewed wax threads, and they are *velenosi,* poisonous. Now I die, and there will be no more paying, but a big money from the insurance. Don Cenzo knows what it is. And my will. He made it, and he knows that, too. He keeps it for I cannot read. . . . Thus I did it; thus, I myself."

"Yes, yes. I see," said Longo; knowing well that the dying man lied to save the living; then he called back the women and went away, determined now that he was certain that Tito should go, too, go far, and go for ever. The women had come back, and would have sat up all night with the old man who was dying, but he drove them fiercely away to bed. All night he sat alone, and early in the morning he sent for Tito. To him, too, he told his wistful lie, but never looking at the young man's face.

That was the second thing that demoralized him; to know that Maso himself knew and excused him, knew and loved him. So he staggered blindly down the hillside in the utter night of the fierce noon, while the weird *fichi d'India* clutched at the steep as it leapt downwards to the sea. Hopeless, hopeless! Utterly hopeless, if his final judgment were to lie with us, with sins of our own to make us merciless to the different sins of others. But Perfection does not delegate the function of judgment, and imperfection is not to be judged by imperfection.

THE LADY OF THE DUNESHORE

I

If one hated a mountain, or an iron-bound coast, that region which we may as well call the Dune Shore would have been the very place to inhabit. The whole province contained no hill of a greater elevation than six hundred feet above the sea-level, and for even such a hill as that it would have been necessary to go far inland. The sea-board was as flat as the North African desert; that is to say, not flat at all, but like an ocean that had been changed into sand after a storm that had past and left behind it a long low ground-swell. Nowhere did the dunes attain any height, but everywhere there were dunes; so that, unless one should walk along the very beach itself, one would continually be going up and down low hills. Next the sea the dunes were of sheer sand, not held together by any herbage, and of changing contour; for, after summer's long drought had pulverized the sand, the gales of September blew it far and wide. Later on, the cold rains and cold gales alternating caked it, and it became hard enough, and not bad to walk upon. Just a little further inland, more out of reach of the salt spray, though not wholly out of reach, a miserable sour grass bound the sand, and held it from shifting. Yet further inland came a region of soggy lean pastures, and hungry reclaimed land, on which meagre crops were cultivated—mostly by mannish-looking women, for the men were almost all fisherfolk, or sailors, or boatbuilders and shipbuilders, or, in the larger of the small towns, engaged in some other commerce that dealt with seafaring matters. There were sailmakers, and ropemakers, ships' store-dealers, even here and there a ship's instrument seller, and a foundry where anchors, bolts, iron beams and girders and cables were cast.

In all the province there was no large town. Helsing, the capital of the Duchy, was about the largest, and its population was under sixty thousand. It was not exactly on the sea, but not far up the river-estuary, and one of its suburbs trailed out almost on to the dunes.

It was not a bad sort of a town. It had a few decent buildings—the Ducal Palace, the Court House, the Town House, the Cathedral, five other churches, and the Bishop's Palace. As for these, they were not raw or new, but would have been older, and might have been finer, but for the great fire of 1630. After the fire everything had had to be rebuilt at once, and there was hardly enough money to go round. So the Duke's palace was not enormous, and was very plain, though not exactly ugly. The Bishop's residence was called a palace only as being his official house; it was of very moderate size and of modest pretension architecturally.

There was also a theatre, but it formed part of the Ducal Palace, and the cathedral balanced it, forming the left wing of that face of the palace that fronted on the Public Gardens. On the other side of those gardens was the Barrack, and the Town House. The Court House formed one side of a sort of square upon the quays. The prison formed another, and opposite was the Duke's Admiralty Court. Nearly the whole aristocracy of the duchy lived at Helsing—for warmth one would almost say, for the lands were cold and wind-swept, and except for occasional "belts" of low stone-pines there was no timber.

None of the aristocracy condescended to trade, but many had shipping interests, and that gave them a further reason for dwelling at Helsing; not but what other towns had many the same importance; in no other town, however, was there a Court and a Court Theatre—one might say a Court Bishop. The Bishop of Helsing was Court Bishop, and he was apt to be a cousin of the reigning Duke.

It was a fairly clean town, and though it was far from suggesting opulence, neither had it any air of being poverty-stricken. Its burghers were solid, slow-moving people, who grew rich deliberately, and never ran risks of bankruptcy.

The Duke was by far the richest man in the province, and all the dukes had had a comfortable habit of marrying princesses with adequate, if not dazzling, dowries.

The Bishop was the Court-Bishop of Helsing, but the Duke was His Serene Highness the Duke of Platland, Count of the Free Trucairs, and Admiral of the Dune Shore, Prince of the Empire.

Neither he nor the society that adorned his court will, however, concern us much—as yet at all events; for strangers were not warmly welcomed in the ducal circles of Helsing, and certainly not strangers who came without certificates of their fitness. And it is with a stranger we have to do.

When Ida Patersen arrived at Helsing she might have been two and twenty, to judge by her appearance, which was staid and widow-like, and perhaps her deep, ugly mourning made her look older, for in reality she was not twenty years old.

Her arrival was of no public consequence, and the public, small as it was, was not immediately aware of it. At first—for some weeks—she lived very quietly in a substantial but staid and decorous inn, the Golden Swan. The Order of the Golden

Swan was second only in dignity to that of the Black Ship—the Duke's armorial had for its principal quarters *sable a swan, or,* and *or a ship in full sail, sable.* At the end of a month Madame Petersen, as she called herself, bought a small house, in that suburb that straggled seaward towards the dunes, and began to live there as quietly as she had lived in the hotel.

The price asked had been rather high, and she had agreed to it (and paid it, too) without demur. The agent had recommended a dealer in furniture, and to him she had gone, and furnished her abode out of what he had. He also found her easy to deal with; and, not being a dishonest man, and perceiving that what he asked she seemed willing to give, he proceeded to name reasonable if profitable prices. She interested him as being a lady of some individuality of taste; for he had in his store not only new stock, which attracted her little, but all sorts of quaint bits of furniture brought at various times from overseas. This she bought—hangings, carpets, even tapestries, inlaid bureaus, and gilded mirrors (often tarnished, but of good design and quality), especially anything French, Italian or Spanish—nothing northern.

She spent freely enough, and if the house had not been so small the furnishing of it would have been very costly.

"She has an excellent taste," the dealer informed his wife, and indeed some of his more regular customers, who often came to chat and to look as much as to buy. "And she takes what she chooses without haggling."

"That," said one of the customers, "must be rather dull. Buying a thing one fancies is like playing a fish; there's little sport in landing him at the first strike. Where does she come from?"

"That, of course, I didn't ask her."

"Madame," his wife observed, "is not a lady one would easily intrude upon. She has a dignity."

"Born, do you suppose?" inquired the customer, who frequented the Court.

"I didn't ask her that either," said the dealer, drily.

"She has a pretty face," declared his wife, "when her veil is up, and a fine face, too, and her hands are the hands of a lady."

"Oh," said the dealer, "there is no doubt she is a lady."

II

Now I want to introduce the reader to Ida Petersen; but I prefer to wait till a few months after she had gone to live in her small house near the dunes; for her mourning had gradually become less portentous, gradually, but by rather swift gradations. During the weeks in the Golden Swan no one could have doubted her being a widow. Then her black became less ugly, cumbrous and dismal; and little by little, while still remaining black it came to lose the character of mourning; but into no other color did it ever merge. And yet she had loved bright if soft hues, and of black she had been used to express an almost vehement abhorrence. One afternoon in autumn she sat by her fire of logs, alone, in the quaint and pleasant parlor where the best of her gleanings from the dealer's were gathered together. The wooden walls were covered with ancient tapestries, and her chairs were covered with fine and rare needlework, made by French fingers dead a century and a half ago.

She rose from her deep chair, and walked to the window that looked seawards—the sea was hidden behind the dunes. A very graceful figure, tall and slim, but not lean or meagre; and a noble head, exquisitely set on. The face itself noble too, and beautiful; but occasionally, often indeed, though not always, marred by a terrible expression. It should be remembered that it was a very young face, not at all that of a woman who had long world-experience. There were no lines in it, and its color was not dull or pallid; the complexion, indeed, was both brilliant and healthy. It was a face, too, not made for gloom, but obviously for gaiety and mirth; expressing in general a happy nature, and a sweet confidence, a warm, trustful outlook upon life and her fellow-men. And yet—sometimes, there swept over it, like a dark submerging wave, a look of utter horror. Such an expression in the eyes (so lovely in themselves, and so apt to reflect wholesome and glad thoughts) could be explicable in one who had been called to behold an abominable crime, some hideous treachery, some heartless cruelty, but to associate with the girl herself any idea of complicity in the crime was not possible—unless the Devil, *quod absit,* should have power to impress the stamp of innocence on a mask of wickedness.

"I can not stay in," she said to herself, not in German. "It fills my book to-day. It illustrates every page. It is cold and bleak, and I daresay it will rain—perhaps snow. It is cosy here. And I am my own mistress. I need not go out in chill wind, or foul weather, as many poor women must. Yet out I must go. Not to the town. I know the town by heart, and I'm not in the mood for its tidy decency and smugness. Besides there's a ball at the palace, and the ladies will be buying fal-lals. I will go out *there;* it's odd how often I feel I must go there. Yet, though it *is* the sea, it is a sea so different. I like the ugliness of *this* sea; it is flat, and grey, and plain; but honest, somehow. Not," and she shivered, and the awful look came darkling all athwart her lovely face, "not cruel, mean, cowardly, treacherous! Ah, God!"

She did not call her maid, but made herself ready to go out without her help. Her three servants were all Helsingers; she had brought no maid with her whence she came.

Her house was the last towards the dunes, and in a few minutes she was walking on them towards the sea, but still not in sight of it.

There was not much wind, which made it more likely that the leaden sky would empty itself of rain or sleet—or, perhaps, regular snow. It was cold enough; and when, as happened now and then, there came a pallid glint of sunlight, the dunes looked all the colder for it. In the higher regions of the air there must have been more movement than down upon the earth's surface, or those rendings of the ragged clouds, which let the pale yellow sunlight down, would not have come.

"I suppose for ever," said Ida, as if answering herself, answering some question that had asked itself in her mind.

Then she came to the ridge of the highest line of dunes and looked out across the sea. It was full tide and the belt of sand between it and her was narrow. It was of a dusky green, laced with white, but thinly; here and there were darker patches. When one of those chilly sun-gleams shone down these patches became deep purple, shading to slaty black in the centre, paling to amethyst at their fringe; and then the green of the waste around, where it lay in the cold light, was yellowish—the green of young larch foliage.

There were no islands in sight here, though there were many along the coast. There was no ship, or boat, upon the desolate water.

" 'Great as the sea is thy affliction, who can heal it?' " the girl quoted.

Then she went down and walked upon the hard sand, only a few feet from the breaking of the waves.

"Bitter," she said aloud, "altogether bitter."

A sea-gull let himself fall, with a loud scream like laughter, swerving, slantwise, down quite close to her.

For many minutes she walked with eyes bent upon the breaking waves close at her side; their monotonous iteration soothed her like a drug. And the clean salt air was doing her good. She was healthy by nature, not only in body, but in mind and heart, too; only a horribly poisoned wound had stricken her heart and spirit.

After she had been out fully an hour the sun-gleams ceased, and there was nothing but the leaden sky and the leaden sea. The clouds had knit together, and cowered lower down. Still it was not yet late in the afternoon, and such light as there was should last some time yet; she hardly wanted to get home till there should be excuse for shutting out the dreary day altogether. Presently the humor took her to leave the beach, and go back among the dunes. She passed over the ridge into a shallow depression between it and the next range of hillocks, not a straight little valley, but twisting, for the hillocks did not lie in parallels. She had not walked there five minutes before, turning round the broken base of one of the hillocks (broken by some high tidal wave), she met quite face to face a man, whose surprise seemed less than her own.

Oddly enough he instantly explained himself.

"I saw you before," he said, standing still and removing his hat. "I saw you walking by the sea.

You did not see me—that was plain; and you did not imagine but that you had the whole sea and shore to yourself. I felt an intruder. If I had walked on we must have met, and I thought it might almost startle you; I should have come so very near you before you knew. So I climbed over the ridge and came to continue my walk here. And now I have come upon you still more suddenly. I hope it has not startled you. If it has, I am sure I beg your pardon."

She had not been exactly startled; but in all her many walks here she had never met anyone but a fisherman, very rarely anyone at all. She was certainly surprised. But there was nothing alarming about him. He was a gentleman, and young—perhaps half a dozen years older than herself; his face was pleasant, very kind and courteous, like his manner and his voice. There was almost a smile in his quiet, manly eyes, but he did not smile outright, simply because a smile would have been a little greater approach to familiarity, and it was clearly his desire to treat her with extreme deference. He had spoken German, and in German she answered, but it was not very correct, and her accent was foreign.

"Oh," she said, "the sea and shore do not belong to me! You could not have been an intruder. No, you did not startle me. Only I never met anyone out here before, and I come here very often."

He still stood uncovered, and he did not immediately move away. "I am afraid," he said, looking up at the lowering sky, "that you are walking in the wrong direction. I am weather-wise, and it will snow very soon."

"Oh, will it?" then she asked him to replace his hat, and he did so, saying:

"In a snow-storm on these dunes one might easily wander far and be lost. When it starts snowing it will go on all night—perhaps much longer, unless the wind shifts. Perhaps you do not know the weather here as well as I do."

"I have never been here at this season. I came at the end of last winter. No, I do not know what your weather is like."

"It is not exactly *my* weather," he said, and now he did smile, "though I have been here at all seasons. You see, I am a sailor."

It did not surprise her. There was something in his face that answered to it; something in the grave and courageous eyes, that were not melancholy, but only steadfast; something, too, in the smooth, browned complexion.

"If you would not think it impertinent of me to advise you," he said, with a singular firm gentleness, "I should urge you not to walk on in the direction you seem to be going, but to turn home."

Most certainly there was nothing like impertinence in his manner of tendering this prudent counsel.

"Oh, I think you are very wise—and kind," she answered. But the word "home" that he had used brought a swift start of loneliness to the girl's mind. Her home had been murdered.

There are faces behind whose thickness few emotions move visibly, but Ida's was not one of them. Just as her brilliant color came and went behind the bright clearness of her skin, so was her countenance but a thin veil of her transient emotions of pain or gladness.

At first he had set her down as a *woman,* though a very young one—perhaps of two or three and twenty. Something in her grace and dignity of bearing had made him, without arguing the point, assume her to be a married woman. But now she seemed to him very girlish and her youth had an almost childlike appeal.

"Come, then!" he said, with a very pleasant air of protection, like an elder brother's. And, as if it was the simplest and most natural thing, he walked at her side.

"I think I can show you a near way to the town," he explained—but not as if in excuse of giving her his escort.

"Oh," she said, but not in the least drawing back from that escort, "I do not live in the town."

"Ah, you *live* here."

"Yes—I do, now. But my little house is the very nearest to these dunes; not in the town at all, but in St. Blarien."

"That is all the better. For it is much nearer, and the snow will be here very soon. See, there is a flake."

"You," she asked, with a quite frank curiosity, "do you live here?"

"Well, I am a sailor, as I said. My town is a ship. But I know Helsing well, and *have* lived there."

"Ah! If you lived there now I must have met you. One knows by sight everyone—from the Duke and Duchess downwards; but I never saw you before."

"Nor I you."

He was quite sure he should have remembered her had he seen her once. Then he added:

"I have been away—very far away; and for just over a year. I wonder how you like Helsing?"

"Oh—well enough; pretty well; not very much."

Yet she had *come* to live there; not belonging to it, she must have chosen it.

"It isn't," he admitted, "particularly lively."

"No. Nor am I."

He hardly knew whether this confession, if it was one, surprised him or no. It had seemed to him that her eyes were windows through which looked out a nature that was cheerful, and yet he had seen that sudden glint of sadness (it was not a shadow, but a wan gleam like those that a little while ago had slanted from time to time across the dunes) which crossed her face when he had spoken of her home.

He made no response to this little saying of hers; a sort of compliment, or some sort of question, would have been almost the only response possible, and he was too respectful to compliment or to question.

The flakes of snow were falling a little more thickly, but they were as yet thin, small and dry, and there was even less wind than before. Such as it was it was, however, coming to meet them—out of the east.

"Look," she said presently, "that is my little house over there. The snow can't be much, or we would not see it."

"Oh no! It is nothing yet. But it isn't going to stop, and it will soon be thick enough."

He had eyes that were used to scan wide distances, and they were turned towards the little house with decided interest. It certainly looked lonely. She knew he was considering it, and said:

"It looks black now, and ugly. But it is not bad inside. It is warm and comfortable. I come out here on these cold, ill-tempered dunes to make myself like it a little."

"I rather like the dunes. An odd taste, eh?"

"I don't know. Perhaps *I* like them—in a fashion. At all events I like them better than anything else here."

"You are not, like me, their old friend. There are not dunes everywhere."

Immediately she seemed to wrap a cloak of silence round herself, even though she spoke again before long. He felt instantly that he had said something amiss.

"I suppose," she said presently, "that you can *understand* my German, but I know it is bad."

"It is not bad at all. Of course I can understand it. I myself have had to learn and speak many languages, and English, French, Norse, Danish and even Russian are nearly as easy to me as German."

"But you *are* German?"

"Oh," said he, laughing, "I'm a Helsinger. But my mother is Russian, and my grandmother, who is still alive, is a Dane."

III

Around Ida's house was a garden, and at the gate the young sailor again uncovered, even while he opened it for her to pass through.

For a moment she hesitated, then, with a smile that he thought more characteristic of herself than anything she had said, she asked him, with frank goodwill to come in.

"My tea will be ready," she said, "and it is not a bit late. Your snow hasn't come to much yet. But a cup of English tea will do you good."

He thought anything she might give him would do him good; but that he could not say.

"I shall melt, and wet your room," he said laughing.

"Oh, no! Only your overcoat is a little snowy, like my cloak. Come! I took your advice; take mine."

"Certainly I will."

And they had, in fact, already almost reached the porch.

"Oh, Madame!" cried Ida's maid, opening the door and coming out. "Madame went out, and I didn't know. I should have taken the liberty of warning Madame that it would snow; and now she is wet."

"Scarcely at all; my cloak only. See, even my boots are hardly wet."

"Please change them, though," urged the sailor. "Madame should change them at once," he declared, still quite with an elder-brotherly manner, as he turned from Ida to her maid.

"Very well—Elsa, take this gentleman into the drawing-room—I will join you in a moment."

It was very dark in the entrance hall, which had only one window of thickened glass, and was hung with dim old tapestries. Even in the drawing-room it was dusk; but the fire cast a pleasant warm light, and shaded lamps were being set about, on the piano and several tables, by Ida's housemaid.

As the woman turned to leave the room she shot a sharp glance at her mistress's visitor, but he was tall, and the lamps cast their light no higher than his waist; his back was to the window, and she could not make out much of his face.

Almost immediately Ida reappeared, and then her maid and housemaid came back bearing tea-things—silver tray and urn, a little special table, and so on.

In obedience to his hostess's invitation, the young man sat down in a low chair near the hearth-rug, and here the light of a lamp fell full upon his face.

"What a delightful room!" he said glancing round.

"I told you it was not uncomfortable."

"No! But you didn't tell me it was full of charming things. I don't believe there is such a nice room in Helsing."

Having arranged the tea-things, the two servants went to the windows and drew the warm curtains close. Then, as they went to the door, they both turned, and simultaneously dropped each a quick, perpendicular courtesy.

Ida's back was towards them, and she did not see it. The young man nodded, and made a little quick gesture with one hand. Neither did Ida see that, as she was attending to her tea-cups.

"You have been here," he said, when the women had gone out, "only a few months. And all these things of yours look as if they had been here always."

"I daresay you think they belong to me—I only bought them. I do not even know who that is," and she pointed to a fine seventeenth century portrait, "but it is a good picture, and the woman's face interested me. So I bought it."

"I can tell you who it is," he said, after he had risen to examine it more closely, and sat down again. "It is Juana la Loca, mother of Charles V, and daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella. Her husband and lover was Philip of Burgundy. 'Jane the Mad.' It is a splendid picture, and you are lucky to have found it."

"I didn't look for it; it found me. How strange that you should recognize it at once."

"Oh, I have had Spanish ancestors, too. And I know a little about those sorts of things."

"Spaniards or portraits?"

"Both, perhaps."

"You are rather a learned sailor." And Ida laughed.

"Poor Juana!" he said, laughing too. "Her husband behaved hatefully to her. And she adored him;

it was part of her madness. She took his dead body with her in all her travels."

As he spoke he arose to take the tea Ida had poured out for him, and, after another glance at the portrait, he looked down upon her.

That awful expression had come into her lovely face—upturned towards the portrait, as it were in sympathy with his allusions to its original. Her beautiful hands lay in her lap—lifeless-looking. And in her deep and exquisite eyes was that appealing look, as of an innocent, helpless, agonized creature who had been forced to witness a dastardly crime.

I do not think the young sailor ever forgot it. Whenever he thought of it afterwards he told himself: "She is the victim of some horrible offense; something cruel, mean, devilish; yes, something cowardly and base. For she herself is full of courage and generous trust." It made him hate somebody, and all the more vehemently that there was neither name nor image in which to house that hatred.

At this moment he felt something he had never known before—the presence of a difficulty in face of which he was wholly powerless.

Not for an instant, after that first one, did he let his eyes rest on her face. He took his cup, and, though all his nature turned to her, he turned his back to her, and as he moved away went on talking as if he had seen nothing to interrupt him. Yet she knew he had seen. And, to account, as it were, for it, she also spoke.

"A ghastly story."

"Isn't it? To drag with one everywhere the corpse of a dead love."

He sat down, and looked into the fire. He had not the least idea what to say. He had not the least idea if she were herself a widow—on her finger he had seen there was a wedding ring. Yet she must be a widow; what memories must be *her* fellow-travelers wherever she went.

Almost immediately she spoke again—trivially, of a trivial matter. "There is no sugar. They have forgotten it. Do you take it?"

"Oh, yes. Lots of it. I think all sailors do."

"Then will you ring?"

He did so at once, and the prim, elderly housemaid appeared.

"You forgot the sugar," said her mistress.

The woman seemed covered with confusion. In a minute or two she returned, set the heavy bowl down, and before retreating again turned to the young man, and dropped another perpendicular curtsey. This time Ida saw; and as soon as the door had closed she said:

"What is that for? I never saw it done before. Is it the Helsing etiquette?"

"I suppose so," he answered, laughing.

"Well, I never saw it. Let me see. Before I bought this little house I lived in the Golden Swan for a month. Ah! there were waiters there; I suppose *they* do not curtsey to young men."

"Oh, no. Look here, Madame——"

"Madame Petersen. That is my name."

"Well, I had better tell you mine. I see your servants know me, and they will certainly tell you if I do not. I am Anton von Helsing-Weissburg."

"One of the Duke's sons?"

"No. One of his five brothers' six sons. Perhaps that's why they let me be a sailor."

Ida laughed. "Ought I," she asked, "to get up and curtsey like Luisa?"

They were both of them grateful for this touch of comedy. Luisa had been a benefactress.

"That old warrior," he explained presently, pointing to another portrait, "is an ancestor of mine. Duke Ernst the Red; and another excellent portrait."

"What a good thing," said Ida, laughing, "that I did not pretend he was an heirloom. I might have christened him, as a lady I once knew used to christen the old portraits she picked up—after members of her own family. 'That,' she said to me one day, pointing her tea-pot at a new arrival, 'is my father's great-grandfather, Lord Newgrange, the famous lawyer. A great man, but queer and much behind the times.' 'He dressed behind them,' I dared to tell her, 'unless he was got up for a fancy-dress ball. That's a Dutch Admiral's uniform of the time of William the Silent.' She didn't mind a bit. 'Oh *that*—' she said, 'you mean the man in the blue coat. He *was* Dutch: Admiral Van Eyck—he came over to escort Charles I's daughter to Holland, and married my ancestress, Lady Marcia de Grandechose. You're looking at the wrong picture.' Suppose *I* had claimed *your* ancestor!"

"I should have been delighted to share him with you."

"You are most generous! Joseph Surface didn't mind selling his ancestors, but you are ready to give yours away for nothing."

"Ah! You read Sheridan. Shall we talk English?"

"Certainly, if you like. But I am not English."

She paused a moment as if about to add something, and he guessed that she was about to say what she was, if not English. But she changed her mind and said no more.

He did not wish to go away till she had had time to recover entirely from whatever it was that had brought that dreadful look into her eyes; and so he stayed on. They talked very cheerfully, and the discovery of her guest's princely rank did not seem to make the least difference to Ida's calm and self-possessed friendliness.

"To-night," he said, "there is a ball at the palace. If you are going to it I wonder if you would promise me a dance beforehand?"

"Oh no, I am not going. I do not go anywhere. As to the palace—I am not eligible; I have not been presented to the Duchess, and I never dreamed of being."

"I wish you were going to the ball. I should look forward to it much more."

"It is very kind of your Highness to say so. But you will certainly never meet me in society. I do not say I shall never dance again; but I cannot imagine how the occasion to do so should ever arise; for I bought this little home intending to settle down here —forever; and I shall not, certainly, ever mix in the gay world of Helsing."

He laughed lightly and said:

"Such a gay world as it is." Then, after a moment's pause, he turned his frank and grave eyes to hers and said:

"We never met till to-day; and I am not given to impertinence; but I cannot simply laugh as I hear you speak of shutting yourself up alone here forever. It makes, to my mind, a terrible picture."

She shook her head gently, and he went on, with a glance around the room.

"I do not mean that there is anything terrible in your home. It is delightful; and, somehow, fits you; makes a fit background."

"Of course I know what you mean. You mean that I am too young to say that here I will sit—till I die."

She stooped a little forward, and he saw some soundless words upon her lips. I do not say that he could have read them by the mere motion of her lips; but they had leaped into his own memory:

"Here I and sorrow sit.
Here is my throne.
Let kings come bow to it."

He was only a prince; but with all the deep chivalry of a noble and gentle nature, he bowed to it. Her eyes were tearless; the horrible look had not come back, but all her girlish youth and grace crouched in sorrow.

"Forgive me," he said, in a plain, low voice.

"No, I thank you. I know, from the first moment, how good you are. It is a great thing to feel such kindness near one. If I do not ask you to come again believe me there is a good reason. I should like to ask you."

"May I come unasked?"

"I think not."

He felt sure her reason must be a good one. He certainly was not going to try and clutch it from her. But it seemed intolerable to think that he could not come again.

"That picture," she said presently, without turning to it, yet he knew at once which she meant, "I can no longer bear it here. You say it is a fine one."

"Very fine."

"May I give it to you?"

"But—it is, perhaps, priceless; a princely gift."

"And you are a prince."

"That is not my fault."

"It is not a fault. Nor a misfortune—"

"Surely *that* is not why I may not come back here!"

"That was not my reason. But it is another reason. Will you have the picture?"

"If I should say, No!"

"I would burn it."

"Why not sell it? I could very easily sell it for you."

"Sell that poor lady, and her story! No, thank you."

"Then I will accept your gift. But, Madame, do you not see that you put me in an awkward place? I am to accept at your hands a very costly gift, and you forbid me to come again even to thank you. And I may give you nothing."

"You may give me a thing I should value—your friendship."

"And I am never to see you again!"

"Does friendship lie in seeing one's friends? I thought you would have known better."

"I do. Though we should never meet again I will be your friend. Forever."

"While I sit here!"

"Yes."

She stood up, but not as giving him signal of departure. Looking down into the fire she spoke again.

"Prince Anton. Listen. I treasure your gift. Sitting here I shall not forget it—nor you. Yet it is to forget that I sit here. I am young, as you say—just over twenty years old; but though I sit here—till I die—it will not be easy to forget. That is my business."

She was quite dry-eyed; but his eyes burned and glistened.

"Ah, dear God!" he cried, "if I could be your brother."

"I wish," she said, smiling, and looking straight at him, "I wish you were. Eh! how kind you are. But I have no brother, no sister, no father or mother; I am free to go where I will in all this haunted world. So I came here—to forget. I never imagined it would be easy, or could be done quickly. Perhaps it never can be done. Only I shall try, and I must try alone. I *have* to do what *she,* Juana la Loca, did from choice. The corpse is horrible, intolerable; but I must carry it with me in my travels till I can forget. *She* did it for love;—I for loathing. I also had a husband. I am not a widow, though I wished Helsing to believe me one. But he is dead—and turned altogether to corruption."

She hardly paused, and then finished.

"Look," she said. "You ask to come again, and I said No. I say it again. And, because you are what you are, noble and generous, you would not try and snatch my reason from me. You see that I have just spoken as women do not speak. I will be still less like other women. I will tell you my reason. I ask you not to come back. I forbid you to come back. A little while ago I sat there picturing the pleasantness of it—how friendly and pleasant it would be if you could come often, constantly. Dear Christ! how lonely I am! But I am not blind, though I may seem to you shameless presently—"

"Nay, Madame, that I will not have you say."

"Listen first. I am not blind. If you were to do as I dreamt for half an hour, and come here often, often as we should both of us wish—I know you wish it. I know I do. This would be the end of it. I should love you, and you would love me. Now you see how shamelessly I can speak."

"There is no shame in it. Only that would not be the end, but the beginning——"

"Ah! And, Prince Anton, I have a husband. His body is not dead, but alive and young. It is his soul that is dead—the soul, at all events, of our marriage. We are not even divorced. So far as I know his crime would not make any Judge declare me free to divorce him. Listen: he believes me dead, and he may even now have taken another wife—God help her if that be so! But I am bound to the loathsome memory of him. It is his memory I try to forget—the memory of what he did. And common sense shouts to me that I never can forget. At any rate, I cannot love, and I should soon love you."

She had called herself shameless, and she had spoken as women do not; and spoken without shame. Yet he *knew* that she was noble and womanly, girlish rather; wise, too, and fearless. He already loved and worshipped her, and knew that she knew that it was so, and that he would not dare to set it out in words, or in any gesture. Because women who are pure and honest scarce ever dare speak as she had spoken. Words are written that are not pure. Their silent modesty engenders the whole plot, the whole generation of pregone conclusions.

Anton had long ago risen, and he stood watching her and listening; he had only risen, and had not moved a step nearer to her. He felt for her an immeasurable respect. She looked so girlish, and so womanly, so simply innocent; and yet her dignity was marvellous. She had used astounding words, and they had only increased her dignity. He did not for an instant fall into the absurd mistake of thinking that she was saying that she already loved him, or that he already loved her. She had *asked* for his friendship, and he knew her to be saying once for all that she neither could or would give him anything beyond friendship; and because she would not she would run no risks, or suffer him to run any.

"You are very wise and altogether noble," he said. "It is unfortunate that my own past must be, in comparison of yours, but a sorry one——"

"Stay," she interrupted. "I cannot let that pass.

It was I who asked you in here. That was my doing. A silly obedience to two impulses—that of mere hospitality, and that of the desire to be less lonely for half an hour. Almost immediately I knew I had been wrong."

"You were not wrong. I do not believe you are ever wrong. I accept your dismissal as right also. Before I go I ask you one thing. You know my name—will you tell me yours?"

She sat down, and looked up into his face, and answered:

"I never meant to tell any human being my name. But I will tell you. It was Sylvia Carstairs—I am Scotch, not English—it became Sylvia Garioch; I call myself Ida Petersen. Please think of me as Madame Petersen."

"I will. And now I am going. I understand that I am not even to come and fetch your gift? I cannot take it away now, can I?"

"You could hardly carry it on your back. No," she answered laughing. "But if you send for it, it shall be ready. Tell me, is she also an ancestor—ancestress—of yours?"

"Yes. So it happens."

"I am glad. Because I like to think she has happy descendants after all her pain. I feel churlish enough in not asking you to come and fetch her; but you see I have said so much that I think it better to end now. So good-by."

And she stood up, and dropped a little curtsey like Elsa's.

Of course she did it that their parting might be a laughing one.

IV

"I thought you were going to stay at home for a while."

"So I did, my little mother," said Anton.

"And you are leaving us so soon!"

"I think it best."

The Princess had always assured herself that she had no favorite among her five sons, but that firm assurance had been necessary, for Anton was more *simpatico* than any of his brothers. She was not herself German, and it had not much delighted her when she was first made aware of her family's decision that she was to marry a German princeling. Her father was of the Russian Imperial family, but only very distantly related to the Emperor, and he had a number of sons and daughters, having been twice married. She was the youngest of his children by his second wife; her face, which was extremely pleasant, was not remarkable for beauty; and an accident in early girlhood had left her with a slight limp. So that the marriage with Prince Rudolph of Helsing-Weissburg had not seemed to her father altogether undesirable. The prince was of reputable character, handsome, and, like all his family, sufficiently wealthy. He was certainly very German, and his destined bride did not much like Germans, or Germany either; but she knew that any suitor proposed for her would probably be a German, and resigned herself to the inevitable. She was pretty well aware that her father thought it advisable she should be married without delay, for she had allowed it to appear that she saw no crime in the ill-dissembled admiration for herself of a young nobleman without the least pretence to royal or princely rank. Without pretension to beauty she had felt the more inclined to condone Count K.'s offense; and, though she had not fallen in love herself, she had suspected that she might have done so had she had pluck enough.

She had not believed herself in love, and at her marriage she had not the least intention of carrying to her husband a broken heart; she had merely decided that the less she thought of heart the better. Prince Rudolph was neither jealous nor suspicious, and he had probably never heard of the existence of Count K. He did not make a bad sort of husband, and his wife was far from from imagining herself unhappy. Her sons appeared, and she was fond of them all, in spite of their being Germans—but she certainly liked Anton the best, who, as she fancied, was much less German than his brothers. As he grew up he really did become less German, and his long absences in other parts of the world helped to increase this tendency.

Between him and his mother there was another point of sympathy, though neither of them said much, if anything, about it—they were both of them bored by the whole business of princeliness.

As for Count K., the princess had not often deliberately remembered him, but she had never forgotten him; and at one time, when her boys were very little fellows, she did occasionally wonder whether Prince Rudolph would not have been a happier man had he married, instead of herself, a certain Fräulein von Z., and whether in that case it would not have been well for her to have braved all difficulties and let herself fall in love with Count K. and marry him, too.

But all this was now very ancient history. Fräulein von Z. had married the Graf von P. (an old schoolfellow of her father's), and Count K. had married two ladies, the former when he was about thirty, the latter when he was nearly fifty.

"I suppose, my son," said the Princess, "I am to ask no questions."

"I think that also will be best."

"I don't wonder," said Anton's mother, "that you like to get away from Helsing. I should rather like to be a sailor myself."

"Poor little Mother! It is a queer little corner, certainly, when one is stuck fast in it."

"I'm *jammed* in it. If one were like the women one sees in the streets and in the Luxgarten" (where all Helsing drove every day of its life) "one could get away. I think *der liebe Gott* must be a Republican, he makes it so intolerable for princes and princesses—especially princesses."

"Perhaps we make it intolerable for ourselves."

"If I had been a brave person and energetic—whereas I was an arrant coward and deadly lazy—I think I should have set up as a Reformer of Princeliness. It is a downtrodden caste of slaves that no one ever dreams of emancipating. When shall you go?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"And you only arrived two weeks ago. And I'm to ask no questions. Is it a lady?"

Anton laughed.

"For one who asks no questions you go pretty far!" he replied.

"Ah, then, it *is* a lady! And you hurry off to her, after two weeks. It's almost as bad being a mother as being a princess. As soon as one has sons they begin to look about for another woman."

"I didn't look about at all. She arrived."

"Anyway, you dash away from your mother to get back to her."

"Quite the contrary."

"Well, you came home two weeks ago, and the day after to-morrow you hasten away to her. Is she a Patagonian?"

(Prince Anton had visited Patagonia during his late absence.)

"I believe not."

"Will it take a long voyage to reach her?"

"I shall not see her for a very long time."

"Anton, what a mystery! Perhaps you are now going to the South Pole—that is the fashionable resort; it used to be the North Pole. Are there Laplanders down there? I hope she is not a *Laplanderin.*"

"I have not the honor of knowing a single Laplander lady. It doesn't occur to you that you are asking questions?"

"Only silly ones. *Tell* me."

"Tell you what?"

"Where are you going to her?"

"I am not going to her."

"Oh, Anton! Do you pretend that it is not for her sake you are going?"

"No. I don't pretend that."

Suddenly the Princess ceased (for a time) to ask questions. "She is *here,*" she told herself. And she was astounded. She knew every lady in Helsing—every possible lady. It must be an impossible lady.

Anton perceived instantly that she was not carrying on her catechism, and was able to guess why.

"Look here," he said simply, "I don't want you to imagine things. I am not in any scrape."

"I can't imagine you running away from one. And I can't imagine your being in one that made running away advisable."

"No. At the same time I am running away."

A sudden idea flashed wildly into his mother's mind.

"Anton!" she cried. "Are you running—alone?"

"Well, not quite. There will be a good many other men on board."

"Oh, men."

"You seem," he said, laughing, "rather disappointed."

"I sniffed a romance. And—and, Anton, *I didn't mind.*"

She also laughed. Then, after a brief pause, she grew quite earnest and said:

"You would never care for anyone who was unworthy. I am *sure* you care for no one here whom I know, no one who comes here . . ." (with a gesture that indicated not only the place where they were, but the whole of Ducal society).

"That is certainly true."

"But there may be *nice* people hereabouts of whom I never heard."

"There is one, at all events."

"Ah! Now I go on. If I were a man I should not bother about being a prince——"

"I do not."

"Good! I should think of my happiness—and hers."

"God bless you, little Mother."

"Now I *will* ask questions . . . you are going alone. Is she to meet you somewhere, to be married to you *there?* Tell me. I daresay you think I ought not to know, so that I may not be scolded when *it* is known. But I do not care. I shall take your part."

"I should not do that without telling my father, and the Duke, too. I am not doing it."

The princess looked plainly disappointed.

"Well," she said cooly, "it will save a lot of trouble."

"I am not afraid of trouble—that sort of trouble. But, I assure you I am not getting married, nor have I the least intention of seeing again the lady of whom you speak."

"I am absolutely certain you love her."

"Are you? You are a very wise lady."

"No. Not at all wise. But I know that. You are quite changed."

"For the worse?"

"Neither better nor worse. Different. Altogether different. You are not in love with a dead lady?"

"Good gracious! A dead lady?"

"Juana la Loca."

Anton literally started, though he laughed.

"Ah! Since that picture appeared in your rooms I noted the difference," declared his mother. "And haven't I seen you staring at it? And with what a look! If Juana's husband were alive you would be capable of killing him."

"Don't say that, Mother. It is horrible."

She was again astounded. A look of real horror had darkled in his eyes—and how could any young man be in danger of wishing to kill Charles V's father! Yet she knew she had touched near a tragedy.

"How," she asked abruptly, "did you find her?"

"Find her?"

"Yes, *Juana*. It is a priceless picture. Where did you find it?"

"I did not find it."

"Then you did not buy it."

"No."

"Then she gave it to you."

"She?"

"Yes. *She*. SHE." And the princess triumphed.

"She must," she declared, "be at all events rich. That portrait is worth half the Duchess's diamonds."

"I think so, too."

"So your lady is rich. Ah, Anton! not, not, not a Jew's daughter?"

"Certainly not," he answered with conviction. "I believe her father was a Scottish nobleman."

"You believe. Didn't she tell you?"

"Certainly not. And I may be wrong, but I think I am right."

The ground he had to go upon was this. She had told him her name was Sylvia Carstairs; that she had married one Garioch, that she had neither father, mother, brother nor sister. He had found, by looking it up in an English Peerage, that there was a Scottish Earl of Solway, the present Earl a young man, who had succeeded a distant cousin some five years since. That cousin had died a widower and had left one only child, Lady Sylvia Carstairs. Lady Sylvia had married, three years after her father's death, a Mr. David Garioch, of Duners, in Shetland.

To Anton is seemed a certainty.

"And do you tell me," asked the princess, "that this Scottish nobleman's daughter is living here in Helsing?"

"I told you nothing about it. But it is nearly true—not quite, for she does not live in Helsing."

"But near?"

"Yes."

"And she bears no title."

"She bears none."

"Then she cannot be a Duke's, a Marquis's, or an Earl's daughter."

"No?"

"I should like to shake the truth out of you."

"You can try. But it will not be shaken out. That which is well fixed in doesn't get shaken out!"

"Anton, a Scottish nobleman's daughter is entirely respectable, though not princely——"

"She is entirely respectable."

"Well, I shall think it all out. And I shall meet her. Scottish nobleman's daughters can't live undiscovered in places like Helsing."

"I am sure you will not meet her. And she doesn't live in Helsing."

"We shall see."

V

On the very day of her son's departure, not two hours after he had gone, the Princess's lady in waiting came to her and said:

"Highness, there is a cabman, and he has a small box. He says it contains something that he thinks he should give to Prince Anton. Something found in his cab."

"I will see the man. Let them bring him here."

"Here, Highness?"

"Yes, here. And when they bring him up, I will see him alone."

Presently the cabman appeared, much abashed at finding himself in a saloon of Prince Rudolph's palace—which was only a wing of the Duke's.

The Princess received him very graciously, and asked what he had found.

"Highness," he said nicely, "I have been ill . . ." and he paused apologetically.

"Never mind. One is not ill on purpose."

"No, Highness. I lost nearly a week's work by it. I was taken ill the day I went to fetch a picture for His Highness Prince Anton——"

"Where from?" inquired the Princess carelessly.

"From the Châlet Ferdinand, Highness. And ——"

"Oh, the Châlet Ferdinand," interupted the Princess, more carelessly (she had never heard of it), "on the St. Hubert road."

"Forgive me, Highness. No. In the North

Suburb, near the Dunes; the last house toward the dunes."

"Ah, yes. Of course. The house where the Herr Professor of Painting lives—who has a glass eye. A worthy man."

"I am sure so. Though I had never heard of him——"

"Not!" (nor had she).

"No, Highness. But the note was not to the Herr Professer——"

"To the Frau Professor probably."

"No doubt—'Madame Petersen'; that was on the note. There was no answer."

The cabman was now allowed to go on with much less interruption. In fact her Highness slightly hurried him.

"There would naturally be no reply. The note was merely an authorization to deliver the picture to you—the bearer. You brought the picture here, and afterward unfortunately became ill."

"Yes, Highness. That is why I did not clean out or examine my cab before. It is my own cab, Highness, and did not go out while I was ill. Today I cleaned it. And I found this. It is doubtless a piece of the frame of the picture. I hope Her Highness will not think I had handled the picture carelessly——"

"Far from it. It is a thing that happens easily."

She spoke most graciously, and most gracious was her smile as she held out her hand for the little box the man was holding.

"Oh yes," she said, after opening it, "it is certainly a little bit of the frame; quite a small bit. It is easy to understand how such a small piece might get knocked off. Perhaps it had been knocked off before and stuck on again."

"I think so, Highness." He did *not* think so, nor did the Princess.

Then she gave the man ten marks, and he thought her a most excellent princess, having half expected a wigging, either for having knocked a bit off the frame, or for not having brought it sooner.

That afternoon her Highness roundly accused her lady in waiting of having a cold in her head, and would take no denial.

"You certainly have a cold in your head," she insisted. "Your dear old nose is red, and so are your eyes; you never cry, so you must have a cold. Also you sneezed at luncheon——"

"I shook out too much pepper; the top of the pepper-box——"

"That would not make your nose red. You have a cold. And I shall drive alone. You can go to bed."

The Gräfin loved to go to bed, with a hot bottle and a novel; and she succumbed. Princess Rudolf drove out alone.

"To the North Suburb," she told the footman, who transmitted the order to the coachman, "the Châlet Ferdinand, please. It is the last house toward the dunes.

At the Châlet she was told that Madame Petersen was in; and in two minutes she was in that lady's drawing-room.

"I will go and tell Madame," said Elsa, curtseying for the fourth time in two minutes. And her Highness was left alone.

"The picture," she told herself, "hung *there*. There is a gap there."

And instantly she brought out of her muff the broken off bit of frame and dropped it into a tall porcelain vase that stood close to the wall, under the gap, and behind a big sofa that stood not many inches out from the wall.

Then she had time to admire the room.

"She has taste, Madame Petersen," she decided, "and money, too. Also she knows how to make herself comfortable."

The very bleak view over the empty and desolate dunes, through the well-curtained windows, only accentuated the warm comfort of the large pleasant room.

Then the door opened and Madame Petersen came in. A pale yellow beam of watery sunlight lit up her figure for a moment as she stood near the door.

"Yes," thought the princess, "she is quite beautiful. And 'born'; oh, ever so much born."

The line of pallid sunlight was only between one window and the door, and in a moment the girl had advanced out of it.

"I am the Princess Rudolf," said her guest, smiling, "the mother of Prince Anton, whom you know."

Madame Petersen curtseyed, but the Princess had come a step nearer as she spoke, and had taken her hand, with a sort of abrupt uplift.

"I have seen him once," said the girl, without the smallest sign of embarrassment.

"He has gone away," said the Princess, seating herself with a little gesture that was half an announcement that she wished to sit, and half a permission to her hostess to sit also. In order to sit down Ida did not at all turn her face away, though she could easily have done so; the Princess could not perceive either that Madame was surprised to hear of the Prince's departure, or that she had been aware of it.

"Yes," Princess Rudolf repeated, "he is gone. He is always traveling."

"His Highness told me that he is a sailor."

"Oh yes. But he has not gone on a cruise this time. He has simply gone away—traveling."

The girl paused a moment, and then asked quietly:

"Did he tell your Highness he had been here?"

"Oh no! He never mentioned your name, nor where you lived—I found out both by accident—after he had gone away. Of course, you are wondering what brings me here—"

"It is, of course, an honor I could not have expected. I am entirely unknown here."

"Except to Prince Anton," suggested his mother, smiling.

"To him also I am very little known."

Perhaps the Princess was wondering how they had become known to each other at all; but she betrayed no curiosity either by word or look. Perhaps Madame Petersen was wondering if she should explain—if so, she had not yet made up her mind.

"I wish," said Princess Rudolf abruptly, "he had not gone away." ("She blames me for it," thought the girl.)

"He had so recently come home," added his mother. "I hoped to keep him quite a long time. He had been so long away; and, Madame, he is very dear to me."

The words were very gently spoken, and Ida perceived at once that she was not being scolded.

"Ah, I can understand that—he is your son," she said simply.

"I have five sons. But he is the only one who never stays at home."

("And the one she would like best to have at home," thought Ida.)

"It is sad for your Highness. If I may say so, I am very sorry for your sake that Prince Anton should have gone away," she said aloud.

"Only for my sake!"

"I do not think your Highness quite understands. I met Prince Anton once—by accident. We should not have met again."

("That," thought Princess Rudolf, "is all you know about it.") But, smiling, she said aloud:

"Fortunate accidents repeat themselves."

"That accident would not have repeated itself," said the girl, not smiling.

("She is sure of herself. She is not a nobody," thought the Princess. "It is a good thing I did not come to sit upon her, it wouldn't have been easy.")

"I cannot," she said aloud, impulsively, "understand why Anton went away. I should have stayed."

To this Madame Petersen attempted no reply whatever. A very slight flush came over her lovely face, but it was certainly no blush of shame or guilt.

"Come," cried Anton's mother. "You are not going to tell me, his mother, that you are glad he has gone!"

"To Prince Anton's mother I should say nothing about it, but since she asks me I will say that I am not sorry. I am neither glad nor sorry. Can your Highness not understand that, had he remained, we should not have met again? He would not have sought me, and had he done so I should have gone away. I think a little time ago your Highness was about to explain to me why you have so very greatly honored me by this visit."

"Yes. I came because a little bit of the frame of the picture of *Juana la Loca* is, I find, broken off. It seems to be quite a new fracture. The frame itself is contemporary with the picture, and, like it, nearly priceless. It would be a great pity to mend it with a new piece—if the broken piece could possibly be found. As soon as I had found out your name and address (it was only to-day) I resolved to come myself and ask if by any chance the fragment was here. The break might so easily have happened during the removal of the portrait from the wall."

"If so I think my servant would have found the fragment and have told me. But I will look now."

She rose at once, and so did the Princess.

"Do let me help you," she said cheerfully.

"The portrait hung there," said Madame Petersen, "on that wall over the sofa."

She drew the sofa, which ran easily on excellent casters, forward; and bent down to search. The floor was thickly carpeted up to the wall. Of course she found nothing.

"Oh, how awkward I am," cried the princess, who had also come behind the sofa, and was groping about. She had nearly overturned the tall porcelain vase, but saved it.

"Something rattled," said Ida, and she shook the vase again, herself.

"There it is," she announced, looking down into the vase. "We must turn it upside down," which she did, and the 'piece of frame' fell out upon the sofa.

VI

"That," said Princess Rudolf, "is exactly the missing bit. Either it fell in there, or somebody dropped it in on purpose."

"The gardener and another man took the picture down. Possibly they broke the piece off, and were afraid to confess."

"Perhaps it was the cabman."

Ida noted shrewdly that her Highness knew the picture had been fetched away in a cab, but she only said:

"No. The picture was ready for him when he came. I told Prince Anton it should be ready."

"If anyone had given *me* so splendid a present I should have come for it myself."

"It did not seem to me in the least a splendid present. I gave quite a moderate sum for it. Prince Anton said it was an original, and valuable ——"

"So you gave it to him!"

"No, not at all for that reason; simply because I wished it to go away, and he admired it."

("I wonder," thought the Princess, "why she suddenly wished to be rid of it? Did she *really*, or was it only as an excuse for giving it to Anton? I must decide that.") Then aloud she said, lightly, and with a smile:

"I suppose, since you bought it, that you also admired it then?"

"Yes. I thought it a fine portrait, and very interesting. But I did not know of whom it was a portrait."

"Ah! Anton knows all those sort of things—besides he is descended from her; I suppose he told you."

"He did not tell me he was descended from *Juana la Loca.*"

("He told her," thought the Princess, "it was Juana's portrait, and he told her Juana's story. Then she wanted to get rid of it. Only another mystery.")

"He certainly," she declared aloud, "ought not to have sent a cabman to fetch such a treasure. He ought to have fetched it himself."

"I cannot see that he ought," said Madame Petersen coolly.

"*He* should have seen that he ought. I cannot understand such a failure of courtesy in him. He is the most courteous young man I know."

"I only saw him once in my life, but he gave me the impression of being all that your Highness says."

They had not sat down again, but were now standing up on the big fur rug in front of the log fire. The Princess was watching Madame Petersen's beautiful face in the glass; the girl's eyes were bent on the logs.

("She shall look up," thought Princess Rudolf.) And half aloud she said:

"You gave him a splendid present; just of the sort he most appreciates; I simply cannot understand his not coming to take it safe home himself—unless . . ." She paused an instant, but Ida did not look up. Then the Princess added: " . . . Unless he had been forbidden to come himself."

"Is it," asked Madame Petersen, looking up and meeting the Princess's eyes in the glass, "is it necessary that your Highness *should* understand?"

Princess Rudolf was fifty-five years old, but no human being had ever asked her such a question before. It was as if someone had suddenly opened a window and let in a current of remarkably fresh air; but she had none of the German abhorrence of fresh air, and was not terrified. In fact she rather liked it. She was quite honest enough, and quite shrewd enough to be aware that the girl was not impertinent—she merely did not intend to submit to impertinence.

("Only I did not come to be impertinent—for so very different a purpose!" she half expostulated, but without a word.)

"Come, my dear," she said, smiling out of eyes that (for all her little traps and schemings) were very honest eyes, and quite rarely kind, "I will frankly admit that it is *not* necessary that I should understand anything you do not choose to let me understand."

("I believe," thought Ida, "she is simply friendly-queer and quaint, but ever so friendly.") And the proud, grave girl thawed instantly.

"Madame," she said, "I beg your pardon—you made me forget—your Highness. If you had asked me," and she laughed, "*plump out,* ten minutes ago, I should have answered straightforwardly. But roundabout questions get all they deserve when they receive roundabout answers—or none. Was Prince Anton forbidden to come here again to take away his picture? Practically yes."

"I am *sure* Anton had *deserved* no such prohibition," cried his mother eagerly.

"*I* am sure you know him well enough to be sure of what you say. But it was no question of desert. He simply asked what was my wish; and I told him."

"Not to come?"

"Not to come."

Ida waited a moment and opened another window.

"I feel sure," she said, very quietly, "that if you had asked *him* was it his wish that *you* should come—he would have answered No."

"You are very direct," the Princess remarked without annoyance, and again smiling.

"I thought you demanded directness."

"Anyway, I do not mind it. But I may say that you are wrong. Had Anton known that I thought of coming to you, and known why I should wish to come, he would have said, 'Go and God bless you.'"

Ida shook her head.

"Of course," added Princess Rudolf, "he *could* not know. He was clearly resolved to tell me nothing about you—not even your name, nor where you lived. He has broken no faith with you——"

"I am sure he would not."

("Ah, ha! my dear. So you did forbid him to tell anyone anything about you!" thought Anton's mother.)

"I simply knew that someone had given him that picture," she went on, "and I found out after he had gone whence, and from whom it came. So *I* came."

Ida's lip did not move, but she looked up, and her eyes certainly asked "Why?"

"Because," said the Princess, "I was curious. I wanted to know you. Yes, and to know what you were like. Please understand—I *do* know my son. He is a very simple person, but he is a prince, and he is not the sort of young man to whom *anybody* dare offer a splendid gift; I cannot imagine his accepting such a gift from anyone he did not recognize as his equal——"

"I certainly am not a princess——"

"(I know nothing about that. I should certainly believe you if you said you *were* one.) I knew Anton too well to doubt the sort of person you must be. I simply wanted to see—and share. I came without the least misgiving. You understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

"Anton *would* have approved, for he would know I could only want to see you in order to—be friends with you. He *will* approve; for, of course, I shall tell him I have been here."

"I hope you will not."

"Why?"

"Because I would wish that nothing should keep the thought of me in his mind. Neither do I wish to encourage the thought of him in mine."

"Ah! that is cowardly. Just because he is a prince!"

The girl looked straight at the prince's mother, and said with remarkable decision:

"I simply never thought of it. It had nothing in the world to do with it."

("She is as proud," thought the Princess, "as proud as the devil.") But she absolutely believed her, and was the more *intriguée*.

"It is not because you are a princess," the girl went on, "that I do not accept the friendship you come and offer; though that is different. You are of the Court here, that I cannot be."

"Is that quite true?"

"I am Madame Petersen——"

"Is *that* quite true?"

The girl turned on her a look that was full of a sudden cold dignity, and the Princess thought she had made a mistake—that Petersen must really be her present name.

"You may certainly be Madame Petersen," she said laughing, "but you might also be the daughter of—say, a Scottish nobleman."

"Or of the Grand Lama of Thibet," retorted Ida, without turning a hair.

"Hardly, my dear. The Grand Lama of Thibet is a monk."

"Oh is he? Yes. I forgot. Anyway, I cannot be of your Court here, and I *will* not be. Will you be angry if I tell you something?"

"No. I like being told things."

Neither of them could help laughing—it was so patently the fact.

"Perhaps, though, you will not like this. Unless you promise to ignore me, to leave me alone, I shall go away."

"Out of the room!"

"Further. Out of this place. I came to this place to be alone; and I confess I find it lonely. Nevertheless I intend to go away unless your Highness promises to leave me altogether alone."

"Because I am a princess!" cried her guest—not believing it.

"Not in the least. Because you are the mother of that particular prince. You might be the mother of the Prince of Wales, and if you were so kind as to offer me your friendship I should consent. I'm not particularly frightened of princesses."

("She is a British subject anyway," thought Princess Rudolf, "her acme of royalty is the Prince of Wales' mother.")

"What is there objectionable in the particular prince of whom I am the mother?"

"Nothing. You tell me all good of him, and I am delighted to believe it—I do believe it, though I know almost nothing of him. Must I tell you again that I have seen him once, and that not for long."

"I think he must have seen you more than once."

"No. He has only seen me once too. Are you trying to force me to explain why I am sure we shall not meet again, and why I neither wish to be specially reminded of him nor that he should be reminded of me?"

"He will need no reminder. He intends to marry you."

"I am sure," the girl answered with calm conviction, "he did not say so, nor hint it either."

"He did neither. Nevertheless I know that it is so."

"And I know," retorted Ida, "that it is impossible."

"What do you mean?" cried the Princess, with a sudden most chilly qualm. "He is not married already!"

She certainly knew her son. She did not believe he would have secrets from her. Yet there was plainly a mystery. He had gone away *because* he was in love, and the girl he loved was here. Then he had been away, off and on, for years. Oh dear!

"Married, no," said Ida a little too positively for a lady supposed to know so very little about him, "you would know if he were married."

"Certainly I should. But why, then, is it impossible he should marry you? You say it is not because he is a prince."

Madame Petersen did not answer. Her hand, with many rings upon it, and very splendid rings, lay now upon the chimneypiece. She raised the other hand and took them all off, but one.

VII

"But," said the Princess in a low voice, "I don't know why, I felt sure you were a widow."

"I am not. And the man I married is younger than your son, and perfectly well."

"Oh, my dear! Oh, my dear!" And the kind, queer, indiscreet, romanceful elderly woman's voice was all sympathy and respect. She had not a doubt of the girl, and the girl felt it instantly. Princess Rudolf's eyes brimmed, she could not have said why, only she felt herself close, close to a great pain and (she was sure) a great wrong.

"Oh, my dear!" she cried, almost with a sob. "You *need* me. You need a friend, and something solid (like me; you see how solid I am!) to lean upon. Don't send me off. Don't send *me* off."

"I have told you why."

"I promise never to tell *him.*"

"No. But I do not want to remember him either—except as the pleasant, courteous guest of one afternoon. I want him to *fade.* I only saw him once, and he will fade. ."

("Not if I know it," thought the Princess, vehemently.)

"Really," the girl ended, "there is no more to say about it. I like you—there. You are not accustomed to be told that—"

"No indeed. Alas, no."

"Well, I tell it to you. I do like you. In spite of—in spite of your ways. And I should like well to have your friendship—you are absolutely kind. But I intend to go away."

"That," protested the Princess, "would be wicked."

"No. Except that I loathe *him* I am not wicked."

"If you loathe him, he deserves it," declared the Princess with robust certainty.

"See now! While you angled and maneuvered I would tell you nothing. Now I will tell you——"

It was quite impossible for the Princess to dissemble her rapture of anticipation.

("She *is* queer," thought Ida, "is she quite, quite a lady?") Nevertheless she went on.

"We had been married a little over a month, and he imagined himself still in love. But he was a coward, and I had always thought him brave, and had always bent down and worshipped bravery. Because he was afraid for his own life he (as he thought) killed me. That is all."

"All!" cried the Princess, "isn't it enough?"

"That," said Ida, who understood perfectly, "is all I am going to tell you."

A genuine old tear was creeping down the Princess's nose—quite as genuine as her incurable curiosity.

"I loathe," whispered the girl, shivering, "the very name of him." She had grown horribly pale, and the old awful look had darkened across her ashen face. But for the moment it was the Princess who was looking down into the fire—with greedily listening eyes. She did not in the least realize that for an hour she had been holding on a rack a very sensitive creature, whose pride and resistance had been kept at a sharp tension, who for several days before had been living on another rack, alone, who for many months—nearly two whole years—had been fighting alone a losing fight against a horrible nightmare of memory.

The Princess only heard her say with horror:

"I loathe the very name of him."

And, afraid to lift her inquisitive glance, she said innocently, "Why not lay it aside?"

Ida laughed, and at that sound the Princess did indeed look up, horrified. And the beautiful slim figure collapsed beside her.

VIII

"Is there," asked the Princess, "a doctor anywhere near here—quite near?"

"There is, Highness," Madame Petersen's maid replied, "the Herr Doctor at the small house with yellow shutters. They say he is clever. He also limps."

"Send at once for him. Tell them to take my carriage for him, let them bring him back in it. If he is not in, say that they are to drive at once to the Allerheiligen hospital and bring back a doctor."

The woman curtseyed and went off at once; she almost hoped the Herr Doctor *would* be out so that the Princess's carriage might have to fetch another out from Helsing for her mistress. But he was not out, and in ten minutes he had arrived—a small, white-faced old man, with, as the maid had said, a heavy limp. The Princess received him in Madame Petersen's dressing-room, a large room, nearly as beautifully furnished as the drawing-room under it, and opening into the actual sleeping room, which was smaller. By that time they had got the patient to bed.

"I am so glad you were in, and were able to come at once," said the Princess in English.

"I beg your Highness's pardon," said the little man, putting a colorless hand upto his ear.

("Ah, ha! So you're a little deaf, and you do not understand English," thought Princess Rudolf; "that is very suitable.")

Through the open door into the next room the voice of the poor sick lady could be heard moaning and chattering incoherently—in English.

"I only said," observed the Princess, very graciously, and speaking louder, in German, "that I was so glad you had kindly come at once. I fear Madame Petersen is, or is going to be, very ill. She fainted—quite dead away; wholly collapsed—quarter of an hour ago, downstairs in her drawing-room at my side. And she did not recover consciousness, but only started moaning and talking wanderingly. She is very young; a very young widow, and has had great trouble. The loss of her husband was very sudden and attended by terrible circumstances. Come to her."

After a few minutes the doctor and the princess came out together into the dressing-room.

"Brain-fever," he declared, without hesitation, "a very delicate organization much overtaxed. I should say there has been long and grievous mental strain. Collapse was inevitable."

"I am sure you are right.'

The little Herr Doctor knew very well he was right—he always knew that. But the lady who told him so now was the wife of his Sovereign's brother, and he did not snort; on the contrary he smiled a little tight, crooked smile, and bowed gratefully.

"Madame Petersen," he said, "must have a nurse."

"*Neterlich.* You can send one? You know of a suitable one? Madame Petersen is—much esteemed by me." ("Madame Petersen," said her Highness's manner, "is a lady of importance.")

"Yes, yes. That is self-understood. Your Highness, there is my sister-in-law; a widow herself, and since her husband's death she has returned to her profession of nursing. A very capable lady, and much experienced."

("I wonder," thought the Princess, "if she is as old as you and as ugly?")

"If she is very cheerful——" she said aloud.

"She is cheerful. And young, quite young. Say forty. Also she is of a pleasant visage. Also she is at hand, for she is in my house. She, and my wife, and I were at tea when your Highness sent for me."

"I think, if she could come at once, I would like to wait till she arrives."

The Princess's carriage took the doctor home, and, in quarter of an hour, returned with his sister-in-law. She looked under forty, and was really pleasant, and reasonably good-looking. As she entered the dressing-room the Princess rose from a chair with a book in her hand.

"I was reading this English novel," she said, smiling, "till you should arrive. It seems charming—no doubt you read English."

"Alas, no, Highness. I neither read nor talk it—I do not understand it at all. Is that necessary? Does Madame not speak German?"

"Oh yes. She is not English. But it is her language. She talks German fluently. At present too fluently—she wanders incessantly."

The Princess had not really been sitting there reading since the little doctor's departure; she had only left Ida's side on hearing the carriage return. Before that she had been very tenderly bathing the girl's burning forehead with Eau de Cologne, and softly smoothing her lovely, but too abundant, hair. Ida never ceased to mutter and chatter.

"Oh!" she moaned, "why did you and father both die? You wouldn't have let me act, act, act foolishly. Especially you. You knew I was foolish. You said so. You know you did. You used to say that. Not crossly, I know. You used not to scold. Father scolded. Sometimes he lost—his temper. He was not gentle. He was good. Yes, I know. Harsh. Sometimes nearly savage. I knew he was good. Only *you* never frightened me. Didn't I always do what you advised? If you had come back *then—then*. It's too late *now*. He has done it now. It can't be altered now. If you had come back *then* I should have listened. *You* would have known. You always knew. You would not have let me. I know you would not have let me. He looked so good. You would have known he was bad. It was not in his face. Oh, his face—up above me, looking down, frightened, frightful. Oh! I was not frightened before—not very much; it was dangerous. Yes, I knew. But I was not terrified till I saw his face. If you had come back in time, it's too late now; it's all done. You would not have let me marry him. I should have listened—really. Yes, though I did worship him. But I should have listened to you. To father, even. You both died. I had nobody. Nobody left. And I wanted somebody. And I loved him then. Till he—oh, his face! Up above me. Looking down. Peering down. Cruel. Oh! coward—cruel. *Then* I grew afraid. I knew. I knew what his face meant. To kill me. To save himself. I knew before I saw the knife. Oh, the mean terror in his face. Like a dog. His lips frothed. He hated me for terror. Oh—when his eyes looked down; the fear in them; the hatred of fear; and the fumbling for the knife. The knife was in his eyes first—before I saw it in his hand. Ah, ah! too late, mother, you cannot wipe him out like that. Ah-h-h." And she fell back with a sudden despairing upward gaze, fell as one falls in nightmare, on to her low, flat pillow.

"She *is* in a nightmare," thought the Princess. "Ah, poor child! Yes, she feels as if she were falling an immeasurable distance, and it is only on to her pillow. *I* have had a nightmare like that."

IX

Anton von Helsing was in Paris. He had taken up his quarters at a good hotel of established repute, which was not, however, one of the newest, most fashionable and most luxurious. We may call it the Hotel de l'Aigle.

He was lunching, and at another table not next to his own, but opposite to it, another young man was lunching alone. As it happened, at all the other tables there were little parties of two, three or more. The young man opposite was evidently British; his dress, his face, his manner all proclaimed it, and Anton decided that he was of good position, also that he was not much used to Paris. He was tall and stalwart, and though not handsome had a pleasant and trustworthy face. The eyes were of a greenish hazel; the hair what is called sandy and not in the least of the color of sand; the mouth rather large, and it carried out the kindly expression of the very clear eyes. The moustache was blonde, and not big. His hands *were* rather big, strong-looking, and capable.

When he had finished eating he signed to a waiter, who noted down what he had eaten and drunk, and took the number of his room. Then he asked a question, which Anton overheard, got up and went out.

Five minutes later Anton went through the same ceremonies.

In the hall he asked the concierge if he knew the name of No. 31.

"Oh yes, Highness! The Earl of Solway. An Englishman."

"Ah, I felt sure he was English."

Anton got his hat and went out. Getting into a taxi he said to the man:

"Au Salon de Peintres Inconnus, Avenue des Champs Elysées."

The gallery was not very large, consisting of two small rooms, and one more spacious. Some of the artists who exhibited there had evidently a *macabre* taste; some seemed to be much in want of any taste at all; and some were, one would say, not likely to remain always *inconnus*.

Nearly in the middle of the Grande Salle there was an ottoman, and there Anton sat down, and began to study his catalogue. There were, as yet at all events, very few visitors to the pictures. When therefore Lord Solway came in, as Anton had been waiting for him to do, he saw him at once. Till he had heard him ask the waiter the whereabouts of the Salon de Peintres Inconnus, Anton himself had not thought of visiting it. All the same, he knew the gallery, and had been here before, during other visits to Paris. He himself knew much and cared much about pictures—somehow he had been a little surprised to hear that other young man inquiring for this particular gallery, not one well-known to foreigners, or to persons without any special fondness for art.

When Lord Solway entered the Grande Salle he held a catalogue open in his hand, and was clearly seeking a number. Having found it he walked straight to the picture, No. 179, without even glancing at any other. From where Anton sat it was quite easy to see at which picture the Scotsman was looking. But it was not so easy to read the number of it. For several minutes the young man stood intently regarding the picture; and when he turned away the expression of his face was very singular. It was a kindly, good-natured face, but now there was a murderous savage expression in the clear eyes, and the pleasant mouth was very hard-set.

Anton got up and walked across to the picture, and as he did so the two young men's eyes met for an instant and the prince slightly raised his hat.

"Oh. You are in my hotel," said the Scotsman. "I saw you at luncheon, at a table near mine."

"Yes. Of course, I saw you too."

Anton smiled as he said this, and Lord Solway said:

"Are you English?"

"No, I am Prince Anton of Helsing-Weissburg. You are Lord Solway? I think I know a relation of yours."

Having said this he moved on to the picture, and Lord Solway went back to it with him.

Anton stood opposite it, reading it, as one reads a book: and slowly on his face the expression deepened to intensity, quite slowly, for he had to understand gradually. Perhaps it was not dark and vengeful as Lord Solway's had been, for anger and loathing had to fight with compassion, and the compassion was in his case the stronger emotion.

"I had that painted," said Lord Solway. "It is not by a Frenchman. It was done for me by a Scots artist. And it has been exhibited in many galleries. I had it done for a purpose. And it is advertised for a purpose. Have you read what is under it?"

At the foot of the picture was a gilt label, on which, in English and French, was the following inscription in black letters.

"A noble lady married an ignoble young man. Within a few weeks he and she together went to seek for the eggs of a very rare sea-bird. They descended the precipice by means of a knotted rope. When the husband felt the rope unequal to their weight he cut it, beneath himself, and saved himself."

"Yes," said Anton. "I have read."

Both young men continued steadfastly gazing at the picture which represented the scene.

"It is," said Anton gravely, "her whom I know."

"But," cried Lord Solway, "you cannot. He killed her."

He laid his hand on the prince's arm, and Anton felt it tremble.

"He meant to let her be killed. But she is alive. She is Lady Sylvia Carstairs."

"Of course. My cousin. I succeeded her father. I was only twenty then. I was never intimate with him or with her. But I have no sentiment stronger than my loathing for that beast—" and he pointed to the man in the picture. Anton had an even stronger sentiment—pity for the victim of the beast. But he did not say that.

"How can she be alive?" cried Solway. "Don't you see it is impossible? You must have met her *before.*"

"No. I never met her till three weeks ago. She is alive. *How* I cannot tell. Lord Solway, I do not feel sure yet whether I ought or ought not to tell you where she is. I only know that she is living somewhere, and that she hides her identity, that she wishes to conceal her existence. I will think it over, if you will not mind, and this evening if you will come to my room in the hotel I will tell you what I have decided. I am not at all intimate with her, though I respect her most deeply. I would rather say no more at this moment, and I will ask you to leave it at that. Of course you are impatient, perhaps inclined to be angry with me: but I cannot help it. What I feel is this—by an accident I have her secret, and no one else has. I must decide whether I am bound to keep it, though, frankly, I shall probably decide not to keep it from you."

"I hope you will not. Would you rather I now left you?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Very well. Good-by, Prince. I hope you will decide to tell me all you know."

And Lord Solway lifted his hat and went away. Anton sat down, where he had sat before, to think. For over two hours he sat there, and by that time there were more visitors to the gallery. As he got up at last to go away he saw a young, very handsome man coming across the gallery, so singularly handsome that several people looked at him with almost open admiration. Yet Anton instantly disliked him. It was not a bad face at first glance, but something ruined it; a furtive, driven look. The young man did not seem at all vain; you would say that he quite ignored his own really rare beauty; if he was aware that people looked at him with curiosity, he was certainly not delighted by it. His manner was at once irresolute and harried. He was extremely slim, and not tall, very light in weight, no doubt. He walked with a queer indetermination, almost zigzagging, as he went across and across the gallery. "Like a mosquito," thought Anton. Once he got quite close to No. 179, and Anton thought he was going to look at it, but he didn't. Three other people stood opposite it, and he turned sharply away and crossed the room. Presently there was no one by No. 179, and he turned as sharply as before and zigzagged across the gallery, so that till he had actually brought himself to it you could not have told whether he really meant to go and look at it or no. But he did go this time, and he devoured the picture with his haggard, splendid eyes.

"It was for that," thought Anton, "that Solway had it painted. Incredible that it should have succeeded."

There was no one at all near No. 179 now except the singularly handsome young man. Anton watched, but did not seem to watch. Not till the man who devoured the picture turned away did Anton walk up to him and say:

"Isn't it a pity the painter did not make the faces portraits?"

"Oh! I don't know. Yes, of course. But the picture would have had to be so large."

The gallery was closing, and there was a small crowd round the door. Anton kept close to the stranger, without this being very marked, as they had to wait for the people in front to get out.

"You," remarked Anton, "are not the only person specially interested in No. 179 this afternoon. There——"

"Oh, I'm not at all interested in it. It is *macabre* and I don't admire the sort of thing. I came to look at 203. A friend of mine painted it."

It was a bad shot.

"Ah," said Anton, "Jean Berthel's picture. It has been here five years."

"Yes, yes, I know that. He told me."

"Your friends, Monsieur, are unlucky. He also is dead."

The people in front had mostly got out now, and the stranger pushed on.

"Yes, yes," he said, "of course he's dead——"

"I supposed he told you."

The handsome stranger had edged between two slightly indignant ladies, and was quite close to the door. But there they made him wait his turn, and Anton managed to get close to him again.

"The other men interested in No. 179," he said over the wretched stranger's shoulder, "who visited it to-day are myself and—Lord Solway."

"He is in Paris?" The words were simply blurted out by sheer surprise and worry.

"Oh, yes! Shall I give him a *rendezvous* from you? I'm sure he would wish to see you. He is in Paris on purpose to see the picture—but I know, Mr. Garioch, he would like to see you, too."

X

As soon as Anton had returned to the Hotel de l'Aigle he asked if Lord Solway was in.

"No, Highness. But he said he should dine here, and he must be in shortly."

"Will you please ask him, as soon as he returns, to come to my room?"

Half an hour later Lord Solway knocked at the Prince's door.

"I am not immediately going to tell you," said Anton, "where I met Lady Sylvia Garioch, or how it comes about that I know anything of her history. Simply because I have something else to tell you. Garioch is in Paris."

Lord Solway, who had only just sat down, jumped up again and said: "Where? How do you know?"

"I know because I saw him. I did not know him by sight—I had never seen him. But for meeting you I should not have known who he was when I did see him. It has all happened most wonderfully. My meeting with you here was purely accidental; I had never imagined I should meet you. Then you told me how you had had that picture painted, and that you had done that for a purpose, and had it exhibited in many places, and its whereabouts advertised for the same purpose. It was not hard to guess the purpose. You were in hopes *he* would be drawn, compelled, to go and look at it. . . ."

"Yes, that was my purpose."

"Strange to say it succeeded. He came to look at it this afternoon. I was still there. I watched everyone who looked at it, but only he looked at it in any fashion at all remarkable. I spoke to him, and let him see I knew the story; I stuck to him and bothered him, and told him *you* were in Paris, and would like to see him. By that time I was *sure* it was he, and I called him by his name; then I was still surer. All the way down the steps of the gallery I stuck to him, talking, and telling him you were determined to meet him. I think he was nearly mad before he got off. There was only one taxi outside and he jumped into it—it had evidently brought him there, and was waiting for him.

"To where we came from," he told the driver, and the man went off at once."

"So you lost him."

"For a time, yes. But I got another cab very soon, and told my man he was to drive up the Avenue and see if he could pick up No. 1266 that was ahead. I said if he did I would give him fifty francs over and above whatever fare there might be to pay. Well he did pick it up, close to the Place de l'Etoile. 'Now follow,' I told him. And he did—down the Avenue Friedland, and back into Paris: finally to the Hotel Mercedes, a rather miserable place in the Rue St. Anne. There he got out and paid the man, and went in. I did not let my man stop, but went on to the end of the street. There I got rid of him and went back: Garioch had not come out again. He was still inside the hotel. I reconnoitered and saw he was not in the entrance, and went in myself. I asked the concierge if a *Lord Edinburgh* was staying there, a friend of mine who had written to say he was coming to Paris and would descend at the Hotel Mercedes. The man was flattered: it is not at all a sort of place where lords would come: and he pretended not to be quite sure. 'There is,' he said, on examining the list, 'a Scottish gentleman, M. MacAlistair—but no, all our other guests are French. If milord Edinburgh arrives shall I say that Monsieur called to see him?' I said, 'Yes,' and at that moment Garioch came hurriedly downstairs into the hall. He looked worse than ever. At sight of me he stopped and turned crimson. 'Monsieur,' said the concierge, 'calls to inquire for his friend milord Edinburgh, whose arrival at the Hotel Mercedes he expects.'

"Garioch lost his head and cried fiercely:

" 'There is no Lord Edinburgh. It is a lie. That man is a spy.' The concierge was a bit taken aback; but I did not look guilty and Garioch did.

" 'Nonsense,' I said calmly, "I am not a spy. I am Prince Anton of Helsing-Weissburg.' And I took out a card-case with a crowned cypher on it and gave the concierge one of my cards. 'You are quite welcome to find out all about me at the German Embassy if you like,' I told him; 'in fact, to go there with me now. As to your M. MacAlistair, his real name is Garioch, and I advise you to look after him. He committed a horrible crime—and you can see for yourself that he knows I speak the truth.' Garioch indeed looked appalling. But with a fierce exclamation he turned and went upstairs again. I doubt very much if the concierge will let him go out without seeing where he goes."

In this Anton was wrong. When he and Lord Solway went to the Hotel Mercedes they were told that M. MacAlistair had paid his bill and left.

"I was not sorry," said the concierge. "If he is really a criminal we do not want him here. But neither do we want to have him arrested here, nor to have his name connected with our hotel. That sort of *réclame* we do not desire." "Of course, it seemed as if Garioch was quite lost to us. But, as I left the hotel a young waiter came after me, on pretence of opening the door for me. He came outside on to the step, and said. 'Attene, I took the number of the taxi, it was 8906: and he told the driver to go to the Gare St. Lazare.' I tipped the fellow and came on here to get you. There is no train for England from St. Lazare till 9.20; that is via Dieppe: ordinarily speaking there is the 7.47 via Havre, but to-night that train does not run because of an accident to a bit of the line that is flooded. I happened to read that in a paper this morning. Shall we go to the Gare St. Lazare?"

"Yes. Can you come at once?"

The young men went off together, without waiting to eat anything: and in less than ten minutes were at the Gare St. Lazare. They went to the ticket-office for the Dieppe line and Anton asked for a ticket for London.

"It is only eight o'clock," said the man, "the train is not till 9.20.

"Oh very well. I will not take the ticket yet then. I really want to travel with a friend, I suppose he has not asked for a ticket yet—a very singularly handsome gentleman, English, with a green tie."

"He wanted a ticket for the 7.47 to Havre: and I told him the train does not run to-night. He arrived in good time for it, soon after six o'clock. I noticed him, because he is so handsome as Monsieur says, and also because he looked very ill—*a par pres abime*. And he was excited."

"There," said Anton, turning away. "I did not really want a ticket. But I have found out that he really came here. My waiter at the Hotel de l'Aigle did not lie. The question is did he stay here? He would probably go to the Bureau de renseignments here and find out if there were an earlier train than the 9.20 from here at some other station. Let us ask."

They did ask, and found that the gentleman, who spoke French badly, had inquired as Anton had guessed.

"I told him," said the man, "that there was the 9 o'clock from the Gare du Nord. But he seemed nearly *fou* to find there was nothing earlier. For some minutes he walked most impatiently up and down the Grande Salle, then he disappeared—perhaps to get dinner."

For nearly half an hour Anton and Solway walked about the huge station, but there was no sign of Garioch.

"We may as well," said Anton, "sit down at one of the tables of the buffet out here in the hall and pass some of the time away dining. It won't be a very nice dinner. But we can see a good deal from there."

So they took a table, out in the great hall, and watched all who came up the stairs close to them. Garioch might not come up by them, of course, for there are two other stairways leading up from the entrance. But, as it happened, he did come: it was then nearly nine o'clock; and his first glance was towards the clock. Almost instantly he looked at the crowd of little tables and his eyes fell on Anton and Solway. His face was quite colorless, and his mouth twitched: the driven look was now far more terrible, and his eyes had a hunted, quite desperate expression. He turned sharply and ran down the stairs, jostling against many of those who were coming up.

"Solway," said Anton, "I had better do the paying here. I shall manage it quicker. You can go after him. I will follow."

Lord Solway went off at once, but half way down the stairs he was at fault: the stairs turned to the right into the lower hall of the station, but on the left was an opening into the Rue d'Amsterdam that runs uphill alongside. There was no sign of Garioch—by which way had he gone?

Solway decided to go out into the street, and go down it as quickly as possible to the station entrance gates: it was almost certain that by hurrying he would reach them before Garioch could pass out that way.

When Garioch reached the gates—he had gone down into the courtyard of the station—he saw Solway standing on the curb outside watching for him. He turned abruptly and saw the prince coming towards him. He stood still, waivered, and turned again. Someone cried out and in a moment a large and heavy motor had knocked him down and passed over him.

He was not killed outright, but horribly crushed, and the blood spurted from his mouth. Almost immediately he died.

XI

"Now," said Anton, "I will tell you all I know."

He and Solway were sitting by the fire in the prince's room, and it was past midnight.

The story was not very long.

"You see," he ended, "I cannot tell you how she comes to be alive. That *she* must tell us. But this I will tell you—if I can induce her, some day, to accept me, I will marry her. There is another thing to say; I have letters from my mother, I found them here when I came in this afternoon: and she writes that Lady Sylvia—'Madame Petersen'—is very ill indeed, with brain-fever. But at the end of her second letter, for two arrived together, she says that Madame seemed better, though not yet out of danger. I shall return at once to Helsing. Would you like to come with me?"

"Certainly I would, but you understand that I do not know my cousin well. Oh! and you must remember I came here hurriedly and have not with me exactly the clothes for introduction to a princely household."

Of course Prince Anton assured him that that did not matter, though it is unlikely that any one of his brothers would have thought so, and it was agreed that they should start together the next morning.

When they reached Helsing it was over a fortnight since the day on which Madame Petersen had been taken ill, and she was no longer in danger. The little doctor had really been skillful and his sister had proved a most devoted and capable nurse. Princess Rudolf had come to see her patient every day, and after the second day the girl had fully recognized her, and had entirely ceased to wander in her mind and talk. She had been disposed from the first to like the Princess, though she did not altogether approve of her, and long before Anton and Solway arrived she had learned to be very fond of her.

"You really are like my own mother," the girl assured her, "while I was light-headed I thought it *was* my mother come back again. Yet I knew, all the time, that she was dead."

"If your mother," declared the Princess laughing, "was like me, it is not from her that you inherit your beauty."

On the following afternoon "Madame Petersen" was downstairs for the first time, and she found her drawing-room full of beautiful flowers. As she had only one friend in Helsing, it was not hard to guess whence they came, and as soon as the Princess arrived she thanked her.

"Oh, I sent them on Anton's behalf," his mother said cheerfully, "as he isn't here yet to send them for himself."

The girl knew at once by her tone that he was coming, and a little flush crept over her pale face.

"He hasn't been away long this time," the Princess went on. "I hadn't expected him so soon. But he will be here to-night." She meant at the Châlet, but intended Madame Petersen to think, as she did think, that he would only arrive at Helsing that night. He was already at Helsing, and Princess Rudolf now knew all he could tell her.

"He has," she went on cheerfully, "a traveling companion who knows you—not very intimately though he is a relation."

"Knows me? Prince Anton traveling with somebody who knows me. How can the Prince know that."

"The Prince knows all sorts of things. My dear, it is best to make no mysteries. There is no longer any occasion for them. Lord Solway is with him."

"Lord Solway!"

"Yes. And I must say you have behaved rather badly in reference to a very kind man."

"But he must have thought I was dead."

"Exactly. And you aren't. Now, my dear Sylvia, he and Anton have important news. They, or one of them, will tell it to you in full when you are strong enough to hear it in full. But I intend to tell you myself in part, and whether the Herr Doctor would allow me to do so, if he knew, I cannot tell. I take it on myself. For it concerns things of which the Herr Doctor knows nothing. No one knows except Anton, and Lord Solway, and I. It is seldom news, but I am not hypocrite enough to pretend that is bad news. *You* are alive, and someone else is dead."

The girl's eyes were fastened on her face.

"Who?" she whispered, laying a hand on the Princess's arm.

"Your husband." And Princess Rudolf watched, not without much trepidation, the effect of her words. The girl's eyes filled with tears which did not fall, and she looked away into the red heart of the fire. Her lips moved soundlessly, and she bent her lovely head a little.

The kind, queer, rash, and tactless Princess slipped to the floor, and knelt beside her, caressing her softly.

"How do you know," the girl said, suddenly, "who my husband was? That he, who you say is dead, was my husband?"

"You married David Garioch of Duners. He is dead. Anton and Lord Solway saw him dead. There is no mistake."

Sylvia looked back at the fire and sighed.

"I have longed to be free from him—from the thought of him," she said simply. "And nothing could free me. Now that I am free—" she paused an instant and went on, "it is like the end of a nightmare. While it lasted I could only loathe him. Now it is over I do not loathe him any more. Is that not odd? For his being dead makes no difference to what he did."

"He killed you—as he thought and meant—to save his own mean life?"

"Yes. If he had wanted to kill me because he hated me it would not have been so bad. It was the meanness and cowardice that made him loathsome to me. I doubt if he was wicked. Simply a coward. I do not know, but I think I could have pardoned any wickedness."

"My dear, you are a woman. We are all like that."

"Well, now I can pardon that, too. Death ends it. There is no meanness in death."

After a while she spoke again.

"It is odd. All these months and months that make up over two years his face has been maddening me, as I saw it that last time. Now it is gone. I can only remember it as I saw it the first day we ever met. He was quite wonderfully handsome."

"So Anton says."

"Ah! He is here?"

"Yes, he is here."

"Please, do not let him come to me. I want to be quite well before I see him."

"He shall not come till you are well, Sylvia——"

"What?"

"Will you tell me how it is you were not killed? I know all the rest."

The girl sighed again and said:

"When he cut the rope, just above my hands, I fell, fell, fell. And he could see me no more. There was a vehement wind, and it blew me, hither and thither, like a rag, and, of course, I was falling lower all the time, but not straight down. I fell at last into the sea, quite out, and clear of the rocks. I can swim very well, but I could not swim at once; if my clothes had not buoyed me up I suppose I should have drowned. When I could strike out I did so, and I swam a good way. I was tired out when a boat picked me up—a small cargo-boat. I told them I had swam out too far and been caught by a current; that I was not of Shetland, but of Scotland, which was true; but had been staying in Shetland—that was true too. The boat was Norse, but the skipper talked English quite well. He said they were bound for Dundee, and thence home to Norway, and I asked him to give me passage to Dundee; I had five or six pounds in my pocket, and I showed them to him. He said he would not want any payment—he was a very nice young man, kind and respectful. When I insisted on paying, he said a pound would cover all I should eat. The rings on my fingers were worth hundreds of pounds, but I had no need to think of selling them yet. At Dundee I was not far from my own house, left to me by my father. And I went there. It was the middle of afternoon when I arrived and all the doors and windows were open, and no one seemed to be about. I went in from the garden through the door of my own little sitting-room, and in a queer Indian cabinet I knew I should find the key of my bureau. The cabinet itself was locked, but the lock was weak and poor, and I easily prised it open with the penknife on my writing table. In the bureau in a secret drawer were the keys of my safe. The safe was not in that room, but in what had been my father's bedroom, and it was hidden behind the oak panels, and no one but myself knew where it was, or how to open the panel. Well, I kept upstairs, and met no one. That was natural enough, as no servant ever used the front stairs, and I think they were all out in the hayfield amusing themselves——"

"But had no one seen you before you reached your house?"

"Several people, but I had dressed myself in very deep, but very common mourning, such as a crofter's widow would wear, and my face was covered with thick crape. It was only at the little station anyone saw me even thus. Thence I walked through the wood, and met no one; the wood runs right up to the shrubberies. Well, in my safe I knew I should find plenty of money. And I took it all—about six hundred pounds; also I took all my diamonds, and some splendid rubies that had been my mother's. I took it all. I was determined to disappear, and I would not tell my agents or bankers. I was ashamed. I went back to Dundee and took a passage to Norway. But I could not bear the high cliffs and the sea. It made me think of Shetland. I stayed a while at Bergen. Thence I went to Christiania, where I sold a very few diamonds. Thence to Stockholm, where I sold more. Thence to Copenhagen, where I sold more. After a while I went to Paris, where I sold a lot. There I read by chance of the Duneshore, and made up my mind to go and see it. I seem to stifle away from the sea, and yet I could not abide any sea where there are rocks and high precipices. I did not see why my money should not last, I had so many jewels.

Of course, I have plenty left—plenty of money, I mean, and of jewels, too. I spent about three hundred pounds furnishing this little house, and it only cost five hundred to buy; to live here costs only about three hundred a year, not much more. It has not tired me to tell you all this, it has rested me. I am not a secret person by nature, and all this secrecy was a strain. I am glad to be at the end of it. Now, please, how did you find out anything about me?"

"Anton found out. He must tell you himself. It is rather a strange story, so simple and yet so unlikely. When I came here that first day, I had not the least idea who you were; Anton knew, or suspected, but he never told me."

"Why did you come?"

"To see you for myself. I knew you could be no ordinary person."

"Why not?"

"Because Anton would not have gone away at the bidding of an ordinary person."

"I never bade him go away. I only said that I did not wish to see him again."

"That was civil!"

"It was not civil or uncivil. It was true."

"And I know why you wouldn't let him come again. I did not dare to ask him, but I knew. That was why I came here. You were afraid of him."

"And of myself."

"Exactly. Now you need not be afraid. There is no great harm in being a Princess, though it bores me to pieces at times."

Sylvia's face again flushed; she liked the Princess, and yet she was also saying things that the girl disliked.

"Will you tell me," Princess Rudolf asked, who saw that she had annoyed the girl, and wanted to change the subject, "how it was that there was so much money in your safe. Six hundred pounds seems a good lot to have in notes and cash in a safe."

"I always kept a good deal. There is no bank very near the House of Carstairs, and it gave my people trouble paying them by check. I paid wages in notes or cash. Then we were going abroad, and I had the money for that. It seemed very odd taking it away and slinking off with it like that—as if I were stealing if from myself. I wonder how Prince Anton came to know who I was."

"Ah, he must tell you. Of course he only suspected at first. The confirmation of his suspicions came about very strangely. What *I* wonder is how that other man got away, why he wasn't arrested at once."

"I do not even know whether it is a crime in the eyes of the law to do—what he did—to save one's own life. But in a newspaper in Dundee I read about my own disappearance and his. We had been seen going to the rocks, and after that no one saw us together. After—after I was gone he must have climbed up, by the knots in the rope. He never went back to Duners, but walked to a little place called St. Olaf's and there he hired a boat that took him to the island called the Mainland. He took passage thence from Lenvich to Thurso, and after that all trace of him was lost. It was in the morning the—thing—happened. It was only quite late in the afternoon they began to search about, and finally they found the rope, and saw that it had been cut with a knife. It seemed very grim to read of their efforts to find my body."

"Why did you call yourself Madame Petersen?"

"It was the name of the cargo-boat that picked me up, and I took it. When I opened an account at a bank here they asked me to sign my name in a book, and I had to invent a Christian name and I chose Ida at haphazard—it was the name of the heroine in a novel I had been reading that very day."

"And, if Anton had not found you out, would you have lived here always, buried alive on the Duneshore?"

"I suppose so. I meant to."

"And your property—did you never think what would become of it?" . . . .

"No. On my marriage I settled it all upon *him*. He had very little of his own, just the little estate in Shetland and scarcely anything besides. It didn't matter: I was rich, for the estates that went with the title were the least part of what my father had: my mother's estates, and my grandmother's, he could leave to me and he did. Even though I was dead Lord Solway would have no claim to them. I had the right to do as I chose with them—"

There came a ring and she stopped talking hastily.

"My dear," said the Princess, "it is only the little doctor, and if I were not myself, he would give me a wigging. I know he will think I have let you talk too much. That's *one* good in being a princess, one doesn't get wiggings—not from doctors."

But later on the doctor told her Highness that his patient was altogether better.

"I find in her," he explained, "the removal of an incubus. The incubus had not been removed by her previous recovery. The collapse itself ended the strain—ended it in collapse. And that collapse *might* have ended everything—her life, or her reason. But it did not. Physically and mentally she is strong, and her youth and strength saved her. But as she recovered I noted the presence of that which I call an incubus. I noted it with misgiving: for if it remained her recovery would never have been sure and complete. Now I am convinced that it has been removed. It strikes me that your Highness has helped her as much as either doctor or nurse."

Princess Rudolf doubted very much if he would have said as much had she not been the wife of the little doctor's Sovereign. But she had no objection to compliments, and she happened to believe that he was right.

"All the same," she told her son that night, "you must not see her yet, nor Lord Solway either. Let her grow used to the knowledge that you are here."

In reality she was much less patient than her son: and he had been to the Châlet Ferdinand many times before he had any satisfactory response to give to her eager demand.

"Anything to report?"

OLD WINE AND NEW BOTTLES

I

"I DARESAY," said Raymond d'Argnes to himself, "it isn't the proper thing,"—but he did it. That is to say he sat down upon one of the benches in the Champs Elysées. And he sat down because he found himself more tired by a very moderate amount of walking than he had expected.

It will be obvious from his uncertainty as to the correctness or incorrectness of sitting down in the Champs Elysées that he was not Parisian; nor was he, in spite of his name, French. Though his family came from Normandy it was English: if eight centuries and a half in England could make it so.

He sat down and laid on the seat beside him the walking stick that he had found more necessary than he had thought it would be. He turned to his right and looked upon the long perspective of the most splendid avenue in any city in the world as it curved up to the magnificent Arch of Triumph, beneath which only troops returning from victory may pass. Turning to his left he saw the avenue end in the vast open space that has had so many names—Place Louis Quinze, Place de la Paix de la Revolution and, at last and still, Place de la Concorde—in whose midst stands the Egyptian monolith on the spot where the ancient monarch of France was martyred.

Then he glanced with half-inattentive eyes at the stream of folk passing either way. Of the men, at least nine in ten were French soldiers, and it seemed to him that nine in ten were wounded. There was a real *poilu,* not absolutely young but seeming older by reason of his hirsute and shaggy chin and neck.

But there were many more to whom the term poilu could only be applied generally, quite young, smart, well-shorn and shaven, nearly all handsome, all with expressive faces. The women, except the very poorest, were almost all in mourning; but Raymond thought with relief that in France deep mourning is worn for relations that in England would not be considered very near.

Two ladies passed quite near his seat at a moment when there was a sort of gap in the stream; and perhaps for half a minute no one else had gone by down the broad walk, though there were strollers under the trees behind him.

The ladies might be mother and daughter; the elder not more than forty-five, if so much; the younger twenty, perhaps. Both were rather tall, and there was a resemblance in their figures, as in their walk and manner, as frequently happens in the case of members of the same family who are constantly in each other's company. They were talking, as they passed, and their voices, he thought, had the same tone; but that might have been his fancy, for they did not speak loudly. They spoke French, and French they undoubtedly were.

The elder lady glanced at him, not as she went by, but just before they came up, and he could see that she noted he was wounded. For a fraction of a moment his eyes and the lady's met, then she turned hers away; but even in that instant she somehow conveyed the impression of sympathy and respect. It did not amount to a smile, even the gravest smile; it was rather like an effort to restrain a motherly benison. The younger lady, he imagined, had not noticed his presence at all. His eyes still followed them when they had gone by. Then his eyes dropped, and he saw on the ground, six paces from his seat, a very small case, probably a card-case. He had no doubt at all to whom it belonged; only one of the two ladies could have dropped it. It had not been there before they passed. He immediately got up, and having picked it up, went after them. The case was quite small, of polished leather, hard, and with a fine grain in it, and dyed green—almost like the old-fashioned shagreen; in one corner was a tiny coronet.

The ladies walked quickly, and he had to do the same, but he found his knee more painful and he limped a little. Still he did not doubt he would overtake them. Unfortunately it began to rain and quite heavily. He could see the two ladies in front, but he saw also that they were going to take a taxi. He felt he must do the same, and so looked about for one.

A dozen were hurrying towards the Arch of Triumph, but all were occupied; several passed in the other direction, but they also were occupied. The two ladies had found one free and had taken it.

"I *must* catch them," he thought, "perhaps there's money in this case."

Presently a taxi swerved in towards the curb, and Raymond saw that an observant French soldier had understood his predicament, and had signalled it. The young cuirassier smiled and Raymond thanked him.

" 'Tis nothing," said the soldier. "Monsieur was half occupied looking after the two ladies who went away in the other taxi. I happened to see this one coming and free." He opened the door and shut it, with another pleasant smile, when Raymond got in, then he saluted.

"Follow that other taxi," the cuirassier said to the driver, "monsieur wishes to overtake it." With a final smile he turned away, quite happy in the belief that he was assisting at a little romance. The driver had not argued, he did not object. "There are forty taxis—which taxi?" but pushed down his label and made off. He picked up the other taxi, and soon drew near enough to note the number. Then perhaps he thought he might as well not make the journey too short; possibly he could have overtaken it sooner. It turned at the Place de la Concorde towards the Hôtel Clisson, and there were many others making the same sweep to the left. It turned again left, towards the Madeleine, where there was much more traffic. Passing the big church, it took the left still and went swiftly along the Boulevard Malesherbes, where the traffic, still considerable, was not so great, and the pursued taxi was easier to pick out. The shower had stopped, and the glistening pavement was no longer wetted with heavy splashes of rain. At the open place in front of the Church of St. Augustine the taxi containing the two ladies again took the left, and bore uphill towards the group of rather solemn, old-fashioned but highly respectable, squares of tall houses. Into one of them it turned and drew up about the middle of the west side.

Raymond's taxi drew in just behind it; he got out and paid the man. The two ladies were standing upon the still wet and shining pavement.

"Claire," the elder lady was saying, "have you any money? I had some in my card-case, but I can't find it. . . ."

"Madame," said Raymond, limping forward, "it is here. Madame dropped it in the Champs Elysées soon after passing the place where I was sitting, and I saw it and . . . here it is."

"And you have taken so much trouble to follow us," said the lady, smiling, and her smile was just what Raymond expected—gracious, friendly and sincere.

"That," declared the young man, smiling, too, "was common honesty."

"Perhaps. But extreme courtesy."

She had taken the little case from his hand, and had drawn from it a note and offered it to the taxi-driver.

"Madame, it is for a hundred francs. I have not change enough."

"Would you allow me to pay him, madame?" Raymond suggested. And he stepped forward and did so without waiting a verbal permission.

"And now," said the lady, "that you have paid *him*, comes my common honesty. I must pay *you*. Will you come in and I will get change?"

Raymond was delighted, and followed the two ladies to the door of the large, somewhat austere looking house. Over the entrance was a shield of arms, surmounted by the same coronet as he had seen upon the card-case. When he had rung, the door was opened by an aged man-servant, and all three passed in. The hall was wide and high, and flagged with squares of black and white marble; the stairs were very broad and shallow; one could easily have ridden up them. At the head of them was a gallery hung with portraits, large and imposing, evidently representing distinguished personages, mostly in court dress. From the gallery several wide and tall doors opened, and through one of them Madame led the way into a spacious salon.

"And now," said the lady, "let me pay you my debt of thanks. . . . The other little debt I could have paid downstairs, for old Jean has always plenty of money! But I preferred to give you the further trouble of coming up here that I might thank you less hurriedly."

"What I did was nothing," protested Raymond. "My only fear was lest my taxi should miss yours.

If it had, I would have looked for your card inside."

"But the address is not on the cards—only Hôtel d'Argnes."

Raymond's eyes lighted with a look of surprise.

"You say, madame," he asked, "that this house is the Hôtel d'Argnes?"

"Yes; I am Madame d'Argnes."

"That is odd," he said smiling, "for if my mother were in France she would also be Madame d'Argnes."

"Really! That *is* interesting. But—if you are not in a great hurry—will you not sit down? You ought not to stand long, for I see you are wounded."

"Oh, I am nearly quite well. I was wounded in the knee weeks ago. I am in hospital at Versailles, and they gave me leave to come to Paris to see my half-brother, who is in an embassy, but I found he had gone to Chantilly; so I was strolling about."

The old butler had reappeared, and was setting out little tables for tea.

"Do tell me, if it is not too inquisitive," begged madame, "about Madame d'Argnes. I never knew I had an English prototype."

"Well—d'Argnes is the surname of my family. My half-brother's name is Furnival."

"I have met him," she interrupted, "he is much older than you."

"Oh, yes. Eight years older."

"Well, monsieur, *our* surname is not d'Argnes. It is de la Mer. But my husband's title is Count d'Argnes."

"That again is odd, for the founder of our family was Count d'Argnes. He was an uncle of William the Conqueror, and came with him to England, and our surname has been d'Argnes ever since. But his lands and castle in Normandy were lost to him before he came to England."

"It is really strange and very interesting. But, monsieur, I am afraid we are not relations, for our family had nothing to do with the reigning house of Normandy. It was only in the sixteenth century that the Château d'Argnes was granted by Francis I to one of the de la Mers; and now it does not belong to us, but is, as perhaps you know, a national monument."

"I'm sorry," said Raymond, "that we are not relations."

"Papa," observed mademoiselle, "will be disappointed.

"My husband," said madame, "is a great genealogist. Jean, will you tell the Count that tea is ready?"

"Mother," remarked mademoiselle in excellent English, "could not live without her tea. Papa rather despises it, and says it does away with any advantage in having a good cook, since it spoils your dinner."

"It never spoils mine," said Raymond.

A distinguished-looking, rather lean, gentleman of about sixty came in, and the Countess said to him:

"I have an interesting introduction to make—Monsieur d'Argnes, Monsieur d'Argnes."

The Count bowed, smiled, and held out a thin hand cordially.

"But now, Henriette," he begged, "will you explain?"

"My husband," declared the Countess, "has no patience, he always reads the last chapter of a novel first."

"I see no use in suffering anxiety concerning people who never existed. Claire, can *you* explain the mystery?"

"It seems to me, papa, that this gentleman is a real d'Argnes, and you only a nominal one."

Then the Countess gave the explanation, concluding with: "But after all, we are not relations. Is it not a pity?"

"Wait a bit," said the Count, "I know all about it. I know all about William, Count d'Argnes, the Conqueror's uncle. He belongs to history. And also I know about the English family of the same name, who belong——"

"Only to Devonshire," laughed Raymond. "When my Uncle Robert wants to tease my father he says we are famous for never having done anything in particular for eight centuries and a half."

"I am quite sure," continued the Count, "that my wife is mistaken in saying we are not relations, Our name of de la Mer is the English name Delamer, and one of our family married an English lady, Adelais d'Argnes, of the Devonshire family."

"So," observed the Countess demurely, "we are cousins. I began," she continued wickedly, "our acquaintance in a cousinly fashion by borrowing money."

The Count looked rather shocked; so shocked that his wife explained matters hastily.

"Claire," he remarked presently, "aren't you stifled in that long coat? Do take it off."

Mademoiselle obeyed and displayed a white nursing dress.

"Claire," her mother explained to Raymond, "nurses in one of the hospitals in the Champs Elysées; to-day her time was up at three, and I had gone to fetch her home when you saw me."

"Tea," observed the Count, "is but a poor sort of hospitality. I hope, Henriette, you will make monsieur stay to dinner."

"I believe," declared mademoiselle, "that we have been wrong all the time, and he is not Monsieur d'Argnes at all."

"Claire!" cried her father.

"I've been reading the stars (only on his shoulder, papa!) and I'm sure he is a captain."

"Unfortunately," said the young man in a low voice, "it is true. I should not be a captain if all my friends were alive."

"Ah," said the Countess, almost in a whisper, "the sad, sad war."

Again Raymond thought how tender and delicate was the little glance of sympathy she gave him, how kindly, how motherly.

His promotion had cost him the loss of the best friend he had ever had.

"Our own boy's place at our table," the Countess said gently, "is empty. He is fighting for France. Will you not take his place to-night?"

II

Raymond d'Argnes was sent home to England, but before many weeks had passed he was back in France; not in Paris, now, but in the fighting line, at a point where the English and French troops nearly overlapped. From England he had written more than once to his kind friends of the d'Argnes family, and his photograph stood on the writing-table of the Countess's own boudoir, close to that of her own son. She had opened her heart to the young English officer: he was just what she admired, brave and quiet, simple and gentle. It was only from English newspapers that she learned how greatly he had distinguished himself. The Count had brought them home.

"There," he observed. "See now, what your captain did! And not a word about it to us. The Victoria Cross is the highest reward of valor the English have."

"And many sergeants and corporals have won it," observed Claire with demure malice.

"Claire," cried her father, "you are a little Jacobin."

"Claire," said her mother carelessly, "was not so taken with our cousin as I was."

"It is only married ladies of forty-five who allow themselves to fall in love at first sight nowadays," said the Count, with almost a wink at his daughter.

"I was only forty-three last Wednesday," pleaded the Countess, "it is ungenerous to lean upon a fact so recent."

"Apart from all this frivolity," said Claire, "are you going to let me go to St. Just?"

St. Just was a town in the north of France, not forty kilometers from the fighting lines. There was an auxiliary hospital there, under the auspices of the Women of France, and more assistants had been asked for. The head of the Association had just called and requested her parents to allow Claire to fill one of the vacancies.

The Count had several objections to the plan; he was old-fashioned and it was not in accordance with his ideas that his daughter should be a nurse in a hospital far from home.

Claire was not at all sure that her mother would take her part, and sent a most grateful glance to her when madame said:

"Adrien, I should be quite of your opinion if Claire had to go and live in a hospital of which we knew nothing. But the auxiliary hospital at St. Just is really a Convent of Reparatrice Nuns, and the Reverend Mother herself is an old schoolmate of mine. With her Claire would be in good hands. Moreover, if you do not wish Claire to live in the convent, she might stop with her cousin, Madame de St. Hilaire, who is head nurse at the hospital. She has a house at St. Just and would be delighted to have Claire with her."

"If she is to go, it certainly would be better for

Claire's health that she stay with Madame St. Hilaire. She would thus have change of scene every day and some pleasant recreation. To tell the truth I think a change from Paris, after more than a year here, would do Claire good rather than harm. You know she was never here for so long a time in her life before."

After a good deal of discussion—the Count rather liked discussion and hated precipitancy—it was settled that Claire might go.

III

One night, when Claire was on duty, a large convoy of wounded was brought into the hospital at St. Just. A warning had come earlier in the week that a larger number than usual might be expected and special preparations had been made. Everyone was very busy; stretchers came in what seemed an unending procession; and many operations had to be performed at once. Most of the cases seemed serious enough; some very terrible.

Claire was working in the same ward with Stéphanie, her hostess's daughter, and they were both of them fully occupied, silent and business-like. Presently Madame de St. Hilaire, herself, came into the ward and said to her daughter:

"Claire speaks English well, does she not? Yes! Well, there are several English brought in with our people, and I have been able to put all together in the same ward—the Good Shepherd ward, on the ground floor. I think I will transfer Claire to it, and give you Marie Duphot here instead. Claire will be more useful there, for Marie talks no English."

She went across to Marie and told her of the arrangement, taking her off at once.

In the Good Shepherd ward were fifteen beds, and in four of them lay wounded English: a sergeant, two privates, and an officer.

"Here they are," said Madame de St. Hilaire in a low voice, "what a comfort it will be for the poor fellows to hear their own language."

At first Claire only spoke a few words to each by way of introducing herself, and showing them that there was a nurse who spoke English, and, as madame had said, they seemed immensely pleased to find someone whom they could understand.

It was the officer to whom she came last.

"Captain d'Argnes!" she exclaimed as soon as she saw him.

"Your brother?" cried Madame de St. Hilaire, thrown off her guard with surprise. "But surely no! He is an English officer, is he not?"

"Certainly. But he has our name and we know him."

At that moment one of the soldiers, the first she had spoken to, called to Claire: "Please, Sister," he said, and she turned at once and went to him.

"Madame!" whispered Raymond to the head nurse, "would you mind bending down, I want to say something quickly."

"Ah! you talk French!" said madame, doing as he had asked.

"Madame, that nurse's brother is here; wounded badly, I fear—you did not know? He was brought in with me. He is over there, in that bed opposite. Do not let her find him, without preparation. He is either unconsious or asleep. I do not know which; nor how badly he is hit; but I know he is Lieutenant d'Argnes; and he is exactly like her, still more like her father, only very boyish. He is a cuirassier, and there is a wounded soldier of his regiment here too; I had met him once in Paris, and we recognized each other and talked a little at the dressing station. He told me first that the young officer was Lieutenant d'Argnes—there is no mistake."

"I will do at once what you suggest. Thank you very much indeed, monsieur. But how are you wounded yourself?"

"A bit of shrapnel in my lung. Please, madame, would you do that at once?"

"Yes, I will, at once. But you; you must be in horrible pain."

"Enough to satisfy me; but please. . . ."

And Madame de St. Hilaire, full of admiration for the courage and thoughtfulness of the wounded man, moved across to where the French lieutenant lay. She did not think, so far as she could judge, that he was so dangerously wounded as the English officer. Nor did she think he was unconscious, but only dozing. And she was right. As she stooped down over him he opened his eyes and smiled.

"You are Monsieur d'Argnes, are you not?" she asked gently.

"Yes, of the Ninth Cuirassiers."

"I know your friends. I am Madame de St. Hilaire, and my husband and I are old friends of your father's. A relation of yours is nursing here and I don't want her to see you suddenly. Where is your wound?"

"Only in my hip. But I lost a good deal of blood, and it makes me weak. So I doze often. Madame, I know which relation it is. For I have heard of Claire being under your care."

"But she does not know you are here. I do not want you to speak to her till I have told her. . . . ."

And madame left him to rejoin his namesake, by whose bed Claire was now again standing. She knew already where Raymond was wounded, and that it was very dangerous. But, of course, she was talking cheerfully.

"And the piece of shrapnel has not been removed yet?"

"No, mademoiselle. It is too firmly fixed, but the doctors say it may loosen. I have to be patient. They dared not operate at the dressing station. Presently your doctors may see their way to do so."

"Claire," said madame, "go and get him some soup—what you English call beef tea, eh?"

"I have seen her brother," she went on, when Claire had gone. "He knows she is here. Now I will go after her and let her know. If patience is to cure you, my dear Captain, you will do well."

IV

Raymond was fully aware of the gravity of his condition, though he said nothing about it and bore his greatest sufferings with cheerful patience. What added to them was that he coughed almost incessantly, and each cough caused real agony. It might, however, be that the coughing would tend to dislodge the piece of shrapnel embedded in the lung.

It had entered through the back, and there was no wound in front. The doctors in charge of the hospital were very skillful, and only too willing to operate, and indeed attempted to do so, but found it impossible to remove the bit of shell without almost certainly fatal risk to the patient's life. The chances were all against his recovery, and he knew that it was so. So did all about him; but he continued to be thoroughly cheerful, and gave far less trouble than many a man only superficially wounded. His doctors and nurses, therefore, soon grew very fond of him, and so did the other patients, his neighbors.

The young cuirassier who had arrived at the same time was orderly to Lieutenant d'Argnes, and was the soldier who had called the taxi for Raymond that afternoon, months before, in the Champs Elysées. He was wounded in one foot, but soon began hopping about the ward, the foot swathed in bulky bandages, and acting as "orderly man." He was a most engaging creature; full of good spirit, and fuller of kindheartedness. He made himself generally useful, but took special care of his own master, and was also particularly glad to do anything for the English captain who had his master's name.

There were two regular orderlies in the ward, and they also seemed to have special pleasure in attending to Raymond, not only because he was more dangerously wounded than any other patient in the ward, but also because he was a stranger in a strange land. Of these two orderlies the elder was about eight and twenty, the younger not more than nineteen.

"Monsieur," asked Madame de St. Hilaire on the morning after Raymond's arrival, "if you would rather be alone, there is a tiny room I could give you. But it is very small, and it is not specially cheerful, for it has but a small window, and the trees outside make it rather dark. Of course, you would be quieter, but perhaps you might find it less cheerful."

"Yes, madame, I think I would. And I like to see my neighbors here. Thank you so much for thinking of it, but I would rather stay where I am."

Madame de St. Hilaire hesitated a moment, then said:

"It is our custom to write to the friends of any patients who cannot write themselves. Should you like us to do so for you?"

"I believe I could write—though not a very long letter. Perhaps you would also write to my mother. I will give you the address, and tell her if she would be allowed to come here. You will not, I am sure, frighten her; but she would much rather know the exact truth. And the exact truth is that I shall probably not get over this."

"I will certainly write. Your mother, of course, knows French like yourself? Yes, I thought so. But I cannot tell her that I think you will probably not get over this, for I have a conviction that you will. I have been doing this work for fifteen months now, and I have almost always been right; even sometimes when the doctors thought there was hardly any hope, and that is not their opinion now. I have also to write to the other Madame d'Argnes, for Henri had a hemorrhage early his morning, and he is not so well. Claire knows; it happened before her night-duty had ended."

When she perceived how this news troubled Raymond she was sorry she had told him.

"I had understood from Claire," she said, "that you did not know Henri."

"No, I do not. But he looks such a boy, it seems pitiful that he should suffer so much."

"But you," said the woman smiling, "you do not look a very old man."

"I am six and twenty."

A little later, when the elder of the two orderlies was attending to him, Raymond asked:

"How is he? Monsieur d'Argnes, I mean."

"Oh, just the same. No worse, if another hemorrhage does not occur. And one hopes there will be no other. He does not fidget, but lies absolutely still, and that is a great thing."

Raymond perceived by his voice and his whole manner that he was well-bred. "You yourself are a soldier—in the Chasseurs à pied, are you not?"

"I was with my regiment in the Argonne, but lost my right eye, quite at the beginning of the war. This is a glass one. Now I am doing this work."

"Monsieur," Raymond asked in a still lower voice, "has he—Monsieur d'Argnes—seen a priest?"

"Ah! You are a Catholic?"

"No. But half the men in my regiment are Irish, and Catholic, and I know that to see a priest is what they think of most when they are even a little wounded. I will tell you the truth: I have seen so much in this war, that if I understood more about it, I should like to be a Catholic myself."

"Monsieur, I am myself a priest, a monk too. I don't look much of a monk in this tunic, do I? And the other—the young orderly (he is not strictly an orderly, but what we call a stretcher-bearer)—he is to be a priest, too. He is what we call a seminarian; only now the war has come to interrupt his studies; but I do not think these works of charity he is doing will injure him."

"What a beautiful face he has; not handsome, but with a singular expression of holiness."

"Yes, he is a good boy. But, monsieur, do you know that it makes you cough to talk, and that I should not allow it?"

"I'm not sure that it does make me cough more. It takes my mind off, and the cough comes from a sort of irritation."

The young priest thought: "A sort of irritation. If I had a jagged bit of shrapnel in my lung I wonder if I should call it a sort of irritation. One is always at school, and the Schoolmaster sets many different pupil-teachers over one."

By the time Madame d'Argnes arrived from Paris, Raymond was much worse; her own boy not at all worse, if not decidedly better. She grieved to see the young Englishman in so grave a condition, and her son seemed full of interest about him.

"Henri," she said gently, "he is interested in you, too, and he asked a question about you, just as you are asking questions about him."

"Claire says he is always asking her about me."

"Yes. But this question he did not ask Claire. She does not know."

"Well, what did he ask?"

"He wanted to know if you had seen a priest."

"Mamma," answered the lad, "I have seen thousands of priests." And he gave a little laugh.

"Yes. But you know quite well what he means."

"Is he a *bigot?*"

"He is not even a Catholic."

"Isn't that odd? I can't understand not being a Catholic. But then, I am French."

"And yet you only think it a joke when——"

"Not a joke at all, Mamma," laughed Henri, "just the opposite. It is a very bad joke to die; and it is when one has to do that that a priest becomes necessary. By and by."

"That bad joke of dying—we all have to make it."

"Some time, yes. But there's no hurry. I'm only twenty-one."

"My little Henri, I hope you will live seventy years."

"At ninety I shall send for a priest—on my birthday. I promise."

"I hope you will not wait till so many years after I shall have made your bad joke. But I think if you did, you would be ashamed to do it then. Do you think Christ only wants dotards? You would think it mean to offer Him your dotage after keeping all the good years for yourself."

"Mamma!" said the lad, still teasing her, "I will send for a priest—even if I am quite well—the day Captain d'Argnes sends for one."

V

When Raymond's mother arrived he seemed to her less gravely ill than she had feared to find him. But she soon understood that he was much worse than she had feared. No operation had been possible, and he was much weaker. Almost all food, even the lightest, made him sick, and he was much weaker. The cough still continued and shook him to pieces. He could talk very little, though he could read, and she often sat silently knitting by his side while he read.

One morning while the doctors and nurses were changing his dressings, she went to the chapel of the convent and knelt down to pray there. At the other end of the little church a nun was kneeling before the altar of the Blessed Virgin. Presently, a bell rang and the Sister rose, and came down the church, passing close to Madame d'Argnes. As she went by she bent her head in a courteous salutation.

"Sister," said Raymond's mother, leaning towards her.

"Madame."

"Sister, when you again come to pray here, will you pray for my boy?"

"We are all praying for him. I was praying for him when the bell rang; it was hard to stop, but Our Lady will take my obedience for a prayer—I was asking her to do something."

"What?" whispered the poor mother.

"To send her own Son to him. To let Him be your son's doctor Himself. 'You can spare Him for a little while,' I told her, 'you have Him at your side for all eternity.'"

To the Protestant lady, though she was not at all bigoted, the nun's way seemed quaint, almost too quaintly familiar, and yet its simplicity moved her, and then it was so tender.

"Ah!" she whispered, "I wish He would go."

The nun hesitated a moment, and then said simply:

"He will go. It is His business. His own business."

Raymond's mother turned her eyes for an instant towards the place where the nun had come and was startled. The sister saw the look upon her face, and was about to turn involuntarily, in the direction Raymond's mother was looking, when the latter, yielding to some impulse, said hurriedly, laying her hand on Mother Genevieve's sleeve:

"No. Please do not look!"

The nun obeyed, and saying, "I must go—you will pardon me," moved noiselessly on her way down the aisle.

"Now, Mother," she said in her heart as she went away, "show this other mother what you can do. Make your Son give her hers."

That "other poor mother" was looking with awed eyes up the little church towards the altar where Mother Genevieve had been praying. Over it, in a niche, stood a figure, life-size, of God's one great Mother. A shaft of light shone upon it and brought out all the colors—the blue mantle flowered with lily-heads, the soft brown kirtle powdered with golden stars, the long dark auburn hair, the jeweled crown. The altar itself was in a shadow, so were the plants and flowers decorating it. But, whereas when the nun had knelt before it, the Virgin Mother's arms had clasped her Son close to her shoulder and her heart, it seemed to Raymond's mother that they were empty now.

"He has gone," she said, not aloud. She still looked and the arms were still empty. "He has gone," she said again.

And then, not wilfully disbelieving, but yielding to innate habit of repulsion from the supernatural and miraculous, she thought: "Impossible. I am superstitious. I will go."

And she rose to go back to her son. As she left the place where she knelt she did as the nun had done, and bent her knee to the tabernacle.

"He is there, anyway," she thought, "I believe that."

Her obeisance, because she was not used to it, was not the same as the nun's; it was such a profound bending of the whole body as is given at court to a sovereign.

"The King of kings," she thought as she bent low.

VI

Outside the Good Shepherd ward was a little office where Madame de St. Hilaire did her writing, and carried on her other business of administration.

"Madame, may I go back to Raymond?"

Madame de St. Hilaire got up from the table and drew the English lady in. "Not for a few minutes please. The doctors have finished with your son, but they are still in the ward. They will be gone very soon. . . ."

"I wonder what they thought of him. When I left him I thought him worse."

"I thought so too, dear madame. I saw him just after you had left him. And I was with him all the time the doctors were examining him. But, courage! I have always felt a conviction of his recovery. To-day he is, I confess, worse than any day since he came here: but there must be fluctuations—to-morrow may be a good day for him."

While Madame de St. Hilaire was speaking, more hopefully than she felt, Claire d'Argnes came out of the ward.

"Madame," she said, "Doctor St. Simon wants you again." Then turning to Raymond's mother she said: "Madame d'Argnes, I do not know if I am indiscreet, but Raymond is better."

The girl did not notice that she had called her patient by his Christian name, nor did his mother. Madame de St. Hilaire noticed it; but not on that account did she think that perhaps Claire *was* indiscreet. Her own opinion was that Captain d'Argnes was very much worse. She, however, had to obey the doctor's summons and went away at once.

"You say he is better!" said Madame d'Argnes, "Madame de St. Hilaire and I were, alas, agreeing that he was worse."

"Yes; he *was,* this morning, before the doctors came, and while they were examining him. But twenty minutes ago I felt certain I saw a change. The doctors had gone to attend to other cases, and I was finishing up with him. He gave a little start as though I had hurt him, touching the wound, but I had not touched it at that moment. All the same I apologized for hurting him. . . . 'But you did not touch me, did you?" he asked, and I had to say that I had not. A few minutes after that he said: 'The pain is gone, and I do not want to cough. I am not choking.' It was true that he was no longer coughing. He has not coughed once since. And he asked me to give him some soup. He said he felt hungry. The soup did not make him sick. I am sure when the doctors are gone and you can go in you will see that he is better."

"*He* did go," thought his mother.

She was so quiet that Claire suggested she could not trust herself to believe such good news.

"I am not deceived," she added gently, "it would be cruel to buoy you up with false hopes. Only I know that he is better. He is reading again: all yesterday and the day before he was not able to read."

"What is it he reads? I did not, for some reason, care to ask him."

"Catholic books," the girl answered simply. "I hope you do not mind. He asked for them."

"No," his mother answered quietly, "I do not mind." She paused a moment and then said: "But I am very selfish. How is your own brother?"

"Doing very well. The doctors think there is now practically no danger of another hemorrhage. He was so much troubled all yesterday that Captain d'Argnes was so ill. As soon as I came on duty this morning he began asking about him."

"Raymond is very fond of him. He said: 'I can't talk to him, because I can't raise my voice enough; but we smile at each other'; and Claire, my dear (you don't mind my calling you so?), your brother has a most entrancing smile."

His sister laughed and said: "He is a naughty boy. He teases our mother. She wants him to be good and he says: 'I haven't been bad enough yet.' He hasn't been to confession for ever so long and he says: 'It's better to wait till one has more to tell, thus one can be sure of contrition.' He is not bad at all; only he is very frivolous."

Raymond's mother gave a little reserved smile. She was anything but frivolous; a religious woman in her way, but all her habits had made her think religion a thing it would be almost indelicate to discuss in Claire's easygoing fashion. She herself had a special voice for religious topics, and Claire talked of them in just the same voice she would have used had she been discussing her brother's tastes in dress or amusement. Above all she was taken aback by the girl's way of mentioning confession—Catholics, she supposed, ought to go to confession, but it seemed to her quite awful to talk about it.

Claire, who was far from being obtuse, perceived that she had somehow been indiscreet. Her mother was much in the habit of reproving her indiscretions.

"All the same," she thought, "I think Englishmen are nicer than their mothers. Raymond would not have looked like that."

Presently the doctors passed out to go to another ward, and Claire said:

"Madame, you may go in now. You will find that he is better."

They entered the ward together, but Claire left Mrs. d'Argnes to go to her son's bed alone. She herself went to her brother.

"Did the doctors say anything about d'Argnes?" he asked her at once.

"They did not to him, of course. But they told Madame de St. Hilaire he was very much worse."

"You speak very coolly about it. I suppose you felt sure of it before."

"Yes. But, Henri, he is not worse now. He is much better."

"Really! In this short time?"

"Yes." And she told him what she had told Raymond's mother.

Henri was unfeignedly delighted. He had taken an immense liking for his English brother-in-arms.

"His mother," he said in a low voice, "she is excellent and very nice to me. She often comes over to chat with me, and one can see that she is full of sympathy. But, oh, Claire! she is stiff. Why do English ladies feed on pokers?"

"To stiffen their backs. The seat of the English conscience is in the back."

"The seat of mine is in my pocket; and sometimes it drops out."

"No one would hear it fall; it is too light. But, Master Henri, one of these days you'll lose it altogether."

"No. I shall tell St. Anthony of Padua to find it for me. He always finds my collar stud."

"You'd better not talk to the Saints about your conscience; they might tell you some disagreeable things about it."

"Oh, no! It is pert misses, like you, who do that. They know all about it, and have unlimited tact. I think that little stretcher-bearer is a saint."

"Does he talk to you about your conscience?"

"No. I tell you he is a saint. But when he talks to me I remember that I have one. If Raymond d'Argnes were a Catholic, he would probably be a saint, too."

"Good gracious!"

"Yes. He and the stretcher-bearer are much alike."

"I can't imagine two people more unlike."

"That is your mistake (one of your mistakes). One tall, noble, and very handsome—you need not blush, mademoiselle, I am not describing you—the other small, plain-faced and insignificant, but they have the same expression, the same sort of expression. They are supernatural creatures, and you and I, my dear, are natural ones."

Claire did not know that her brother and the little stretcher-bearer had struck up a kind of intimacy. But she knew Henri well enough to guess that his talk with the young seminarian would be very different from his talk with her. She and he were always chaffing each other, even when the subject of their conversation was a serious one.

"After all," said Henri, "it's just as well d'Argnes is *not* a Catholic."

"Why?"

"The day he sends for a priest I have to send for one. I have promised mother."

"And you would keep your word?"

"Of course I would. I am supposed to be a gentleman." Claire laughed and went off to attend to her duties.

VII

The little stretcher-bearer, whose name was Roussel, liked very much to wait upon the young lieutenant of cuirassiers; and the lieutenant's own orderly was not at all jealous. He had a cordial liking for Roussel; and was fond of helping him in his tasks about the ward. Roussel never bored Henri and never tried to talk about religion. He had a certain impression that the young officer was not religious, but he thought Our Lord must be fond of him all the same. "I don't see," thought the little seminarian, "how He can help it. *I* am, and I have done nothing for Him, while *He* has done everything."

"What a lot of trouble I give you!" said Henri to him, on the afternoon of the day on which Raymond began to grow better.

"No trouble. Only little pleasures. And—and I think it a great honor. In my heart I salute all the wounded—and in the street and here in the ward. 'Voilà, des braves!' I think. It is wonderful to be brave. I am not."

"Eh! but that is untrue. You are much braver than a fellow like me. You have no human respect. I'm full of it."

The lad regarded him with a quiet, direct look out of his grave eyes and said:

"Perhaps what you call human respect is shyness."

"You, my dear Roussel, are the first person who ever thought I was shy!" and he laughed.

"Still it may be so."

"You have something in your head, say it."

"Perhaps I had better not. I do not say things well."

"Well enough for me. I am not a master of good French."

He knew very well the boy did not mean that, and said: "It is you who are shy."

"Maybe. But it is not that. When one talks amiss one injures the subject."

"You will not. Say what you meant. I give you an obedience—there!"

He laughed, but Roussel's rather pallid face flushed a little.

"Well, I accept the obedience you give me," he said. "When I said that perhaps what you call human respect is shyness. I think I meant this—you might omit some external proof of reverence for what is right, not because you are on the side of what is wrong, but because you are too shy to range yourself on the side of——"

"Well, *mon petit,* go on."

"Of Our Lord then, lest it should seem you were claiming a friendship with Him that does not exist; taking a certain liberty."

"It certainly would be a liberty for me to claim that friendship."

Roussel did not go on; and did not guess that Henri really wished that he would.

"Why," asked the young soldier after a pause, "did you stop?"

"I had said what I meant, and badly; as I knew I should. That is a liberty. No one has a right to speak ill in a good cause unless he is bound to say what he can."

"You have not injured your cause; don't be afraid."

Henri meant more than he said. To him it seemed that the lad, even if he spoke far more clumsily than he did, must help "his cause" by being what he was. He felt sure that it was purity, faith, religion that had made the boy what he was. No doubt he was the son of a peasant, a peasant himself, with not much general education, but the young officer recognized in him a nobler creature than himself, and knew well in what school that nobility had been learned. Who was his Schoolmaster, what His lessons had been.

"Listen; *mon cher,*" Henri said presently, "all talk worth listening to is of the things with which one's heart is full. I wish you would, when you talk to me, not try to choke yourself up, but speak of what is in your heart."

"I can't talk much of anything. I have not the habit. At home even I picked up the habit of silence. My mother's heart is full of us (her seven children) and of our father, but she does not talk of us."

"Not to you."

"There are hardly any neighbors. We live three kilometers from the village—a little tiny village. It is only when she goes to Mass she sees people, and then she has to hasten home. There is so much work."

"But you have had to learn the habit of thought. You have, for instance, to make meditations."

"I do it ill. I have always distraction. Everything distracts me."

"For instance?"

"Well—anything. I try to meditate about Our Lady and I look perhaps at her statue to help me; and my eye falls on a flower and I think of that—how wonderful its color is, and then I say to myself: 'God thought of everything, even the color of the flower. What kindness! He need not have made any, people do not eat them; or He might have made them all green or all red. And then I think of the smell of them. He thought of that, too, and I suppose they smell like Christ's Feet. And then very likely I think of some poor soldier's feet, crushed and wounded and lame perhaps forever, and one thinks: 'You will have to take his arms, poor *brave;* it is hard enough to get to heaven on two sound feet. You will have to help him up that steep road.' And then my thoughts wander to other wounded, to you, often, lately: and instead of meditating on the Blessed Virgin's humility, I am begging her to obtain that you have no more hemorrhage. I am a wool-gatherer."

"Eh, my little stretcher-bearer, go on gathering your wool for me, and perhaps she will weave a white garment out of it for some poor devil of a soldier who hasn't kept his own very clean."

VIII

Meanwhile Raymond and his mother were talking too. He had been reading: and looking up he caught her eye.

"You wonder what my books are?" he asked, smiling.

"I used to wonder. I think I know."

"They are about the Catholic religion. I want to know more about it. I think it always interested me; but only as a fine thing out of date like chivalry and the Feudal System: a great idea that had made the Middle Ages more picturesque than our own. Still one could not now go back to the old feudal ways."

"I suppose not," said his mother, rather uncertainly. She was a Tory of Tories, and was not sure that modern times were all that they should be.

"Well, I think there is always affectation in ignoring that past things are past. Tournaments and jousts now—they would be an affectation—and we do not need to fortify ourselves in castles. An old castle is most fascinating, but to build a new one is appalling. I suppose I thought Catholicism was gone like the castles. Just as in some old families there are the castles still, and their owners do right to preserve them carefully, so in some of our oldest families there is still the Catholic faith, and I thought them also right, having it, to keep it—a sort of heirloom and relic. But where it was gone, it seemed to me, it would only be an affectation to pretend it hadn't gone—like building a new castle. You see I thought it also a relic, and relics are of the dead, not of the living. So I thought there would be a sort of vulgarity in becoming a Catholic—as if a man should buy some other family's heirloom; imagine a *nouveau riche* buying at an auction the shirt Charles I was beheaded in!"

"It's just what Lord—would do if he had the chance!" declared Mrs. d'Argnes with disgust and conviction, and rather glad to be able to say something quite on Raymond's side.

"You understand then. Well, since I came out here I have found how different it is. The Catholic religion is not antique; it is eternal. It is not mediæval a bit; the Middle Ages belonged to it; but it did not belong to them. It is quite as modern as being alive, and eating and drinking and being happy and sad; and instead of being an obsolete phase it is an undying principle and the only one for which hundreds of millions of living men would care to die. It is no more dead than Christ." He paused an instant and said in a very low voice, "It is Christianity."

"Oh, Raymond!"

"Yes. I have come to feel sure of that. All others are broken chips knocked off Christianity by the jostle of doubt and opinion. The difference, I have come to see, between the Catholic Church and other Churches is the difference between God's revelation and man's opinion. Perhaps, what first set me on that train was a thing a young officer of my regiment said. He is a Catholic and very devout, but not fussily or obtrusively. Everybody respects him because one feels that his religion is part of himself, not part of his talk. Well, one evening—we were taking our rest and were altogether—some of us were talking about religion and he was reading. One fellow said: 'My idea is so and so,' and another said, 'The way I look at it is this,' and someone else said: 'And my notion of it is that,' and so on. It was interesting, but simply a clatter of theories: then one of us asked Chichester what his ideas were. 'I am,' he answered simply, 'a Catholic. It is not with us a question of notions, but of what God has revealed. The Catholic Church teaches us that.' And mother, I think that is why other Churches keep changing their teaching and the Catholic Church never does. They started with human opinion and so they naturally feel they have a right to modify it. The Catholic Church knows she has no right to change one jot or one tittle of what Christ revealed and set her to guard. She is the trustee of His bequest of faith, and cannot cheat His children of the smallest coin of it."

"You intend to become a Catholic?"

"Yes, dear mother. I hope you will not mind very much."

"I am sure you will only do what you think right. But it will divide us so."

"You and me?"

"Yes, dear. It will build up a wall between us."

"There is no wall between you and Lionel; you and he are just as much to each other as ever you were."

Her son, Lionel, had abandoned all faith and said so. His mother had been shocked, but, as Raymond said, it had not divided her from her son.

She could not answer that, but spoke of something else. Raymond was saying: "I do not believe you will love me less because I am a Catholic, and if I could love you more I should believe it would make me love you more."

She just touched his hand, smiled and said: "If you turn Catholic you will have to go in for miracles and all that sort of dreadful stuff."

Even as she spoke she felt an uncomfortable twinge, and really thought she heard a voice say, not in her ear, but in her heart, "I did go."

"Go in for them!" said Raymond with a little smile, "if you mean believe in them, I do: God is always the same, omnipotent and kind. There are still blind men to be made to see and dead folk to bring to life."

She was not really listening to him, but wondering whether, if she were incredulous, this miracle of his being better might be cancelled through her fault. That frightened her. Then she thought, "It was not I who asked Him to go. It was the nun who asked His mother to send Him. *Her* faith was rewarded, not mine, and her faith doesn't stumble." That comforted her, but she prayed in her heart: "Do not let me spoil it."

IX

When Claire entered the ward next morning—for she was on day duty—her brother's little friend, the stretcher-bearer, said to her at once:

"Please, will you go to Monsieur d'Argnes?"

"My brother?"

"Yes, mademoiselle. He asked me to say you were to go first to him."

"Here I am, Henri, what is it?" she asked, as soon as she had reached his bedside. "Is anything the matter? Did you have a bad night?"

"No." Then he looked queer and said: "But—you will have to send for a priest."

"Oh, Henri! Do you mean that you are worse?"

"Worse than I thought, perhaps . . . but, oh, don't look frightened. I was teasing you.

"You don't really want a priest?"

"Yes, I do. I told you I would keep my word; and Raymond d'Argnes is to have a priest. The little stretcher-bearer told me. He is going to become a Catholic. Roussel is so nearly in heaven already with delight, that if we don't hold on to him he will slip off altogether."

"I'll tell you who won't be in heaven then—Madame d'Argnes. She will hate it."

"Mamma?" said Henri, hypocritically, pretending to misunderstand. "I should think she would be glad."

"Not our mother, but Captain d'Argnes'. She is Protestant all down her long back."

"People," observed Henri audaciously, "always do dislike their mothers-in-law."

His sister darted a most savage look at him, which he sustained with unflinching effrontery.

"It is perfectly beastly of you to say that," she remarked hotly, in English.

"Ah, ah, Miss, you would not dare to use such expressions in French! Stick to your mother tongue; it restrains you. It wasn't at all 'beastly' of me to say that. It was to clear the ground. It was to save you the embarrassment of having to make a certain announcement one of these days."

Claire did not look much mollified by this.

"If mamma heard you talking like that," she observed, "she would wash your head for you."

"If mamma heard you talking of 'perfectly beastly' *you* would be soaped, my dear. As a matter of fact she and I quite approve, and you know very well that she and I can persuade papa of anything; if you are too uppish I shall withdraw my consent, and *then* see what papa says!"

"You don't mean to say," said Claire in a tone of horror, "that you and she have been discussing this."

"Yes, I do. It is quite correct. Young ladies are not to arrange these matters for themselves. The heads of their families have to adjust their opinions first."

"You one of the heads of my family! What—I shall have to talk English again."

"Well!"

"What *cheek!*"

"Claire! I'm sure your excellent *Mees* (what names English Meeses do have! Mac-Gilly, Cuddy, wasn't it?) I'm sure *she* never taught you to say 'what cheek!' "

"No, it was you."

"Pray understand that though there are no genders in English there is masculine English and feminine English. I may talk of *your* cheek, but *you* may not talk of *mine*. Yours, by the way, is slightly flushed. . . .

Clare, still unreconciled, went off to her duties. All the same there was a grain of truth in what

Henri had said. If something did happen, the fact that her mother and brother were cordial in approval, would certainly go far to secure her father's consent.

X

Raymond continued to improve. He was able to eat well, and almost hourly seemed to recover strength. The cough was wholly gone. The doctors, who had not yet made another examination of the wound, began to hope that an operation might be possible, and the piece of shrapnel be removed. When they did examine the wound they found that the piece of shell had come away and was near the entrance of it. It could be taken out instantly and without an anæsthetic. The wound itself was already much more healthy, and now it would be necessary to encourage its healing. Hitherto it had been essential to keep it open.

As Raymond was now able to talk, not only without fatigue or danger of bringing on the cough that had agonized him, but in a much stronger voice, Henri asked to be moved across the ward to the bed next his, rendered vacant by the departure of one of the wounded. Raymond was delighted, and Madame de St. Hilaire gave her consent.

Henri could not help teasing his sister, and said to her before he was moved across: "You see I shall thus be able to improve my mind by hearing your conversation with Captain d'Argnes."

"He talks a great deal more to your little stretcher-bearer than he does to me."

"One can understand that. Roussel is not frivolous. He does not say 'cheek'."

The priest came to Raymond and gave him conditional baptism and heard his confession, his profession of faith and absolved him. For his first Holy Communion it was decided that he should wait till he should be able to go to the convent chapel. But at St. Just there lives a Bishop, not the Bishop of the vast diocese, but one of his Vicars General, and he came to the hospital and gave Raymond confirmation. While he did this screens were arranged around the patient's bed. As he came out, when the brief rite was finished, he saw Henri looking up in his face, and he smiled.

"Everything goes well, my brave man?" asked the bishop, and as he smiled the young cuirassier thought: "What a good man. There is my priest."

"Monsignor!" he said aloud. And he made a little gesture for the bishop to stoop down.

"Yes? What is it, my brave man?"

"You have just made a soldier of Christ of the Christian," said Henri, "now make a little Christian of this soldier. I want to confess myself."

For a bishop monsignor was young; he was not yet ten years in the priesthood.

"I had to do that before," he said, smiling down into the honest young eyes. "I was a soldier, too; not an officer, just a little corporal of infantry" (he was about six feet high) "and one day The Captain called me—and orders are orders—I had to obey. I had to change armies, and make myself a Christian. I tell you this that you may feel that I know all about it. I did not mean that one cannot be a good Christian in our glorious French army; I know there are hundreds of thousands; I only mean that *I* was not."

He spoke so simply, so wholly without pose or unctuousness, that Henri was quite sure he had been right in thinking, "Here is my priest."

The screens were still round Raymond's bed, and as Henri's was the last at the end of the ward, no one saw that the bishop was sitting at his side. It was only just as he was going away that the little stretcher-bearer came to take away the screens. Claire came up at the same time. When the bishop had gone, Henri, who was as teasing as ever, said to her:

"I shall not send for a priest."

"Oh, you have changed your mind."

She did not speak reproachfully, but he saw at once that she was disappointed that he had gone back on his word.

"After all a bishop is a priest," he observed, making a queer little face at her.

"Do you mean . . . ?" she asked eagerly, in a low voice.

"Yes." And though he only nodded she understood.

"Isn't he nice?" she asked. She had far too much tact and instinct to gush forth in congratulations. All the same she was in her heart thanking God; she felt sure it was years since he had been to confession.

"After all," whispered Henri, with a little jerk of his head toward Raymond's bed, "it was his idea, wasn't it? I had not the least thought of it."

Another patient called her, and Henri looked toward Roussel, who had just finished taking away the screens and was about to go away himself. He caught the lad's eye, and with a gesture of the head invited him to come near.

"Roussel," he said, when the little stretcher-bearer was standing by his bedside, "did you hear my sister and me talking?"

"Of course I did. But I was going and coming, and only caught one sentence; besides, you were neither of you talking loudly."

"What was the sentence?"

"I thought," the lad answered honestly, "that I heard you say, 'I shall not need a priest.' I then took one of the screens away to the end of the ward."

"I suppose you were sorry?"

"I had not known you had ever thought of sending for a priest. But I was sorry."

"You would like me to confess myself? Don't you often find it hard to find anything to say?"

"No. But I have heard some people say that they found it hard."

"Ah! that's the worst of going too often. I had no difficulty."

He could not help teasing even Roussel a little, but he liked much better making him happy.

"I told Claire," he said, "that I should not send for a priest because I had confessed to the bishop."

XI

By the time Raymond was well enough to go to the chapel for his First Communion, Henri was also able to be up; though he could not walk. He went in a wheeled chair to the chapel and received Holy Communion, too. On the afternoon of that day he was again wheeling himself about in the chair, though only in the ward. Presently the door opened, and Madame de St. Hilaire came in and at her side walked Count d'Argnes. Neither of his children saw him enter; their backs were turned to that end of the ward.

"Claire," Henri was saying, "to-day has an odd feeling. Can you understand?"

"Yes, I think so."

"It feels," the young cuirassier said, "like the day of my First Communion."

"Henri," she said, almost in his ear, as she leaned over the back of the wheeled chair, "I was afraid you would have had too much human respect. The chapel was so full, and you not being able to go to the altar made it worse."

He had occupied a bench quite at the front, and the priest had brought the Blessed Sacrament to him there.

"Oh," he said, "the little stretcher-bearer taught me not to mind about human respect. He thinks he is a coward, and I know he would go to Holy Communion before ten thousand unbelievers."

Madame de St. Hilaire touched Claire upon the shoulder and said:

"Look down there, you two people, see what visitor I have brought you."

Claire turned the chair round with a rapid sweep, and at the same moment they both saw their father and mother coming toward them.

"Papa!" they cried.

"Yes. I am here! I took it into my head to come and see what you were all about."

Madame de St. Hilaire went away and left them to themselves.

"Sit down," said Henri, "that's my bed."

And M. d'Argnes sat down upon it.

"Henri," he said, "I find you very well. You have recovered nicely. And Claire—I think the change of air has done her good. Madame de St. Hilaire tells me she is a very good nurse, but she does not look overworked."

"Oh, no," declared her brother, "Claire has excellent distractions."

His sister looked savage and her mother looked inclined to give her son a slap; but one cannot box wounded men's ears, and he escaped.

"Captain d'Argnes," said the Count, "looks almost well. His mother is not much like him—a very noble woman, but—no, I find no resemblance."

"Claire does not find any, either," remarked her brother in a disengaged manner. "Papa! should you like Claire to enter holy religion?"

"My dear boy," cried her father, "what on earth do you mean?"

"She is determined never to change her name."

Count d'Argnes adjusted his *pince-nez* and looked at each member of his family in turn.

"What is Henri talking about?" he asked appealingly.

"Well, circumstances," said Henri, "lead me to the conviction that she is resolved to stick to the name of d'Argnes."

His mother was trying not to laugh, and Claire was trying (with indifferent success) to look loftily unconcerned by her brother's foolish remarks. His father, without any endeavor at all, was looking thoroughly puzzled.

"There seem," said Henri, "only two ways in which she can carry out her plan; one way is to enter holy religion; the other . . ." and he gently raised a crutch and pointed down the ward to Raymond's mother, whose tall figure was turned their way. Raymond himself, with his back to them, was hidden in the big armchair in which he was sitting, ". . . . the other," explained Henri, "is to do as *she* did."

"As *she* did?" repeated his father.

"Yes. Didn't she marry a Mr. d'Argnes? I think it an excellent plan; and so does mother. As for Claire, I suspect it's about the only thing in which she would be disposed to imitate our good friend, Raymond's mother."

A FRANCO-AMERICAN ENCOUNTER

I

"Ah," said Miss Shenstone, making a grab at Piou-piou, "here is Madame de Valmandois."

It was not at the gentleman to whom she had been talking that she grabbed, but at her sister's *griffon.*

"He is," she exclaimed, as she clutched him, "always excited out of doors. It is only excitement that makes him seem to bite people; all our dogs are perfectly good-tempered. But they are excitable (of nervous temperaments), and out in the garden they wish to rush about. The arrival of any additional person they seize as a pretext. . . ."

"I suppose Piou-piou," remarked M. de Saulmoz, "regarded me as a pretext; he certainly seized me."

Miss Shenstone hardly appeared to hear this observation, for she merely completed her sentence . . . "indoors they are always calm and hospitable. I wish Anna would take up Dando, he makes more fuss than Piou-piou, and he *looks* more savage. Thank goodness Essie has got Fi-fi in her lap, I hope she will keep him there. Beau Bichon doesn't seem to be about. He bit one of the gardeners after luncheon, and it was the one whose sister the second footman is making up to; I shouldn't be surprised if Michael had shut him up in the study to curry favor."

"If I wanted to make up to a young lady it would never occur to me to shut her brother up in the study."

Miss Shenstone smiled indulgently at this poor pleasantry, and said:

"Of course, it is Beau Bichon who is shut up—oh, there he is!"

There, indeed, he was; tearing wildly across the lawn, and barking with such passion as almost to choke himself, and quite to blind himself, for otherwise he would hardly have tumbled over in mid-course. Piou-piou had leapt from Miss Shenstone's arms, Dando had hurled himself from under a wicker tea-table, where he had taken up a post convenient for refreshment, when its good things should be dispensed, Fi-fi fled from the embrace of Miss Essie Shenstone, and all three were making amain at Madame de Valmondois when Beau Bichon tumbled over himself, whereupon they instantly fell on him, and bit any part of him that they could get at.

The perfidy of this conduct shocked the four Miss Shenstones, who dashed to the relief of the prostrate Beau Bichon. Each seized a tail or a leg of her own or of one of her sisters' pets, and Madame de Valmondois reached the company in a comparative lull. Dando, who loved sympathy and sentiment, wailed, indeed, and Fi-fi made explosions like a cat, Piou-piou silently bit his mistress's elbow to calm himself, and Beau Bichon glared and hiccoughed defiance, as who should say, "Wait a bit. I shan't forget, my dears." Otherwise there was calm.

"I arrive," observed Madame de Valmondois, "with some *éclat.*"

She herself had remained entirely undisturbed, and had, while all four dogs were in full tilt at her, continued to advance toward her hostesses and their friends. Perhaps there were twenty people under the trees near the tea-tables; only three or four were gentlemen. Most of them seemed to know Madame de Valmondois, Gaston de Saulmoz had never seen her before.

He had an impression that her entrance, if ordinarily pointed by less *éclat*, seldom failed to attract the attention of the company. He could not imagine her arrival anywhere passing unnoted. He even told himself that her presence anywhere must somehow add a distinction to the company she joined, no matter of whom it might consist. And all this, he also assured himself, was not due merely or wholly to her beauty. Her beauty, in fact, was of a quality that might not always arrest the first hasty glance. ("All the same," he thought, "no one *could* glance hastily and be content.") The distinction that even a first glance revealed was not in her face but in herself. She was tall, but not so tall as she seemed —not, he found, a little to his surprise, so tall as himself. She was slim though not thin; her figure was charming but it was not in her figure alone, any more than in her face alone that her charm lay; nor yet in her manner of walking, of moving, of standing still, though she walked so beautifully that Gaston assured himself that she could not be English, her movements were grace itself, and yet simplicity itself, too; and when she stood still he thought her so graceful that any movement must soil her. He had only heard her say the four words quoted above, but they were enough to tell him that her voice was perfect.

Being a man he could not have told anyone how she was dressed; in black, yes, but not in mourning; the black was light in texture, gauzy, summery, and there was a little lilac in the gown and in the hat.

How old could she be? Only royal ladies, he thought, could have so calm a dignity and be mere girls; yet it was a girl's figure, and, now that he could again see her face, it was the face of a lovely girl. She was talking to a whole group and he could hear quite plainly.

"Presently," said Miss Shenstone, "I want to introduce you."

"Who," he asked eagerly, but speaking in a very low voice, "is she?"

"Madame de Valmondois."

"I have lived so little in France since I was a boy —hardly at all in Paris—that I am afraid I do not know what that means."

"She has not lived in Paris till now. Valmondois is one of the many titles in the Saint Mesmin family; her husband was Duc de Valmondois."

"*Was?* Is he dead?"

"Oh, yes. She married at seventeen. M. de Valmondois was killed in a motor accident five weeks afterwards."

"How terrible for her."

"Yes. But . . ."

"But what?"

"Well, I personally thought him most disagreeable. And he was not an angel."

"There are no dukes among the angels, Mademoiselle."

"No, but there may be angels among the dukes. *He* was not one. And then he was thirty-five years older than her; and—well, I thought the marriage a mistake; and if I was right, its speedy end might not be such an irremediable misfortune in the long run."

"At seventeen few misfortunes are irremediable; you say she lives now, at last, in Paris.

"She has a house there. But she had lived and still lives chiefly on her estates; the winters she has sometimes spent at Bagneres de Big. . . . It was there she and we were neighbors."

"Of what nationality is she?"

"Why not French? You can hear that she talks French perfectly."

"Yes. Really perfectly. I cannot say why she should be French. It would be very kind of her to be so."

"You evidently do not believe she *is*, though. Nor is she."

"Not English, I am sure."

"No. Her kindness extends further than that."

"You mean that she is American?"

"Yes. She is American like ourselves. In fact, her mother and ours were relatives, though not near relations. Her mother was a Virginian, and so was ours. But her father was a Philadelphian and ours was from Georgia. Now come and let me present you."

Though we have spoken of this lady as Miss Shenstone, she was not the eldest of the four sisters. Miss Anna was the eldest, and she alone of the four was frankly and exclusively American; Miss Essie was the youngest, and had only been to America once; she was to all intents and purposes a Frenchwoman, and both her accent and idiom in talking English had a French tinge. Miss Megsie reverted for type to her maternal ancestry, which was Scottish and highly aristocratic. Miss Sally, whose conversation with M. de Saulmoz we have been overhearing, was quite equally French and American. All four ladies were extremely American in the admirable qualities of unbridled hospitality and measureless largeness of heart; perhaps also in a chronic tendency to unfettered criticism of whoever happened to be President for the time being of the United States. No accusation was ever more sharply repelled by each of the four than that of being English—an accusation always rather to be made against English-speaking sojourners on the European continent by the Continentals, who really mean no harm by it. This vigorous repudiation was due merely to patriotism; and did not imply any dislike of Great Britain; on the contrary, there would have been five Miss Shenstones had not one of them married an Englishman of excellent family and position. These ladies had no hatred of monarchs, but in a monarchy the public are called subjects, and the Misses Shenstone had no idea of being subjects. Yet it must not be inferred that they lived in France because it was a Republic; there is no reason whatever for supposing that they would have quitted it had it suddenly made up its mind to be again an Empire or a Kingdom. Most of their French friends awaited such a conversion with loud impatience, though without ever doing anything whatever to bring it about.

If it be inquired of what age were these ladies, I can only say that such curiosity is intrusive, and that I will not indulge it, merely remarking that the charming chateau near Versailles in which they spent their summers had been bought by them about five and twenty years ago.

II

M. de Saulmoz, it may be remembered, alluded to himself as having been absent from France almost continually since his boyhood; which circumstance was due to the fact that his father, the Marquis de Saulmoz-Monthois, had been French Minister in Portugal—and then French Ambassador at Washington.

As he had lived with his parents until it was time for him to come back to France for his period of military service, he was a better linguist than is common with young Frenchmen of his age. For he spoke Spanish, Portuguese and English quite fluently.

To Madame de Valmondois, however, he spoke

French, as it was in French that Miss Sally Shenstone introduced him. Having performed the little ceremony that lady moved away to talk to some other guests.

"I admired," Gaston observed, smiling, "your intrepidity at the moment of your arrival."

"I resented only the affectation of those gentlemen. All the Miss Shenstones' dogs are old friends of mine, and they recognized me perfectly. One's friends should not disown one in public."

Few people, thought Gaston, would be less likely to be so disowned than Madame de Valmondois.

"It may have been humility," he suggested.

"Humility should be less vociferous. If you wish to cut me, when next we meet, till you are sure of being remembered, I trust you will not be quite so noisy about it."

"Perhaps they were thinking of the story of the poor and obscure noble from the country who bit Louis XIV's hand, on being presented, to secure remembrance."

"He secured more than the little he aimed at. For if the King forgot him, posterity, we see, has not."

They were walking toward a part of the garden called the Bosquet, where, in the midst of the small thicket, a small white temple crowned a low mound; a semicircular pond at the foot of the knoll reflected the little temple.

"It is pretty," said Madame de Valmondois, "but I do not care about it. It is too obviously a sincere flattery of the Music Pavilion in the Little Trianon."

"You despise flatteries, even when sincere?"

"I do not admire small imitations. There are thousands of copies of Versailles—its grandiosity. Louis XIV had not a faultless taste, but it was large.

If he had laid out Versailles on a less ponderous scale it would have been cittish."

"You know Fontainebleau also, no doubt?"

"Yes, and care much more for it. Fontainebleau is history; Versailles is only autobiography, and self-conscious; the autobiography of a big little man whom I do not heartily admire."

"If you would think of it as the cenotaph of a great monarchy, its grandiosity, perhaps, would seem more fit. St. Denis was the burial place of our Kings, but Versailles is the tomb of our royalty."

In spite of the somewhat phrasic quality of his little speech, the simplicity and quietness of his tone saved the young man's words from the pitfall of magniloquence near to which they certainly ventured.

And Madame de Valmondois, who knew the history of his country pretty well, was fully aware that nearly his whole family, as it had existed then, had died for the crime of possessing a name that meant loyalty to the monarchy in its agony.

They stood close to the water's edge.

"I cannot say," she confessed, "in spite of my strictures, that the reflections are exquisite."

She raised her eyes to compare them with the originals; his were still bent upon the water, and one reflected image really held his gaze.

"No one could deny it," he said gravely.

"The reality," she said, "is not so perfect as the shadow. If logic were true it would be. But the reflections down there discard all that spoils the reality. How, I wonder? The real little temple is an affectation, a courtier-ism; the one down there is lovely."

"Down there it is a picture. Only supreme artists can make their pictures better than the original when the original is lovely; even a supreme artist has to fall short of an original that is itself perfect. But, if there is obvious imperfection in the reality a picture can ignore it. Is that the answer to your riddle?

"No. But I have found it."

"Will you tell me?"

She paused, the fraction of an instant, and then answered, "Man arranged all *that,*" pointing to the other side of the water, "and man built *that* little temple. God arranged all *this,* and only He built the temple down there."

"Is that," he wondered, "religion or mere poetry?"

And he did not wish it to be poetry.

His eyes had followed hers down into the water, and they could look at her image there without intrusiveness or impertinence.

"God," he thought, "certainly made that; one of His chefs-d'œuvres."

"You see," she said, "that the charm of all down there is like the charm of mountains in the clouds. No one's foot ever climbed that little path to the temple, or ever will; no one will ever scratch a vulgar name on those white walls down there."

He perceived that her tone, though earnest, was grave. Perhaps a certain shyness had assailed her after her use of a Name so great that most of us will not easily use it to one another. And they were strangers. He was half sorry, but he thought himself bound to suit his tone to that which she chose, and he laughed a little.

"I am afraid some one will walk up your little path!" he said, and pointed across the water.

A gardener was going up to the temple.

"He cannot walk up my path unless I let him," she declared. "I will not look down. Besides, a gardener doesn't matter. Adam was a gardener."

"What you call in English a husbandman. Rather an unlucky husband."

"At all events he had no trouble over his lovemaking. No rivals and no uncertainty. He woke to find himself married."

"And with a hole near his heart. The hole his sons often inherit; the heaven-sent spouse not so often."

"Come, M. de Saulmoz," said the lady, turning away from the water's edge, "confess that a man prefers to *find* the heaven-sent wife for himself, instead of having to submit to such a rather dictatorial heavenly provision."

"Oh! if *finding* were all! But one may find her for oneself without the possibility of gaining her for oneself. Adam had no *embarras de choice;* Eve or nothing. But, then, Eve was in the same predicament; it was Adam or old-maidhood."

"How short history would have been had she chosen old-maidhood!"

Madame de Valmondois, who always listened attentively, had noted with satisfaction how the young man at her side had not left the first half of his last speech to stand alone. Had it been the conclusion of his utterance her own reply would not have been so easy. "He is well bred," she thought. Of course, she had become aware that he admired her, but he had not made compliments.

"By the way," she observed, "I noted just now that you can talk English, though it was only one sentence."

"My father, you see, was our Ambassador at Washington till three years ago, and I was there during the whole of his stay."

"That," said she laughing, "would enable you, according to some impertinent people, to talk American."

"Do *you* talk American?"

"Of course, I can't tell," she answered in English. "You must judge for yourself."

Until they had rejoined the group around the tea-tables she continued to speak English.

"If that is American," Gaston assured himself, "Adam and Eve must have been Americans before the Fall!"

III

"Is she not charming!" asked Miss Essie Shenstone. Tea was over, and she was walking with M. de Saulmoz. Piou-piou escorted them with bland dignity and looked as if butter would not melt in his mouth.

"She has a quite singular charm. It seems a pity that more quite young girls can't be widows! As a rule they are not interesting; then they are married, and their interestingness is more important to their husbands than to the public. I do not mean to say that Madame de Valmondois owes her charm to her misfortune. Her grace and beauty, her peculiar quality, do not come from her widowhood, of course. But the fact that she is at once a young girl, and married, and unmarried, all help. So much dignity would seem strange in an unmarried girl of her age unless she happened to be a royal personage. Yet she is thoroughly *young,* and she has no pose; her dignity is not that of place, but of quality."

"We are all of us devoted to her," said Miss Essie, and Gaston perceived that the strength and conviction of his eulogy of Madame de Valmondois pleased his friend.

"If I were you," Miss Essie continued, "I should call upon her. She receives on Thursdays."

"She would, perhaps, think it intrusion."

"Oh, no, I shall tell her I asked you to do so."

She gave the address—a number in the Rue Bayard—and there was no fear of his forgetting it. After a while they began to speak of the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand, the news of which had arrived that day.

"Many of the Austrians will be easily consoled," he said, "he has always been much disliked."

Neither of them had the least idea that the horrible crime would prove the match that was to set a smouldering Europe all ablaze.

He was rather glad that the very next day was not Thursday; for though he was impatient to go and see Madame de Valmondois, the very next day would have seemed too soon; yet he could not have waited a whole week. On Thursday afternoon about four o'clock he was on his way to her. It now seemed to him a very long time since they had met; for, though he had not done a great deal in the meantime, he had been away from Paris for a whole day, and during his absence he had thought continually of her. He was by no means a man liable to falling in love at first sight. He was not, indeed, in general what is called susceptible. Somewhat silent and reserved, those of his friends who knew him well enough to take liberties had been rather disposed to chaff him as being too much centered in himself to have very open eyes for ladies' charms.

Now, however, he was quite sure that he had found his heaven-sent lady. But he was neither vain nor sanguine, and he did not flatter himself that she even took an interest in him. The moon does not drop into our arms because we recognize her splendor, any more than in obedience to our tears. This moon of his seemed very far up in an aloof sky, and a sky that was too serene and clear not, as he thought, to imply a certain coldness.

Still, he was a man, and what a man could do he would do, however difficult it might be and however long.

He was told, as he expected, that Madame was at home; but the footman, a little to his surprise, was not sure that she was *visible;* he would, however, go and see.

"The reason," Madame de Valmondois explained as soon as the footman had closed the door, after ushering Gaston into her *salon,* "the reason why you were not at once told I was *visible* is that for this week I had changed my day for receiving. A friend of mine has her fête to-day, and she begged me to come. I must go about five. So I have put my own day off till to-morrow. If I have to leave you at five perhaps you will come to-morrow—I ask it because Madame de St. Firmin will be here, I know; she is a very old friend, she tells me, of your mother's, and wants to meet you. But, do sit down. I need not go till five."

Gaston thought his mistake a most happy one. There was to-morrow to the good, and he had to-day as well. And to-day he had a *tête à tête,* which he certainly had not expected. He also perceived with satisfaction that Madame de Valmondois had been speaking of him to his mother's friend.

"Oh," he said, "I have often heard of Madame de St. Firmin. My mother even tried to persuade her to come and stay with us at Washington, but the journey was too long for her."

"You know she is old—not the contemporary of Madame, your mother: she had been *her* mother's friend. She is, however, entirely delightful: I like her better than almost any one I know. I must tell you that she was immensely interested to hear about you, and wanted to know far more than I could tell her. That is why you must come and answer all her questions for yourself."

Presently it appeared that the old lady had wished to know what he was going to be.

"Of course I could not tell her," said Madame.

"I'm not absolutely sure that *I* can. I have only finished my military service a few months ago and since then I have been to London and St. Petersburg. Before my military service I was for a little over a year unpaid *attaché* to my father. But I have not decided to enter diplomacy."

"You have just finished your service in the army!"

"Yes. I look rather old, do you think. It is true: most people say I look six and twenty, or more."

"Six and twenty is not very old!"

"No. But my mother says it is indiscreet of me to look so old. You see she is only forty-three and you would say she was not more than five and thirty. When one is beautiful and looks still young it is a great lack of tact in one's son to seem nearly thirty."

"Madame de St. Firmin showed me the portrait of the Marquise. She is certainly beautiful."

It is not necessary to detail all their talk. It is enough to say that Gaston did not go away much before five o'clock and that Madame de Valmondois did not appear to think he was staying too long. Of herself she said nothing, but in him and his life in America she showed a sincere interest.

"*A demain,*" she reminded him as he took his leave. "I shall meet your mother's friend in half an hour, and shall promise her that to-morrow she can ask you all about your mother and yourself."

"Madame, there is no fear of my forgetting to-morrow," he said; but he did not say aloud, "though no such person as Madame de St. Firmin existed in the world." In the street he enjoyed very pleasant reflections.

"The merest beginning of a prelude," he thought, "but not a set-back at the start, at all events. And the excellent Demoiselles Shenstone have asked me to dinner on Sunday: I have an intuition that they have also asked Madame de Valmondois: I wonder if she said Yes. If Madame de St. Firmin really loves my mother *she* shall invite me too. There is another avenue. If she gives me the chance I shall *fréquenter* that old lady, and it is hard if I do not meet Madame there also."

IV

He had no idea that in the old lady he had never seen he already had an unavowed but eager ally. She loved no young person as she loved Madeleine de Valmondois, and she loved Gaston's mother for her own sake and for her mother's. Gaston's grandmother had been the dearest to her of all the friends of her far-away youth. Now she was determined to find in Gaston himself the renewal and reincarnation of the qualities that had made his mother, and *her* mother, dear to her. Certainly he would have no difficulty in attaining her intimacy: but she went further than that. He was, she decided, to prove the one young man worthy of Madeleine.

About an hour after he had left the Rue Bayard the old lady and the young one were talking of him.

"So I shall see him to-morrow," said Madame de St. Firmin. "Why don't you tell me what he is like?"

"You know very well that it is the portraits of dogs that I can paint. You insisted on my painting yours, and said it was not like anybody."

"I'm sure he is not a dog."

"Of course not. But I can't describe him. He is tall and rather lean. And serious. And he talks well, but solemnly, and not very much. To-day, however, he talked more."

"Yes, but is he handsome? He must be."

"Then you know more than I do. I really cannot tell you if he is handsome."

"He must be. His mother is absolutely beautiful. You have seen her portrait."

"He is not at all like it."

"But his father was a very handsome man. All the de Saulmoz men are."

"Then he must be handsome. He is a man and a de Saulmoz."

"You are very annoying. I am devoured by curiosity."

"Don't let it eat you all up in twenty-four hours. This time to-morrow you will know exactly what he is like."

"Twenty-four hours is a long time at my age. Tell me now."

"I have told you all I know. Nearly all. He was not sea-sick in crossing the Atlantic, but he was in crossing the Channel. He wears black and white hats."

"Black and white hats!"

"A black one to-day, a white one the other day at Versailles."

"How tiresome you are! Has he no eyes?"

"Two, so far as I noticed. I'm pretty sure he has two. Had there been fewer, or more, I should have remarked it."

"Of what color are they?"

"I don't remember. To save you trouble I may as well say that he has a mouth (rather too firm) and a chin (rather much of it)."

"No nose, I gather?"

"Oh yes. I did not perceive anything approaching to deformity in him. Here comes Miss Essie Shenstone, ask her. She knows him much better."

On the following day Gaston went to keep his appointment: and he did keep it, though something happened on the way that chilled his eagerness, chilled him to the marrow of his life.

Turning out of the Avenue Montaigne into the Place François Ier, he noticed carelessly that two elderly gentlemen were talking together. They stood still near the middle of the round *place* and one of them had his back to the Rue Bayard. He might be about fifty-five: the other was older, and, to judge by the loud voice in which his friend addressed him, slightly deaf.

Gaston had to cross within a few yards of them. There was no traffic, and there was no one else in the *place*.

"Austria is behaving very badly," almost shouted the elder gentleman, who endowed all the world with his own deafness. "God knows what'll come of it."

"She always does. Her politique is subterraneous. Eh, well! we shall see. I've just been to the Hôtel Valmondois. The Duchess, you know, is marrying again."

"Already! To Monsieur de Gréoulse?"

"Not at all! To Henri Flamboin. . . ."

"Tiens! Beauty and the beast?"

"The beast all right. As for the beauty . . ."

Gaston did not slacken his pace at all; what he heard he heard just before passing close to the two gentlemen, as he passed, and as he was leaving them behind. He did not turn his head by a fraction of an inch; and the gentleman who alluded somewhat dubiously to the question of Madame's beauty certainly lowered his voice then.

Gaston walked on into the Rue Bayard and his pace did not alter; but his face had altered, and he told himself plainly that his life had altered. Everything had changed. Ten minutes ago the sky had been overcast, and a black shower had threatened, but Gaston had not accused the day of being dull or gloomy. Now the rollicking breeze had rolled the big cloud away, and there was abundant sunlight. But to Gaston the garish light on the white houses seemed ghastly—like a glare on dead faces. He seemed hardly to remember the words he had heard, but they had done his business for him. What he appeared to remember most in them were the things that made no difference.

" 'The Hôtel Valmondois,' " he repeated to himself; "it is a good house, and has its courtyard and *porte-cochère;* it is an hôtel, of course, but I did not know it was a family house. That fat idiot did not seem sure about the beauty. It is strange I did not think of knocking him down."

It was bitter to him that the other man should at once have been ready to couple a name with that lady's, the moment he heard of her as betrothed. A Monsieur de Gréoulse. And there was another man. Two men at least, anyway. He had somehow felt a certainty that since her husband's death there had been no man—and there were two.

Everything was changed. He had really been looking forward to meeting his mother's old friend, quite apart from his selfish interest in making friends with her. He had thought of the amusement and pleasure it would be to write and tell his mother all about her. Now he hated the necessity of meeting her; it would be sheer penance and *gêne.* He felt almost an antipathy to the old woman.

He had been covering the Miss Shenstones with his benisons for having asked him to dinner; now he looked forward with repulsion to the idea of meeting Madame de Valmondois there. Yet he had no idea of not dining with them; no idea of not going to the "Hôtel Valmondois." That he had not was characteristic of him. He always kept to engagements; he seldom changed his mind or his plans.

Only the plan of his life was changed. *He* had not changed. That was the worst of it. It had revolted him to hear two men's names joined with Madame de Valmondois's in the space of a few seconds, but he had not changed his mind about her. Ten minutes ago he had told himself what a long task the winning of her must be, what a hard one, no doubt; but he knew now that he had not doubted, that he had simply determined she should share his life with him. His life was *gone;* there would be nothing for anyone to share.

" 'Already.' That old man must be a fool. He was an insolvent fool. Had not the Duc de Valmondois been dead three years? Though she was only twenty, he had been dead three years. 'Already,' indeed! Had she not a right to marry to-morrow?"

All the same, she had no right to marry anyone but himself.

The "Hôtel Valmondois" was down at the end of the Rue Bayard, near the Cours le Reine. He had reached the outer door, opening into the courtyard. He could hear a Seine boat screaming on the river. It was as hideous as if a *gamin* had shrieked suddenly in his ear. All the same he turned in; the big doors stood open, and a huge Limousine car stood under the *porte-cochère.* A large, fat, pale man was getting out of it. It was a car that spoke, almost shouted of opulence, but there was no coronet on it. The fat man's neck bulged out behind over his tall, stiff, shining white collar. He was too spruce for his age. All these trivialities Gaston noticed.

V

Gaston was ushered through the *salon* where the Duchess had received him yesterday (yesterday! it seemed five years ago) into a much larger one, where there were already a number of people. She was accepting the greetings of the fat man out of the Limousine. Gaston was almost surprised that he should have been able to get upstairs so quickly; he ought to be out of breath.

Then M. de Saulmoz was announced, and the Duchess moved a step or so towards him.

"Madame de St. Firmin is here already. She is quite impatient," she said, smiling. "Come and be presented to her. It will take you an hour to answer all her questions."

All the same she did not quite immediately take him to the old lady. She kept him at her side for a few moments and spoke of something else.

"Two Miss Shenstones are coming," she told him, "I have promised to dine with them on Sunday, their little dinners on Sundays are an institution. Always *en petit comité*, you are not asked unless you are thoroughly approved."

"I am proud to say, then, that I also am dining with them on Sunday."

"Voilà. Your *imprimaton!* Madame de St. Firmin is glaring at me. Come! For an hour there will be more and more people, then fewer and fewer. By the time Madame has done with you I shall be able to talk to you myself. Come!"

"She makes much of me," thought Gaston, "because she is engaged. She can be civil without *arrière pensée*.'

But he only smiled and followed her to the sofa where Madame de St. Firmin was sitting.

"Now, Célestine," the old lady said to a young lady who was trying to talk to her, "you are to go away. Monsieur de Saulmoz is to sit there."

And she immediately set him down at her side.

"I will leave you," said their hostess. "Monsieur de Saulmoz can tell you for himself, if he is handsome!" she laughed, and bending down almost whispered to Madame de St. Firmin: "I had better go and talk a little more to Monsieur Flamboin; I cut him a little short on M. de Saulmoz's arrival."

She went away and immediately began a small conversation with the fat man of the Limousine. At first he looked a little sulky, as if conscious of having been neglected. Then he thawed and assumed a somewhat *pawing* manner—perhaps his way when he wished to be charming with ladies. His ample chest was turned towards Madame de St. Firmin's sofa. The Duchess's slim back was towards it, and Gaston could no longer see her face.

"Who," asked Gaston, "is M. Flamboin?"

"Oh," replied the old woman, "he is a very happy man. But I do not admire him."

"Is it necessary to admire him? Why is he happy?"

"Because he has induced someone who might have known better to make him so. It is not in the least necessary to admire him. I do not care at all how rich he is, his money has nothing to do with me. I like people to marry in their own class."

"So do I. What is his class?"

"Goodness knows. He is what they call a financier. And he is ambitious, and wants to be a personage. But I do not see why people in our *monde* should help him; especially by marrying him."

"Nor I. But I suppose it is a question of taste."

"A question of the loss of taste. But, M. de Saulmoz, I did not come here to talk of M. Flamboin. I want to talk about your mother, and your grandmother, too."

And she usually did what she wanted, and so Gaston and she talked for very nearly the hour Madame de Valmondois had prophesied about the subject the old lady chose.

"Mind," she said, at last, "you are to come to me very often. If not I shall write and complain to your mother. I am too old to receive many people, but the ones I like come often."

Here was exactly what Gaston had wanted; now it was no good. All the same he promised, not eagerly; and he was not the man to say Yes and mean No.

Madame de Valmondois did not talk to M. Flamboin for anything like an hour. Far too many arrivals of other visitors demanded her attention. But the big millionaire did not turn away with a displeased air; in fact, he moved about the room with an appearance of complaisance, and it was not difficult to guess that, as he went from one acquaintance to another, he was receiving congratulations. He seemed to purr, where he did not paw. Gaston was pleased to be able to decide that he was altogether loathsome.

When M. Flamboin departed it was almost in the wake of a lady of about his own age, also stout, and entirely free from distinction of manner, but with some appearance of having been pretty. She had a little of his purring way, and Gaston would not have heard with surprise that she was his sister.

"Had M. Flamboin a sister?" he asked his old friend on the sofa.

"A sister? Oh, yes! A Madame Rou-Roussel, a Roubaise; as rich as he is. She was here just now.

I suppose she came on the strength of the approaching relationship. That's the result of those sort of adventures. All the Duchess's family will have to see Madame Roubaise panting up their stairs, except me! I will not."

"Why do you suppose the Duchess marries such a man?"

"Dieu sait! But some women like to *make* a man. He is pushing and not a fool, and means to arrive. Perhaps she intends to be the wife of a Minister. No doubt she could help him. Had she any children they might have stood in the way. A woman of our world would not like to have to present such a stepfather to her son."

"Her son would be rather young to object!"

"As her son has never been born we can't say. . . . But I really don't want to talk about M. Flamboin, nor his marriage; though, for that matter, it is what everyone is talking of. *That* nuisance will not last long as they are to be married without delay."

As Madame de Valmondois had said would be the case, there were not so many people in the room by the time Gaston's long talk with Madame de St. Firmin was finished. Still, it was very far from being empty.

"Gaston," said the old lady (she had already told him that she must call him by his baptismal name), "Madeleine is talking to no one; and here is a crony of mine bearing down upon me. Will you not go and talk to the Duchess?"

How welcome such a hint would have been had he not heard this hateful news! As it was he acted on it chiefly as a fitting courtesy to his hostess.

As he walked across the room he thought how beautiful the girl was; and she looked more youthful without the hat which she had been wearing on both the other occasions. Had he really only seen her twice? Could he really have only known her five days and her marriage be so horrible a blow to him?

"I have answered all Madame de St. Firmin's questions," he began. "As you told me they were numerous."

"She was quite savage with me because I could not tell her what you intended to be. She seemed resolved that you should be something important. Not to be ambitious, she says, is idleness in anyone who has the means to be ambitious."

"*You* think men should be ambitious?"

"Oh, I? Well, yes; I think a man should do something. If he is poor it is always *something* that he should work for his living. If he is already rich, or well off, and need not work to live, he should live to work so as to *be* something."

("She is not thinking of me," he told himself, "she is thinking of M. Flamboin.")

He, therefore, only smiled, and bowed as though to accept her judgment, without comment.

At once she felt that his cool politeness amounted to a sort of reserve if not exactly to a rebuke.

"Nevertheless," she added quietly, "one should mind one's own business."

She would certainly show no more interest in what he might have been saying to Madame de St. Firmin.

"I do not quite understand," he said simply. And he turned his rather somber eyes to meet hers.

"No? I was, perhaps, seeming to lay down my own ideas as a sort of principle. My ideas can certainly not be principles for—other people."

He saw that he had offended her, or rather that he had somehow repelled her.

"Madame," he said, "your principle is altogether to my taste; and that you should frankly tell me what you think (you remember I had asked you) was simply a kindness. I am not as it happens poor enough to have to work to live. So far as I can see work will be the only thing worth living for."

His eyes were certainly somber, and, though his words were not, their tone was. She was surprised; for on their two previous meetings he had struck her as being grave but by no means melancholy.

"I am glad my pronouncement did not displease you," she said, "for a moment I thought it had—I am rather a new acquaintance to be dispersing my advice."

"Oh, Madame! I must be a stupid fellow to have given you such an impression. Your advice I should know to be an honor. I will tell you the truth: it did not seem to me that you were giving me any; I thought you were thinking of someone else."

"Of someone else! I was thinking of nobody. I assure you it is not my habit to talk to one person and suit my remarks to some third person. M. de Saulmoz, would you mind telling me of whom you could imagine I was thinking?"

He answered at once, but with some hesitation. "I do not think I have the right to tell you. I have annoyed you already—twice, it seems! You would feel that I had taken a real liberty if I answered your question frankly."

"There can be no liberty in frankly answering a direct question. It is so extraordinary! You do not know even the name, perhaps, of a single friend of mine. I have very few. How could you be thinking of any person as likely to occupy my thoughts."

"No, Madame, I know none of your friends, except the Misses Shenstone and the Comtesse de St. Firmin. And I have only heard the names of two others."

"What are their names?"

"M. de Gréoulse and M. Flamboin."

"As it happens I do not know M. de Gréoulse. He is a friend of my brother-in-law's widow. One sees him in society, but I simply do not know him."

"There remains only M. Flamboin."

"I certainly was not thinking of *him* when I was speaking to you. To tell the truth he is not a person I think of with much pleasure. M. Flamboin! It is quite bad enough that he should be on the point of marrying the lady of whom I just spoke to you; my brother-in-law's widow."

The rain had come after all, and the boisterous wind had not dropped; the rain smacked at the windows, and there was a moaning whistle in the window-sashes. But Gaston did not think the day was falling sadly.

"What," he asked, as carelessly as he could, "is the name of the lady who has so greatly honored M. Flamboin?"

"Her name?" Then Madeleine de Valmondois felt herself flushing. "Why—the same as my own. She is Duchess de Valmondois. My husband's elder brother is Duc de Somain—*there* he is, the tall, very thin man with white hair and *pince-nez*. My husband's *younger* brother became Duc de Valmondois. He died a year ago, scarcely a year ago. He had been married for nearly twenty years. And now the Duchess is making a new departure. After all, M. Flamboin will not be my brother-in-law. He is not even marrying my sister-in-law. Perhaps you think it out of place in an American, a Republican, to object to a man because he is not *noble;* it isn't that. But he is *ignoble.* He is brutally rich; he can bring riches out of anything—out of a drain, out of a puddle. One can be vulgar without being rich. *He* would be vulgar if he had to sweep a crossing."

"Let us hope," said Gaston, laughing, "that he will not be reduced to sweeping one in the Rue Bayard in front of the Hôtel Valmondois."

"The Hôtel Valmondois is not in the Rue Bayard, it is in the Place François Ier; you passed it, perhaps coming here. Madame de St. Firmin is going—I must say *à demain* to her; I lunch there to-morrow."

"So do I. She was very kind as to ask me."

He had a much livelier sense of her kindness now than when the invitation had been given. He also thought with extreme benevolence of the Misses Shenstone. What tact they had! M. Flamboin he had the highest authority for still thinking intolerable, but he had no animosity towards him, and had no malevolent desire to see him sweeping a crossing. He certainly would not be a brother-in-law. M. de Saulmoz escorted the Comtesse de St. Firmin to her carriage; as she leant on his arm down the stairs she said:

"I hope you will follow your father's lead, and be an Ambassador. If I were a man I should have been an Ambassador."

"Then why were you not an Ambassadress?"

"I can't think. Unless no Ambassador asked me. As a matter of fact the Ambassadress is quite as important as the Ambassador. I advise you to remember that."

"Yes, I promise."

"She has to be beautiful, and clever, and distinguished, and dignified, and of high reputation. And if she is also rich it is no great disadvantage."

"There could be no difficulty in finding such a lady!"

"That depends who seeks. Some men never can find anything."

"And some can't get what they want when they have found it."

"Not if they are *bêtes*."

Gaston had some just misgivings that he had already been *bête*. Did Madame de Valmondois guess that he had thought her capable of marrying M. Flamboin?"

"You'll think of me," he said laughing, as he put his mother's old friend into her carriage, "if you happen to meet such an Ambassadress as you describe?"

"Perhaps. *A demain*. You are coming to luncheon to-morrow?"

"Of course. Do you think I should forget?"

He thought that, as it was still raining, the old lady might as well have offered him a lift in her big carriage. But she did nothing of the kind.

"My dear," she cried, "I have left my handkerchief on that sofa. You might bring it with you to-morrow. Tell the man 'Home,' please."

She knew quite well that he had not intended to go back to the *salon*. Old *intirgante!* But the handkerchief really was on the sofa—under a cushion.

"Not, however, by such easy tricks," thought Gaston, "is my business to be done. It will take long, and it will be difficult."

VI

Next day at Madame de St. Firmin's, Gaston had something to say to her, and he said it aloud at luncheon, where only two other guests were seated at the large round table—Madame de Valmondois and Miss Essie Shenstone."

"Madame," said he, turning to their hostess, "you have ordered me to be an Ambassador: I hope you will not be angry if I cannot obey you quite instantly."

"One sometimes has to begin by becoming an *attaché,*" she admitted.

"I had thought of that. But I cannot even begin in that way for the moment. Events have moved very rapidly, more rapidly than the newspapers have as yet found out. The Quai d'Orsay is nearly certain that there will be war. Austria is forcing war on Serbia, and it is pretty sure who is pushing her from behind. We do not want war, England has no army and hates the idea of it. But Russia will not allow Serbia to be *ecrasée,* and says so vigorously. The English Foreign Office is exhausting itself in trying to keep the peace, but Austria will not listen. England has lost the habit as well as the *gout* of mixing herself in continental quarrels. We know who has always meant to force *us* to fight. And if Austria makes war against Russia we are bound to range ourselves on Russia's side. England *ought* to be bound to range herself with us; as to that we shall see. But if France goes to war—well, I am afraid, Madame, that I cannot become an *attaché* till it is over."

The three ladies who heard him had the impression, whether rightly or wrongly, that he had more definite authority for his remarks than he hinted, that probably he knew more than he said.

At least one important personage at the Quai d'Orsay was his father's old and intimate friend. The old Comtesse jumped to the conclusion, though she did not proclaim it, that he had actually come from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs whither he might have gone really on some business connected with his own entrance into the diplomatic service.

"I wonder," she said, shaking her old head, "if we are ready. We *thought* we were in the Soixante Dix."

"Germany is anyway," said Gaston. "That is the best of being a man of one idea. That whole nation is an army. And armies do not exist for the sake of shaking hands with foreigners who are also neighbors."

"And Germany is not a Republic," said his hostess dismally. She herself was vehemently monarchist.

"Come, Madame," laughed Gaston. "France won a few battles when she was a Republic. The Republic was the mother of Napoleon."

"Hardly. One isn't born before one's mother, and *he* was born before *her."*

They all laughed.

"If Napoleon had been the son of the First Republic," the old lady chuckled, "he would have been a matricide: for he strangled her without much compunction."

"In *our* Republic," said Miss Shenstone, "we take care to have no Napoleons to play such pranks with their mother."

"So I've heard, my dear. So do we here now."

After this little passage of arms, they fell to graver talk.

Madame de Valmondois had always thought Gaston grave; he certainly was no longer melancholy, and if he was still grave it struck her as being a cheerful gravity. He had found, she thought, a purpose; and it made him earnest but contented. She did not know that he had found two: one she herself had provided last night; the other the day's news had given him.

"You never thought of the army as a profession?" asked Gaston's hostess.

"Oh, no! If there is war I must fight as a simple soldier. When the war is over I shall remember your commands."

They all thought, "if you are alive." And he did not forget that proviso, but it would have been very unlike him to express it. His disposition was rather courageous than sanguine, and he was not at all the sort of man who takes it for granted that mishaps are for other people only. He knew quite well that all he might have to do in life might be finished in a few weeks: but he saw no use in staring at the chance, and most assuredly would not talk of it.

He did not much like the idea of war, because he could not guess how France would fare in it. Had he been a soldier by profession it might have been different. Still he had been a soldier very lately, and if there was war he felt that nothing could be more immensely interesting and absorbing than taking his single share in it.

"Eh, my dears," said the old lady, "if you remember 1870! I had hoped to see nothing like it again. This can't be as bad as that. It is terrible when one is old to think of one's country's scars torn open to bleed afresh. You young men turn to your bright swords, we old women can turn only to our rusty prayers."

Gaston glanced quickly and quite involuntarily at Madeleine: were *her* prayers rusty? He thought not. Could he trust in having a share in them? Her eyes met his, and I think he read a promise in them.

VII

This is not a war story. That the war came and has not gone a whole agonized world knows. Its taste is in our meat and drink: it is in all we read, though we choose our books never so carefully from old shelves laden before it came: it walks with us, though we pace the unvexed fields of neutral lands; the lark's song at heaven's gate or near it dins it in our ear; its cloud is on the most aloof mountain top; and the artillery of great oceans echoes it in their booming caverns.

To an old man of peace and of the pen who has stood near-hand to it the anguish of writing of it is too raw and terrible. He will not.

If he has not wholly failed in this swift picture, to sketch the outline of a young man's portrait, the reader will not need his asseveration that Gaston de Saulmoz did not fall short. What he did Gaston never told nor will this writer. Where unnumbered heroes did their best Gaston did as they. Their comrades know their names, history may never know them. History likes to sum up and generalize; slow as she is and fumbling enough in her gait, she is hasty and will scarcely encumber herself with endless rolls of names that are not to recur in her page. To have laid one's life down, or stood with it in one's fist at gaze with Death and ready to yield it up if need be—that is not enough for history: her business is not with the led who fall, but with the leader who conquers.

Yet I think the fallen carry smilingly their comrades' names before another Court of Honor as patient because it is Eternal, as history is hurried and transient.

The round world does not ring with Gaston de Saulmoz's name, but some have reported his deeds in a book that shall outlive history, and many of his comrades still alive will remember them always. Fame may be too busy for him: she cannot be everywhere, and it is somewhat her fashion to give most easily to them who are rich already. And Gaston did another thing she seldom likes: he fell out of the ranks—twice; not willingly but by reason of being cut down in them.

His first wound came in the first few months of the war: and it was serious enough. For three months he was in hospital. Then he was able to go back, and fought for half another year. The second wound left him with only one arm.

But what has been so briefly told took a long time in action and it had for him much result.

He did not actually leave Paris till about three weeks after his first meeting with Madame de Valmondois though he had resumed his private soldier's uniform six or seven days earlier. During those three weeks they had met many times, at Madame de St. Firmin's house, at the Miss Shenstones' and at Madame de Valmondois's own. At least five of those six ladies had felt sure that he would not go away without declaring himself. What the sixth expected it would be more difficult to guess, and more indiscreet to inquire. From the day of his first seeing Madame de Valmondois in their garden the four kind American ladies had been aware that the young man had been seriously attracted by the beautiful Duchess; and they were shrewd judges of character; he was not, they were convinced, the sort of person who fancies himself in love once or twice a year. They were discreet as well as observant and dropped no hint elsewhere or to Gaston himself, still less to the Duchess, though they had known her much longer and knew her more intimately. Nevertheless they perceived that what they had seen begin had not died away. The first attraction had steadily though rapidly deepened.

Under normal circumstances they could imagine that M. de Saulmoz would not be a very hasty wooer. But the existing state of affairs was not normal: events of all sorts were moving quickly elsewhere, and they thought his might move rapidly too. That he and the young Duchess were constantly meeting they knew; surely he would not go away without saying something to the purpose.

Madame de St. Firmin had somewhat outgrown discretion, and almost boasted of it. She thought herself too old to call delay by the demure name of patience.

She was not exactly in awe of Gaston, but, though she would venture so far as to wrap up dexterous hints in the folds of indifferent observations, she was not quite hardy enough with him to do more when he chose to appear wholly obtuse.

"You are made for an Ambassador," she told him, "you are all prudence and caution. Events must mold themselves: to grab at them and twist them in your fingers to your own shape you would think mere rashness."

He only laughed and said that his father was fond of quoting a great English writer who declared that for tangling a skein there was nothing like violent tugging at one particular thread.

With Madeleine de Valmondois she was frankly indiscreet.

"To-morrow he goes," she said, "I wish I knew if he had done his duty."

"You may be sure he will do it."

"Don't be a hypocrite. You know what I mean very well. His duty *will* be to do things. Here it is to have said something."

"He is not talkative. But he says more to you than to anyone else."

"To me? There is nothing for him to say to me. You are intolerable! Has he been a fool?"

"He is not in the least a fool."

"He would be if he went away without saying something to you. There!"

"On the contrary, he would be wise."

"Wisdom consists in knowing what one wants."

"And also in not spoiling one's chance of getting it."

"*You* know at all events what he wants."

"My dear old friend, if he tells you his secrets (which I doubt) he does not tell them to me. And therein I say he is wise. If you try to force me to guess all them, I refuse. Would you mind talking of something else?"

VIII

They neither of them saw him again for three months. To the old Comtesse he wrote several times, to the Miss Shenstones about as often: once he wrote to Madame de Valmondois, as she carefully told Madame de St. Firmin. It appeared that he had asked her to lend him a certain book, and in returning it he had written a letter.

"A nice letter?" demanded the old lady.

"No doubt it is a nice letter. I will give it to you to read."

"I have not the slightest desire to see it if you are willing to show it to me."

"I am perfectly willing."

"Then keep it to yourself!"

At the end of three months all the ladies of whom we have spoken as his friends saw him. For he was brought, wounded, to a hospital at Neuilly. Among the voluntary nurses, *infirmieres,* was Madame de Valmondois herself: and she promptly reported his arrival to Madame de St. Firmin and to the Misses Shenstone.

"You are nursing him?" asked the former with ill-concealed triumph.

"No. He is not in my ward. There are twenty wards."

The Comtesse was quite clearly of opinion that they had put him in the wrong ward. But the Duchess was busy and would not stay to talk.

When Madame de St. Firmin went to see him she allowed herself to be taken over the hospital by the *Infirmiere Chef* who was her own niece.

"I think," said the old plotter, when she had seen it all, "that you have put *my* young friend in the least cheerful of all your wards. Eighteen and twelve are the best—bright and pleasant. Thirteen is dismal, besides it's an unlucky number. If he doesn't get well it will be your fault!"

The *Infirmiere Chef* laughed and said:

"There is not a spare bed in Eighteen. They are all full" (the Comtesse had carefully noted the circumstance), "but they have two empty beds in Twelve, and it is opposite Thirteen. I did not know M. de Saulmoz was superstitious! But it wouldn't be difficult to move him."

"Oh, *he* isn't superstitious. *I* am: so is his mother." (Oh! Madame de St. Firmin! where do you suppose you will go to?) "I certainly shall not tell her he is in Thirteen."

"If you wait till to-morrow perhaps you can write that he is in Twelve."

It was certainly a weakness of this old lady to try and prevent Providence from being overworked.

Thus it came about that for nearly three months Gaston was one of Madame de Valmondois's patients, and she neglected none of them. We are not bound to suppose that she exclusively neglected *him*. Still, there were many patients, and she was was far from being the only *infirmiere* in the ward. Perhaps Madame de St. Firmin exaggerated the importance of her success; more especially since it is true that "in vain is the net set in the sight of any bird," and Madeleine had seen the net very promptly, though the *Infirmiere Chef* had suspected nothing. Gaston knew nothing about it, had he known it is probable he would have been less irritated than was Madame de Valmondois.

When he went back to the front Madame de St. Firmin was disgusted. "I thought," she avowed unpatriotically, "that the only good of being nearly killed was that you wouldn't have to go and be killed again. You've got the *Croix de Guerre* and the Medaille Militaire, you ought to give the other young men a chance."

She would have been still more annoyed had she known how doggedly Gaston had been moving heaven and earth to get sent back to the front at once. If he had not done this he would perhaps not have gone back for at least another three months.

Madame de Valmondois did know, and was not offended. Had he been her husband she would have wished him to go if he should not be simply unable to go. And he was not even her betrothed. She had long "known what he wanted": and she had wholly approved of his not asking for it. Had he asked before he first went to the war she would have said "No": that he had kept silence was, she was sure, because he had not felt that he had any right to expect "Yes." She could not love merely because she was loved, nor mistake a respectful affection for love. That her friendship amounted almost to affection she confessed, and she did more than almost respect him.

But when he went away to fight once more she would not have said "No" had he asked. Even then he did not ask. Though they had been friends for over half a year, he did not ask if she would be more. And therefore he did not tell her in any speech, or in many speeches, that he loved her better than all the world. Whether she fully understood his silence this time I am not prepared to say.

She was quite certain that he had not changed: he had *grown,* but though his character had developed, and was finer, richer, more ripe, she knew very well that his heart, which had also deepened, was not changed.

Still he left her that second time, also without asking anything of her, without offering her anything—for indeed he could not have offered that thing without asking it in return. That, of course, she understood: and no doubt she understood too that he must be aware that if he now offered she would give. Anyway he had gone, and he had not even said that he would write to her. To the Miss Shenstones he did write, and to the old Comtesse: and in writing to them he always asked "her news" and sent his *hommages* to her. But to herself he did not write even once. He knew her *fête* day, and when the 22nd July arrived a *gerbe* of exquisite flowers came to her from a florist's with his card attached to it, but there came no letter.

She took the flowers to the Madeleine and had intended asking that they should be added to the immense number before the statue of the saint, but changed her mind and asked that they should be placed before that of the Blessed Jeanne d' Arc. She prayed a long time after the man had gone away who had done her bidding. But the card was not on the flowers: that she kept.

"How silent he is," she thought. "And I never liked talkative men. But he is silent."

On the card was written only her own name, above his printed name and *"Souvenir respectueux."*

Madame de St. Firmin no longer teased her: she was angry with Gaston. Had he behaved himself as he ought she felt sure Madeleine would have told her. She was savage with Gaston, but she was not indiscreet enough to put her crossness into writing. She kept all her indiscretion for word of mouth. But she left his letters, as they came, a long while unanswered.

IX

Then he came back. Not, this time, to the hospital at Neuilly, but to one at Fontainebleau. There was no question of Madame de Valmondois nursing him now. At the moment she was not nursing at all: she had worked too hard, and been constantly a little ill, and at last the doctors had simply ordered her to rest. That was only a few days before his return from the front in late October, 1915. He was quite unaware that she had temporarily broken down.

It was from Miss Essie and Miss Sally Shenstone that the Duchess heard of his arrival at Fontainebleau. They had been to see him the day before. They began by saying how cheerful he was, then they told her that it was the left arm that had been wounded. With singular carefulness they managed the telling, not holding her in suspense, but quite quickly and yet gradually arriving at the whole truth. The lower arm was gone; it had been blown off just below the elbow. The real danger had been at first, the danger that he might bleed to death. All that danger was over before he had been sent down from the front; now he was doing very well.

"Madame de St. Firmin," said Miss Essie, "will be almost glad, for now he can fight no more."

Of course, they all three talked of it for a long time; when the two kind Americans got up to go they said they had promised Gaston to go and see the Comtesse de St. Firmin.

"I think Anna and Megsie are going to Fontainebleau to-morrow," said Miss Essie, "I suppose you would not care to go with them?"

"No. But I should like them to tell him that I will come."

They knew that she meant she would go alone. I really cannot say if they were surprised. Perhaps they hardly knew themselves if they were or no. She went on the day following that on which Miss Anna and Miss Megsie Shenstone had been.

"They told me," he said, "that you would come. I did not dare to expect you so soon."

"I should have come yesterday only that they were coming."

"They said you had not been well. But I think you have been really ill."

"I don't know. The doctors said I was, or that I soon should be. I did not feel ill, but tired."

"And now you come all this way; that will not rest you."

"It will. I could not stay at home and not know how you really were. Not see with my own eyes. *That* would have tired me."

He was pale, for he had lost much blood, and he looked older. Nevertheless, he did not seem ill. After having been so slow, it might have struck her as odd that he should now be so quick, for he held out his hand—his only one, and said: "I have only this one left; but it is the right one." And he offered it to her.

And without hesitation she took it.

"You know what I mean?" he asked, not holding her hand long, but meeting her eyes plainly.

"Yes, I know," she answered as plainly.

"I shall not die," he said, "that is why I offer it to you now. I might have been killed. While there was that certainty I would not hold out to you what might have been a dead man's hand."

"I have always understood you," she told him, "from the first day."

"From the first day I loved you," he said, "and I cannot hide my wants. But I knew that if I spoke soon it would not gain me what I longed for. When I went away the second time I knew better what that hell was like to which I was going back. If I should not come back I would not have you bound to my memory."

"I should have been bound. I should have been then in truth a widow."

He did not explain further, for he saw there was no need. Simply he would not have had her be known to the world as a woman widowed of her betrothed. Neither did *she* explain. Her coming to him, thus by herself, to many men would have seemed strange, perhaps unworthy of her and her somewhat aloof dignity. He knew her too well.

"I have always understood," she said again. "That is why I came to-day. I knew what you would say. I came on purpose. You had waited long enough. So had I."

"Ah, Madame! How long it has been—for me."

"For us both."

"Do you remember," he asked presently, "the first day that we met, how we talked of Fontainebleau?"

"I remember all we said."

"I never thought then what was to happen at Fontaineleau."

"Nor I. How could we, either of us? But I knew then that something had already happened—there at Versailles. I had met someone who would give me a thing I had never had. Unless I could give him as much I could not take it; I cannot. It was a long time till I knew that I could give him as much."

"I also have always understood."

Then her grave eyes changed, and there was a little dancing light of mischief in them.

"Always?" she said. "When you thought me capable of marrying Monsieur Flamboin?"

"Ah," he protested laughing, "you begin on that already? I thought you would have kept it for our first quarrel to grind me down with!"

"Oh, I could not wait for that. It might have been so long."

"Very well. If you grind me down *now,* gloating over my stupidity, I can only say that you are *pert.*"

"I can be ever so pert. You think you know exactly what I am like. But I am not so solemn as you imagine. At first I used to wonder if you were not too grave for me. Our kind friends at Versailles, Miss Anna and Miss Essie, Miss Megsie and Miss Sally, they know I can be pert, and I have often made them laugh. Gaston, I do not believe I ever made you laugh."

"Well, begin now. You could never find it so easy. To-day I could laugh at anything. You need not be extremely witty."

"Strange to say I can't think of anything in the least amusing. But it will be rather amusing telling Madame de St. Firmin. Latterly I've been afraid of going near her. She has been savage."

"But with me; I could see that."

"With me also. She evidently thought it was my fault you had not done your duty."

"All the same I like Madame de St. Firmin. It was a great thing to perceive that what I wanted to do that she considered to be my duty."

"Of course, one likes her. Gaston, do your father and mother know anything about me?"

"I expect they both know all 'about you,' as you call it. I told my mother, and no doubt she has told my father. Do you know what those dear Americans are going to do? They say they shall come and stay at Fontainebleau—Miss Essie says Piou-piou requires change of air."

"So do I."

"You will come and stay with them!"

"If you can induce them to ask me."

"No doubt my mother will come here. She is in England. Then you can stay with her."

"Gaston, I shall return to Paris to-night. And I shall go and satisfy Madame de St. Firmin about something. Before she saw you she tormented me to know if you were handsome, and I really could not tell her. I shall now report that you are really. . . ."

"What?"

"Not so bad considering."

"There," he said, "I promised I should laugh, even if you were not very witty. You see, I keep my word. Is this a pretty ring?"

And from under the pillow he drew forth a little twist of white paper, and unfolded from it a half-circlet of large emeralds.

"Give me your hand," he demanded, and he set the ring upon her finger.

"Have you," she asked, laughing, "a jeweller under your pillow?"

"Oh no. I bought it in Paris before I went away the second time. It was the only thing of yours I had, so I wore it round my neck on a chain."

"But it would not have been mine if I had not taken your hand just now."

"No. But I always understood. There is just one word I want to say. I have never said it to myself. You see how confident I have been; but always respectful. In my thoughts I never called you anything but 'Madame.' Now I want to say 'Madeleine'."

FOR SURMISE

I

"JEANNE," said Madame de Beaucaire, "I want you to come indoors, there are some visitors. A lady and her daughter—English, with letters of introduction. And I find Madame enough; you must come and help me with Mademoiselle."

Jeanne smiled and got up at once. The two ladies turned towards the house.

"I have an idea," said the girl, "from your way of speaking, that I shall find mademoiselle more than enough."

"It is possible. But I did not intend to give you that impression. You know I am nervous; and strangers made me more so—strangers who drop out of the clouds! No, there are no clouds," with a little laugh as Jeanne lifted her pretty head toward the sky, "when I am nervous I imagine myself more deaf than I really am. . . . ."

"You are in reality scarcely deaf at all."

"Well, I can always hear *you*. You do not yell."

"Do these English ladies yell?"

"No. Oh, no! But they talk in duet—at least the daughter does."

"She must be clever."

"I mean that while her mother is speaking she chips in."

"That is not very well-bred."

"Oh, they are not ill-bred. But Madame does not talk French easily; correctly, but not fluently—perhaps she has not been in France much recently, and has lost the facility—then her daughter seems to want to hurry things up and puts in."

"I call that being *mal elevée.*"

"*We* should think so. But the English—*autre pays autres moeurs,* you know."

"And what are they doing all this time? You left them to interrupt themselves at their leisure?"

"Oh, no! The young lady said she was dirty and would like to wash her hands—it *is* very dusty, and they came from Rochebérg in an open motor. So I rang for Marie and she has taken them upstairs. Madame was certainly covered with dust."

"Mademoiselle also, I suppose."

"No. She did not seem dusty. Perhaps it is her style of dress that does not show it.

"She *is* clever, evidently," said Jeanne, with a little laugh. "It is certainly clever to avoid all the dust that covers your companion in the same motor."

They had now reached the château, and entered the drawing-room, a large, rather gaunt room that seemed almost dark after the sunlight outside. There were fine pictures on the walls, and the portraits at once gave the impression that the family at home here must be one of consequence. The furniture was all of one period—Louis XVI—and was of an excellent taste. There were no nicknacks, and not many flowers.

"They haven't come down yet," observed Jeanne. "Perhaps Mademoiselle is having a bath. English people do it all day long, don't they?"

"Jeanne! Tsh! here they come."

A footman threw open one leaf of the big double doors leading to the hall, and stood aside. Two ladies entered. Both were tall, the elder was also lean, but her daughter was only slim. She had, indeed, a very pretty figure, but her mother walked better: the girl seemed to want to run.

"Madame," said her hostess, presenting Jeanne, "this is my niece, Mademoiselle de St. Gatien."

The English lady bowed—she was really not yet near enough to shake hands: Mademoiselle de St. Gatien made a curtsey. Madame de Beaucaire then introduced the two girls. By this time they were close together and Miss Hexham held out her hand. It was a pretty hand, very well shaped, but rather sunburnt.

"She is clever," thought Jeanne, as they shook hands, "and certainly pretty: more than pretty. And my aunt was right, she is not ill-bred."

The English girl had very dark blue eyes, with long lashes, they and her abundant hair were nearly black. Her nose was particularly well-shaped, and Jeanne had had an idea that English noses were apt to be thick; it was an aristocratic nose, but it had a little tilt at the end that gave it a slightly impertinent expression. The mouth, not very small, was also well formed and had an air of distinction, that was not spoiled by a tiny curl of the excellent shaped lips, though that little curl carried out the impertinence of the nose.

Lady Hexham was not in the least like her. She had never been pretty, but as an elderly woman was still handsome. She was frankly badly dressed, but had she been in rags no one could have mistaken her for anything but a lady, and a lady of position too.

"We did not know," she was saying, "that your château was anywhere near Rochebérg: and I had meant to have written first and sent on our letter of introduction."

"It was very natural," said Madame de Beaucaire, "for though Rochebérg is nearer, our post-town is Saint Blaise des Ours, and we are not even in the same Department as Rochebérg."

"No. And then we thought that you would allow us to bring our letter ourselves. Had we posted it we should not have known for a couple of days if you had received it—and you might have been away."

Miss Hexham looked a little bored by these lengthy apologies and explanations, but she did not interrupt. Perhaps she could not very easily, as Jeanne was talking to her.

"We are going on to St. Blaise," Lady Hexham now explained, "we have ordered rooms there and dinner. I hope my slow French does not bore you very much. Of late years we have spent much time in Italy, and now I find that when I open my mouth Italian comes into it instead of French."

"My mother is too conscientious," her daughter declared, "she really talks French much better than I do, but she waits to choose the most correct expressions. I go straight across country heedless of all obstacles. If I make mistakes *tant pis pour mes auditeurs*. *I* don't mind in the least."

She did not even now actually interrupt her mother, as her remark was ostensibly addressed to Jeanne, but her tone was not subdued, and Lady Hexham evidently paused to let her daughter's little speech be heard.

All this Jeanne confessed was not bad manners, though it was not French manners. From her aunt's description she had been prepared to find Miss Hexham something less than charming, but she perceived that the girl was at all events not disagreeable.

II

The English ladies had refused Madame de Beaucaire's invitation to stay for dinner. But they would have tea.

"May we see the garden?" Miss Hexham had asked. "It looked fascinating from the window upstairs."

And when they had gone out into it, and the two elder ladies were a little in front, she went on—"I saw you being fetched. I was sorry for you. Your aunt was unable to convince you that you would find us most engaging people. Description is evidently not her forte."

And the young lady laughed demurely. Jeanne laughed too and said:

"She did not attempt it. She merely said you were here."

"If she only said that then description *is* her forte. For you had quite made up your mind about us both before seeing us. That was obvious.

"And what had I decided?" asked Mademoiselle de St. Gatien, endeavoring to acclimatize herself to this somewhat breezy frankness.

"That I was intolerable and my poor mother a victim. Live and learn, my dear." (Jeanne was not yet sufficiently acclimatized. People she was used to meet did not say things to which urbane reply is almost impossible, nor did strangers call her "my dear.")

"I am learning," she declared, laughing.

"If I had time I could convince you that I am not Mamma's tyrant, but her slave. It is I who conduct her life for her. I who provide her with beds, luncheons and dinners. She does all our forgetting and I have to do the remembering. Europe is strewn with her handbags—it is her inalienable prerogative to forget *them:* interference *there* would be cruel. All I can do is to prevent her putting anything into them that matters, and to see that they are themselves of no value. The result is some vulgarity occasionally—*that* one was all I could buy at Rochebérg. I scoured the town for it while Mamma was writing a sonnet among the ruins—in the Abbey kitchen."

"Does Madame write sonnets?"

"Thousands. Hundreds survive, but she keeps bundles of them in her handbags. Do you always live here?"

"I or my aunt?"

"Oh, you don't live with your aunt?"

"No—I live with my father. But I come here often and stay long, for my aunt has no daughters left."

"Dead?"

"No, one is married, one is a nun."

"And which shall *you* do?"

Jeanne nearly jumped. Three quarters of an hour ago she had never heard of Miss Hexham's existence; and now that extremely pretty young lady was asking her questions that none of her old friends had ventured on.

"Can you advise me?" she said, smiling rather coldly. "Which have *you* decided on?"

"I can't very well become a nun; I am not a Catholic. The worst of the other thing is one can't tell what it's like till one has tried, and when you *have* tried you have to stick to it."

"That reflection," said Jeanne, "has perhaps occurred to profound thinkers before."

"Have you definitely resolved to dislike me?" asked Miss Hexham, standing still and smiling with great vigor at a magnolia blossom.

"Oh, no. But give me time."

("I am beginning to talk very oddly," she thought, "I am learning quite quickly.")

"There is really," said Miss Hexham, "no necessity to dislike me. And—I would rather you didn't."

As she turned her pretty face to Jeanne it had so quaintly fascinating an air of almost childish frankness that the other girl found it irresistible. The more so that it was not *quite* childish. Jeanne was, by a year or two, at least, the younger; and certainly Miss Hexham was not young for her twenty years. She had seen much more of the world, and her eyes did not miss much. Much that she had seen might as well have been missed. Yet now there was a very youthful appeal in her voice and in her lovely eyes; and it was no pose. Of all pose she was simply incapable.

"Mademoiselle," said Jeanne smiling, and perhaps because she was not always smiling her smile seemed to be a gift worth something, "indeed there is no necessity for me to dislike you. But, if I did, how could it matter? You had not seen me an hour ago, and in another couple of hours you will have seen the last of me."

"I don't know about that. It often happens to me to meet a new word which I had not known the existence of; then I meet it constantly, and it becomes part of my language, and I wonder how I did without it before. And so it is with people. You need not count on never seeing me again—I shall crop up. Don't you go to Paris?"

"Of course I have been there, and—well, I daresay I am here five or six times in the year—but I never *live* there now. My father is very delicate, very nervous, and since my mother died we live almost at Champs-le-marais."

"Is that your château?"

"Yes, it is a château."

"Big?"

"Very big."

"Where is it?"

"In the Sologne. It is a very quiet place."

"No neighbors?"

"Oh, there are neighbors; but they live a good way off. And Papa is not often well enough to receive company. If people come a long way and are not received they give up coming."

"And you have no sisters?"

"None unmarried. There are three of us, two girls and a boy. My sister is six years older than I am—she is married, and her husband, M. de Chandesfontaines, divides his time between Paris and their home in Burgundy; and she divides *her* time between him and her children and her poor people."

"Chandesfontaine? Is your sister the Princess de Chandesfontaine?"

"Yes."

"I know that name." (Jeanne was not surprised. It was sufficiently illustrious. But she did not say so.) "And your brother, is he also married?"

"No, he is attaché to our Embassy in Rome. He comes home, of course, but I am mostly alone with my father at Champs-le-marais."

"And when you come here, how does M. de St. Gatien get on without you?"

"His sister, the Duchesse d'Hesdigneul comes to take care of him. She is a widow."

"I must say your life doesn't sound very amusing. I suppose you are 'out'?"

"Out?"

"Well, in England one is 'out' when one has been presented to the King. But there is no Court at the Elysées, is there?"

"No. Anything but."

"After one is presented one goes to balls."

"I have been to some. Not very many."

"Did you like them?"

"Some of them. You go about the world much, do you not?"

"Yes, we never sit still. I get tired. But my mother likes to woo fresh inspiration in fresh scenes. Almost anything does if it is new—well, not new, but never seen before—a mile-stone, or a mill, a fortalice, or a crag, or a dead cow in a meadow. The microbe of inspiration may be perching on any of them; if it assaults her we stop and the sonnet ensues."

"You also write poetry?"

"God forbid! I detest it. I'm all for people. Mamma is rather bored by them."

"By all people?"

"Nearly all. She says the great ones are all dead. For me I thank the gods I am not great. I should like to go and talk to that gardener, and find out all about his life and his children, and what he thinks about."

"He probably doesn't think. He is an excellent servant. His children squint, like their mother; she had a little money."

"I think you are as hard as a tenpenny nail." (Jeanne laughed at "un clou de vingt sous.")

"Am I? You say you are all for people. I'm all for facts."

"Yes, my dear. And you are too proud to go and find them."

Jeanne pondered this saying, not feeling at all sure of understanding it.

" 'Proud'?" she queried, not as well pleased as if she had been certain it was a bad shot.

"As full of pride as an egg is full of meat. Not because you are beautiful, nor (perhaps) because of your rank, though I'm not so sure of that. You're a duchess or a princess, I suppose?"

"My father is a duke. I'm simply Jeanne de St. Gatien."

"Very simple, indeed! *Je suis in prince, in comte aussi je suis le Seigneur de Cony.*"

"I wonder," said Jeanne laughing, "why you are scolding me."

"To get *at* you. You sit in yourself as in an impregnable castle, and I want to make you come out."

Jeanne had so instinctively felt this motive that she was quite surprised at its being boldly avowed.

"Having sat in my castle all my life," she said, laughing, "is it worth while to drag me out for half an hour? Of course, I should go back."

"It is always worth while to do anything that is anything. Providence sent me here on purpose. You are obstinate enough to go back; but if I had, even for half an hour, got you outside you would not find it quite the same. You would know what it was like outside and might try again. You are as old as the hills at eighteen or so. The selfishness of the people for whom you live will end by making you as selfish as a statue. Who comes here?"

III

Miss Hexham had turned to look at the château; it was worth looking at, and the afternoon light fell upon its western front flatteringly. In shadow it had an air of somewhat sad reserve; the sunshine lent it geniality, and made it more humane. One could now imagine children playing there and making irreverent noise.

"It is my uncle—and my brother," said Jeanne. "My uncle has been to Fléche to fetch him from the station."

The two gentlemen came across the grass. The

Marquis de Beaucaire was a country gentleman, who only dressed when he was in Paris; on his estates he was merely clad. He looked about fifty. The young attaché was rather trim, and a good deal like his sister, but only good-looking, whereas Jeanne, as Miss Hexham had remarked, was beautiful.

"My aunt and Lady Hexham have gone down to the lake," said Jeanne; then she presented the gentlemen to Miss Hexham. They uncovered and held their hats in their hands while they spoke to her.

"Mademoiselle," said M. de Beaucaire, "we bring what is good news for us, but bad news for you. You will have to honor us with your presence longer than you intended. We have been talking to your *mechanicier*. He tells us that your car gave trouble all the way from Rochebérg——"

"That is true, but Mamma did not mind. The first stoppage occurred where there was a ruined château, and there was something inspiring at each of the others."

"And now," added the Marquis, "the car will not budge at all. The only plan is to let a car of our own tow it to Fléche, where there is quite a good garage. But, if we can imagine you to be so kind, you and madame must stay here till to-morrow."

Jeanne perceived at once that her uncle was merely hospitable, but that her brother for his own sake hoped that the ladies (only one of whom he had seen) might be induced to stay on.

"We will go," she said, "and find my aunt, who, I hope, will persuade you to remain."

It was ultimately decided that Lady Hexham and her daughter should stay till next day. Considering how much Miss Hexham had seemed desirous of her friendship, Jeanne was a little surprised to perceive that this decision was due not to her, but to her mother. All the same, the English girl still stuck close to the French one, a circumstance not lost on the Comte de St. Gatien, who was fully prepared to relieve his sister of the easy duty of entertaining the young stranger. Lady Hexham fell to him instead.

"You are attaché at your Rome Embassy," she observed, in a far-away manner. "Ah! Rome is home to me." (The rhyme had served her in more than one sonnet.) "Everywhere else I am in exile."

The word exile she had found unmanageable. No dexterity would rhyme it with smile; she had coined "flexile," but had got little change out of it. She adored language, but words instead of being her henchwomen were too apt to be her shrewish mistress. M. de St. Gatien behaved well, but he rather wished that Miss Hexham were doubly an orphan. To be bored and to seem interested were part of his profession; but he could not forget that he was now on holiday.

"Why," he asked his sister, as she turned into her bedroom to get ready for dinner, "do you absorb Mademoiselle? Her Mamma gives me earache."

He enjoyed perfect health, and looked it; when disposed to indisposition he invariably professed ear-ache.

"Loulon, it is not my fault. But Mademoiselle arrives with a mission to do me good; and you know the English—their duties those they will do."

"Pray let her do *me* good. I need it more. My ills lie too deep for mothers."

"Well, you must do it all yourself. I will say this for her——"

"The mother?"

"No, of course; the daughter. I half thought that when you cropped up. . . ."

"Cropped up!"

"You see, I am half English already! When you arrived I should not have been surprised if she had left me a little in the lurch. But, to tell the truth, Monsieur, she hardly seemed to remember you *had* arrived."

"So I perceived."

"To me she is affectionate. Really affectionate. *Par de blague.* I like her; and I did not mean to."

"She had much better like *me*. She would get on quicker. You know, my excellent Jeanne, that you are as approachable as an obelisk."

At dinner there were three gentlemen and three ladies. The latter have been accounted for; the third gentleman seemed to be everybody's uncle—except Lady Hexham's and her daughter's. He sat by Jeanne and talked furtively of food, a subject which he illustrated by copious anecdote.

M. de St. Gatien sat next Miss Hexham and wished the party were larger. He had little opportunity for *tête-à-tête;* with only six people at table the conversation was apt to be too general. He began to think better of Lady Hexham when one of her peculiarities seemed to his enterprising mind to open the possibility of a small adventure.

"My mother, I perceive," observed Miss Hexham to him, "has lost her pocket handkerchief. She is sniffing. Armed with a handkerchief she never needs one. Conscious of its absence she develops instantaneous catarrh."

It was true that Lady Hexham had sniffed, and that lamentably; her replies to M. de Beaucaire were becoming embarrassed and her whole manner much pre-occupied.

"Muriel!" she said appealingly. "It was in my little bag."

"I suppose you left it in the drawing-room . . ."

"I know I brought it down, for I was sitting on it in the *salon* and it humped me."

"If," said Muriel, getting up. "Madame de Beaucaire would excuse me——"

At the moment no servant was in the room. M. de St. Gatien instantly rose, too, but said nothing. It looked as though he were merely going to open the door for Miss Hexham. But he had deeper designs. He did open the door, but when she had passed out he followed, and shut it behind him.

"I know exactly where it is," he declared, keeping beside her. How needlessly quick she walks, he complained to himself. "There is no hurry."

"I think *I* do. But one can never be sure; it is quite possible Mamma is sitting on it at this moment."

The drawing-room was not yet lighted up, and it was already dusk. Arrived there this young diplomatist made some haste, and felt about in the recesses of a large easy chair. He uttered a small expression of disappointment.

"Haven't you found it?" asked Miss Hexham.

"Have you?"

"No. But you were supposed to know exactly where it was."

"The wisest are less wise than they think at times," he suggested airily, continuing to search in all sorts of places, chimneypiece included.

"Yes, that is true," agreed Muriel. "You have not examined the coal-box."

"Mademoiselle, your tone is ironical. It could not be in the coal-box unless it had been secreted intentionally. And you yourself—you are abandoning the search already!"

It was true that Miss Hexham had turned toward the door and seemed on the point of retiring to the dining-room. She laughed and said cheerfully:

"It has been secreted intentionally."

"In the coal-box?"

(But he did not go to look there; he preferred to keep an eye on the lady.)

"No, Monsieur, not in the coal-box. In your pocket." Her laugh was distinctly *at* him, but he determined to laugh *with* her.

"The highest wisdom," she observed sententiously, "is simplicity."

"How did you know I had found it and—hidden it again?"

"You were rather in too great a hurry. You almost pushed past me. We must now hasten to Mamma's relief. If she is kept long in suspense she is capable of sneezing."

She evidently meant to go, and go she did.

"How extremely fast you walk," he remarked.

"The distance is not great; but if the pace fatigues you I will take word that you are coming and relieve Mamma's mind. There is a chair, you might rest a little."

"I can never rest alone. I require assistance. Solitary repose is mere inaction and exhausts me. I am sorry you have been in such a hurry—I wanted to talk to you about my sister."

"I like talking *to* her better. Come, Monsieur, am I to open the door myself?"

IV

They all left the dining-room together, but the gentleman who was everybody's uncle did not reappear in the drawing-room. M. de St. Gatien did not find that the change to it promised any greater facility for conversation with Miss Hexham. She rejoined his sister, almost as if after a long absence, and her mother bore down upon him.

"The Coliseum!" she exclaimed, "what must it be looking like to-night! The moon was rising before dinner—the harvest moon."

For a moment Loulon felt his blood tingle to rebellion. Then a gentler feeling toward this long-backed poetess suggested itself, for he was not without resource.

"It may be," he said, speaking softly and not too loud, "mere association and home prejudice. But for my part I have never seen anything that moves me more than the moon (the harvest moon) upon our ruins here. They are, of course, haunted. They lie behind the lake. By such a moon as this (harvest) moon to-night they seem to lie *in* it. Silver in a bath of steel. And one can hardly help seeing the ghosts of the White Sisters in the ruined choir. You know the convent was sacked in the Revolution." He spoke earnestly, but dreamily, almost absent-mindedly.

"I should like," murmured Lady Hexham, "to see that."

"Ma tante!" he said, with a singular return of vivacity, "Madame wishes to go and see the ruins by moonlight." Then, briskly going to his aunt, he almost whispered: "*You* need not come, nor my uncle. You play your piquet. *I* will escort the English poetess."

His air of polite martyrdom might have deceived the very elect. It did not deceive Jeanne. She had heard the proposal and watched the little conference preceding it; and she was a good sister.

"We will go, too," she said to Muriel. And they went; but it was Jeanne who took possession of Lady Hexham.

At first Miss Hexham seemed inclined to avenge herself by a wilful silence. Her temper, however, was too good for obstinate unpleasantness. But when she broke into a low laugh M. de St. Gatien was not entirely satisfied.

"May I not share your merriment?" he inquired, with some dignity. Now dignity in Miss Hexham's opinion should never be permitted to walk arm in arm with impudence.

"You have every claim to share in it," she replied ingenuously, "having occasioned it."

"It is a great thing to be amusing without having even tried to be. Many wits fail in spite of laborious effort."

"Perhaps one should not laugh at a young man's devotion to his profession."

"My profession!"

"I understood your sister to say that it was diplomacy."

The moon was really splendid; her light upon the smooth lawns was more golden than silvery. What M. de St. Gatien noted with greater admiration was that it completed the beauty of his scoffing companion.

"Do you think," he asked meekly, "that a tone of mockery suits this serene stillness?"

"As well as plots and infinitely trivial schemings. The night is not only silent, but sincere."

"I am sincere. Do you demand my silence also? *That* I think would be presumption on my part. Only to established intimacy is silence permitted; I am no more than your host."

"If I were sincere and not silent, you would have the right to call me rude."

"Prove me."

"I would rather be talking to your sister than to her brother."

That she *was* sincere was the worst of it. He knew she was.

"You at least," she said, "are not rude. You might have told me that *I* was, and I think you would have been right."

"Oh, no," he answered quietly. "I could not. I am a man."

"Ah, but," she cried, "I do not want mean feminine privilege. What I meant was simply this. You spoke of your sincerity—she *is* sincere. She will not even pretend to like me—but her disapproval is worth fighting against. Her reserve is part of her fine character. Nevertheless, I would like to violate it. Can you not see what is happening to her? But wait—before you answer, I want to finish my explanation. I would, I say, like to *make* her talk; not to make her like myself, but because of something I would, if I could, break up in her. There isn't much time, is there? Or much opportunity? I simply said out what I meant, and it didn't sound courteous to you. I *would* like to be talking to her. And——"

"And what else?"

"It seems to me better worth while than making moonlight talk with you. Listen: I see you can be patient and gentle, too. What you say to me you might say as well, or better, to any other girl. It is part of a convention. What I would, if I could, say to her, *might,* if I knew how to say it, do some good."

If she had not spoken very rapidly, without pauses, he might have thrust in at more than one point. That she afforded him no such pauses was, he knew, not accidental. He was clever enough and sincere enough to perceive her absolute incapability of coquetry. It *was* his sister in whom she was interested.

"Now," he said, with a plain gentleness that advanced him to a point of intimacy he could never have reached by scheming, "tell me what you mean about Jeanne. For, really, I do not understand."

"That is just it! None of you do. You do not see that she is a girl of very fine and noble nature, whose character will be spoiled unless something intervenes. You look half *froisse* already. You say the moonlight demands sincerity, and mine sets your back up. But I do not care. Listen! I am going to be worse. The truth is everyone about her is selfish——"

"I am sure Jeanne did not tell you so."

"Of course not. But, well done! You are becoming clearly warm like the moonlight. We shall get on much better that way. Well, I repeat, your father, your aunt the Duchess, your aunt here—as far as your sister is concerned—are all selfish."

Her tone was not that of a philippic. Her voice, always very musical, had sunk to a low, restrained pitch. She was not scolding, but she was pleading. This he recognized, and turning for a moment to glance at the girl's lovely face, he thought, "She is speaking of a thing she knows. Her life is nailed to some other's selfishness."

"Duty," she went on, "is a noble thing; a fine motive of life; but the acceptance, when it is only succumbing to their imposition of an incubus of poor duties dulls some souls and chokes some lives—many girls' lives. I do not want anyone to spurn the duties, but I want Jeanne to take care. There is nothing ignoble in the rôle of *garde-malade* to one's father—even if he is not ill. She would not be Jeanne if she refused it. But a girl's character has to shoot outwards, and blossom outwards, and bear fruit outwards. The danger for her is that there should be no outwards. She *must* live, and be somebody; she can not be a useful nobody; of that dull mechanic rôle she is not capable, whoever may be.

"The danger is that she will be simply Mademoiselle de St. Gatien, year by year, settling down more hopelessly into the slough of the despond of her high birth, her rank, her impregnable position; without contact with anything; all the world outside, and inside nothing but a girl's ghost. If I were eloquent I could make you understand. But I only know what I mean and can not say it. Love will be beneath her. Life will be beneath her. Pride will be her only confidante."

Being a young man, perhaps, it was not unnatural that he was thinking, while the girl spoke thus oddly, rather more of her than of his sister. Odd he did think it. But, somehow, its strangeness did not make him simply think "The English are all mad. She has a bee in her bonnet." He merely understood that she was not a girl to flirt with and forget. He had quite abandoned the idea of flirtation, but he did not think he should easily forget her; and he found it more interesting to be walking by her side now than he would have found it had flirtation been possible.

"It is to me," he said quite frankly, "wonderful that you should care so greatly. I see you do care."

"Strange that I should care when I believe that I see a fine and noble nature that threatens to be stunted and made empty? Is not emptiness being full of nothing?"

"Mademoiselle, what can she do? French girls of our class do not make themselves careers."

"Girls of any class have a right to *live*. I did not dream of what you call a career. Girls of your class in France marry or become nuns."

"I hope she will not become a nun!"

"Of course. When you come to France for your furlough, or whatever you call it, you like to find her here!"

"For my part I should be glad that she married."

"And you know that she will not while your father lives, and he may live for thirty years. Could she marry then? She can not marry because she is Mlle. de St. Gatien, and no man who would be fit for her would marry your father's nurse, and be shut up in his enormous hospital in the Sologne. She has no more idea of marrying than I have of cutting my throat. She understands. She is to be Mademoiselle de St. Gatien and leave her money to your children."

Then Muriel, to his surprise, turned sharply to him and laughed. "And now," she asked, "are you glad you took so much trouble to make my innocent mother declare a longing for the moon—the harvest moon? Has it been a triumph of diplomacy?"

V

Monsieur and Madame de Beaucaire did as their nephew had suggested and sat down to piquet.

"They say," remarked the Marquis, "that the English are all mad. It was the old one that wanted to go and find ghosts by moonlight in the ruins. If it had been the girl it would have been very well. Also she makes poetry—the old one."

"Among the letters you brought from Flêche was one from Gaston de Pierngrise. It was his wife from whom they brought an introduction. They knew Lord and Lady Hexham when they were at our London Embassy. He says they are of the very best position, and Lord Hexham was charming, also extremely clever. Madame was always *bizarre.*"

"She looks like an asparagus without sauce."

"She was enormously rich. So was the husband, and Mademoiselle will have it all: there never was any son. He says she would have half London running after her, but her mother hates London and takes her all over Europe in a motor-car. It seems to me that the girl is sick of it. The mother is *bête,* and selfish, too. I will take three cards, please."

"The girl is pretty. I take five cards, you see."

"Certainly she is pretty: but her mother must be blind not to see that all this rushing about in every sort of weather will ruin the child's look—she is too brown already, and too thin. She has a beautiful skin and it will grow coarse and harsh. I do not look at my cards."

Monsieur and Madame de Beaucaire had just finished the sixth hand when the moonlighters came in.

"It was exquisite!" Lady Hexham declared, "and M. de St. Gatien was so eloquent that no wonder a ghost came to listen to him."

"You saw a ghost, Madame!"

"Oh, Mamma! It was only me," Muriel exclaimed. "I heard M. de St. Gatien telling you where you should look, and I strolled round there, behind the pillars in the shadow, then crossed a slant of moonlight!"

Loulon had no further talk with her. She soon went over to his uncle and began a conversation with him that lasted some time. They got on excellently, and M. de Beaucaire found her, what neither Jeanne nor Loulon had done, extremely amusing. "She is full of wit," he told himself, "she is *spirituelle et fine.* And not tiresome. Talking girls usually are. Her manners are pretty too: frank, but not bold. She has grace and distinction. What does the mother mean carrying her about the roads of Europe like a caravan-girl!"

He was a shrewd person and it was not lost upon him that his nephew was envious of that *tête-à-tête*. It delighted him: when one is a grandfather, and not at all a lady's man, it is pleasant to see handsome young men neglected in one's own favor.

Madame de Beaucaire thought it rather a pity that Loulon should have only his aunt and sister and the young lady's mother to talk to.

When the party broke up Loulon went to his sister's room.

"Did she," inquired Jeanne, "ask you to like her?"

The question, or rather his sister's tone, her attitude toward the English girl, somehow annoyed him.

"Far from it."

"Perhaps she perceived it was unnecessary."

"Quite unnecessary. I like her very much. But it is a matter of perfect indifference to her."

"What am I to say? What did you come to say?"

"I came to talk about her. But I no longer feel disposed to. The subject bores you. Perhaps also you are tired and I had better say good night."

"I am never tired. As to the subject boring me—I am simply indifferent. I am not specially interested in this girl: she is a new type to me, and I am not sure that I admire it."

"You mean you are sure that you don't."

"Put it how you choose. You must be fair, Loulon, and remember that I am not like you. You have seen the world and live in it and meet foreigners often. I see very few. I am simply French.

To me it is a new thing to meet a girl with her heart in her mouth."

As Miss Hexham had said, Jeanne was sincere, and she only said now what she actually felt. Still, just as M. de Beaucaire had been conscious that his nephew was envious of his own *tête-à-tête* with Muriel, so was her brother instinctively conscious that Jeanne was jealous of the attraction the English girl inspired in him. Jeanne had seen him flirt very often, but only now how this sort of jealousy assailed her. Poor girl! He was the person she loved best, and she would like him to love her best.

"When one has no heart," he said, slightly reddening, "there is no danger of its mounting to the lips."

He was not thinking of his sister, but of countless women he had known, in whose mouths was only the more or less deftly veiled demand for flattery. But it was natural that Jeanne should be thinking of herself.

"I would rather have no heart," she said coldly, "than put out my tongue to show it."

"Jeanne!" he begged. "I wish you would not abuse her. It seems *hard*. Because she thinks so much of you."

"That is just it. I do not ask her to think much of me. It is an impertinence. I am a French girl, and it seems to me intrusion. Do you think your sister has to accept the alms of friendship from any chance stranger who turns aside off the high road!"

"Naturally," he said quietly, "I know that my sister is Mademoiselle de St. Gatien."

Of course he was thinking of what Muriel had said. Her voice was echoing in him, and the echo affected him more than the actual words had done. Perhaps because the words had brought him a new idea that did not then convince, and now the idea had lodged, and he saw that it was true. Certainly he also perceived that the girl herself would not be able to do any good: possibly she too knew she had not much chance of success, that she was giving herself to a forlorn hope: if so, being brave himself, he must admire her the more. To assail his sister in her fortress must demand, he was conscious, a very valorous readiness for self-sacrifice. That it implied also some lack of tact he did not pause to remember. Tact is mostly supreme calculation, and the bravery that hurls itself to a forlorn hope must ignore calculation. All wise probabilities are defied by the simply brave.

"I am afraid," he said gently, "that you will never like her——"

"At last we are agreed."

"It is a pity. She is worth liking——"

"She will be gone to-morrow."

"Not as far as I am concerned. Jeanne, I am determined that to-morrow shall not see the end of *my* intercourse with her. You may as well know."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"It is as bad as that."

He did not retort her certainly provocative tone. His tone was gentle; grave, but friendly and kindly. He had abandoned any idea of being cross.

"I just want you to know," he added smiling.

Their eyes met in the mirror over the chimney-piece, and Jeanne told herself that he had, somehow, bettered. A new something had come into his face. He was more a man.

All her life afterwards she was glad that, meeting his eyes in the looking-glass, she had answered his smile with her own. Two roads met there; division and affection. She had been within an ace of walking away into final isolation down the wrong one.

"I succumb," she said, just touching his shoulder for an instant.

He only lifted his own hand to touch hers, and said nothing.

"I thought," she said, "I was stronger. But I cannot lose my brother."

"Poor Jeanne! You haven't much. Your brother hasn't been much. There will be more of him."

He did not say, "And you will gain a sister."

And, to reward him for not saying it, *she* said it.

"If you succeed I shall have a sister."

"I shall not succeed soon."

"She is not hard-hearted."

"No. But whole-hearted. And I have no place in her heart yet. It will not be easy to find the way in. Patience!"

"You patient?"

"Yes. It is the first time I have wanted anything worth patience. Can you not see the change?"

"I see it—with wonder."

"Yes. I give you leave to wonder. To me marriage has seemed the end of youth. Now I know it is the beginning of manhood."

"That is the change. I saw it *in there.* You were a fascinating lad. And this girl has come round the corner and made you a man."

"Jeanne," he said, "no girl could do that. It is what she had in her hand. I wish some man would come round the corner with it in his hand for you."

"To make me a woman? It is better to be a girl as long as one can. When I am a woman I shall be an old one. It is different with boys—they are only boys till they become men: incomplete, unripe."

Her tone was no longer hostile, or hard. So long as she spoke of *him* and *his* future it was now gentle and friendly; but when she spoke of herself it was dry and reserved. He was quite aware that she had brushed aside his allusion to *her* future.

"Jeanne," he said, "it *is* well to be a girl as long as you can. It is also well to be an old woman when the almanack insists—when a woman hears children call her 'grandmother.' But to be an old woman at seven or eight and twenty, that is not well!"

"I am not twenty!"

"No. But you are already too old, because you have already given up expectation; you abdicate the future, and, without liking it, you say to the present, 'Let it be permanence.'"

It may seem that Jeanne must instantly resent this, in arms, as she had resented Miss Hexham. But she did not. Miss Hexham was a stranger, Loulon was her brother. It even soothed her lonely spirit that he should think of her. She thought it was a part of the change in him.

"Lovers," she thought, "are notoriously selfish and self-absorbed. Love has made him unselfish. He can feel outside himself. Lovers are supposed to see only one girl in all the world, to him love has revealed the existence of his sister."

It touched her close. Are we not all of us touched by the pathos of our own lives? She knew what an arid waste her life was; that *he* should know, at once made it less desert. She had loved him as girls so often will love an only brother whom they know well to be selfish. She had not grudged him the pleasant sunlight of *his* life, though her own was all a monotone of shade; but she had never expected him to think of her life, or to realize its sterility.

He not only knew but he was resolved to interfere.

"Look here, Jeanne," he said simply, with a cheerful decision that was comfortable to her. "I am not going to see you sacrificed. There's no reason why *you* should be a *garde-malade* than why Adéle should be, or I, either. And Papa is more than half *malade imaginaire*. When I go back to Rome, I intend that you shall go with me. The Ambassadress is my excellent good friend, and she is also our cousin, as you know. I shall say nothing till she invites you, then I shall simply tell them, Papa and Aunt Célestine, that it is out of the question to refuse. Have I ever failed to get anything that I wanted out of them?"

"Nothing that you have wanted."

"Well, I want this. You need not look doubtful. I shall manage it. It will not be nearly so difficult to make Papa understand that he must do without you for six months as it will be to persuade Miss Hexham that she cannot very well do without me for her whole life. But I intend to do that. I intend to do both."

"How long," asked Jeanne, laughing, "will it take?"

"To persuade Papa, quarter of an hour.—To persuade Miss Hexham, perhaps a quarter of a century."

"I do not know," said his sister, "which to admire most, your patience or your humility!"

THE AWAKENING OF MISS GIRVAN

I

Miss Girvan sat alone in her blameless drawing-room (the word "parlor" she abominated) and no doubt she was reading. In her hand, that is to say, she certainly held a book, and she was not asleep; her eyes were on the page, and they even followed the lines; not so very long ago she had turned a leaf. Perhaps she would turn another presently; nevertheless she was scarcely at all conscious of what her author was telling her, and, as he was a quite superior writer, *he* must have known Miss Girvan never, in fact, read any but superior books; though I cannot honestly say that she was at heart a literary person. She was well enough educated to know who are the best authors, and to them she was determined to stick. On leaving school, indeed, she had received from Miss Selina Porteous a compendious list of "safe" authors, with a suggestion that she would do well to follow a definite course of reading.

"You," the schoolmistress had said, "will have abundant leisure. Pray do not be contented to suppose your education now complete. Supplement it for yourself. The town where your parents now reside is not large; its situation is relatively remote; you may find the society restricted: accustom yourself to the *best* society, which you will find in the best writers."

I protest that Miss Selina Porteous was not a prig: she thought of EDUCATION always in large capitals, and feared that in large capitals too many other and less worthy things absorbed the public interest: and she was from top to toe a schoolmistress. But she was not stupid, and she was not without some cool personal interest in her departing pupil. Carrie Girvan had been almost a model pupil, not brilliant, but painstaking, obedient, of good principles, anxious to learn (if only she knew what) and not dull; no, not even dull, though her perceptions were less industrious than herself, and her appreciations seldom alert.

"Thank you, Miss Porteous," the girl had answered, "I will follow your kind advice. Pokestown is a small place. There is, I should say, *no* society there. I am sorry Mr. Pentlow and Mamma have chosen to make it their home. As you say, the situation is very remote."

As to the last indictment, of course the situation of every place must be remote from many others—it depends whence you start measuring. Miss Porteous and her departing pupil meant that Pokestown was far from Boston—as indeed it was—very far.

In alluding to Mr. Pentlow and her Mamma, Carrie had meant almost to correct Miss Porteous—to go as near to correction as was consistent with sincere deference: for Miss Selina, in speaking of "your parents" had touched upon a sore point. Carrie by no means recognized Mr. Pentlow as a parent: her father had been the late Mr. Craigswood Girvan—a very different person. Few families in Boston had had a tenderer respect for their pedigree than the Girvans: it was not in the least mythical, and after a century of separation, the Girvans of Craigswood in Ayrshire were quite alive to the honorable existence of their kinsfolk in New England. Perhaps, if he had not been the last of them, and therefore unaided by the risk of adverse family criticism on the spot (the Laird's family in Scotland might be supposed to be hardly alive to

New England values), Mr. Craigswood Girvan might never have been guilty of falling in love with the undeniably pretty Caroline Stevens, who had not any family in particular: she was fifth daughter of a Kentucky farmer, who, if he wanted a pedigree, would certainly have to begin it in his own person.

In her heart of hearts I am afraid Carrie did blame her father for his only marriage, as she undoubtedly blamed her mother for her second.

Carrie hardly remembered him—he had been almost an old man when he married, and he died when she herself was not five years old. But she was sure that she remembered him to have been very different from Mr. Pentlow. Mr. Pentlow was far from old, nor was he ugly—quite the contrary: Carrie, however, held his good looks in poor esteem. They were common, blatant, like his voice and his obstreperous geniality. His boisterous cheerfulness struck her as scarcely less common, and was even more blatant, not affected but spontaneous and unjustified by circumstances for his circumstances were always involved. When he died he quite radiantly declared that it was a Providential interposition to save him from bankruptcy. If, he asserted (and poor Carrie had some reason to believe him) he was to live another three years he would be bankrupt, sure enough. Carrie had helped to avert that stroke on repeated occasions. Her own fortune had been materially diminished by that help. And she had trenched on it also for the education of her half-sisters and half-brothers: and, as each of the three went out in the world, Carrie had opened her purse generously enough. What she had less generously loosened were the strings of her heart. She had a dutiful and quite genuine fondness for her mother (though if she could have chosen her, that mother would have been a wholly different sort of person). She had never been nasty to her stepfather, whom she had thought nasty, which he was not; and he had innocently imagined that she was fond of him in her way: but that was one of his many sanguine mistakes. In any relation of life she would have thought him intolerable; as her stepfather the whole idea of him set her teeth on edge, and it was really to her credit that even he, with all his coarsegrained easy-goingness, had never been forced to realize her dislike.

As to Ben, Susie, and Lizzie, they were so like him that it was hardly surprising she should have thought of them chiefly as being his children, three superfluous commemorations of her mother's unpardonable second marriage.

II

Miss Girvan sat, as has been remarked, in her drawing-room alone. And alone in it she spent a very large proportion of her time.

It was in a peculiar sense her own room; the whole house belonged to her, had been bought by herself with her own money very soon after Mr. Pentlow's death; and it need hardly be said that it was not in the abhorred Pokestown. But, to do her justice, Carrie never spoke of the house as hers. She never even alluded to "my drawing-room." It was simply "the drawing-room." Still, this was entirely *her* room. Her books were there, which she read with conscientious if laborious persistence; her piano was there, upon which she had long ceased to play—Miss Porteous had said nothing about the duty of continuing her "music," perhaps not entirely through forgetfulness, but partly because she was fully aware how little the girl cared for music. Her papa's portrait hung there, and the large old print of "Craigswood Castle, Ayrshire, Seat of Alexander Girvan of that Ilk," with the engraved escutcheon of the Girvans between the words "Craigswood" and "Castle." The seats of the chairs were covered with tapestry-work wrought by her own hands, one at school, the others—to match—since.

When indoors, which she mostly was, Carrie always sat in her drawing-room; Mrs. Pentlow never did, except when she came in there to drink her tea, after which she returned to the breakfast-room. The breakfast-room looked "up street," and the old lady liked to note what went forward outside. Miss Girvan never looked into the street; her bedroom peered out over a lawn on which no one ever played any game, and the drawing-room was on the ground floor beneath it. The view from the lower room was even less exhilarating, for the evergreen hedge at the end of the lawn was high enough to shut out the shaggy paddock,visible from upstairs, in which Miss Girvan's pony supported as best he could a life of forlorn uselessness (for Miss Girvan rarely drove out) and dismal seclusion. If, as is unlikely, his mistress ever adverted to that seclusion she would not have pitied him, he was not much more secluded than herself, and, idle she was, she never wallowed in self-pity. She took her own seclusion for granted as the lot of a woman whom no one had married, and unconscious of any neighbors whose intimacy she could support.

Was Miss Girvan at this period an old maid? She was under thirty by as many years as she had unexpectant, not inexpressive eyes. What did those two darkish brown eyes, a little darker than her abundant and certainly pretty hair, express? Alas, most noticeably, the absence of expectancy.

They were far from being bad eyes. They were not small nor mean, nor cold, though cool; they were incapable of malice, or unkindness. A little prim, possibly, as was the neat, though not too small mouth; but not hard, nor suspicious; not calculating, nor superstitious, nor conceited. One's eyes express, not one's ancestors, but oneself; and, if this lovely lady was silently vain of her pedigree, she was wholly free from any vanity on her own account. Of herself she thought meekly; so meekly that it never had caused her the least surprise that no one had ever betrayed the least wish to marry her. Her stepsisters had found admirers even at school, to the great annoyance of their schoolmistress, and had both married very young—Carrie providing the wedding clothes, and wedding feasts, and some moderate dowry for each, as well. Yet, in spite of the sort of good looks they inherited from their father, Carrie herself was far more really pretty; and if men had all good taste—but it is probable the young men who married Susie and Lizz had not good taste. Carrie's figure was pretty, and would never grow coarse; her hands and feet were small and excellently shaped, her ears were dainty, and she had a good skin and a singularly good nose.

Yet no one had ever asked her to marry, and she was sure no one had ever dreamt of it.

After all it is expression which matters most, and the expression of Miss Girvan's quite pretty face did nothing much for it. Anyone could see that she was harmless, really a lady, inacapable of anything mean or unworthy. But not much beside. Was she, in fact, simply insignificant?

Rising from her seat to stir the fire, she laid her book open on the table, and said:

"I try to read it. But can't get on. Is it because there is nothing in the book, or because there is nothing in me?" Then pausing with the poker in the fire, "No one has ever tried to read *me*—because there is nothing in me. In my book, the book of me, there are eight and twenty chapters already, and nothing in any of them. I don't see what there can be on the others. Well, it's better to be blank than blotched. God has kept the blotches away, if I have provided only the blanks."

She still held the poker, and still looked down into the fire, which had rewarded her touch by a little blaze. It cast a not unflattering glow upon her bent face, always rather pale; and the dancing flicker reflected in her eyes a movement and comfortable glimmer that helped them also; for they were of themselves too immobile.

"Twenty-eight chapters! If there are to be seventy or eighty it will be rather a heavy book to hold."

She put the poker back in its place, neatly (as she did everything) and returned to her chair. It was perhaps too comfortable a chair; she, perhaps, had grown too much used to all such comfortable things, to rely on them, as it were, and pad out her meager life with them if not consciously at least deliberately. That drawing-room of hers was a blank dull sort of room; correct, blameless, but expressionless. It made no hospitable suggestion, and you could not imagine any cheerful company crowded into it—Miss Girvan would have hated to see it crowded. But it was full of physical comfort. The carpet of a drabbish neutral tint, was very soft and very thick,and ran up to the wall everywhere, and into every corner. The rug before the fire was of a rather expensive white fur and very "deep" and warm. The wide French window had been (by oft-repeated visits of an intelligent carpenter) made to fit exactly and exclude all draughts, as had the door. The curtains were of a soft velvety texture, and very ample, so as to draw quite close after day-fall. The risk of any draught from under the door was guarded against by a screen, not ugly, but a little blank, for it had four tall and wide folds covered with a very pale gray damasked silk, closely resembling the wall paper.

The whole house was comfortable, noiseless and staid: and Miss Girvan kept a good table, and drank a little good wine with her slow unhurried meals. In spite of the inroads on her fortune made by the late, though unlamented, stepfather, and by her assistance of his children, Miss Girvan was by no means poor, and all the expenses of her house were borne by herself. Mr. Pentlow had lived long enough to spend all his wife's money.

It must not be supposed that Carrie spent hers only upon herself: she still sent substantial help to her married sisters, whose families increased more rapidly than their husbands' incomes: her mother had excellent clothes and was never without a comfortable lining to her purse: and Miss Girvan gave considerably in charity—it was indeed her principle to devote a tithe of her income to charity, in which she did not count generosity to her sisters. What she devoted to "charity" was mostly placed at the disposal of her minister (the Girvans had always been Presbyterian) and she was glad that he should spend it without much reference to herself. From any personal contact with the poor she shrank, as she shrank from bleak weather and books with any crude appeal to the emotions.

Miss Girvan, I say, resumed her place in her deep and soft chair, and drew it slightly nearer to the fire. Having adjusted a plump cushion to a more exactly comfortable position behind the nape of her neck, she resigned herself with some complacence to the enjoyment of her material advantages.

"No," she thought, "the Book of Me will not be worth reading, but—I hate tragedy. It won't be awful."

The rain smacked against the large plate glass of her window, and one could hear a rattling wind outside, but it did not moan in the window (it used to, but Carrie had had that corrected) nor in the chimney.

"Pussy," she said, "you like to be warm as well as I do. You have an excellent home, and you would turn up your nose at a mouse, wouldn't you?"

Miss Girvan did not care much for animals, but she liked to see a cat on the rug before the fire. It brought out the flavor of her own comfort, as warmth brings out the bouquet of some wines. The worst of Pussy was her occasional indiscretion in having kittens, which her mistress thought to be a slightly indecorous weakness: however, they were soon drowned, and neither their mother nor Miss Girvan thought much more about them.

"It's a thoroughly disagreeable day," said Carrie, "that is the best of having nothing to make me go out when I do not wish to."

She let her eyes wander round the room and said:

"I don't *see* what's the matter with it—it's a quiet plain room, and not uncomfortable. I'm sure nothing shocking ever happened in it—I suppose it's uninteresting, but they say rooms reflect their owners. I'm not interesting," she paused and added—"thank God. For they say the annals of the untroubled are dull." She remembered that several of her school-fellows had had, since those calm school-days, troublous lives enough.

"Poor Mary Findlater," she thought, "there was a romance, but what a tragic one! And Esther Purchar—a story for a novel, but not the sort of novel I would willingly read. I like happy endings:

not only a wedding but an income too. No, I would rather sit here alone, by this warm hearth, and hear the wet wind outside, than have to know there were chapters like *theirs* in my dull book. Even Susie and Lizzie have worries enough, and Ben's scrapes would be almost tragic if they weren't so vulgar."

III

"Please, Miss Girvan," said the Irish housemaid closing the door behind her and advancing nearer, to speak more confidentially, "there's two ladies in the hall, and they would like to see you. Shall I show them in?"

The Irish servant girl was only temporary. Miss Girvan's parlor maid was a staid, and not very young spinster from Massachusetts, who dated from the purchase of the house. But she had gone home to nurse a dying mother, and Norah was her locum tenens.

"Two ladies? What ladies?"

"Well, Miss, they're sisters."

"Not the two Miss Blitters!" (Carrie detested the Miss Blitters.)

"Well, Miss, I should think not. I don't think they're sisters to one another. They're Sisters of the Holy House. Nuns, Miss."

Miss Girvan was quite unbigoted. She had no animosity against nuns; only she had never met any.

"And you said I was at home?"

"Ma'am, I said I thought perhaps you were engaged."

The rain slapped at the window and the wind clattered among the boughs of the trees outside—and Carrie was anything but hard or ill-natured.

"Bring them in, Norah. And bring tea as soon as you have it ready."

One of the Sisters proved to be quite young, and the other might be forty. They were both rather damp. The elder did the talking, at first, and the younger looked at the floor.

"Miss Girvan," Sister Philippine began, "we know you are not a Catholic. But we have heard that you are generous, and we have come begging. We go everywhere. Very few are cross with us for troubling them. It is for our old folks and our little ones. We have lately opened a house here—about a year ago, and it's full already, forty-two old men and women, childless you know and helpless; and nineteen little things, nearly babies some of them—orphans."

"I'm fraid you're very wet," said Miss Girvan.

"Oh, no. We have fine big umbrellas, almost like gig-umbrellas. A wet day is rather good for us, we find more people in, and that's everything."

"I should hate paddling round in the rain," said Carrie with perfect truth. "*I* certainly am not cross at your troubling me—it only troubles me to see you so uncomfortable. It's such a contrast—" and she glanced at herself, and at Pussy, and round the warm dry room.

"Ah," cried the Sister genially, and without the faintest ironic intention, "that's altogether different! It suits you to be comfortable. And why not? All your comforts come from God."

The younger sister gave an almost imperceptible nod as much as to say, "There's no doubt of that."

"Anyway," said Carrie, "I shall be very glad indeed to help. I daresay you won't think it much—I don't know in the least what people usually give you. . . ."

"Oh! nothing, sometimes; sometimes enough to feed all our old folks and all our children for a day."

"And how much *would* feed them all for a day?"

Sister Philippine told her, and it seemed to Carrie terribly little. She knew to a penny what her own housekeeping cost, and it had never struck her as extravagant.

"Well," she said, "and there are yourselves. The nuns themselves, I mean. How many of *them* are there?"

"We are sixteen in community."

"Well, and you must eat!"

"Certainly," laughed Sister Philippine, "we eat—what the old folk and the children leave."

Carrie shuddered. "Look here," she said, "I will give you $200—but I should like to make a condition."

At the mention of so generous a sum, both sisters made a little exclamation, and the young one looked up from the floor. When Carrie spoke of a condition they tried not to seem disappointed.

"What condition, please?" asked Sister Philippine.

"That you go straight home and beg no more to-day," said Carrie promptly.

"Then I'll promise," declared Sister Philippine, and they both laughed.

Carrie saw there was a little joke and asked what it was.

"Well, the truth is our rounds are over for to-day. It is nearly five o'clock and we generally do our begging between nine in the morning and five in the afternoon. This was to be the last house. Perhaps you will not give us so much now."

"Oh yes, I shall."

And Carrie went over to her bureau whence she returned with the money.

"There's $202," she said. "The two dollars are for a cab. Your convent is quite at the other end of the town, is it not? It is pouring. I want you to go home in a cab."

She spoke with far more animation than was her custom, for it was seldom her custom, poor girl, to be interested, and she was interested now. Not, I fear, chiefly in the old men and women and orphans, but in the two gentle ladies who were begging for them. Her eagerness brought a slight but most becoming flush into her pale cheeks, and her quiet brown eyes had an unwonted light in them.

"Your condition," said Sister Philippine, with a little laugh, "was that we should go home—"

"In a cab!" declared Carrie firmly.

"I didn't hear that," said Sister Philippine.

"Nor I," said Sister Angela.

"Come!" cried Miss Girvan, "is it worth while to lose two hundred dollars for your old creatures just for the sake of getting more thoroughly wet? That would be obstinate!"

"I think it would."

And both sisters laughed quite comfortably.

"What a pretty creature you are!" said Carrie impulsively (she was far from being impulsive in general), and as if she couldn't help it, to Sister Angela.

"Oh, dear!" said Sister Philippine, "Nuns and compliments are queer company."

But she did not speak severely.

"Come," cried Carrie, "if she is pretty, it's no more her fault than my comforts are mine. My comforts and her looks come from the same place."

She spoke so genially, and looked so girlish that Sister Philippine felt quite at home with her. When they had first entered the room she had inwardly decided that Miss Girvan was a stiffish personage, and had put her down for well over thirty.

"Dear me," laughed Sister Philippine, "you can be quite saucy!"

Undoubtedly it was the first time anyone had called Miss Girvan saucy. If Mrs. Pentlow had heard it she would have been almost frightened. But Carrie rather liked it, without exactly knowing why. The stout nun was so human; she seemed to give out a kind of warmth and wholesomeness like an atmosphere. People usually accorded to Miss Girvan a sort of matronly position, as if she were almost elderly, and this Sister treated her as a young girl.

"How old do you think I am?" she demanded abruptly.

"Oh—well, three or four and twenty, perhaps. No, less, I should say."

"I'm twenty-eight."

"That's young, too. And—do you live all alone . . . here? It's a fine room, but, but, somehow, elderly."

"Yes, I live all alone here. And it *is* elderly. That's exactly what it is. I can't help it."

As she spoke, in a queer, almost flurried fashion, the younger nun caught her eye and Carrie found it very sympathetic.

"Won't *you* say something?" she said. "You've hardly spoken to me."

"I was thinking," the nun answered, with a gentle hesitation, "that I would rather live among our old broken-down creatures and our little orphans."

At that moment Norah entered with a tray—a very heavy silver tray, laden with heavy silver teapot, cream ewer, and sugar bowl.

"How long you've been, Norah!" said her mistress, please bring in the other things quickly."

Then turning to her guests she said:

"After your ploddings through the rain a cup of tea will do you good."

They explained that they never ate or drank out of the convent, but thanked her with hearty goodwill. Her obvious disappointment was very hospitable.

"But," said Sister Philippine, "if you will come to our Convent we should love to give *you* tea."

"Do," begged Sister Angela.

IV

When Mrs. Pentlow came to the drawing-room for her tea, she immediately became conscious of a change in its atmosphere.

"Your visitors didn't stop," she observed, glancing at the two extra and unused tea-cups.

"No, Mamma! and I was so sorry. But they weren't exactly visitors. They were beggars!"

"Beggars, my dear?"

"Clean beggars; and very nice."

Then she explained.

"Well, I'm sure I'm glad they came. They've done you good," declared her mother.

"How?" asked Carrie, not austerely.

"You look ten years younger—you do, indeed. And ever so much prettier. That's the truth, my dear."

"Mamma, you *know* I'm not pretty."

"Just you look in the glass."

Carrie laughed and did look.

"Perhaps I don't look so *frumpish* as usual," she admitted.

"You aren't a frump a bit; only you live as if you were. You live as if you were an elderly person. Don't bite me for saying so, but it's the truth. I wish those begging ladies would come every day. I never saw such a difference."

Mrs. Pentlow was quite astonished to hear herself talking like this. It was due to the change in the atmosphere of the drawing-room.

"They do a deal of good, those ladies," she observed presently. "I've heard a many praise them. I wish I'd seen them."

"One of them," cried Carrie, "said I was *saucy.*"

Her mother swallowed quite a large bit of toast prematurely.

"My shakes!" she ejaculated.

When Norah came to take the tea-things away Mrs. Pentlow arose in accordance with her custom to return to the breakfast-room.

"Stop and talk," her daughter begged. "I want to talk. You've got your knitting, and we can keep blind man's holiday."

Mrs. Pentlow did not say "My shakes!" this time, but she felt it. Never before since they had lived in that house had Carrie given the slightest hint of a desire not to be left alone when her mother had shaken out the crumbs (into the fender, and with due respect to the drawing-room carpet) and prepared to withdraw, as soon as tea was over, to her own region.

When Norah had gone Carrie sat for a few minutes looking into the fire without speaking, and her mother knitted, equally silent.

"Mamma," the girl said presently, without turning her eyes from the fire, "I suppose you can read while you knit. You never need to look at the knitting."

"Oh, yes, I *can* read, easy, as I knit—by propping the book up on the table. But I don't do it very often. I don't study like you."

Carrie had a half-guilty consciousness that this was a very fine name for her somewhat torpid reading.

"Well," she said, "I suppose you prefer your own thoughts."

"I don't know as I'm very fond of *them,* either. While it's daylight I look out of the window and see what folks go by, and that. When it's dark and the house is shut up, I have my chair turned round and I knit by the fire. That's company. I can't truly say that it's exactly *thoughts* I prefer to reading."

Poor Mrs. Pentlow, she was not plucky enough to confess that she had a good deal more conversation than she now hinted at. When the servant came with the lamp, and when she would come in afterwards to attend to the fire, or on that pretence, her mistress would seldom let her go without a fairly prolonged chat. The cook was breakfast-room maid. As the more austere Selina was drawing-room maid I am afraid Mrs. Pentlow and the cook gossiped, though harmlessly. And Carrie's mother was fully conscious that gossip with a servant could find no favor in her daughter's ideas of correctness.

"Mamma," said the girl, and she spoke with a certain impulsiveness that her mother was not accustomed to see in her, "Mamma, it all sounds rather —lonely."

The tone was so obviously self-accusatory that Mrs. Pentlow, who was entirely good-natured and easy-tempered, said:

"Well, my dear, I don't know as I often feel it like that. When a woman's getting up in years, and has three children's worries and scrapes to think about, and a comfortable home of her own to think about them *in*—if she's any sense, she don't get wondering if she's lonesome. I should say *you'd* be more like to feel lonesome all by yourself in here." (Mrs. Pentlow was quite aware that Carrie had no such resources in Selina as she had in Jemima.) "Though, of course, there's your studies. What I mean is, you're young, and yet you never let any young folks' pleasures come anigh you. And you sit here forever, just as a woman might, thirty years older than you are, who'd never married."

For a little while Carrie seemed to sit musing what her mother had said. It was true enough and good enough sense. And she was quite sufficiently intelligent to perceive that it expressed an habitual thought—Mrs. Pentlow was not the woman to put out in pat phrases all at once a new idea that had only just arrived.

"Mother," she said, with a little blush, at last, "what does it matter whether I begin now or in thirty years to live —like that? You know I shan't ever be married."

I fear Mrs. Pentlow had even discussed this very subject with the cheery cook—who was about Carrie's age, and had, at least, two strings to her own bow.

"And why not, my dear? See how quick Lizzie and Susie went off. And not half your looks—no, my dear, they hadn't. They were pretty enough" (she was still a pretty old woman herself), "but they hadn't *your* looks. None of your style." Carrie winced at that appalling word. "They're my own gals, but I know as well they're a different class! Yes, and I know what you're thinking—*their* husbands would never do for *you*. So they wouldn't. But there's plenty of young men in the world as are your class. There's nought to hinder, only your living shut up in this room like a hermitess, if there's such a thing. A young man can't exactly knock at the front door and say to Selina, 'I'll just step in the drawing-room and propose to your young lady. Can he now?"

"Oh, Mamma, I don't *want* any young man to step in!" cried Carrie really blushing. There was much common sense in what her mother said, but (plainly) it seemed to her vulgar. Yet, she knew that it was all said with so simple a frankness that somehow it failed of the real essence of vulgarity.

"No, you don't. There it is," said Mrs. Pentlow. She shook her head and that head-shake was eloquent. "There's the obstacle," it declared roundly, "and it's one that no one can climb over."

"But, mother! Why should everyone marry? Lizzie and Susie have trouble enough; and, of my old schoolfriends, half who have got married have had far, far worse troubles than theirs."

"Troubles! What does a trouble or two matter? Don't it say as we're born to 'em as the sparks fly upwards? And it's better to share them than sit chewing them by yourself. I'd troubles enough with your stepfather (he and me together had) but I never repented marrying him, for I was fond of him and he of me. I know you couldn't bear the sight of him, though he didn't see it—and it wasn't for me to tell him. He hadn't much head to speak of, and no manners (not what you'd call manners. Well, I know they were common), but his heart wasn't common; and, Carrie, I'd liever sit by my fire and remember it than—study. And I'd liever have Liz and Sue married to men as thinks the world of 'em, and have children at their breasts (troubles or no troubles) than have them sit alone with naught but a book betwixt them and the thought that there was nothing but the next meal to look on to, and be lonely night after night, and a long day to follow, and so on with all the nights and days, and nothing to expect, nothin. Eh, my dear! I'm sure I thank the Lord (and *you*) for all the comforts I have. And more I thank *Him* that you aren't dependent on anyone, nor poor. (Struggles 'd never do for you, my dear. And He spares them to you.) But often when I kneel at nights I can't help asking Him if that's *all* He can send—'just a little happiness.

too, O Lord,' I call out; not out loud, but in my silly old heart."

A very sharp stab of compunction assailed Carrie. Just now she had noted very shrewdly, though silently, that her mother had spoken of *three* children; as if Ben and Susie and Lizzie were all the children she had. And, hurt, she had confessed that it was not strange or unjust; they were loudly demonstrative in their affection for their mother, and what was *she?* Because *their* noisy kissings, and inopportune embracings struck her as "common" she had made of a cool evenness of demeanor, and absence of all effusion a point of breeding. And now came this poignant revelation of a simple, but loving, mother kneeling at night in the decorous comfort of her lonely bedchamber, and crying out to Heaven for happiness for the daughter who had always kept her at arm's length.

The girl's really pretty face was held between her two long and shapely hands as she bent her eyes on the fire, and her mother saw shining tears slowly form in those eyes, and slowly break from them.

"Oh, my dear;" cried the old lady. "Oh Carrie!"

"I'm a wicked girl."

"Wicked! Because you've never been a husband catcher, like most! Eh, my dear! I've always been proud of it. Sue and Liz led their young fellows on—didn't I know it? They'd have got married right enough, without it, I'll be bound: still I know they led their young fellows on: they were in a hurry like—Sue and Liz were. And for that matter it was in their blood. I was just the same."

"Oh, Mamma, please don't."

"Yes, but I was. I don't know as poor Pentlow wanted much leading on—he was not that sort; he was like one of those big bouncing sort o' dogs as'll scarce wait for a look in your eye to encourage 'em. But Mr. Girvan was very different. I was younger still then, and prettier, too, but he was a deliberate kind o' gentleman, as had been a bachelor too long to give it up without a bit of help, and I did help him, else p'raps I'd never have been your mother—and many's the time I've wondered whether I'd not better have left him alone. But I doubt, if I had, you'd never have had a mother at all, so I do. But, Carrie, I shouldn't like to think o' *you* helping on. It wouldn't be like you, nor yet worthy of you, so it wouldn't."

"Mamma, dear; I wasn't thinking of that at all when I said I was wicked. I was thinking of how I'd treated you, not since I grew up—indeed always."

"Treated me! I don't know any girl as does more for her mother. What have I ever wanted for? Isn't it your bread I eat? and isn't every stitch on my back your giving? and the good bed I lie in, warm and comfortable (when many lie cold and hard) isn't it *your* bed, as you paid for? Yes, and though you see that I have everything, haven't I always plenty in my purse? And my children—where'd they be but for you? Who educated them and paid for their weddings, and saw as they didn't go empty to their husbands?"

Mrs. Pentlow made no more pretence of knitting; her knitting lay in her ample lap, and her large soft hands fluttered in the air and large shining tears coursed down her cheeks.

But Carrie shook her head.

"All the same," she said sadly, "I've neglected you—"

"Neglected me! I'd like to hear anyone else say that! If that's neglect!"

"Yes. That's just what it has been. I've let you live all alone in the same house with me. All these years. All these selfish years."

"My dear, I can't abide to hear you speak like that. I've always understood. We're not equals, and that's the simple truth. I was never your papa's equal and he missed it. Couldn't I see it? He was a gentleman to his fingers' ends, and I was never up to his level, never. Poor Pentlow, you couldn't do with him at all, but he and me *were* equals, he was my sort, and he was the husband I was fit for. And Ben and Liz and Sue—I'm the mother for *them*, but not for you. It cuts me to hear you blaming yourself, so it does."

"Eh, mother: it's time I did blame myself. I've not been in much of a hurry about it. Doesn't all you say make me blame myself much more?"

"Then I wish I'd bitten my tongue out before saying it—"

"No, I'm glad. It shows me what I'm like," and the girl bent her pretty head lower, toward the flickering red, warm heart of the fire, and added, "I *know* now. There's only one real lady in this room, and it's not me."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Carrie, Carrie, don't say such ugly things. Don't now. It does cut me. All the beautiful clothes as ever you've given me could never make a real lady of me, and I know it well."

"No," said Carrie, "it's not on your back, it's in your heart. And God did it."

V

"Mamma," said Carrie, a day or two after this, as they were finishing their early dinner, that Miss Girvan had liked to call "luncheon," "those ladies, the nuns, I mean, asked me if I would go to tea with them at their Convent. I think I shall go to-day."

"Do, my dear. It will do you good."

"Yes. I think I shall have Blight's carriage and drive there. But I want you to come, too."

"Me!"

"You wouldn't *mind* coming?"

"Oh, no, I should like to see that place. But shan't I be in your way?"

"When you say that it *cuts* me, as you say. Do come, you'll like those ladies."

So they went together. And the drive was quite a treat to Mrs. Pentlow. She liked an excuse for wearing her velvet and furs, and she liked what she called a "ride"; and particularly she liked having Carrie at her side chatting comfortably.

At the Convent, Miss Girvan asked for Sister Philippine in some dread of hearing that she was out begging. But the Sister Portress said No, it was not Sister Philippine's turn, she was in, and, if the ladies would wait a few minutes she would fetch her. Meanwhile she led the way across a bit of garden to the main building.

"It's a pretty garden," said Mrs. Pentlow to Carrie. "What a thing for those old bodies to have such a nice place to walk in."

A number of old men were strolling about in groups and enjoying a pipe of tobacco.

"I'm glad," Mrs. Pentlow whispered, "as they let them smoke. I thought, likely, there'd be a rule against it, when you're old, and poor, and done for, a pipe o' tobacco is a fine thing. There's not so many pleasures left as you can do without one and not miss it. I guess these nun-ladies are sensible. And the Convent's a fine building, look! Not *prisony*. A fine cheerful house, wi' plenty o' windows and light. Yet it don't look all draughts and bleakness. Carrie, here's a nun."

It was Sister Philippine, and she was walking toward them with the last sort of person in the world Miss Girvan would have expected to see there—a young man. A tall, stalwart, decidedly handsome young man, with a rather loud voice, and a cheerful open-air kind of manner.

"Sister Philippine," said the Portress, going forward, "these ladies are asking for you."

"Well, now!" cried Sister Philippine, "if that's not kind of you, Miss Girvan! I didn't half think you meant to come. And you've come so soon."

Carrie introduced her mother.

"That's better still of you, Miss Girvan, to bring her along. This gentleman is our doctor, Dr. Desmond Clare—he cures us all for nothing. Nearly a hundred patients he has with us all, and not a fee among the lot!"

"And not many patients among the whole hundred," said Dr. Clare laughing. "Nuns never let on that they're ill, if they ever are; and the little ones are the healthiest children I come across. It's only a few of the old folk, and you know, Mrs. Girvan, that nursing's the best part of doctoring, and it's the Sisters who do all that."

Mrs. Pentlow thought him a delightful young man—Carrie was not sure.

"But," said the former, "though I'm like Miss Girvan's mother, I'm not Mrs. Girvan. I'm Mrs. Pentlow."

As plainly as if she had said it, her tone implied, "I'm *only* Mrs. Pentlow, that's all."

"Before we go in," suggested Sister Philippine, "perhaps you'd like to see the garden. This is only the old men's garden. The old women's is prettier, I think, and then there's the little ones' playground, and their little garden plots, and their cricket piece."

I do not propose to make the reader also go round those gardens. But Mrs. Pentlow and her daughter went round the whole place, and Dr. Clare helped Sister Philippine to do the honors.

"If I hadn't such a good daughter," Carrie's mother confidentially informed the young man, "and want for nothing, I should think I'd be fine and content *here*. It's that homelike."

"Yes, it is. It isn't *called* a 'Home,' thank goodness, but it just is one. We never call our *own* homes 'Homes,' do we? We stick that label on places that aren't at all *home-ish,* and that aren't for ourselves; the nuns *make* this a home, and take good care not to label it."

All the same he was half laughing. For the elderly lady at his side, in her furs and velvets, looked so particularly prosperous that he was amused at her idea of needing a refuge for her age but for having such a good daughter.

Miss Girvan and Sister Philippine were well in front, and Mrs. Pentlow (who loved talking) chatted away unrestrainedly with the cheery young Irish doctor.

"Do you live here?" she asked him.

"Oh, no. I live in town; I have my work there. This is just recreation."

"What part of town do you live in?"

"In Washington Avenue. All by myself. I'm a helpless bachelor."

"I'm sure you're not helpless. Washington Avenue! And our house is at the end of Jefferson Street, not so far off of it."

"I call it quite near."

"Who," demanded Mrs. Pentlow, "mends for you?"

"No one in particular."

"Eh dear! And your socks—when there's holes in them, how do you manage?"

"*They* manage to get bigger—the holes do," answered Dr. Clare laughing.

"So I should think!" She glanced involuntarily down at his feet as if she were wondering whether there were holes in his socks at that moment. He perfectly understood the glance.

"Yes," he confessed boldly, "my toes are poking through *now*."

"It's fearful. Dr. Clare, I just wish you'd let me mend you. I mend my own boy still, though he is out in the world. He sends me a parcel o' things and I send them back something more Christian-like than they come. But I've nothing to do, and I'd just love to mend you, too; your own mother wouldn't mind?"

"My own mother," the young man said gently, "has gone already where these good nuns are going."

"Eh dear, eh dear! And I'm sure she'd be no ways an old woman not if she'd been spared, now."

"She would be fifty-two; I'm thirty-one, and she was just one and twenty when I was born."

"Poor thing! And to have to go away and leave you: eh, it must have been hard for her."

"I don't know. She was wrapped up in my father, and his death nearly killed her: she died herself so soon after that I think she could only feel that she was hurrying after him catching him up on his way."

"Well," said Mrs. Pentlow with all her frank simplicity, "I've buried two husbands: and it was hard enough to lose them, but I shouldn't have liked to go and leave my children—I've three besides Carrie there. Not own brother and sisters of hers, you know; nor yet of her sort. Ben and Sue and Liz are more ordinary-like."

It is quite possible that Miss Girvan's mother amused Desmond Clare, but if he smiled sometimes it was a smile full of friendliness. He liked the simple motherly creature, and told himself that she was altogether "a good sort."

Presently Sister Philippine took her turn of walking with her, and Miss Girvan fell to the young man. He found her very unlike her mother, much less talkative, and either shy or reserved. Had she been a young girl fresh from school he would have decided that she was merely shy, but she was not without a certain dignity and self-possession, and her demure quietness was anything but awkward.

He found the easiest thing to talk about, as it was in the circumstances the most obvious, was the Convent, the nuns and their work. To that she listened with evident interest, and after a while he perceived that her face could show plenty of animation. He was quite sure that, whereas her mother had almost at once begun talking of *him* and of herself, it would not have been possible to make Miss Girvan talk of herself or of him. When Sister Philippine led her guests indoors she begged him also to come in and have his tea, but he excused himself, and took his leave.

"My dear," observed Mrs. Pentlow as she and Carrie drove home, "I *did* enjoy it. A *treat* it was. And what a splendid tea! I'd like, if one got to know 'em better, to ask for the receipt of those potato-scones—as light as feathers they were, and so much taste; in general potato-scones are heavy and no more taste than flock. The one they call Reverend Mother—I *did* like her: and so pretty an' all. You'd never think, she had all that great house and near a hundred in family to manage for. A pretty doctor's bill she'd have every year, too, if that Dr. Clarke didn't do it for nothing."

" 'Clare,' Mamma: his name is Dr. Clare."

"Just like me. I always do get wrong hold o' names. Carrie, I'd like to give them something for their house—you keep me so well in pocket. I'd got it on the tip of my tongue to offer something as we were coming away, then I was afraid it'd look badly—like paying for the good tea."

"Yes, I'm sure you were right. It would be better to send it."

VI

"Norah," said Carrie a fortnight later, "will you tell Mrs. Pentlow that tea is ready?"

"I will, Miss—but she's got a visitor. A young gentleman. Shall I bring another cup?"

Miss Girvan hesitated, "almost flurried, she was," Norah subsequently reported to the cook.

"Has he been long?" asked Carrie.

"Pretty well, Miss. Best part of an hour."

"Then he must be near going. No, you needn't bring another cup. Just tell Mamma, when he has gone."

But Norah considered that the breakfast-room fire must want attention, and went to see to it herself without troubling Jemima.

"Norah," said Mrs. Pentlow, "it's nearly five o'clock. Didn't I hear you carrying the tea-things to the parlor?"

"Yes, ma'am. It's ready."

"Then we'll go to tea, come along, Dr. Clare," said the old lady. "You shall carry my traps for me."

Norah usually carried them, but she was far too wise to offer her services on this occasion. She went instead for the extra cup and saucer, taking care not to reach the drawing-room before Mrs. Pentlow and her guest.

"Well, I never!" said Jemima, "a gentleman's fallen down the chimley at last! If it wasn't for sollying her gown I guess Miss Girvan'd be fit to jump up it to get out of his way."

"An *Irish* gentleman, too," said Norah, giving an extra polish to the cup and saucer, "and lovely tall. And the eyes of him!"

"You go along. It's Miss Girvan as his eyes are for."

"Please God."

Miss Girvan's drawing-room struck Desmond as somehow quaintly characteristic: not that it was quaint in itself, but simply that it was so demure, so staid, and prim: it was by no means ugly, and it was comfortable, warm, too, though its colors were cold. It was not devoid of taste, but it suggested a taste somewhat timid. And it was too elderly.

"He thinks it dreadful," thought Carrie, who had caught the quick comprehensive glance with which the young man took it all in.

She was not sorry to see him, but she did not look glad. He shook hands, but her own hand barely touched him and he thought it limp. He had not the least idea that she, having heard from Sister Philippine of his good work among the poor, his generosity, and self-sacrifice, regarded him as a hero.

He was still thinking of her room. "It is," he thought, "thirty years too old for her. Here she evidently *lives,* she has assumed the rôle of old maid at eight and twenty." (Needless to say her mother had told him the age of all her children.)

As Norah had said, Miss Girvan was really a little flurried, but her manner was so calm and staid that it only showed itself in a slightly heightened color that made her prettier.

"It's something uncommon," observed her mother, "for *us* to entertain a gentleman; the only one that ever comes in is Mr. Pound."

"And who," asked Desmond cheerfully, "is the lucky Mr. Pound?"

"Oh, he's our Minister—Reverend Simeon Pound. I don't know as he's lucky. He has eleven children and they mostly have something catching among 'em."

"He must be a gold-mine to his doctor," said Desmond laughing.

"Not if his doctor's like you and does it all for nothing," said Mrs. Pentlow.

"Oh, but all my patients aren't nuns. I assure you, I've rather a big practice, and some nice sickly rich patients among them; people who wouldn't think it respectable to have a cold without sending for the doctor. Miss Girvan, I'm sure that's a first-rate piano. I'm cracked about music."

"She never plays, hardly," complained her mother, "and it's a pity. She used to play anything you like—nothing too hard for her. She studies, you see."

Desmond looked slightly surprised. He had not thought of Miss Girvan as a blue-stocking.

"Oh, Mamma! The truth is," said Carrie simply, "I *never* could play. At school they taught me difficult sonatas, but I always had wooden hands. And my 'studies' are—reading novels."

Of course, when she mentioned them, he glanced at her hands, which were singularly pretty, and looked by no means wooden.

"After tea," she went on quickly, "perhaps you would have mercy on that poor piano, and play for us upon it. It is always kept in tune, but it must be wretched having all possible music in oneself, as it has, and for none of it ever to be brought out."

"I can't believe," he said, watching her face with interest, "that you do not *care* for music, or you would not have said that. Perhaps you are idle."

"I am altogether idle. I do nothing at all. Nothing. But as for caring for music—I only know that I have none in myself. And I simply do not know whether I should care for it in anyone else. I have never heard any music that seemed to me very beautiful."

"You never go to concerts? To *good* concerts?"

"We have lived in small places, and—to tell the truth I never go *anywhere.*"

"That is true," said her mother, shaking her head rather dolefully. "Dr. Clare, young people are supposed to love nothing like going about, but *she* never has gone anywhere. Dear me! I should have thought myself in prison if *I'd* been forced to shut myself up as she has shut *herself* up, and no one to free her."

The young man was keenly interested. He was sure that the motherly widow was letting escape some long pent-up feeling; and that the girl shrank from hearing it, not crossly, but from habit, and from a shy reserve that obsessed her. He was also sure that the girl was not merely dull or stupid.

To him, who fully realized that this sober, neutral-tinted room was all the setting her still young life had, it seemed pathetic, almost ghastly. There was something morbid about it that almost angered him, that he at all events wanted to smash up.

"You see," the girl said, speaking with an oddly humble honesty, "I have never had any friends."

Her tone said, quite simply, "Why should I have had any?" There was the humility; and it was odd because he felt instinctively that Miss Girvan had not been used to think herself inferior to her surroundings.

"If you have had no friends," he said smiling, "surely that must have been your fault."

"Oh, yes," she answered, taking his words in a sense quite different from that which he had intended, "I am sure it must have been my fault. The world is full of nice people—I am sure it is. But I have never had the knack of finding them."

"And, of course, if you really do always shut yourself up—in here—they could not find you."

"That's what I say," declared Mrs. Pentlow, slightly varying what she actually had said, "folks can't knock at the front door and tell the girl they'd thank her to show the drawing-room as they'd come to make friends with Miss Girvan."

But Carrie remembered so clearly what her mother really had said, that she flushed hotly.

"She's very pretty—*more* than pretty!" thought Desmond. Her character struck him as by no means dull, but queerly dormant, and he was sure it might awaken to something fine and noble. There was, he told himself, an almost childlike innocence, a limpid purity and a plain honesty that the cruel shyness, or timidity, only made more interesting. Yet he knew that she was useless, and he was used to women, like the Sisters of the Holy House, whose whole life was usefulness and service; yet her uselessness did not at all dispose him to think meanly of her—it only struck him as a part of her misfortune.

He noted shrewdly that when she was not blushing her face was pale with a rather peculiar delicacy of clear whiteness, yet he was certain that she was not delicate or unhealthy. It was simply the result of a life almost wholly passed indoors.

"Now," she said, when it was evident that he had finished his tea, "will you not try the piano?"

He at once did as she asked. And Mrs. Pentlow secretly thought, "She can play better than him if she likes. Those things aren't difficult, I guess."

They sounded quite simple at all events, and were soft and dreamy, largely on minor keys; a string of very short things, without (as Mrs. Pentlow decided) much tune. She liked plenty of "air"; things you could get hold of immediately and hum.

Carrie did not think them so easy, and she perceived at once the delicacy and certainty of the young man's touch. Listening very attentively as she did, she began to fancy a certain sequence and connection between the rapidly changing themes; almost a voice expressing one idea in varying phrases. Some of the first movements were a little sad, in all there was something plaintive. This rather surprised her, for he had struck her as above all things cheerful; indeed, she had felt his buoyant cheerfulness almost as a reproach. Yet she was aware that in what he played there was no morbidity.

After quite a momentary pause—as if what he had been doing was merely an introduction—he seemed to express a theme more definitely. There came a little prelude full of animation and light; then a movement of ever-deepening softness, almost sleepiness. And this effect remained; and here it was that Carrie became fully aware of the composer's and the player's genius, for surely these sounds were meant to express, and did express, what you would say sound could not—a heavier and heavier silence. It did not really last long, but appeared to; and while it lasted every note seemed like a tiny flutter, ghostly, almost inaudible, falling on the thick silence, as a leaf might on the floor of an autumn forest, as a muffled footfall in an empty place. Then you would say the silence was a mere breathing in sleep, an unconscious waiting. And at last came a light, but definite footfall; and then a singular rustle and awakening, like the spring's resurrection, that gave all the effect of light and sunshine, merry breeze, and merry bird, whose frozen music thawed in the day's eager warmth.

"What is it?" Carrie asked, rising and going over to him, as soon as he had ended, and before he had time to go to her.

"The Legend of the Briar Rose."

"By whom?"

"By Nobody."

Of course she knew that he meant by himself.

VII

It grew, by fairly rapid degrees, into a custom for Desmond to come to see Mrs. Pentlow and her daughter. And every time he came he played, and presently they found that he could sing, too. Carrie's mother liked the singing much better; she could understand it better—so she thought.

Because she liked ballads, he oftenest sang them; old English ballads, old Scots ballads, and Irish, too, of course.

Mrs. Pentlow liked the English ballads best. Carrie liked best the Scottish; perhaps there was something in her Scots blood that answered to them. Many of them were terribly pathetic; and as she sat listening by the fire her eyes often brimmed with tears; and he knew, though she did not think that he could see her.

"They are not morbid, it seems to me," she told him one evening, "and yet they are so pathetic that I can hardly bear them."

"There is nothing morbid in pathos," he answered simply. "Nor anything unwholesome in being touched by real sorrows, though the hearts that felt them have ceased to beat centuries ago. I shouldn't think very well of you if you could hear 'The Queen's Maries' and not be moved."

The echo of it was deeper down than in her ears.

"Last nicht the Queen had four Maries,
This nicht she'll hae but three.
There's Mary Beaton and Mary Seton
And Mary Carmichael—and me."

"Your Scots ballads," she told him, smiling, "have made me more a Jacobite than ever."

"I'm glad you are a Jacobite. Every woman the world over is, if she is worth anything, and a Scots girl *must* be."

"It was after the '45 that my great-grandfather's grandfather came over here," she said. "He was the second son, and had 'gone out' with the Prince. His father and elder brother stayed at home."

"Yes. I know. To see how the cat was going to jump. I'd rather be descended from your man. My people had fought for James in Ireland. And the King made the Desmond Clare of that day an Earl." He laughed and added, "I'm Jacobite Earl of Tallaght now, if I wanted to set up as an American Earl."

"*Are* you American," she asked, "or Irish?"

"I am both. My father was naturalized here, and I was born here. I'm an American. But every drop of my blood is Irish, and I was educated in Dublin."

They were alone in the drawing-room, for during Desmond's singing Norah had come and called Mrs. Pentlow away to see a dressmaker. Carrie's mother loved clothes still, and, not regarding herself as a lily of the field, took much thought as to what she should put on.

"Did you really compose that music you played here the first time you came?" Carrie asked, almost absent-mindedly.

"To express the Legend of the Briar Rose? Yes; it came out of my head as I went along."

"I thought it wonderful. I don't pretend to have known all it meant—for though I knew the legend, I did not know what you were doing. I wish, now I *do* know, you would play it again."

"I don't know if I could. I was *thinking* then of the Legend. Something had brought it into my head."

"Think of it again!"

"I'm not sure if I can—in the same way. The Princess has begun to wake."

He looked down at her and smiled; it was a very pleasant smile, kind and honest, with not a hint of mockery in it. But she looked up in time to catch it, and certainly he had no cause to complain that she was pale.

"How," thought he, "could I ever have been so stupid as to think her pretty? She is much, *much* more."

Yet he was sorry he had made her blush, for he was singularly unselfish, and though it made her (as he thought) lovely, he saw that she was startled.

"Oh," she said, catching at anything to say, "I have wondered whether she, the Princess, grew old while she slept her long sleep."

"When she woke she was younger than ever," he assured her. "And she kept on growing younger."

"I hope," Carrie declared laughing, "that she knew when to stop, or the Prince must have found her a perfect baby."

"Oh, no! no fear at all of that. He liked to watch her growing younger. In that way he could be sure that her wretched long sleep had stolen nothing—that she had got back the empty years."

"It's rather a ghastly story after all. It all hung on a chance. If he had never come she would have never wakened."

"Oh," protested Desmond, cheerfully, "he was *bound* to come. That was what he was for."

"*He* hadn't been idle before. He had been doing all sorts of things while she slept."

"All sorts of dull useful things. *The* thing was to get through the tangle round her and wake *her*. That was his business. All the rest, that came before it, was only training."

"I wonder," said Carrie, "whether he found her after all rather stupid?"

"Certainly not. She was *not* stupid—quite the contrary."

Carrie laughed.

"You seem to know all about her," she said.

"Yes. I have made a complete study of her. If you imagine she was stupid it only shows that I know far more about her than you do."

"Don't you think that she was liable to relapses? I suspect she had a somnambulistic way at times. The sleep had got so into her bones."

"You really do not understand her a bit! She had slept so long that, once awake, she had a horror of it. His difficulty was to induce her ever to shut her eyes."

"It surprises me that you should be interested in the Legend. It isn't my idea of you."

"Do tell me what your idea of me is."

"Well, I should have thought you quite incapable of patience with anything morbid; and, after all, the Briar Rose story *is* morbid."

"No. It is the story of a horrible morbid thing cured. The Princess fell sick of that disease; I am interested precisely because she was cured. The Prince cured her. You see, I am a doctor; and a very rare disease is far more appealing to a doctor than an every-day one."

"You think her disease very rare?"

"So rare that I never expected to come up against a case of it in real life. That can not be an accident. I was allowed to meet it in order to cure it. That is what, I believe, I was for."

"You think it worth while?"

"I can imagine nothing better worth while—worth a whole life's effort, if that were necessary. I tell you that I believe it to be the thing I am for."

"It seems to me," she said in very low tones, "that you are very humble."

"Humble! It seems to *me* that I am very ambitious—like the fellow who woke the princess. You remember how he did it?"

"By breaking through the tangle that had grown up all around her while she slept."

"That first. But he did not simply call out, and babble in her ear, and go away. He held out his hand and asked for hers; I call that amazingly ambitious."

"To me it seems quite different. Only a singular goodness."

"I told you you did not know anything about her. Singular goodness, indeed! Why he was a very ordinary fellow. She was miles above him."

"*She* didn't think so."

"No, God bless her! She had slept so long—without so much as a dream—that she simply had no idea as to what men were like. And, having no one to compare him with, when she saw him she did not know that he was quite an ordinary decent sort of fellow."

"Oh, I'm glad you have done abusing him. You admit that he was a 'decent' sort of fellow."

"Oh, dear, yes. I'm far from intending to abuse him. I should like to make the very best of him. I should paint him with the heroic virtues—if I wasn't sure of being found out."

He laughed, and she smiled.

"Perhaps," she suggested, "she wouldn't have demanded quite all the virtues."

"No, she was far too wise. She had plenty for them both. What she wanted was an honest fellow, not too foolish, a protective sort of man, used to the knock-about world outside of which she knew nothing, and of which, alone, she would have been frightened, in which she would have lost her way badly. *She* had all the delicacy and gentleness, *he* had to supply the toughness that can stand the knocks and jars of life."

"I am sure *he* was gentle," Carrie protested, but in a very soft voice, "marvelously gentle."

"Pray don't think I grudge your praising him. I love it. Praise him far above his deserts and *I* shan't object. But I'm afraid you don't know *him* as well as *I* know *her*."

"Oh, I can fancy he had his faults. For instance, he was sure he knew best."

"Only about her."

"For my part I would rather believe what his friends say of him than what you say. As to *her* friends——"

"Poor lady! She hadn't any."

They both laughed, and Carrie lifted demurely laughing eyes to his and asked:

"How *can* you tell!"

"I've heard her say so."

"Gracious! And she dead this thousand years!"

"She's no more dead than you are. She isn't even very old. Not very, very old."

"How old?"

"She looks about one and twenty. Sometimes much younger."

"That's not very honest of her. For she's older than that. A great deal older."

"Gracious! And how do you know?"

"She and I were much together as children: even earlier. I can't remember her birth, but I remember her falling downstairs at four years old and it hurt *me*. It even raised bumps on my forehead."

"What sympathy! You *must* have been fond of her!"

"I don't know that I was. I don't know that I am. She bored me to death. She'd bore *you* if you had to live with her as I have."

"No. You're wrong again. There is nothing boring about her. She interests me all the time. I propose to spend all the rest of my life with her, and you shall see that she will give up boring even herself. Only she'll have to do for me what she did for the fellow who got through the tangle. You pretend to know all about her. Do you think she'll do that?"

"Do what?"

"Give me her hand?"

A PRELUDE IN PROSE

When it became known in Blackmere that Mere Park was taken there was quite a flutter of excitement.

"It would be," said Miss Ranger, "a great thing for the place if some really pleasant strangers came among us."

"Oh! of course," Miss Bywater agreed (but doubtfully), "if they really were pleasant."

"I agree with you," Mrs. Landward observed, "one never knows what strangers will be: and we have been so comfortable among ourselves. We all get on together."

"Yes," said Miss Ranger, "that's just it. We are all getting on together. None of us grow younger. . . ."

"I shouldn't wish to," declared Miss Bywater, who certainly might have grown thirty years younger without becoming exactly a girl.

Mrs. Landward sighed; but her sigh was more cheerful than Miss Bywater's protestation of contentment. She was nearly seventy, and had long given up thinking of youth.

"All the wishing in the world wouldn't make me anything short of an elderly woman," Miss Ranger continued; "but a little young blood in the place would do us all good."

"There are the Carraway girls," suggested Miss Bywater.

"Yes; and all three of them have been the Carraway girls these twenty years," remarked Miss Ranger, ruthlessly. "And there are the four Dearings—all young ladies, no doubt; but the youngest of them will never see thirty again."

"Cissy and Carry are twins, though, and not five and thirty," Miss Bywater observed, "and Helena comes between them and Julia. Julia won't be two and thirty till July—she was called after the month."

"I shouldn't at all mind if the new people at Mere Park were young—quite young," said Mrs. Landward. "But I rather shrink from strangers. And I hope they won't be rich—we all live so quietly."

"A little money in the place wouldn't be amiss," Miss Ranger observed, "and they are not likely to be millionaires. Mere Park is nice, but it would not accommodate any establishment."

"Old Mrs. Prestwick always kept a butler," Miss Bywater reminded her, slightly offended. For Mere Park was the nearest approach to a "place" quite close to the little town.

"Oh, yes, and a gardener, and three maids; that's not an establishment," said Miss Ranger.

She was second cousin of Sir Park Ranger, of Rangewood, and had larger ideas than Miss Bywater.

"I wonder if there will be many daughters," Mrs. Landward remarked. She took it for granted that the tenant would be a widow lady—old Mrs. Prestwick had been a widow, and all the married ladies in Blackmere (except the doctor's wife and the Rector's) were widows and had daughters. No one had any sons on the spot; the doctor had one, and so had the Rector, but Dr. Swallow's son was in the Colonies and the younger Mr. Glebe was a curate in the Midlands.

"There may not be any," suggested Miss Ranger. "There may be seven sons."

So bold a surmise startled Mrs. Landward.

"It would be a great thing for the Carraways and the Dearings," said Miss Bywater. "Seven sons!"

"If they were not too young," said Miss Ranger drily.

As it turned out, the tenant of Mere Park was not a widow; but he was a widower, and not offensively young—perhaps as old as Miss Bywater. He had not many daughters, only one in fact, and that one was hardly twenty years of age; pretty, too, and with pleasant manners, as every one agreed as soon as she had been seen in church.

Captain de Guise looked delicate, and Miss de Guise evidently took great care of him. There was also a young man—not precisely handsome, but "well-looking," and certainly better dressed than Dr. Swallow. Was he a brother? Was he a young Mr. de Guise, or only a visitor? If he was Captain de Guise's son, would he live at Blackmere, and if so what would he do there?

It transpired in the course of a day or two that he was Captain de Guise's son, but only half-brother to Miss de Guise, for the Captain was not now for the first time a widower.

Mrs. Landward, who had only been a widow once, thought he should not have married again; Miss Bywater, who had never been a widow, thought it did not matter. He was not old even now.

"I call Muriel a sweet name," she declared, "it sounds hereditary; and de—with a small 'de,' you know—quite aristocratic; no doubt they are well connected. Muriel de Guise! I wonder what the Captain's name is—something equally distinguished, I daresay; his nose is marked; you can see that. I remember Lord Oldcourt's nose, when he gave new colors to the Militia."

"So do I," said Miss Ranger, "when he blew it it was like a fog-horn."

"I alluded to the shape. It was remarkable—all the Oldcourts have it, I understood."

"Miss de Guise hasn't her father's nose, and I think she is just as well without it," Miss Ranger noted.

"Oh! there are male and female noses in families," Miss Bywater conceded, "hers may be some ancestress's. I should say young Mr. de Guise must be nine and twenty . . . and Julia Dearing doesn't look more."

Ranalph de Guise was, in fact, twenty-seven, and the Captain's name was Ranalph, too. Lest the reader (should there be one) should share in Miss Bywater's altruistic hopes on Julia Dearing's behalf, we may as well say at once that to the day of his death the younger Ranalph never had any inkling of them, and never realized the separate existence of any of the Miss Dearings. And yet he continued to live in Blackmere.

And so did his sister, which concerns us more.

On the whole, the arrival of the de Guise family did little to justify the pleasant fluster it had occasioned. No one accused them of being too fine for the place, and they were civilly responsive to its gentle advances. But the Captain thought himself an invalid, and disliked evening parties except in his own house. Muriel seemed occupied in making him comfortable, and her brother was often away. It was whispered that he was a poet, and he would not have objected had he been aware of the whisper, though he would have preferred to have it circulated in London.

"I should think," he observed kindly to his sister one day, "that you could write yourself. Prose, of course." (No poet ever believes that any contemporary could write poetry.)

"Certainly it would be prose—if I wrote in verse," said Muriel. "It generally is, don't you think?"

"It almost always is. That's why I recommend you not to affect verse. I shouldn't like to see your initials at the bottom of a 'Lyric' in the Poet's Corner of a local paper."

His own initials had lately been visible to the world at the end of a Sonnet on the Waterhen in a Saturday weekly much addicted to literature and total abstinence. Ranalph had now quite decided to adopt poetry as a profession; and, having seven or eight hundred a year of his own, it did not much matter.

When he spoke of his sister writing prose, it was chiefly an opening for the discussion of his own future as a poet: and, as she did not seem disposed to jump at his fraternal suggestion on her account, he did not press the matter, but talked about literature and himself instead.

"Raeburn says," he observed gravely, "that my powers (whatever they may be) will never fully awake till I have suffered."

Miss de Guise had often heard of Mr. Raeburn; he had been at Cambridge with her brother, and was now on the staff of the paper that had published "The Waterhen." She imagined him to be a somewhat ladylike young man with more taste than sense; but she had never seen him, and only knew him as quoted by Ranalph.

"Wordsworth must have suffered a lot," she remarked. "In secret, I suppose."

"Oh! Wordsworth! I don't know that I think so very much of Wordsworth. Only about two per cent. of his sonnets are great."

He had expected that some reviewer would have said of "The Waterhen" that no finer sonnet had appeared since Wordsworth's "On Westminster Bridge"; but the remark had not yet been made.

"By the way," he said, at the end of this conversation, "Raeburn wants to come down here. Shall I say next week?"

When Mr. Raeburn arrived Muriel was agreeably surprised. That he had taste she could not deny; his talk about books and about beauty in nature, though not at all forced or ostentatious, proved it. But he was not in the least ladylike; neither was he (as she had decided he would be) prettily good-looking. Perhaps he could hardly be called good-looking at all, but he had a fine, strong face, and a manly figure, stalwart and vigorous. He was certainly not deficient in good sense and he did not talk too much; when he did talk, he evidently knew what he wanted to say. Somehow to her surprise he said to her one day:

"Don't encourage Ranny to go in for poetry. If it's there it will come out. A man ought to work; I don't call making sonnets work. A fellow who has nothing to do but wonder what he can say in poetry will never have anything to say."

"I thought you encouraged him."

"No, I don't. I got them to put in his sonnet, because it deserved to be put in—better than plenty of verses they had published. But I try to make him do something with his life: if his life has nothing in it neither will his poetry have anything in it. To some men troubles have given the spur that drove them to be poets—but one doesn't desire that incentive for one's friend."

"And a woman? Have the women who wrote best had any special trouble, or anything special at all in their lives to urge them into literature?"

"Miss de Guise, I wasn't talking of women or of literature, but of a young man who wants to be a 'poet'."

"I beg your pardon."

"You needn't. I only asked you to note what was my point. Now for yours. The five greatest women writers in English have been, as I think, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, Emily Brontë and George Eliot. The last was set on, it may be, by the cross-purposes of her life. Emily Brontë was unique and can form no instance for common argument. The other three were particularly normal women who were only remarkable for doing with extraordinary fidelity the duties they found ready to hand. If Emily Brontë and George Eliot can hardly be cited as peculiarly domestic, they can."

"So you think a woman's absorption in her home need not prevent her writing?"

"Not if she knows how. Jane Austen, Fanny Burney, and Miss Edgeworth certainly did know how. Do you know that I am a publisher's reader?"

"No. I thought you were on the staff of the Lambeth Review."

"So I am. It does not mean a great deal. I write about two columns a week in it. I could hardly live on that. I write other things: and also I read for one firm of publishers. 'House' is the cant term now, not 'firm'; we only talk of the Firm of Habsburg or Bourbon; it is the House of such and such a publisher. In Byron's time they didn't mind being called booksellers."

"Do you have to read many books by women?"

"Hundreds—and by old women in trousers, too. It's not a fiercely exciting trade—being a publisher's reader. But now and then one is rewarded. I have here in the house with me a MS. that is a book. I should like to read you some of it. May I?"

"Wouldn't that be unfair to the writer?"

"Depend upon it the writer would like all the world to read it: and many will."

"Is it a man's writing or a woman's?"

"The writer assumes, or really owns, a name that might be a man's or a woman's. That is why I conclude it is not a real name. You remember that the Brontës called themselves Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell."

"And this name?"

"Ah! That's a different matter. I am sure I may read you part, or if you like, the whole of the book; but I'm not so sure that I can tell the author's name—yet. I shall certainly advise our people to publish the book, and they will: then you will know the name."

When Mr. Raeburn began to read, Miss de Guise said laughingly, "I mustn't peep at the MS. or I should certainly make up my mind whether the handwriting were a man's or a woman's."

"You may peep as much as you like; it is all typewritten. Shall I begin?"

He read three or four chapters; then paused.

"Well?" he asked. "Have you nothing to say?"

"I am not a publisher's reader."

"No. But I know you are what is more to the point—a reader. If anyone talks to me for five minutes about books I can tell if they know what a real book is."

"And you have said that this is a book?"

"Yes. A singular book. Not because it deals with abnormal things—that is mere singularity and may be merely bad taste. You can see that it deals with quite ordinary people and events; and there is no effort to make them seem rare and strange. The rarity is in the power to make them absorbing. Can you deny you are interested—already?"

"No. It does not interest me."

"It must. This writer is so full of interest in the plain folk described, so intimate in knowledge of them that the capacity of appreciation amounts to creation. No great author ever created anybody; the 'creations' of fiction or of poetry are monstrosities. Shakespeare and Jane Austens did not manufacture men and women, but perceive them."

"Jane Austen and Shakespeare in a breath!"

"The universe and a village tea-party may be joined in a breath; both are real. His theme was everything; hers was what she knew. No one could have known it more perfectly. This writer also knows; and he (or she) handles a thing Jane, the supremely tactful, never touched—emotion—and so delicately that one is moved before suspecting any assault on one's feelings. A pathetic grocer. Confess you never foresaw pathos threatening a grocer with flabby ears."

"I shall confess nothing. The moment the grocer appeared (dropping h's over his shoulder to his wife in the parlor behind the shop) I knew that he was ultimately intended to give me a lump in my throat."

"And he did!"

"I was too much occupied in watching the effect of him upon you."

"I wish you would not fence. Tell me that you relish the quality—the real literary quality—of what I have read."

"Of course, if you insist on my relishing it!"

"That's fencing again. I know that you do relish fine work—little as we have talked about books I know that. You are not so uncertain of your own judgment as to admire any that has been sealed with public admiration. Come now—praise me this new writer's work."

"How can I refuse? I am a most obliging person. Tell me in what terms I am to praise and I will use them."

"Obligingly! Miss de Guise, you are exasperating. If this were poetry and you were a poet, I should tell you you were jealous."

"No, I'm not jealous of your new author. I wish him (or her) all possible success. By the way, how do you know it is a new author?"

"Because with such powers if he was not new he would be well known; and authors stick to the reputation they have gained like grim death."

"You think this one will achieve reputation?"

"Yes."

"And fortune, too?"

"Perhaps. But the two things do not quickly unite just now. I meant literary reputation, and the best literary work is not the most successfully financial. If 'Cranford' were as yet unpublished, and were to appear now, it would gain for its author a real reputation, but it would not probably make her rich. But you still wander from my point; tell me frankly what you think of this book I am reading to you."

"Why not go on reading it?"

"Because I want encouragement. My own opinion of this writer is very high; but I would like another opinion."

"How can my opinion be independent when you force it? Oh! please don't look savage. Come, I'll praise. The people interest me, as you say they interest the author; I feel that I know them."

"Exactly. And also, I hope, that the author makes them worth knowing, which a less art could not."

"Very well. I concede that, too."

"I don't want concessions. I want spontaneous admiration."

Miss de Guise laughed.

"You want so much," she said.

"Yes. More than I may ever get—from you. More than you suspect. You are determined to economize your eulogies of this writer and I am disappointed. I thought you would be more generous."

"You are so generous yourself there's no keeping pace with you. I'm sure Curtis Marke ought to be much obliged to you."

("Curtis Marke," said Mr. Raeburn to himself, "she never saw the title-page.")

"The typescript," he observed aloud, "reached our house from a London Club for ladies and gentlemen. I think of calling there and asking to see Mr. Marke——"

"But how if it be a name assumed?"

"I think it is; but I should run the real person to ground. If, as I believe, the author is a lady, I should have a proposal to make."

"About the publication of the book?"

"About that in any case. But, I should, ultimately, propose something else, if Curtis Marke should be a lady."

"Oh!"

"She and I might share profits."

"Do publishers' readers usually make that sort of proposal?"

"They can only make it once. There could only be one way of it. Curtis Marke would have to become Mrs. Raeburn."

"How romantic! But, Mr. Raeburn, how if she were indeed a lady, but married already?"

"Then I should be disappointed again."

"Again? Have you already 'proposed to Nom de Guerre' and found her married?"

"No; I was alluding to the way in which you disappointed me by your stinginess of admiration of this writer, whom I so deeply admire. Curtis Marke might disappoint me again."

"By having a ready-made husband, I see. Perhaps it would be safer not to risk any such discovery. Why not let well alone, and publish his book——"

"Her book."

"Very well, since you are so sure. Her book; and leave the sharing of the profits alone?"

"I prefer the risk. And as to the profits. I am not really thinking of them. It is the author I want."

"Dear me! What a romance! And perhaps she is fifty—and like a horse. Do not profane people say that the sublime George Eliot was like a horse?"

"Oh, she is not in the least like a horse: and I doubt if she is one and twenty."

"You are in love with her book, and have made a frontispiece to it (her portrait, of course), and have fallen in love with it, too!"

"Over head and ears."

"How delightful: and what is the frontispiece like?"

"Miss de Guise, I am not a poet, nor a painter. I cannot sing or paint perfection . . . just go over to that looking-glass and look in it, and you will have a more exact idea of the frontispiece than any awkward words of mine could give you."

MANEUVERS

"LOR!" exclaimed Mrs. Tumblin, pointing with her whip at a placard posted in front of the bridge over which she was just about to drive.

THIS BRIDGE IS ENTIRELY DESTROYED.

C. D. Martingale,
H. O. Longmore,
Umpires.

said the placard, printed on white paper and affixed to a board mounted on a lean, leggy pole.

"Lor! William, look'y thar!" cried Mrs. Tumblin over her shoulder.

William had his back to the placard, but turned himself round to read it aloud.

"Don't look as if the destruction was visible to the naked eye, do it, mum?" he observed, eyeing the bridge, which presented the same appearance it had worn during a good many centuries.

"No, it don't!" agreed his mistress, rubbing her nose with the whip-handle about where *its* bridge would have been if it had ever had one.

William got down and clambered over the rails into the field on the right to get a good side view of the bridge.

"All right *this* side," he called out. Then climbing back into the lane, and thence into the field on the left of it, "All right *this* side, so far as mottle eye can see."

"S'pose," his mistress suggested, "I get down and walk over; if it bears me you can lead the mare o'er."

"Yes, mum. But wait till I've walked o'er first. If it bears me, 'twill carry you."

It *did* bear him; it also bore Mrs. Tumblin, though if it be true that the last straw can break the camel's back, the difference between her weight and William's *might* have done the bridge's business. For Widow Tumblin was a big woman, tall and portly, and whereas William was, as she herself considered "an insignificant scrap of a creature," who had been brought up in a racing stable and retained all the meagerness of his youth. The mistress expanded with the years, as they rolled prosperously by, the man only dried and withered like some sorts of apples.

"P'raps you'd better take the mare out and *lead* her over," suggested Mrs. Tumblin, safe on the homeward side of the bridge, "and then just pull the car o'er. Dumpling's heavy. I should be loth to see the bridge go in with man and cart and all."

"So should I, mum. If it did, I'd have the law o' they Manoovers, if I was you, mum."

"No law for me, thank you kindly. I'd set the County Council on 'em. Seems hard tho' as they Manoovers should go about like roarin' lions blowin' folks's bridges up."

While she stood watching William lead the mare over, a young officer on horseback, with a white band round his arm, came clattering down the lane.

"Halloa! What's up?" he called out.

"Seems as this here bridge is destroyed completely," replied the widow.

"Oh, it'll carry *you*," the officer declared, laughing. "You're not a belligerent."

"That's as may be," said the widow, uncertain whether a compliment or the reverse was intended.

The officer rode over the bridge himself and cantered away, with sharp glances to right and left.

Dumpling was harnessed again as his mistress took the reins, then William got up behind and they drove on.

As they turned in at the white gate that led by rather a fine old avenue of elms to her own front door—not that Mrs. Tumblin was going there, for she always drove into the yard—she espied a second placard, more audacious, as she inwardly declared, than the first.

THIS FARM AND OUTBUILDINGS IS OCCUPIED BY
HALF A BATTALION OF CAVALRY
(SOUTHERN ARMY)

C. D. Martingale,
H. O. Longmore,

Umpires.

said the placard.

"Well, I never!" cried the widow. "That Martingale beats all for imperence."

"And Longmore's as bad, tho' he do come in half a neck behind," agreed William.

"Cavalry too! They'll eat up all the new hay, sure as my name's Maria."

"And the troopers'll have nought to do but make love to the wenches," suggested William.

"Where be they, 'Lijah?" she called out to a carter, who had just turned loose the big wagon horses in the home field.

"Be 'oo?" asked 'Lijah.

"Why, they cavalry—the sodgers!"

"There baint bin no sodgers, except three as came to the back door a while gon and asked for a drink o' milk—and paid for it, tuppence a glass, they did. Sixpence they gave, they did for the three glasses."

"And Miriam should never have took it," cried the widow, "pore thirsty chaps. It's just encouraging them against temperance; surely there's milk enow without charging sodgers tuppence a glass for it. But 'Lijah—where's the rest of 'em? The half battalion o' cavalry as the board gives notice of?"

"Oh, *them!* Them's nowhere. I see the officers come and have thick board set up. I axed 'em if you was agreeable, and they said no doubt you was. All ladies was, and the cavalry wasn't comin'. That board was to prevent others fro' comin'. Then they laughed both on 'em, and said as much hay as goed in a teaspoon would feed all the horses *that* half-battalion would eat on yer."

"Lor!" said Mrs. Tumblin, stepping to earth with a confused sense of the intricacies of military tactics.

"Aunt Maria!" came in a clear, high voice from the garden.

"Well, Fan?"

"I'm looking for you. I've been out blackberrying!"

"It's early for 'em," said her aunt, letting herself into the garden by a small white wicket, "but the summer's been so hot and long, they're ripe, I dessay, before their time."

"Yes," replied Fan, a very pretty girl as slim and fair as her aunt was stout and rubicund. "I found plenty. But, Aunt Maria——"

"Well, then?"

"In the far close, where I found enough in one hedge to fill the basket nearly, I found a poor soldier lying just as if he was dead, right in the hot sun with his face turned up—as red as a plum, poor fellow."

"My goodness!"

"Yes, and I believe he'd fainted. He was all alone, and his comrades would never have left him lying there if they'd known, would they?"

"They're 'ard-'arted, sodgers is," observed William, who was listening over the low wall.

"Anyway he was all alone," Fan went on rather breathlessly, for she had run home nearly all the way from the far close, "and his collar seemed so tight and he was strapped up so, with all sorts of guns and knapsacks and bottles strapped all over him——"

"Bottles there's sure to be," remarked William with cold criticism.

"And I was half afraid the poor thing would die, Aunt Maria——"

"Like enough," said Aunt Maria, sympathetically, but enjoying herself.

"Not he!" said William.

"So," Fan went on hastily, "I undid him."

"Larks!" cried the widow.

"Him, indeed!" said William.

"I undid his neck, and it was ever so hard——"

"His neck was?" queried Aunt Maria.

"His cheek, I doubt," suggested William.

"The buttons were," said Fan, "and then, because I hadn't any brandy or anything——"

"Not likely. Whativer'd you want with brandy in the far close——"

"I ran home, and please, Aunt Maria, do send a couple of men to carry the poor fellow home——"

"And how on earth am I to tell where his home is?" the widow expostulated.

"The canteen's his home, I reckon," said William.

"Home here, I mean," Fan explained. "We can't leave a fellow-creature to die in our far close."

"Not if we can stop him," her aunt agreed heartily.

William would have argued out the question of his *being* a fellow-creature. But the opportunity was not permitted him.

"Just you put that mare up," his mistress called out over the low wall, and tell John and Enoch to come on to the far close in a minute. Come, Fan, we'll go on first, and take a spot o' brandy and a jug o' water with us."

Armed with the "spot" in question (about a pint), a glass and the water-jug, the widow and her niece made haste to the far close. The soldier was sitting up, staring vaguely at the landscape.

"For all the world," thought Mrs. Tumblin, "like a calf that's lost his mother."

"Hope you're feeling more like yourself," she observed aloud: not that she had the slightest idea how that might be.

"Yes, a bit, thank you," the soldier answered, trying to get up. He was a mere boy, quite slight and delicate looking. The widow's motherly heart went out at once to him. She had had a baby son once, who had just taken a peep at this world and had enough of it.

"Just take a sip of this," she said, plumping down on the grass at his side and handing him a glass of pretty strong brandy and water. "It'll do 'ee good, maybe."

It did do him good.

"What's the matter, lad?" the kindly woman asked. "What's hurtin' ye?" She had noticed a look of pain on the young, innocent face.

"Well," the boy answered simply, "I fell at that hedge—the others were a good bit in front and I couldn't keep up because I'd chafed my heel long before, and could scarcely limp along on it. I fell on my leg and I think it's broken. I dragged myself up out of the ditch, and then I suppose I went off."

"Dear heart! And the sun this side of the hedge beatin' down on 'ee like a furnace. Poor lad, we'll see to it. Hurry up, John, there, you and Enoch."

"William's on'y just told us," coming up at a ramshackle trot.

"Now this immediate minute," Enoch corroborated.

Their mistress bade them kneel down (like a pair of camels) and make a "lady's chair" with their four joined hands: the soldier with an arm round each of their necks was hoisted upon it, and the procession moved homewards.

At the farm they found the young officer who had passed the widow by the bridge.

"This is your farm?" he began with an easy, good-humored politeness. "I delivered a despatch and thought I'd ride in and explain about the cavalry. But I see you're in charge of an ambulance. . . ."

Then explanations followed, and the officer said he would ride on to camp and send back a doctor.

"His leg's broken sure enough," he observed in a lower voice to the widow, with a glance at the helplessly dangling limb in question. "They'll send an ambulance to take him to the field hospital," he added in a business-like manner.

"No they won't!" declared the widow. "He'll just bide here. Let the doctor come and welcome, but the lad'll be in bed 'fore he's ten minutes older, and in bed he'll lie or my name's not Maria Tumblin. That's flat, perambulance or no!"

"I'm sure you're very good," the young officer said, with a glance that included Fan. "We shall all come here to break our legs. . . ."

"Get along," cried the widow, "and you, John and Enoch, bring the lad up the front way—the stairs is easier. Sorry to leave you, sir, but it never *was* good for a broken leg yet to be kept waiting."

The young officer, thus dismissed, saluted and rode off at a quick trot. Quarter of an hour after the soldier boy was safe in bed, a medical officer rode up and took the case in hand.

"A rough diamond," the other officer had said to himself as he trotted away with a smile as he thought of Mrs. Tumblin; "good sort, too. The daughter seems a different class altogether."

This was sharp of him, as he had not even heard Fan speak, and he was right in both his judgments, for the widow was a "diamond," and a rough one, and her niece was, as Maria Tumblin would have stoutly maintained herself, of a different quality entirely.

For generations Matthew Tumblin's family had owned Sheepdown Farm, and about a thousand acres of lands belonging to it; but some of his immediate ancestors had set up for little squires and had spent more, hunting and sporting, than the modern Sheepdown estate warranted. When Matthew succeeded there was a mortgage of five thousand pounds on the land, and he had scarcely anything left to live upon. Fortunately for him, he fell in love with Marie Netherstone, the only child of a well-to-do miller, who died the year after their marriage, and her money paid off the mortgage and left a thousand pounds over.

Matthew, however, died young and Maria reigned in his stead, for they had never had children, except the baby son, who lived less than a year.

As his wife had freed the land, Matthew left it to her, his only sister being well provided for, she having married a Chalkminster solicitor, one Herbert Newbridge (Esquire by Act of Parliament). Frances Newbridge was the only child of this marriage, a very nice girl, pretty and well educated.

She was fond of her uncle's widow, and often stayed with her, Mr. Newbridge being well content, for he also liked his wife's sister-in-law, and agreed with his wife that Sheepdown ought not to go off to any of Maria Netherstone's cousins.

As we have no room for mysteries, we may say at once that the widow had never the least intention of leaving her husband's property to anyone but her husband's niece. And during her long widowhood she had done well by the little estate, buying back a neighboring farm that had long ago belonged to it.

But with all her comfortable prosperity, the widow never set up for a lady; her father had started as a working man, and her mother had been the daughter of a very small farmer. That her husband's niece was a lady she had no doubt whatever.

While the two women were at supper a step was heard on the walk, and a knock came on the front door that opened onto the pretty garden.

"It's that doctor captain come back, I'll be bound, though he said he shouldn't till the morning," remarked the widow, in a low tone to her niece. "Well, let him. There's always supper for an extry one in *this* house, thanks to goodness. Well, Captain, so you've looked in again—oh!"

For as Kezia ushered in the visitor, the widow perceived it was *not* the doctor.

"Yes, I've looked in again. I thought I'd like to walk over and ask how your patient is."

It was the young officer who had passed the widow by the bridge.

"You're welcome, Captain. Kezia, set another place. You'll have a taste of supper, won't you?"

"Thank you, I shall be very grateful; there's not much going up at camp," and the stranger looked at Fan as if he thought an introduction might be convenient.

"This is my niece (leastways, my poor husband's), Miss Newbridge," explained the hostess.

"My name's Martingale. . . ."

"Indeed!" murmured the widow ("the imperent one!" she thought to herself).

Then aloud:

"It's you that destroys the bridges, is it?"

"Me? Oh, no! That's my uncle, *Colonel* Martingale. I'm only a galloper."

"Only a galloper! And how fast might the colonel ride, then?" exclaimed the widow.

The young officer laughed, and explained briefly his official position on maneuvers. He was a cheerful young man and good-looking, as the widow was not too old to notice with approval.

"I'm a sort of mounted errand boy," he declared. "My uncle's a big pot and hardly remembers my existence. I'm not a captain, though you kindly call me one—so, of course, I ought to be one."

It occurred to Fan that he had rather forgotten the young soldier with the broken leg. And this occurred to him also presently, for he repeated his inquiries with an easy air of interest and good-will.

"As it happens, the lad belongs to my own regiment," he observed, "and what's more, too, to my own company; so, of course, I take an interest. You'll forgive my looking round to ask about him?"

"Yes, sure. Come when you like."

"Oh, we'll be moving on soon, but not to-morrow. There's to be a big battle close to-morrow. You and Miss Newbridge might like to see it. I'll tell you where to go to see it properly. You know that hill with the British Camp on it?"

"Tinling's Rings," the widow interpolated, and the young officer told them all about it.

After supper the widow went off to see her patient, and Mr. Martingale said he would wait and hear her report. So Fan and he were left alone for a quarter of an hour—Mr. Martingale thought five minutes—and observed, on the widow's return, that her clock seemed fast.

"Farm-house clocks always are," she admitted. "They're mostly half an hour before the day."

"Ah, I thought so," said the officer, as if that made it obvious that there was no hurry.

"Well," he promised, when he said good-night, "I shall look for you on Tinling's Rings—about ten o'clock, mind. And I'll tell you what it's all about. You'll never get so good a sight of a battle in all your life."

"Please God!" said the widow.

"So he's not the imperent one," she remarked, when the last sound of his footsteps had died out on the gravel path.

"He did not seem to me at all impertinent."

"That's what I'm saying, I like his way. So free and pleasant and none cheeky with it all."

The widow saw the battle next day and understood nothing whatever about it. If Fan also failed to understand it, it was not Mr. Martingale's fault. If sanguinary, the combat was not protracted, for it was all over by two o'clock or so.

"The Northern Army," Mr. Martingale assured them, riding up for the ninth time to the side of the governess cart, "is completely annihilated."

"Wiped out," said Mr. Martingale complacently. "That regiment," he explained, pointing to a very lively looking body of men swinging over the hill in the direction of their camp, "was cut to pieces. Nine out of ten of them are as dead as mutton."

"It makes my flesh creep to hear 'ee," the widow protested, and Fan and the young officer only laughed at her.

"If you've the heart to peck a bit after such ghastly doin's," said the widow, "you'll find it down home at Sheepdown."

"That I have—only there's a bit of a pow-wow first, and I must hang round till the bosses have done it—then I'll come. I daresay I'll not be very late. You drive by the lanes—I ride across country."

He saluted and rode off, the widow vaguely surmising that pow-wow was some military dish he was bound to devour on the field.

"Some nasty Indian mess, I'll be bound," she assured herself.

The pow-wow by no means destroyed Mr. Martingale's appetite for Mrs. Tumblin's roast chicken, and all the afternoon he lingered on at the farm. Fan liked poetry, and he read it aloud beautifully—under the cedar tree, while the widow dozed and knitted. Having been out all morning, she had a mildly unearthly feeling as if it were Christmas Day (for Wednesday couldn't possibly be Sunday) in the third week of September. Once she snored, and woke up slightly offended with the other two in consequence, but they had clearly not noticed, and she merely remarked that the last piece was the prettiest.

"So I think," said the officer, without explaining that the last piece had been read over half an hour before.

* * * * * *

The lad with the broken leg got quite well at last, and went away with a very grateful heart, but he was wise enough to be most grateful to the widow, although her niece had found him first in the far close.

Mr. Martingale went away too, but not "for good." The last time he went Mrs. Martingale went with him, and nowhere in all the earth was there any Frances Newbridge—not that her parents minded, or her aunt either.

ATHELMAR

I

Lady Francis Acres, of Coldacres Park, had a good deal to be thankful for, but hardly realized it. On the contrary, she considered herself a failure, and her original intention had been to achieve a striking success. She had been the beauty of her father's five daughters—but then Lord Martinhampton's other children were almost all plain—Lord Chilmark, the eldest son, was undeniably ugly, though his excellent temper and lively manners made it a matter of very little consequence. The son of a rather poor earl, he had married the handsomest daughter of a marquess who was so rich that it was always said he would be raised to a dukedom.

Lady Mary St. Mark, Lord Martinhampton's eldest daughter, was nearly as plain as her brother; but she too, did very well indeed, for she married her brother's wife's second brother, Lord Hubert, who was Chancellor of the Duchy of Cornwall in two Conservative administrations. Lady Adelberta was only a little better looking, but, as her husband was a bishop, it did not matter.

Lady Gladws was as plain as her eldest sister, and yet she married an ambassador, who was given an earldom on retiring from diplomatic life.

The Ladies Frances and Rachel were twins, but very little alike; what resemblance there was only served to accentuate the great superiority of Lady Frances in point of beauty. So that, when Lady Rachel married Sir John Wrest, of Wrestling Hall, one of the greatest magnates in the proud country of Rentshire (where the squires were all rich enough to be peers) it was confidently predicted that her pretty sister might look very high indeed. Perhaps she looked too high. One of her grandfathers had been a duke, and she thought there was a duke who would like her to be a duchess. But he married a Miss Mayflower, of Massachusetts, and there, as far as Lady Frances was concerned, was an end of him. One thing she had resolved *not* to do, after her twin's marriage, and that was to become the wife of any baronet. She did not like Sir John Wrest at all, and almost told him so: he as good as said that he did not care sixpence whether she did or no. Also, she explained to her family that a baronet was a ridiculous thing—a commoner with an hereditary title, no coronet, and precedence below younger sons of life peers.

And yet at thirty she herself married a baronet, of about her own age, and not strikingly handsome, nor phenomenally clever or good-tempered. He had not (as she had pointed out several years earlier) even a Christian name—he was Sir Fallows Acres. "Baronets *don't* have Christian names," she observed. "It is part of their absurdity—look round you (it was at a ball in London) there's Sir Fulham Rhodes, Sir Euston Square, Sir Kensington Gore, Sir Snell Marshgrove, Sir Bridge Knight, Sir Frene Peak, Sir Rutland Gate—not a Christian name among them!"

Still, if she had chosen to remember it, she had, as we have said, many things to be thankful for. Her husband was wealthy, and she could not possibly have been poor; and his family was ancient, and the baronetcy dated from Charles I's time. Coldacres Park is a fine place, and the house is large, comfortable, and singularly picturesque—more like a castle than many big places that are so called—it was, in fact, a castellated manor house, dating from the fifteenth century, and it had always belonged to the Acres family. Sir Fallows was member for his division of the county, and the house in London, 17 Kent Square, in Belgravia, was also a family mansion, and had belonged to his ancestors since the square was built, and long before it was re-christened after Queen Victoria's father. Added to all this, Sir Fallows was very fond of his wife, and, though not a sweet-tempered man, he was an excellent husband and of most respectable character. To her he was always courteous, and, indeed, considerate. He proved it by never betraying in words his disappointment that she brought him no heir. The family, indeed, was in no danger of extinction, for his brother Constantine had three sons, and his uncle Philip had two sons and five grandsons. But neither Sir Fallows nor Lady Frances liked Constantine or his boys, and they particularly disliked Uncle Philip and all his clan. So Lady Frances felt herself a failure; instead of being ancestress to a line of dukes, she had only to look forward to being aunt-in-law to a baronet.

II

Lady Frances was not addicted to good works. The *role* of Lady Bountiful had no charms for her; it almost implied intimacy and co-operation with the Rector of Cold Glebeham, and she could not abide parsons, and detested the Rector—as did her husband. Also, she was sensitive to unpleasant smells, and declared that all cottages smelled of corduroy and Irish stew. Nor did she care for the sort of adulation which (she chose to believe) was the payment fine ladies exact for condescending charity to their poor neighbors. Had she interested herself in the poor around her she would have been less bored in the country; as it was, having no children, and finding most of her neighbors of her own class rather dull, she was often bored for days together.

But though not addicted to the ordinary good works of ladies in her position, Lady Frances had an irresponsible kindness of heart, and her heart suffered from a chronic though unavowed hunger. She was quite aware that her husband was in love with her, and she had married to oblige him. Then it seemed to her that she had done enough, and the idea of falling in love with him in return never occurred to her. She did not make game of him to his face (though she did to her father, who did not mind, once she was married), and that, she thought, was very proper in her. She pretended, on her best days, to be interested in the property and the constituency; but she had many days that were not her best, and then she would listen, but yawn prodigiously, and suddenly begin talking of her dog, or her parrot, or a French novel. When she was really amusing—and she often was—Sir Fallows was not amused, and that she perceived very plainly.

"What a pity he didn't marry Rachel," she would think. "*She* would never have puzzled him. No one ever heard her say anything funny, and I could have quarreled with Sir John. It's no use quarreling with Pincher" (Sir Fallows hadn't liked being called "Pincher" at first, but he had had to get used to it) "he wouldn't understand it."

One day a thing happened that quite altered the stagnant condition of things at Coldacres Park. Lady Frances came in from a drive with a baby on the narrow front seat of the brougham.

"Take care, Stoger," she said to the butler, as she got out of the carriage, "of that parcel; there's a baby in it. You'd better send for Ribbits." (Miss Ribbits was her ladyship's maid, and Lady Frances thought she hated her.) "Ribbits," she directed, when that frosty spinster appeared, "take it up to my sitting-room, and don't let the borzois eat it. It's my adopted son; and, of course, poor Czarevitch will know his nose is broken. If he eats it, *you'll* be eaten. Is Sir Fallows in?"

"Yes, my lady. Writing letters in the library."

"Very well. I'll come up in five minutes. Stoger, has your wife been confined lately?"

"No, my lady."

"You don't mean it! Well, I'll bring it up by hand, like Pip in 'Great Expectations.' If you drop him, Ribbits, I'll know you did it on purpose."

"Poor little thing," said Ribbits, with outraged femininity, "*I* shan't drop him."

Lady Frances went away delighted. "Poor old Ribbits," she thought, "I never thought she had so much *repartee* in her. I did drop my monkey, but not till he bit me. I clove to him after he had bitten Stoger, both footmen, and Pincher. And I dropped my lamb when it bulged out into a mere mutton. Pincher, I've been to Cold Swaffham, and brought back a new pet. He won't bite you, and he won't say 'Gladstone forever,' like my parrot. And he shan't kill two peacocks, like Czarevitch. I'm going to bring him up by hand, like Pip's sister, so you'll have to be Joe Gargery, and 'ever the best of friends,' you know."

Sir Fallows pushed back his chair and looked astonished (he often had to); but there was something unusual in his wife and it softened him. *She* was softer. For all her queer incoherence and inconsequence, he could see she was in earnest, and that her pretty eyes glistened with a light that was not hard and mocking. She came quite near and let her dress touch him, and looked down into his harsh face with a pucker in her lips, that was like a promise of tears.

"What is it?" he asked shyly, and wondering what she would do if he laid a hand of his on the little fingers that were playing with the pen he had laid down.

"Oh, Pincher, do let me keep him," she begged, and a small hot tear dropped on the blotting pad. She had never asked anything before, as a favor, like that; and never had he imagined that she could melt into meekness and petition.

"I don't know what it is; but I promise, Fan, you shall keep him."

She did not quite look at him, but she heard the shake in his voice, and out of the corner of an eye she did see his patient, wistful face.

Was he hungry, too?

"Oh, Pincher, it is very good of you. You *are* a gentleman."

"I hope so," he said, more stiffly.

"Ah, but it doesn't follow as you think it does. Lots of men whose family is all right would not promise, like that, without knowing. And this is a hard thing. You will think it a hard thing; and, Pincher, I will give you back your promise, if you can't bear it."

"Fan, for heaven's sake tell me what it is."

"Oh, I know how you want a son" (he almost shivered as she said it), "and so do I. Not, like you, for the sake of the family—though I can't stand Constantine or Uncle Phil; and *you* can't, though you don't say so. But I want a baby. And it *is* one. Can you bear *that?* I'll give you back your promise——"

"A baby! What *do* you mean, Frances?"

"Ah, I knew you couldn't! And oh, I did want to keep it so."

Then she wept. And she slid down to the floor, and cried against the arm of the chair (with a grinning lion's head at the end of it), and told him all about it.

"I drove all round by Cold Swaffham," she said, "and somehow I felt lonely. There was a gipsy-woman trailing behind her husband along the road, and she had a baby in her arms, and she cuddled it up against her neck. And the children ran in at every cottage door as we drove past—like little rabbits into their burrows. At Swaffham that young doctor, old Kilham's assistant, came out of the 'Acres Arms,' and stood still on the steps, putting his gloves on before getting into his dog-cart, and his face looked grave and anxious. Pludger, who keeps the little inn, was talking to him, and I stopped and signed to him to come to the carriage window, but the doctor thought I meant him, and came instead. I asked him if anybody was ill in there (I saw it couldn't be Mrs. Pludger, her husband looked as dismal as ever), and he said 'Yes.' A strange lady had been brought up from the train in the station omnibus, too ill to go on her journey; she wasn't traveling to Swaffham; and they had taken her in and put her to bed——"

"A lady?" Sir Fallows interrupted; "really a lady?"

"Yes, for I saw her. I asked the doctor if I might, and he went back with me. There's no doubt she's a lady, but very poor; and, Pincher, she had a wedding ring, and her sad, dying face was so good. Yes, she was dying; I stayed more than an hour, and she was dead before I came away. She had grown worse, much worse, even in the few minutes after the doctor had left her, and before he came back with me. 'Collapse,' he whispered to me, only he called it 'Collops.' He did what he could, so did Mrs. Pludger; she's not a bad woman, though she does wear only velveteen and smells of stale beer. He seemed to think I could do no harm; so I knelt down by the bed and made him and Mrs. Pludger go behind the screen, and I asked the poor lady if I could be any help at all. She opened one hand (the other arm was round the baby), and there was about twelve shillings in it—a half-sovereign and some sixpences. She meant it was all she had, and her eyes said that she knew she was dying. Then she tried to touch the baby with that hand, and I knew very well that she was saying all the help anyone could be to her would be *there*. And so I put my mouth to her ear, and asked if I might have it for my own. And I said: 'I am a married woman, too; but I have no baby. And I am rich.' I know, Pincher, that I'm not—but there was no use puzzling her, and explaining. And so I promised I'd be her baby's mother—and that's all. She never spoke, and now she's dead; and I brought the baby home. Ribbits has it. I told them at the inn I should pay for everything—the doctor, and the funeral, and all that. Of course, I can very easily do that out of my own money; so I can for bringing up the baby—only I promised without asking your leave. And I know what a thing it is to ask. It is a boy baby, too, and that makes it worse. If you can't stand it I shall not wonder; but, oh! I should like to keep it."

"You mean," said her husband gravely, but gently, too, "that you want to adopt it?"

"Yes, please; though it's a dull, ugly word. I want it to be my own. She gave it to me for a present, and it doesn't belong to anyone else."

"Was she a widow? Was she in mourning?"

"Oh, Pincher! People don't wear mourning in bed—stop. Don't get impatient. I'll answer seriously. I'll tell the truth; her clothes weren't mourning clothes. The linen was neat, like a poor *lady's*, and every bit marked 'A.C.M.' Mrs. Pludger said that the lady had spoken once, after the doctor went out, and before he came back with me. She tried to point to the baby and said 'Athelmar,' and Mrs. Pludger said it after her twice or three times, to be sure of the name, and asked if that was what she wanted the baby christened. She could just whisper 'Yes,' and that was the last word she ever did speak."

" 'Athelmar,' " said Sir Fallows, making a little note in pencil on a slip of paper of the name, and of the initials A.C.M., too—"as if," thought his wife, "I should forget them."

"Athelmar," he observed, "is a very uncommon name. It might be of importance in helping us to identify the child."

"Oh!" cried Lady Frances, "I hope not. I want to keep him for my own."

"You shall keep him unless they who have a legal claim to him are found, and then it may be impossible."

And here we may as well say that in spite of all efforts made by Sir Fallows and his lawyers, no one with any such legal claim to the child was found; the railway ticket which the dead lady had possessed was only for a great junction whence lines to every part of England branch off, and afforded no real clue even to what had been her destination.

Over the stranger's grave in Swaffham churchyard Lady Frances caused a marble cross to be erected, with this inscription:

To the Memory of
A. C. M.
A strange Lady who died here 20th
March, 1888, the Mother of Athelmar

March (adopted son of Lady Frances
Acres), who was Born on the same date.

Sir Fallows, when he read it, did not fully approve of the inscription; for he thought the mention of his wife's name unnecessary. But he never said it till the stone had been set up, and he believed it would be difficult then, if not impossible, to remove it—even if Lady Frances would have consented. So there it stood.

When the baby was christened he received the name of Athelmar; but it seemed necessary to give him also some surname when the moment for registering the baptism arrived; and Lady Frances herself proposed that of March, being the name of the month in which he was born. To this Sir Fallows made no objection, and as Athelmar March the child was registered.

III

Lady Frances was in her thirty-fifth year when she brought Athelmar home in the brougham; and nearly five years later she had a child of her own—a girl.

"Now," thought Ribbits, "we shall see who drops the poor fondling" (foundling).

Perhaps Sir Fallows himself half suspected that his inconsequent wife would now tire a little of her adopted son, but she did not. Her own baby only seemed to teach her how to be more motherly to the little boy who had no real mother. And seeing this made her husband respect her more. He had perceived long before that the coming of Athelmar had been a good thing for his wife, and for himself too. She must always be queer and capricious, but she grew gentler, and a certain hardness and defiance towards the world and towards her husband softened. She never forgot that evening in the library when he had told her she might keep the child. She had now an interest in life that made her much more rarely complain of the dulness of Coldacres, and she gave up railing against the stupidity of neighbors whom her husband had known all his life —and liked chiefly for that reason.

"I hope," she said one evening, soon after her own baby's birth, "you won't begin to wish you hadn't said I might keep Toto." ("Toto" was Athelmar; she had nicknames for everybody.)

Her tone was almost shy and he could see she was really anxious.

"No, Fan. No; that would be cruelly unjust. I never go back on my word."

She was pleased and laughed a little.

"Well, Pincher, you have your reward: for Toto thinks more of you than of me."

Perhaps she would not have been pleased had she really thought this; but it was true that Athelmar had a peculiar devotion to his rather austere-looking, silent foster-father.

"Wasn't I right," she asked presently, "when I told you Toto's mother was really a lady?"

"He is a very high-bred looking child," her husband answered, quite understanding.

"And I only hope Carlotta will be as pretty," said Lady Frances, looking down at her baby's small pink face.

"Carlotta?" and Sir Fallows almost blushed with pleasure. "Isn't she to be another little Frances?"

"No. Certainly not. One Frances is quite enough for you! She's to be Carlotta."

Now, Carlotta was not only his own dead mother's name, but it had long been a favorite in the Acres family (old Lady Acres had been her husband's cousin), and Lady Frances had often abused it and said it was harsh and ugly. So he knew she meant to be good and gracious.

"Fan," he said, "I should be very ungrateful to grow cold to Athelmar—since he came he has set us all to rights."

As the years went on, troubles of a kind they had never expected fell on the Acres family at Coldacres Park. No son ever followed little Carlotta, and her father, anxious to make better provision for her and his wife, did, as many have done, and acted unwisely in investments which were really speculations. There came a terrible day when he knew that he was practically a ruined man—for every inch of his property was strictly entailed—and even to meet all his liabilities he had to raise money on his own life interest. And though he was not old, he was then as near sixty as fifty years of age, the doctors who examined him for insurance found—or thought they found—that he had organic disease of the heart. To insure at all he had to pay enormous premiums.

The jointure settled on his wife was safe, but though good it was not large, and for his daughter, now nearly sixteen, there was no provision except what he could make by saving and by insurance on his life.

Lady Frances behaved perfectly, and did all she possibly could to lighten her husband's trouble, and to convince him that she found nothing to regret in their comparative poverty.

"Athelmar," she declared, "will set us all to rights; and, Pincher, in spite of those wretched doctors, you will live another thirty years—another forty. I shall ask Dr. Hart." (Dr. Hart was the gentleman who had brought Athelmar into the world.)

Strange to say, she was right in both her prophecies. Dr. Hart (when she persuaded her husband to let him examine him) declared that in his opinion there was no organic heart-disease, but only a functional derangement that might, and *should* be cured—as a matter of fact, Sir Fallows is alive and well now.

Also Athelmar did set matters to rights, though not by any marvelous things achieved by himself. At twenty he was not only very handsome, with that look of high breeding of which Sir Fallows had spoken when he was a small child, but he was clever and his conduct had always been excellent. At school he had done very well, and now he declared that he was ready to earn his own living. Inwardly he resolved to do more—and help his foster-father—though exactly how he could he could not yet see.

One morning he said to Lady Frances: "If you and Sir Fallows will let me, I want to accept a situation. I have found it for myself by answering an advertisement."

"A situation! What situation?"

Lady Frances did not much like the word, it sounded like going to be a butler or a gamekeeper. Sir Fallows was chiefly struck by the lad's having found it himself.

"You've been very quiet about it," he said smiling.

"Well," Athelmar confessed, "I didn't want to bother either of you till I saw what came of it. It seemed rather a bold thing to offer myself; and I could hardly suppose it likely I should succeed. And, after I had written, I was afraid I might have done wrong in writing from here, with this address on the paper. So I wrote a second letter explaining that, though I lived here, I was no relation of yours, but had been brought up by you out of great kindness."

"Well! What is the 'situation'?" asked Lady Frances impatiently. Carlotta was listening eagerly, but kept quiet. In looks she resembled her mother, but in character she had more of her father's sober restraint.

"Private secretary to a gentleman in Paris," answered Athelmar. "At least, he writes from Paris —I don't know where else he lives. But he asks me now to meet him in London. There is his letter."

It was written in the third person, and said that Lord de Valence would be glad to have a personal interview with Mr. Athelmar March at the Langham Hotel in London on Thursday, 22nd March, at 11 A.M. If the interview proved satisfactory, Lord de Valence thought it probable that Mr. March would become a member of Lord de Valence's family.

"And is this," asked Sir Fallows, "his first letter to you?"

"No. He wrote before, in answer to *my* first, asking a number of questions (which I answered), and saying that the salary would be £200 a year. Doesn't it seem a lot?"

"Private secretaries to wealthy men sometimes get much more; but they are not often so young as you. Does he know your age?"

"Yes. He asked the date and place of my birth, where I was educated, what my father's position and calling had been, my state of health, height, and description—also I had to send a photograph. May I go up to London to see him?"

"Yes, but I shall go with you. You cannot satisfy him as to your character so well as I can. And I must also satisfy myself as to his. I admire very much your determination to earn your own living at the earliest possible moment, but we must be sure that this stranger is a man fit for us to entrust our son to."

Lady Frances was truly pleased, and Athelmar was even more so.

"By the way," Sir Fallows asked, "did you tell him you were an adopted son?"

"No, I had no right to say that. I only said how you had brought me up, and educated me, and done everything for me from the day of my birth."

After breakfast Sir Fallows withdrew to the library and there he consulted a Peerage, but of that he said nothing to his wife or to Athelmar. The reference he looked up was to the name of Lord de Valence.

It ran as follows: *De Valence, Baron Aymer de Valence,* 11*th Lord de Valence, of Court Valence, Hereford, b.* 3*rd March,* 1860, *succeeded his uncle Athelmar,* 10*th Lord,* 9*th April,* 1888, *m.* 20*th May,* 1887, *Alice Clare, d. of late Rev. Henry Marlow. Heir presumptive, his cousin, Capt. Aymer Humphrey de Valence,* 111*th Lancers, s. Rev. Humphrey Athelmar de Valence,* 3*rd son of* 9*th Lord.*

Somewhat to her surprise and much to her pleasure, Sir Fallows told his wife that she had better go to London with him and Athelmar.

"If I find nothing objectionable in this man," he said, "I shall ask him to meet you. *I* can speak warmly in praise of the lad, but *you* can be eloquent."

"He asked you about your parentage," Sir Fallows remarked casually to Athelmar. "What did you tell him?"

"All I knew; that is, nothing as to my father; as to my mother, that Lady Frances knew her for a lady, that her initials were A. C. M., and that her ring had a date engraved inside it: 20th May, 1887. Also I said that it was by her direction I received the name of Athelmar, and that March was given me for a surname because I had none and was born in that month. I thought I ought to tell him all I knew."

"Perhaps you're right."

"Did you tell him," laughed Lady Frances, "that *I* only call you Toto?"

"No, I didn't," and Athelmar laughed too.

IV

At the Langham Hotel, on the 22nd, Sir Fallows sent up his own card with Athelmar's name penciled on it; and he was not surprised to receive a message that Lord de Valence would wish to see him first alone. He found the nobleman looking older than his forty-eight years warranted—very dark, rather handsome, with an irritable expression of face, and a sort of rough, but imperious manner, such as colonists often have who have lived much with people of inferior race. Still, he was very civil, and courteously thanked Sir Fallows for taking the trouble to come to him.

"Of course I came," said the baronet simply. "Athelmar has been like a son to us; and though I respect his resolve to earn his own living, now he is grown up, we could not let him leave us unless we were satisfied that he was acting wisely."

"You are very straightforward."

"So is he. There are few good things I could not truthfully say of him. Of course, he can bring you no testimonials as to capacity; for at his age, it would be impossible that he should have any experience; but I may say that he has been very useful of late to me——"

"Never mind all that. Just tell me all you know about him—about his antecedents."

"He seems to have told you all that is known."

"Would you mind telling it all again. I do not ask out of idle curiosity. His name is a rare one—and it is my own."

"Is not your name Aymer?"

"Aymer and Athelmar are the same name. One a French form, the other Latin. In our family the eldest son is usually called by it—in one form or the other; and generally the form is alternated in each successive generation; my father's was Athelmar, his father's was Aymer, like myself. I will ask you an abrupt question. Does your foster-son resemble me?"

"You may judge for yourself presently—but I see no resemblance. He is very fair, with clear blue eyes, and a brilliant complexion."

"Perhaps he is like his mother."

"I never saw her. But Lady Frances says he is like her."

Then Sir Fallows told again the whole story of Athelmar's birth; in doing so he often quoted his wife verbatim, and once he spoke of the baby as Toto, which nickname Lady Frances had from the very first day given rim.

" 'Toto,' who's 'Toto'?" asked Lord de Valence abruptly.

"It was a name my wife gave the child, and one she did not invent; among the few things left behind by 'A.C.M.' was only one scrap of paper, a torn bit of a letter beginning 'Darling Toto,'—written in a woman's hand, and with only a few words besides—as if the writer had begun a letter and abruptly ceased; it was in the dead lady's pocket, and perhaps was written in the train; there was no date or heading, and the penciled writing was shaky and distorted."

"Toto was my wife's pet name for me. . . . Now do you guess anything?"

"I never guess. But I am here partly because I wondered——"

"I thought so. I can explain nothing now; I am on pins and needles to see *him;* but this I will say: though I am now a very rich man, I was penniless when I married—nor was I a lord—or a lord's heir; my uncle's own son was living; alas, he killed himself—and his father, too, in doing so, wretched lad! I was in pursuit of him to try and save him and came up a day too late; he was in Australia, whither he had fled to escape public disgrace. And I had left my poor wife in anger. She was wrongly jealous and accused me bitterly and falsely. And I would explain nothing, but gave way to my appalling temper; there was a bitter quarrel, and she said she would go back to her own people—but that I know she did not. She was silly and savage, and I was savage and brutal. It is a long and sad and miserable story—but you cannot hear it now. I want to see Athelmar."

The lad was sent for, and, as he entered the room, Lord de Valence said in a low voice to Sir Fallows: "There is no doubt at all. He is Alice's son," and he turned away into a window, leaving the youth standing, half troubled, in the middle of the room.

Coming back, Lord de Valence went up to Athelmar, and took his hand, but the left one; holding it in his own right, he pushed up the sleeve and said: "Did none of you notice this?"

"Of course, it has always been noticed."

A little higher than the wrist there was a mark like a bruise, a V, as if made by two pinching fingers.

And Lord de Valence thrust up the left sleeve of his own shirt and coat and showed another mark like it.

"Now," he asked, almost laughing, but eager, "can you say Calisthenics, Æsthetics, Esthonic, Sosthenes."

Considerably astonished, Athelmar repeated:

"Calis-sosthenics, Æs-s-thetics, Es-s-sthonia, Sos--s-sthenes."

"It is rude to imitate people!" laughed Lord de Valence. "Can't you say them without lisping?"

"'I don't lisp," cried Athelmar, quite indignantly.

"Nor do I, except in words where th follows an s. But you do there. So we all do. Sir Fallows, you deny that he is like me, but isn't his mouth like mine, and also his ears? Look what a queer crumple they have. I'm not cracked, Athelmar, and you needn't be afraid Sir Fallows is going to let you become private secretary to a lunatic. When I wrote to you I said that if this interview was satisfactory you would probably——"

He paused, intending, I think, to be interrupted.

"Be engaged as your private secretary," suggested Athelmar.

"Did I say that? I think not. I did not promise that."

Sir Fallows smiled, though Athelmar looked disappointed.

"No, Athelmar," said Sir Fallows, "Lord de Valence did not promise that. What he said was that, if this interview was satisfactory, you would probably become a member of his family. I noted the expression. But, Lord de Valence, if you will allow me, I would suggest that at this moment we should all go and join Lady Frances at luncheon; she will be of more use to you than myself."

And they went.

V

Lord de Valence not only went to luncheon with Sir Fallows and Lady Frances, but went down with them and Athelmar to Coldacres Park that same afternoon. There he was shown the very few articles that had belonged to Athelmar's mother—her clothes, the scrap of an unfinished letter, and her wedding ring.

"I did not need to see them," he said. "I was certain Athelmar was her son the moment I saw him. His voice is my own, but his face and figure are hers—and it is not an ordinary face. I can identify this ring with the date of our marriage on it, and each of these poor bits of clothing; they are marked with initials of her maiden name, because ours was a sort of runaway match, and she never had any trousseau. Certainly the scrap of a letter is in her writing, and I treasure it, because it shows that she had forgiven me—little as she had time to write before her great illness fell on her; you can see yourself that that little scrap is a message of reconciliation. I have had my twenty years of purgatory for my fault—now from beyond the grave comes this message of forgiveness. *Now* I may tell Athelmar."

Athelmar was told. Lord de Valence did not engage his services as private secretary, but he did take him as a member of his family.

"I am," his father told Sir Fallows, "a very rich man; not because I am Lord de Valence, for our family had long been rather poor, but because for twenty years I have been making money. I could not bear England after returning here and failing to find my wife, and I have lived entirely abroad. I had nothing else to do but make money, and I made it all the while—the more readily perhaps that I did not care much whether I made it or no. Some people's speculations fail" (Sir Fallows sighed) "because it matters so much to them; mine always succeeded because it did not seem to matter at all. Athelmar will be very rich."

And so he was. At five and twenty he succeeded his father, and long before that he had married.

Sir Fallows had no further anxiety as to Carlotta's future.

Athelmar's wife needed no provision from her father, and her husband so managed matters that she was able to pay off every claim and every encumbrance on her father's life income.

"The best thing you ever did," Sir Fallows told his wife, "was bringing Athelmar home, and the best I ever did was saying you might keep him."

"Oh, Pincher," she said, "supposing I hadn't driven round by Swaffham that day—if I hadn't seen that young doctor on the steps outside the "Acres Arms" and been a woman who always asks questions; Athelmar would have been taken to the workhouse, and been brought up a pauper. How awful to think of—what a chance saved him!"

"Chance, Fan? Providence, rather."

FRING

I

FOR twenty years Miss Fring had lived at Burnham Abbey and she could no longer imagine herself living anywhere else. All the same she had only come for three or four months, and the reason of her coming at all was like this—Lady Julia Fitzrupert, whose husband, Sir Rupert Fitzrupert, owned Burnham Abbey and Burnham village, and all the lands that had long ago belonged to the Abbess of Burnham, was, as we all know, sister of Lady St. Blazes, down in Cornwall: and Lord St. Blazes suddenly resolved to economize. It had never occurred to any of his family for several generations: and it might not have occurred to *him* had not the inventor of Pearl Soap been seized with a strong desire to live at Blaze Castle. He offered (through the family lawyer) such an enormous rent that it seemed, said Lady St. Blazes solemnly, a DUTY to accept.

"You know, Babbo," she argued with a sudden sense of financial insight, "we have always spent more than we had: that *must* mean debt. If we let this place to the soap man we *shall be actually getting more than we spend*" (her husband shook his head, not as impeaching the justice of her position, but dazed by it) "and that must mean getting *out* of debt. If you get ten pounds a day and spend twelve pounds ten you get into debt two pounds ten every day. If you get fifteen pounds a day and only spend ten, you're getting out of debt at the rate of five pounds a day—you can't deny it."

Lord St. Blazes knew he couldn't.

"But, Totes," (her ladyship was christened Giralda) he asked dubiously, "where are we to live? We can't live in London all the year round. No one could. Even if Sixteen wasn't a tight fit for us with all the girls grown up."

When anyone at Blaze Castle talked of Sixteen he meant 16 Buccleugh Square, as proper a place for a poor peer to live as any in London, though the houses *were* thin—"tall and squeezy, like Aunt Carlotta," the young St. Blazes ladies called them.

"No," agreed Lady St. Blazes, "no one could expect us to live all the year round at Sixteen: not if we owed millions. But we needn't. There's Melbourne."

No one at Blaze Castle meant by Melbourne the capital of Victoria, but a small property of that name belonging to her ladyship. It, a set of fine emeralds, two silver soup tureens (one of which didn't leak), five bedroom candlesticks of the same metal, and nine or ten family portraits, had been her dowry—though an earl's daughter she had so many sisters.

"Melbourne!" observed her husband, without enthusiasm.

"It's small—" she conceded cheerfully.

"About as big as this room," said Lord St. Blazes, less cheerfully: but then the White Saloon at Blaze Castle was one hundred and twenty-four feet long; and no fires on earth would ever warm it in an east wind.

"It's small," continued her ladyship, "but it isn't ugly: and it's a Grange: there's no harm in living in a Grange—one's notepaper wouldn't disgrace one. I shouldn't care to live in a tiny *Hall*—that would be vulgar: a Hall should be ENORMOUS or it's nothing. Its smallness will be our salvation. If we let the soap man come here we not only get the rent (and to refuse *that* would be like evading Providence) but *he* will have this place to keep up instead of us. And at Melbourne we can't spend much."

"*I* could if I tried," said her husband with gloomy candor. "I could spend thirty thousand a year in a—Chambers De Broke did."

"De Broke is a misery, and so's she. I'm not, and you're not. Come, Babbo! Here's our chance: live on here, and we can't cut down anything—the place won't let us. But now there's this new departure opened up—let's do it: for the children's sakes; and oh, Babbo, I'm sick of Billy!"

"So am I!" said the Viscount, whose legislative duties sometimes bored him: all the same he was touched. He dearly loved his wife, and his children, and his home: and for the sake of all three he would let a rather vulgar stranger come and live in the house that no one but the St. Blazes had ever lived in yet.

Lady St. Blazes wrote to Lady Julia Fitzrupert—in her huge, sanguine, happy-go-lucky, good-natured handwriting, that used up reams and reams of notepaper every year:

> BLAZE CASTLE,
> Thursday.
>
> DEAR JUDIE,
>
> That man who makes Pearl Soap (it smells like Ratafia Pudding, so I can't stand it) is going to take this place, and we shall live at 16 and Melbourne. So we shall *congédier* two footmen, and two kitchen-maids, four housemaids, both scullery-maids, and some of our own maids. We're going abroad first, for three months, and it would be quite absurd for each of the girls to have a maid to herself. Of course, Flunce will come (no one else could make me wake in a morning) and Button.

They've been with us ten years, and would break their hearts without each other to quarrel with. But Lacy and Ribb are new, and we must get rid of them. While we're abroad Flunce and Button will have to manage for the girls between them. Then there's Fring; you say your creature *must* go at once or there'll be bloodshed in your halls, and implore me to find you someone. Take Fring as a loan; she's excellent; most honest, civil and respectful (but not too dreadfully; she doesn't say "my lady" at every comma); very well conducted (a Roman Catholic), and been in good places. She can dressmake very well, and is not talkative. Our neighbors, the Polwelliams, have a chapel in the house, and she goes there—do let her go to Mass if you can. Babbo has a cold in his head, and sends his love. Your affec.,

TOTES.

Lady Fitzrupert sent a telegram—she never had any stamps, and the telegrams went into the butler's book:

Send your treasure and I'll pay her back honor bright.

JUDIE.

II

So Fring went to Burnham Abbey and liked it. At first she didn't, because she came as a stopgap, and the housekeeper, butler and valet (like Miss Nipper) suspected Temporaries. But Miss Fring, they found, leant to permanence and was gentility personified. Mrs. Stumger, the housekeeper, liked to talk (and so had the late lady's maid), Miss Fring preferred listening. Mrs. Stumger confessed to her own conscience, though not elsewhere, that she "had never lived higher than a baronet," whereas Miss Fring's lowliest place till now had been a Viscount—there had been a Marquis, and a Duchess (though Italian), and yet she never bragged of them. Here was true restraint and gentility—Sellars, the butler, never wearied of the Earl (and only a Scotch one) that had been his last place. Sellars and Braces (the valet) conceived a high opinion of Miss Fring because they could not in the least perceive that she was a favorite with her ladyship. Sir Rupert was "short" with his butler, and not sweet with his valet, whereas Tucker (the late lady's maid) had been for ever quoting the intimate and jocular sayings of my lady to her. Miss Fring never had much to tell of Lady Fitzrupert, and Sellars and Braces cheerfully concluded that it was because her ladyship only took her on sufferance. And they were not altogether wrong. Lady Fitzrupert thought Fring dullish; and, as she had only come for three months, it was hardly worth while making out if there was anything particular behind. Fring was plain; and her manner was plain, too, demure, sober, not shy, but self-contained; at five and twenty she was as staid as a woman of forty. Lady Fitzrupert liked to say queer things, and Tucker had thoroughly enjoyed them and loved to repeat them. Fring heard them with a subdued air of refusing to be surprised and didn't even laugh.

"Will your ladyship wear any ornaments to-night?" she would ask, almost absent-mindedly, a moment after her mistress had said something funny, which would have filled Tucker with impatience to be off to "the room" to retail it—with (imagined) improvements. And not a soul in all Burnham

Abbey would have guessed why Fring was absent-minded.

"She's all Totes promised," Lady Fitzrupert would admit to herself, "as respectable as a hearse and six horses, honest, clean, tidy, careful, a wonderful dressmaker, respectful, good-tempered—and no more idea of a joke than a stone ball on a lodge gate."

But the positive good qualities were so undeniable that Fring stayed twenty years. When the St. Blazes returned to England Lady St. Blaze wrote to her sister and said: "The girls have picked up a Frenchwoman, who has broken Flunce and Button's noses. You can keep Fring, if you like. Babbo sends his love, he has a housemaid's knee, or he would write himself; he got it in the Coliseum tumbling out of the place where the Emperors used to sit, while he was standing back to say 'Ave Cæsar moritim te Salubant.' It won't get well, and he won't try a bonesetter. An Italian prince wanted to marry Juliet, but she said his name wasn't Romeo, and she didn't see any point in it. If you don't want to keep Fring, Lady de Ribstone wants her."

"Then she won't get her," said Lady Fitzrupert, who couldn't abide any of the Pepin family, and felt quite sure that, if Fring went to Appleshaw Court, old Lady de Ribstone would try and pump her about Burnham Abbey and its ways. "And she might as well," Lady Fitzrupert confessed to herself, candidly, "try to pump the Pontine Marshes."

So Fring stayed on, and stealthily grew into a permanency.

III

Nobody at Burnham Abbey had the slightest idea why Miss Fring was absent-minded, and at last she didn't know herself. She did at first. She had misgivings about her soul.

In the first instance she would never have gone there had she not understood that she was to be sent to Mass on all Sundays and days of obligation.

She went the first Sunday after her arrival. A Cabinet Minister was staying in the house, and on Saturday night he received a command to dine with the Sovereign on Monday; but the Queen was in Scotland, and he would have to go to London to pick up his court dress, and that meant catching the only morning train from Saltminster at 10.50 on Sunday. A brougham took him; but there was a luggage cart to take his things and his valet, and Lady Fitzrupert (with a brilliant stroke of relevance and recollection) told Fring at 11.15 on Saturday night, that it could take her to Mass, too.

"Thank you, my lady," said Fring, "it's but a little place, Saltminster; I wonder when Mass is?"

"Oh, Mass goes on all the time from sunrise. I've been abroad. I often said Mass. At Mainz there was a High Mass at each end and little Masses all round. You could hear eleven at once."

"There'd be a many priests there . . ." observed Fring.

"Oh, baskets of them: they sang through their noses——"

Fring was not impressed by the circumstance, at all events it did not convince her that there would be a long succession of Masses at Saltminster.

"I've seen the Saltminster priest," her ladyship went on, "he never wears anything but a tophat. You go in with Lord John's man and let him drop you at the corner of Ox Row, it's not five minutes from there to Fiddle Street where the Catholic church is, you'll get there by half-past ten—or twenty to eleven. Probably the service is at eleven. Even if it's at half-past ten you'll be in time, for the priest has to go round first making aspersions on the people, as our French governess used to say."

Well, Fring went, and didn't arrive till quarter to eleven, and the Mass was at ten; so she was rather late.

On the following Sunday Lady Fitzrupert was on a short visit at Beansite, where the Duke was entertaining their Serene Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Reannfels-Hinterlangonbach, and of course she took her maid with her. The park at Beansite is so big that the nearest village is seven miles off—and the nearest town is eight miles further on. Even there there is no Catholic church, though there are nine Nonconformist chapels.

On the Sunday after that Fring borrowed a bicycle (they were nothing like so common then, and she had no great proficiency in riding them). She got to Mass in time, but arrived at Burnham Abbey on her return with a black eye and no skin on her nose, having collided with a telegraph post and been shot off on to a heap of newly-broken granite stones for road mending.

"My goodness," cried Lady Fitzrupert, "if they black your eyes at Mass——"

But Fring was so deeply hurt by this jocund condolence that her mistress stopped laughing and said:

"You shall have the dog-cart next Sunday, and Thomas shall drive you in. I'll speak to Sir Rupert about it in good time."

She really meant it, only the horse belonging to the dog-cart was seriously indisposed on the following Sunday, and Thomas considered it would be as good as "killing of him in gold blood" to put him in the shafts.

The Sunday after that Sir Rupert, my lady, Mr. Braces and Miss Fring were all at Dudlow Manor to see the Honorable Maria Duddle married, on Monday morning, to Captain Shikker, the great sportsman and oriental traveler.

"Fring," said Lady Fitzrupert on Saturday night while being dressed for dinner, "I asked Lady Dudlow about Mass, and she nearly had a fit—thinking I had turned Catholic like a thief in the night. But there's no Catholic church anywhere about here now —I told you there was, and so there used to be: Catesby House is only a mile away, but it seems Sir Guy Fawkes-Catesby has let Catesby to some sewing-machine people (American and Pilgrim Fathers, no doubt) and the chapel is shut up."

It is not necessary to explain exactly how it was that Fring hardly ever *could* get to Mass: and it would be sad to explain how gradually she came to give up trying. You must remember that I am not asking you to believe she was a young woman of determined character or of intense piety. She was honest, respectable, well-conducted, not vain, nor untruthful, not light-minded: but she was not eagerly devout and all her surroundings were placidly pagan. From week's end to week's end she neither saw nor heard anything whatever to remind her of her religion: and her disposition was spongily receptive. Without being quick to receive new impressions she slowly absorbed the influences that pressed upon her as intangibly as an atmosphere. At first she had felt a dull misgiving of losing her faith, but when she was really losing it she had ceased to notice.

If you do not think her story worth attention I will ask you to remember that it is that of hundreds and hundreds of Catholic servants in non-Catholic houses up and down England.

IV

When the St. Blazes came back from the Continent not three months after Fring went to Burnham Abbey, but seven, there was her opportunity; but she missed it. Had they returned four months earlier she might have seized it. But she had been at Burnham more than half a year and was used to it: she liked her mistress much better than Lady Fitzrupert imagined, and she also liked Mr. Braces. This is not going to be a romance of the housekeeper's room, and I may say at once that nothing came of Fring's silent and shy admiration for the sparkling Mr. Braces. He was quite unaware of it, besides he was engaged (not impatiently) to a Mrs. Scraper, who was trying the experiment of a small boarding house at Coldport-on-Sands, and when it turned out a success, he, in due course, married her. Fring bore no malice and subscribed thirty shillings to the electro-plated teapot, milk-jug and sugar basin that the upper servants at Burnham presented him.

Still when, three years earlier, Lady Fitzrupert had said to her, "Fring, will you stay on here, or go to Lady de Ribstone?" the thought of Mr. Braces had not been without influence.

"I don't like changes, my lady," Fring had replied calmly.

The attractions that held her to Burnham Abbey were not all romantic: the place was thoroughly comfortable, and Fring liked comfort. She was not greedy, but she enjoyed good eating: her wages were high, and her mistress was generous; her own room was uncommonly pleasant and had a fire all day in winter, spring and autumn; and the housekeeper's room was the most comfortable room in the house.

Oddly enough there *was* one thing at Burnham that reminded Fring now and then of her religion; the only Catholic who ever showed his nose there was an Irishman who came at rare intervals to buy rabbit skins, but Fring had nothing to do with rabbit skins and seldom saw him. She didn't want to, his calling was low, and it annoyed her that he should be associated with her religion. But Burnham was an Abbey, and the name gave her a sort of smack from time to time. Strange to say, it was not so at first: she had lived there for many years without thinking of it.

It began in this way: Lady Fitzrupert bought all manner of old things, warming-pans, door-knockers, chairs with no bottoms, and so on; and one day she came back from Saltminster with a crozier sticking out of the window of the brougham. It was wooden and gilt, and had belonged to a statue.

"I'd have bought the statue, too, Fring, and given him to you. But it was St. Joseph, and he finds people husbands—I thought of it in time; and he was six feet high in his nimbus, and wouldn't go on your chimneypiece." (She was wrong about his being St. Joseph, he was St. Patrick.) "So I let a dealer get him for three pound seven, and gave him five and twenty shillings for the crozier."

"But, my lady, you can't wear it."

"No. But that didn't stop me buying the copper warming-pan, nor the spinet with no insides. Isn't it pretty? And quite the proper thing for an Abbey. I shall pretend we dug it up."

Mrs. Stumger saw the crozier in the Green Drawing-room and didn't approve of it.

"It's enough," she told Fring, "to bring one of them old Abbesses out of their graves to look for it. There are no ruins here, thanks to glory, but the bowlin' green was the old buryin' ground, and there's them as have seen what *I* could never abear to."

"What?" asked Fring, with awe and eagerness combined in pleasant proportions.

"Nuns," answered Stumger, poking the fire and looking over her left shoulder (at the jam cupboard).

From that out, as they say in Ireland, Fring never completely forgot it was an abbey, and the idea of nuns would now and then occur to her—not comfortably.

"Did the Fitzruperts turn the nuns out?" she once asked Mrs. Stumger.

"No. It was before their time. They're from the Stuart times, this fam'ly; they got Burnham by a marriage. Seymour was the name, I think, of the gent that old King Harry gave this place to. Or else it was King Edward. Anyway, Seymours got it."

"And what came of the nuns?"

"They were sent to the right about. The Abbess died under the big yew near where the lodge is—she was as old as sin, but an 'armless woman, of titled fam'ly, and it was winter (Christmas Eve, I've heard say) when they carried her from her bed all in a litter (and no wonder, not expecting it), but she died under the big yew, and they say her spirit ran back to the Abbey—folks saw her, her black gown showing up on the snow in the moonlight. She's one that walks, or used to. And if I was my lady I wouldn't bring croziers in the house to give her something to come for."

Fring sincerely hoped she would never see her. In ghosts she believed with reluctant firmness. Why on earth couldn't Burnham be a Castle, or a Court, or a Hall, or a Manor—anything but an Abbey?

She kept oftener and oftener remembering that it was an Abbey, and why. Over and over again she thought she saw a black-robed figure lurking in a corner of the long gallery; and though it always proved to be a shadow, the next time she was equally sure it was a real figure.

At last, and no wonder, she began to dream of the figure. One evening, in a foggy dusk, her mistress said:

"Fring, I must have dropped my little gilt bag on the bowling-green before tea. It's the only place I stood about at, go and look for it, please."

The moon was just up, and there were long shadows; the grass looked white in the wan light. Fring found the bag, but was sure she had seen the black figure motionless under a broken cedar tree.

That night she dreamt; and in her dream she sat up in bed, sure that someone was in the room, and stared about to look for it. Out of the shadow by the door it came quietly into the dying glow of the pleasant fire; a black-gowned figure holding my lady's crozier, and pausing, and peering, as though searching for something—some little thing, for it stooped, and groped, as if the thing were too small to find easily.

"Oh, ma'am. Oh, my lady—what is it? What are you looking for?" wailed poor Fring in her dream. "There's nothing here but what belongs to me; *I* never took any of your things; nor anybody's things. You'll find nought here but what's mine."

"Yes, it's yours," said a voice, very old and weak and patient, "and I'm trying to find it. But it's grown so little—if I can't find it, and give it back to you, you'll lose it out and out. It'll be clean gone, and there'll be an end of it."

"Never mind it, ma'am, my lady," pleaded Fring, in her dream. "Don't you trouble. I shall never miss it—maybe I'll get another."

"No. That you never can. You've only one and it's growing smaller, and smaller, and smaller; and being smothered——"

"Oh, my lady, ma'am, what is it?"

"Your soul. . . ."

And then Fring awoke, crying bitterly, and the pleasant cosy room, with a good fire blazing still, and thick curtains and good furniture, had never looked homelier; but it was long before Fring could go to sleep again, she was in such dread of dreaming that horrible dream over again; yet it was worse lying awake, for that had *only* been a dream, and she was in a nervous terror of seeing something with her waking eyes.

Twice afterwards, a week later and two weeks later, the dream came back, though never again did the nun with the crozier say anything. There was no need. Fring knew very well what the little thing was for which she was looking—peering and stooping.

After the third time Fring made up her mind.

"My lady, if you please," she said to her mistress, "I'd like to leave."

"Fring!" cried Lady Fitzrupert, quite indignantly, as if Fring had said something disrespectful.

"I do beg your pardon, my lady," wailed poor Fring. "You've been a kind mistress, and you've never known how truly fond of you I've been for many many years—from the first, I think. But there's a little thing I have of my own, and, oh, I shall lose it if I stay here——"

"Lose it? Lose what?" demanded her ladyship, staring with unfeigned astonishment.

Fring was very earnest not to tell, but her mistress was determined to be told, and she was a far more obstinate woman. Of course, Fring told her at last—had she said nothing about her dreams I think Lady Fitzrupert would have laughed; but the whimpering old woman's maid did tell about them, and her mistress was extremely superstitious. Any religion she had was a singular mixture picked up out of all sorts of books, a kind of bric-a-brac, not at all useful, and not worth very much. But she was ready for any superstition. She would not believe anything because God had revealed it, but she would believe any odd story told on the authority of somebody's aunt or somebody's cousin's gamekeeper. Also she was good-natured, and she saw very clearly that Fring was "all to pieces"; besides, she was no longer young herself, and a younger person about her would be more cheerful.

"Well," she declared at last, "if you do go I can give you an excellent character."

"Thank you, my lady, but I wasn't thinking of taking another situation—not at present."

What she did was to become a lay-sister in the very Order to which the Burnham nuns had belonged: and there she is still, much respected and placidly happy.

"Dreams and omens, and such-like fooleries," she sometimes says to herself, "no doubt they're fooleries: but God don't fish for fools with wise-folk's bait; and p'raps He condescends to teach a body that can't be taught wisdom any better way by means even of a foolery."

As to whether the moral of this story is good or bad, you must make up your mind for yourself.

Personally I lean to Fring's opinion.

HER LADYSHIP

I

When Doris Hepworth announced her intention of earning her own living as a schoolmistress the Hepworth family was deeply scandalized—much more loudly so than when her Uncle Varloman took to drink; but then he did not precisely announce the circumstance—it announced itself. The Hepworths were genteel, and it is not genteel to become a schoolmistress, and teach village children reading, writing, arithmetic, and such other subjects as the School Board in its inscrutable wisdom declared to be necessary for future plowboys and their sisters—such as chemistry and composition.

They did not go so far as to assert that it is genteel to addict one's self to habitual inebriety, but instances of it had occurred in families even more well connected than their own: whereas Board schoolmistresses were unheard of in the pedigrees of any family that *had* pedigrees. Added to which, they saw no reason why Doris should earn her own living at all. Her father was alive and held the respectable post of principal assistant junior clerk in the Waterways Department of the Board of Inland Communications. The secretary of the department was Sir Higham Pitcher, and even the assistant secretary had married an honorable—the Honorable Terentia Marples, seventh daughter of Lord Strathtidlem. The office of the Board, as everyone knows, is in Whitehall, and all its members hold their noses aloft, and duly despise all such civil servants as have their offices in Somerset House or on the Embankment.

True, Mr. Hepworth's salary was not large, and his family was; or perhaps we should say each of his families was—for he had been twice a widower, and had twice ceased to be one, and none of the three Mrs. Hepworths had been denied the blessing of offspring.

It is fair to say that Mr. Hepworth himself saw nothing scandalous in his eldest daughter's determination to earn her own bread and butter; it was chiefly her aunts and her late mother's aunts who were shocked at her doing so.

Miss Adeliza Hepworth complained most, and with most right, as she was the wealthiest member of the family, and held more state than any of the others. She lived by herself in a small chilly country-house called Billings Court, where she had ample leisure to survey her own gentility and to alter her will whenever any of her kindred annoyed her. If it had occurred to her to invite her niece to come and live with her she might have been less lonely, and possibly Doris would never have been a schoolmistress; but that idea never entered what she was pleased to call her head. She preferred to scan the imperfections of her relations from afar, and point out their deficiencies through the penny post.

She duly wrote to her brother—to Doris she never intended to write any more—and explained that his daughter was taking a step which would render it impossible for her, Adeliza, to retain any further cognizance of her existence, and darkly alluded to four hundred pounds which would now be devoted to the endowment of a cats' cemetery.

"To bury herself in, I suppose," observed Mr. Hepworth, and his own wit put him in so good a temper that he gave Doris ten pounds as a parting present.

His wife, however, took Aunt Adeliza's part; her step-daughter's decision to go forth and work for her bread she took as a reflection on herself.

"Well, my dear," her husband urged, "I can't live forever, and *I* can leave Doris nothing: she might have to go out as a governess—and she prefers being independent. Besides, it's easier beginning young, while one is stll energetic."

"She might marry. Robert Skewpole has an eye on her, I'm certain."

"That's more than I would dare to say—he squints so, there's no saying what his eye's on."

"Reginald, pray! We needn't *all* be vulgar, even if one of your daughters *is* going to be a schoolmistress."

Mr. Hepworth warmed his gloves, and went off to the Waterways; and in due time Doris went away to take up her first appointment.

We need not follow her long career step by step. It will be enough to say that by the time she was six-and-twenty she had a school of her own, in the remote Fenshire village of Cold Overton.

Her adventures had not been hitherto exciting, but neither had she been unhappy. Her health was good, and her disposition cheerful; she made no great demands of life, and Fate had not persecuted her—Fate is probably too aristocratic to trouble herself about schoolmistresses.

She was slim and active, with a neat figure, and a face that boasted no wonderful beauty, but was far from being insignificant; her skin was as smooth as that of a peach, her dark grey eyes were large, intelligent and thoughtful, her mouth suggested sweet temper, even when she was not smiling, and her smile was very pleasant. Perhaps her hair was her strong point—it was of a rich auburn brown, and very abundant, soft and shining, and she did not neglect it. She wore it in a manner that suited her, and her dress was always neat and dainty, though quiet and inexpensive.

When she had settled herself into the cottage attached to the schoolhouse, she felt as though she had now fixed herself for life, and she mildly thanked Heaven that she had so little to complain of.

The cottage was not pretty outside, but it was comfortable and convenient within, and she had taste enough to make it look like the home of a lady. Her books lined nearly the whole of one wall, and stood on shelves she had made herself; her pictures were of her own painting, and had been framed by herself, and the curtains were embroidered by her own hands, too.

Cold Overton is a long village, consisting of one winding street, at one end of which is the church and the vicarage at the other end is the school. All round are flat fens, over which the mists from the sea, three miles off, are apt to creep when the short winter day turns from leaden grey to black.

"I'm glad there are shutters," Doris said to herself; "they make it twice as warm." She put another piece of wood on the fire, and her cat, Tudor, smiled to himself as he lay on the warm rug, and thought complacently of less well-to-do cats that had to search the hedges for sleeping birds if they wanted any supper.

The log burned with a blue flare, for it was a bit of ship's timber, and tarry—Doris had bought a small load of it from a certain Moses who came round with a donkey cart on which he sat with his wooden leg cocked out in front of him like the bowsprit of a little vessel.

Doris was knitting and her eyes occasionally wandered to the fire, and the blue flame made her think of ships and the sea.

"I hope it wasn't a wreck," she thought to herself. "God help all on the sea to-night." For the wind was keen and cold outside, and sometimes the blast would smack at the shutters, or even whistle in at a keyhole as though saying: "Let me in! Come now! I want company!"

But Doris, instead of letting him in, stuffed the keyhole with flannel list, and let him carry his complaints elsewhere. So he ran away across the flats to sea, and whistled fiercely in the rigging of any ships he could find, and Doris sat warm and snug by her fireside, while Tudor purred approvingly.

So far as Doris could see she would sit there night after night, through all that winter, and all the winters of, say, the next fifty years. And she had not the least objection. She was not ambitious, and she liked her work; it was not useless, and if it was not highly paid, it yielded her all she wanted. Smart clothes, fine feeding and "society" were as far outside the scope of her desires as they were beyond her reach. She told herself flatly that she was an old maid; it was merely a question of time, and she had no intention of interfering with what time would bring about. She drew her chair a little nearer to the comfortable red fire, and wondered how Mr. Drumble spent *his* evenings.

Mr. Drumble was the vicar and there was no Mrs. Drumble; so that the sagacious reader may perhaps say that Doris would not have wondered how he spent his evenings had she really been in earnest about being an old maid—at six-and-twenty, too! But then Mr. Drumble was about as old as her father and was a leathery person, with a beard of half a dozen different shades of dingy grey. The reader must take my word for it that Doris Hepworth had not the least idea of becoming Mrs. Drumble. She merely wondered how his evenings were spent because he was the only person of her own class within a radius of four miles, because he lived alone, like herself, and because, somehow, he did not give her the idea of being a man specially addicted to reading.

As it happened he was at that moment wondering how Doris spent *her* evenings; he knew she was a lady, and he did not for a moment suppose she would make friends or companions of any of the village folk. He told himself that it was a pity, for her sake, he was a bachelor; had there been any Mrs. Drumble he and that lady might have been neighborly.

Strange to say, Mr. Drumble and Miss Hepworth were both of them being discussed by Mrs. Bagg, of the post-office, on whom Mrs. Diggle, the sexton's wife, had dropped in for a chat.

"There," said Mrs. Bagg, "him a bachelor and her a single lady—and well born, as anyone can see—it's a pity they don't make a match of it. It would be company for them."

"Very like they will. What strikes you and me, Mrs. Baggs, may strike them as well. 'Twould be a good thing for his linen—I'm sure his cuffs are as furry round the edges. And his hankershers are as holey as one of the prophets."

"And there'd be an end of reading at his meals—cruel for the digestion. Well, I wish her good luck, and him too."

About three weeks after this Mr. Drumble's sister came on a visit, and he took the opportunity of "being neighborly." Miss Hepworth was invited half a dozen times to supper, and she made a good impression on Miss Acacia Drumble—her Christian name was the only ridiculous thing about her.

"Well, Acacia," said the gentleman one night, on returning to the drawing-room after escorting their visitor to the door, "it seems very snug in here; there's a biting wind outside, and I felt quite inhospitable when I shut Miss Hepworth out."

"You ought to have walked home with her."

"Oh, I don't know. Village people are such talkers."

"Or you should have asked her to stop."

"Asked her to stop!"

"Yes—to stop for good. You have often asked me."

"Yes. Why won't you?"

"Because I should feel bound to stay here forever."

"And that's just what you ought to do. That's what I *meant* by stopping for good."

"Exactly. But I can't. Philip, I'm going to be married."

"Good gracious!"

"Yes, I'm engaged to be married."

"Goodness! And why did you not tell me before? You've been here a fortnight."

"Twelve days. But I have only been engaged since five o'clock."

"Since five o'clock! Nobody was here at five o'clock except Solomon Baggs, the postman, and he's married already."

"It isn't Solomon Baggs; but he brought me a second post letter and he waited in the kitchen while I wrote the answer. The answer was 'Yes,' and I'm engaged to Captain Eustace, whom I have mentioned to you pretty often."

"Him! I think you have. You said, I think, that he was not handsome."

"Handsome is as handsome does. He's about as good-looking as I am. You'd better follow my example."

"*I* can't accept Captain Eustace."

"You can give Miss Hepworth the chance of accepting you."

Unfortunately he gave the chance too soon. He thought it over, and next day, without consulting his sister further, suggested mildly to Miss Hepworth that it would be very kind of her if she would become Mrs. Drumble.

"It's no good," he informed Acacia at tea time. "She doesn't seem to care about it."

"Care about what? Care about what? Who doesn't seem to?"

"Miss Hepworth, of course. There's no one else. I asked her and she was very nice about it, very nice, indeed. But it's no good at all."

"Good gracious, Philip! You don't mean to say you asked her to-day. You should have waited; no wonder she made up her mind at once."

"Why, you seemed to think I should have asked her last night."

"Oh dear, what foolish creatures men are!"

"Captain Eustace is a man."

"If he had asked me like that—but he waited three months and let me see what was coming. You don't suppose his letter surprised me. I could stay here six week—if you'd gone on having Miss Hepworth here you might have asked her during my last week. How awkward! I suppose I shall feel bound to go away now, and you'll have a schoolmistress like the last one, who sang all the hymns flat and smacked the children."

"No. She won't go away; I begged her not to. I begged her to think no more of what I had said. 'It was merely an idea of mine—and of my sister's,' I told her. 'Pray think no more of it—*I* shan't.' "

"Good gracious! And you dragged *me* in, too. I have no patience with men. The older they are the sillier."

II

To do him justice Dr. Drumble did seem to "think no more of it." And Doris did not find her position had been made embarrassing. She continued in charge of the school at Cold Overton, and gave everybody complete satisfaction. Mrs. Baggs and Mrs. Diggle still thought she and the Vicar ought to make a match of it, but they were leisurely people themselves and were content to give them time.

The winter merged with chill deliberation into spring; spring presently warmed itself into summer; autumn soon laid summer by the heels, and then the long, windy, foggy winter set in on the fens once more, and Cold Overton justified its name.

Doris found her snug cottage very pleasant in the long firelit evenings, and she never felt them over long, for she had taken to writing, and had achieved more moderate success than falls to ninety out of every hundred who make the attempt. Within the last twelve months she had earned as much by her pen as her whole salary came to, and she found she could write best in winter; she was sure of being free from interruption during the long hours between tea and bed-time.

Tudor did not wholly approve of this writing—it occasioned a certain unpunctuality in the matter of supper; and Tudor liked his meals regular.

One evening Doris, with her little table close to the warm hearth, was busy with her pen, which was taking a higher flight than usual.

"I hope nobody who has been *in* a shipwreck will read this," she thought to herself. "I can't say I regret not having been in one myself. I wish that loose bough would not knock at the shutter so—it's much too cold to go out and see to it."

But the knock came again—not at the shutter this time, but at the door, and Doris had to get up and go to it.

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger whom she found on the doorstep. "I knocked at the first door I came to. I'm nearly frozen, and I wanted a warm; but really, I beg your pardon, the wind has blown your candle out."

So it had; but there was a splendid fire, and the cosy room was full of warm light.

"Come in," Doris said, without hesitation, and the stranger walked in without waiting to be asked twice. His thick outer coat was drenched, and the rain dripped from the hat he took from his head.

Doris shut the door, and whilst she lighted the candle again, bade him warm himself.

"Take your overcoat off and hang it to the fire," she said in a business-like manner, and the stranger obeyed, to the extreme annoyance of Tudor, who didn't like to be dripped on.

"They told me at Sandmouth that the vicarage was the first house in cold weather," the stranger explained, "but I'm sure I took a wrong turn, and I suppose I've arrived at the wrong end of your village. I'm coming to stay with Mr. Drumble, he's my uncle. There is only one fly in Sandmouth and it has gone to a dinner party five miles away, so I walked it."

"If Mr. Drumble expects you, he'll be anxious perhaps."

"No, he won't. For I was to come to-morrow. But my ship got in a day early, so I came on."

He had not said he was a sailor, but he looked like one, and Doris lifted up her little table bodily and put it away in a corner. It made her shy to think of her amateurish account of a shipwreck being so close under the nose of a sailor.

"I'm a frightful nuisance to you," he went on cheerfully. "You were writing, and I've interrupted the flow of your ideas! But really I was frozen. It was a downright charity to let me come in and thaw myself."

"I'll make you a cup of tea; the kettle is boiling, you see."

"It would be awfully good of you. But I'm spoiling the writing."

"The writing will keep. In fact, I had just got to a sticking place."

The stranger laughed comfortably.

"Who was in trouble? he asked, "the hero or the heroine? I hope it wasn't the lady. Men are used to it. Born to it, you know, as the sparks fly upwards."

He did not look as if his own troubles had weighed heavily on him. He was, perhaps, a year older than Doris; tall, straight, comely, with a bright eye that seemed full of healthy merriment. His manner was frank and free, but not free and easy; on the contrary it was plain enough that he was well-bred and used to the company of well-bred people. His features were refined though strong, and the hands he held out to the fire were those of a gentleman, finely shaped, if rather large. His voice was pleasant, and the tones clear, but not over loud.

"I think I ought to tell you my name," he remarked smiling, "dropping down *incognito* like this. I am, as I said, Mr. Drumble's nephew, and I am Sir Ralph Berwick."

"My name," the young lady explained, "is Doris Hepworth, and I am the schoolmistress."

"Doris Hepworth! I've read yarns by you! Rattling good yarns, too. I read one in the train to-day and now I have interrupted you in the thick of another."

"Perhaps," said Doris laughing, "it was providential. "I was describing a shipwreck and hoping no one would read it who had ever been in one. Fate may have sent you to tell me all about it."

At that moment another knock came at the door and Sir Ralph Berwick looked as little pleased as Tudor had been at his own arrival.

It was Mr. Drumble himself.

"Good evening," he said as soon as the door was opened and without coming in. "I came down to tell you that two of the little Baggs have developed measles and I think we shall have to close the school for a week or so, till we know if any more cases appear."

"Come in," said Doris. "It is much too cold for you to stand talking in that wind, and I've a visitor that belongs to you."

Sir Ralph, who was hidden by a tall screen, heard all this and was rather amused at her self-possession. Some young women in her position would, he thought, have been slightly embarrassed by the arrival of their "chief" at a moment when they happened to be entertaining a strange young man.

Doris was not in the least embarrassed. She led her new visitor in and smiled cheerfully at his surprise.

"Ralph!" he exclaimed, "how on earth did you get here?"

His nephew explained and Doris continued her preparations for tea.

"One cup of tea," she observed, "is not much of a return for all the suppers you have given me."

Sir Ralph suppressed a smile; he perceived that his uncle was not so free from embarrassment as their hostess.

"So he stands her suppers!" he said to himself, "these quiet parsons know a thing or two."

Mr. Drumble longed to explain that it was only when his sister was at the Vicarage that he entertained Miss Hepworth.

"Ah!" he said diplomatically, "when Mrs. Eustace comes again we must have more supper parties."

"Meanwhile it is my turn to be host," said Doris, and invited the two gentlemen to sit down.

It was not a very late party when Mr. Drumble and Sir Ralph said good night, it was not yet eight o'clock. Then Doris went back to her writing.

A night or two afterwards Sir Ralph came again.

"My uncle has been called out to go to see an old woman who lives at the other end of the parish," he explained, "and when I got in from a long walk I found a note from him saying we should not have supper till nine o'clock. So I came round to inquire how that shipwreck is getting on. I really *was* in a shipwreck once, and I offer you the use of my experience."

He persuaded her, much against her will, to read what she had written, and then he told her, briefly but with a certain pictorial force, exactly what his own shipwreck had been like.

"Can you work it in?" he asked when he had finished.

"Yes, I think so. I will try presently."

"Then I shall come again to-morrow evening to hear what you have written."

"I took it for granted," Doris remarked presently, "that you must be in the Navy. I gather that you are not."

"No. I was meant for the Civil Service, but I didn't cotton to it. Then I chucked it, and I was too old for the Navy so I went into the Mercantile

Marine. I was determined to be a sailor of some sort. My people were rather scandalized—they didn't think the Merchant Service smart enough."

Doris smiled to herself and he noticed it.

"What amuses you?" he inquired.

"I was thinking we had something in common; *my* people were scandalized, too; they didn't think a village schoolmistress at all smart either."

"It seems to suit you."

"Yes, it does. I like being my own mistress, and eating bread I've earned myself."

When he went away, which he did in a few minutes, Sir Ralph thought over this.

He did not unreservedly agree to it. Women, in his opinion, should eat what man earned for them. When he got back to the vicarage he found Mrs. Eustace there.

"Philip wrote and said you were here," she explained, "and asked me and Jim to come and help to amuse you. But Jim has an examination for promotion on hand. So I came myself. Is Miss Hepworth still here? Phil never mentions her and I don't like to ask; it's a sore subject, I expect."

Mrs. Eustace was still a chatterbox and soon told her nephew all about it.

"He does not seem very lovesick," Ralph declared, poking the fire unnecessarily.

"No? I daresay not. When she refused him, he told her it didn't matter. It's a pity he was in such a hurry. She would have looked after his shirts and seen that he had his hair cut."

Ralph did not seem to think his aunt's idea a very brilliant one, and that lady perceived the fact with some amusement.

"We'll have her to supper again," she observed cheerfully. "You and I can play cribbage and leave the coast clear."

"I can't play cribbage."

"Oh, I'll teach you. The great thing is to give them time, I must beg him not to propose again for—well, say a fortnight."

"I should think once was enough."

"Oh, I don't know. I'm all for her marrying; she's really very pretty and very well-bred, and quite as well born as we are. It's all nonsense her being a schoolmistress."

"There's something in that!" agreed her nephew.

"And," said Mrs. Eustace, "Phil's her only chance."

Ralph poked the fire again, and smiled up the chimney.

Mrs. Eustace stayed three weeks, and while she was packing on the day before her departure, she also smiled—into a hat box.

"I don't believe," she assured herself, "that Phil will mind a bit. He has so little spirit."

Nor did he.

When she went down to tea her brother swallowed three cups without saying a word.

"Where's Ralph?" she asked demurely.

"He has gone back to fetch Miss Hepworth—he was here just now. He asked me to tell you. It's just as well I did ask her too soon, though you were cross with me at the time. Ralph will suit her far better, and, though I enjoy your visits extremely, I don't know that I should care to have a lady *always* on the spot. It seems to upset the women servants, and I could not stand being tidied as a regular thing. During your visits I make the best of it. But only to-day, you tidied two sermons together, and now I can't tell which is which!"

"And you really don't mind? You're not disappointed?"

"Not at all. But Ralph would have been. He tells me he was so nervous till he knew what she would say, that he couldn't even read the newspapers. I remember when *I* asked feeling nervous, too—if she had said 'Yes,' there would have been no backing out of it."

When Aunt Adeliza heard the news she telegraphed to her lawyer and made a new will without a day's delay. As Sir Ralph Berwick was very well off, and his wife could not possibly need any more money, the old lady left her Billings Court included, and that will was never altered.

"Doris," she wrote to her brother, "is the only member of the family who ever had any decision of character; she takes much more after me than after you or her poor mother. Sir Ralph must bring her here as soon as the honeymoon is over; Lady Berwick must be introduced to her future tenantry."

BY THE WAY

I

"It's no use, sir," observed the railway guard (a civil person with a rosebud in his button-hole), "I'm afraid you'll not find a place. All the thirds are full up. The train's moving—you'd better step in here, sir."

And he held open the door of a first-class carriage, and assisted either the indecision or the inagility of Dom Maurus by a slight pat or push in the small of the back, which landed him almost on the knees of a young officer, who smiled pleasantly. Dom Maurus dropped into the seat opposite, and begged his pardon.

"The railway company," observed the only other legitimate occupant of the carriage, "should provide more third-class compartments."

He was a gentleman of what is called a full habit, with a great deal of double chin, and a neck that overlapped his stiff collar considerably. The young officer glanced at him, but turned his eyes away again quickly, as though the briefest inspection were quite enough to satisfy any desire he had had of looking at the gentleman.

The stoutish gentleman had a good deal of luggage and had so disposed it as to take up a good deal of room. Dom Maurus had only a small bag, which he contrived should take up no room at all, as he almost sat on it.

"Pardon me," said the stoutish gentleman, "are you going to London?"

Again the young officer glanced, hurriedly, at the stout gentleman, and in doing so uncrossed his legs, and crossed them again—as it were impatiently. The glance and the gesture seemed to protest "surely this poor gentleman may go where he likes without giving *us* any account of it."

"No," answered the young monk, "I am going to Oldminster."

"Then you will have to change at Saxby. In the slow train you will doubtless find plenty of third-classes."

At this second allusion to third-class carriages the young officer darted a third glance at the stout gentleman and coughed slightly.

"Did you address me, sir?" asked the stout gentleman, turning himself in his collar.

"Anything but," replied the young officer, without a moment's indecision.

"Personally, I frequently converse with the chance companion of a journey," remarked the stout gentleman (whose portmanteaux had the letters O. Y. stamped upon them in gilt). "Thus I enlarge my knowledge of the race."

"To get tips?" suggested the young officer.

The only tips of which the stout gentleman had cognizance were gratuities, and he looked vague.

"Life itself," he explained, "is but a journey. And I snatch the chance of encounter of its little counterpart to widen my outlook."

He widened his outlook at the moment by opening his bulgy eyes to their utmost capacity.

The young officer slightly groaned and buried himself in *Punch*.

"You, I take it," said O. Y., "are one of the band of our brave defenders."

"I'm not," declared the young officer desperately, "in the band. I doubt if I should defend you very bravely."

"I used," observed O. Y., "the term 'brave defenders' generally. Of your personal courage you are yourself, no doubt, the best judge."

He spoke with a smile of great extent, but superficial depth.

"And you, sir," he said, slightly indicating the intruded third-class passenger, with a little wave of his fat hand, "are, as I apprehend, a Roman priest."

It showed, I think, what a good fellow the young officer was that he was much more savage with the stout gentleman for his assaults on the third-class passenger than bored by those levelled at himself. He looked at O. Y. with a very plain intention of demanding, "Why the mischief can't you let *him* alone?"

"I am not a priest—yet," answered Dom Maurus, "and I am not a Roman. Most of the younger Roman priests are, I fancy, at present with the Italian armies."

"I took you," said the stout gentleman, "for a Catholic—"

"I am certainly a Catholic."

"And your dress is clerical!"

"You seem," remarked the young officer cheerfully, addressing O. Y., "to have made a clerical error."

The stout gentleman slightly cleared his throat, but did not look at the young officer.

"You state," he observed to his other victim, "that you are not a Roman—"

"Any fellow could see," interpolated the young officer, "that he was an English gentleman."

"But," continued O. Y., ignoring the interruption, "you admit you are a Catholic—"

"It is no admission. It is the best thing there is about me."

The stout gentleman closed both eyes as firmly as he had previously opened them, and slowly shook his head. It was clear, his opinion that if being a

Catholic was the best thing about the third-class passenger he must be in a bad way.

He kept his eyes so long closed that the young officer began to hope that he was going to sleep, though he could not divine in what had lain the narcotic power of his fellow-victim's very brief speech.

But O. Y. opened his eyes again suddenly and remarked—"I fail to understand why you denied that you were a Catholic priest."

The young officer's disappointment made him truculent.

"You fail to understand a lot, I daresay," he declared. "Why not go on failing?"

"I am not habituated to failure. To understand things is my unalterable custom: Why deny it?" In answering the young officer the stout gentleman had not looked at him: he had looked fixedly at the direction for stopping the train. But he turned largely to Dom Maurus to address him.

"Because it happens to be the case that I am not a priest. I am only a deacon."

"A deacon!" cried O. Y. "And surely a deacon is as much a young priest as a young elephant is a, a, an elephant!" He spoke with the air of a man who scorned trifling and subterfuge, and regarded the trifler with some severity.

"A young deacon may become a young priest certainly," said Dom Maurus smiling, "but a young elephant is an elephant already."

O. Y. shook his head sadly. He had been prepared to find Dom Maurus disingenuous, but this was very bad.

"I perceived at once," he observed, "that you were an ecclesiastic of the Roman Obedience. I am seldom deceived."

"And I," almost wailed the young officer, "perceived at once that *you* were a bore of enormous calibre: and oh, how glad I should have been to have been deceived."

The stout gentleman grew a little purpler, but to this attack he made no verbal rejoinder whatever. Perhaps because, like Dr. Johnson on a certain occasion, he had nothing ready.

"Your hair," he remarked to Dom Maurus, who had long ago removed his hat, "is oddly cut" —("Good Lord!" cried the young officer) "—is oddly cut," repeated O. Y. imperturbably. "I opine that you are a friar."

"No," said Dom Maurus. "I am a monk."

Again the stout gentleman had the air of expostulating thrice.

"A monk, not a friar. Very well, indeed."

"I wish I was a *monkey,*" wailed the young officer, "a man-eating monkey. I'd do my best, though it poisoned me."

"An officer and a gentleman!" remarked O. Y., lifting a fat hand and dropping it again rhetorically: smiling at the square toe of his immense boot with an exasperating sense of having neatly triumphed.

The young officer seemed so very ready for retort that Dom Maurus put in a plea for peace.

"I should leave him alone if I were you," he said.

"Yes, if he'll leave *you* alone."

"I don't mind it in the least. I imagine he is perfectly well-meaning."

The young officer looked with admiration at the young monk—it was so abundantly evident that his kindly tolerance was gall and wormwood to the stout gentleman.

The young officer smiled, and leaning forward said in a low voice—

"You are, I see, very well able to look after yourself. I shall leave you alone and watch the fun."

"I," said O. Y., rising so to speak in his stirrups, "am used to petulance."

Dom Maurus bowed, and no words could have more clearly said, "You must occasion it pretty frequently."

"But petulance," added O. Y., "never turns me from my purpose. In life's course one meets many men: and *their* life interests me. *Yours* does."

Dom Maurus bowed again.

"Yes, yours. Now tell me what it is."

"My life?"

"Yes. The life of a—I *beg* your pardon, *not* a friar—but a monk. What does a monk *do?*"

"Well, sir; you see monks are men" (O. Y. slightly raised his eyebrows as willing to let the statement pass unchallenged) "and, like other men, they do different things."

O.Y. again assumed the air of defying the whole Church of Rome, to deceive *him* with shallow subterfuge: let alone one deacon who wasn't man enough to admit he was a priest and face the consequences.

"I had hoped," he said patiently, "to have learned what the life of a monk is from one who, who, who *undergoes* it."

"Well, I myself am a Benedictine."

"Oh! A Benedictine," (he pronounced it like the liqueur) "and what do *you* do? Make the beverage of that name?"

"It is not commonly used precisely as a beverage. No, neither I nor any Benedictines in England make the liqueur. It happens to be a patent of a foreign house. I will tell you, if you care to listen, what we do. We have a large school for boys, and many of the monks teach in it, though not all. We have a house of studies at Oxford, for ourselves and for boys who have gone on from school—a hall in fact. At home we have a large farm where much of what we use is grown; and that, of course, requires management; some of the monks see to that. There is, in so big a house, much correspondence, and the Abbot and his assistants see to that. There is a large, that is, extended parish, and two of the monks attend to that. Some of our monks are great students, and some are writers: apart from the fact that we have a quarterly *Review* published at the Abbey, and all its contributors are monks. So hurried an epitome must be dry, but I hope you can perceive even from it that one way or another we have a good deal to do."

O. Y. slightly bowed and less slightly shook his head. He intended to convey the impression that he would not commit himself; that which as stated by the young monk sounded a good deal might in reality be very little indeed.

"You appear," he observed judicially, "to create activity for one another. However, I am glad to hear that there *are* activities (of a sort)——"

"So far, then," said Dom Maurus, with an air of relieved suspense, "we are fortunate in escaping your censure."

"So far, yes. Observe, I do not enter in the discussion as to how far those activities are directed to an end intrinsically good. To admit the intrinsic goodness of the end would be tantamount to admission that education in certain principles was itself laudable. Now those principles——"

"*Oh,* Lord! cried the young officer, "why can't there be a moderate railway accident? I'd sustain a shock, or lose a toe or two, and never claim a penny from the company, if only it would give you aphasia."

So profane a wish really had momentarily the effect desired. The stout gentleman was for many a minute dumfounded; and he could (during that lamentably brief period) only shake his head at the rack for light articles, only on which a ponderous bag of his own reposed.

"By principles," he said then, "I have through life been guided."

"I wish to goodness they had guided you into some other carriage," cried the young officer, still with great heat.

"The carriage has a door——" O. Y. was beginning.

"It has also a window," the young officer interrupted darkly.

O. Y. smiled disdainfully. There were two windows, but if the young officer had paused to consider he must have perceived that the stout gentleman's back would secure him from any chance of exit by either of them. The stout gentleman did consider it, and it restored his complacence. "You," he said to Dom Maurus, "are, as you state, a Benedictine——"

"Are you going to prove that he's a Kummel or a Curaçoa?" moaned the young officer.

"And the Benedictines (I have heard the claim advanced before) make some show of educational activity. But there are monks who do not even set up such a claim."

Dom Maurus bowed patiently.

"Monks who do not even pretend to do anything whatever."

"Is that so?"

"That is so. Possibly as a Benedictine you may excuse yourself from defense of the Carthusians—"

"Look here," exclaimed the young officer, "mind what you're saying, *I* am an Old Carthusian."

For the first time the stout gentleman really did jump, and for the first time Dom Maurus laughed.. The young officer looked so particularly young, and his whole appearance was so far from being monastic, that O. Y. had some excuse for being taken aback.

"This gentleman," explained Dom Maurus, "is not claiming to be an old monk; he was probably educated at the Charterhouse."

"He *stated* that he was an Old Carthusian—I fail to comprehend."

"Comprehension ain't your strong point," observed the young officer with unfettered candor. "I'd knock it off if I were you. Try contrasted ignorance; you're cut out for it. You'd get the Gold Medal for it any year."

"Come," pleaded Dom Maurus, "he does his best. No, sir," (to the stout gentleman), "I should not presume to excuse the Carthusians. Theirs is a rare and high vocation."

"Vocation presumes calling. Who calls them?"

"He who calls you to serve Him, no doubt in some different fashion."

"I, sir, am a WORKER."

("I wish," murmured the young officer, "you were at home; in your workhouse.")

"A *worker,* sir. That is my calling. To work for good. To increase the sum of good in the world."

"The Carthusians, unseen and unheard, are employed, like you, in increasing the sum of good in the world."

"By doing nothing! By leading idle lives—like drones."

"I do not know that we need at present occupy ourselves with the usefulness of drones. If they *were* useless there would be something amiss with creation; for they would not exist had they not been created by the same Wisdom that created the queen bees and the WORKERS. It is enough to remind ourselves that the drone is as essential to the bee race as the queen, and more so than an equal number of worker-bees. But at present we are talking not of bees, but of Carthusians. They, and many like them, such as Carmelite nuns, and the other pure contemplatives, do their noble share in the Church's work for God by *contributing to its quality*."

The young monk, as he ended, rather lowered than raised his voice, but his final words were spoken with a clear emphasis.

"You are probably aware," he went on more quickly, "that many persons do, in fact, join our Church?"

The stout gentleman lifted a sad hand, as who would say, "Alas! Too true."

"And what brings them to it?"

"Delusion!"

"No doubt you think so. But you must see that *they*, at least, would not so answer. They join the Church because of a certain quality that they come to recognize in her. Because in her they recognize something that they do not find elsewhere; a quality of excellence that draws them; that which we call the Note of Sanctity. If the Saints had not been Catholics you may be sure that our preachers would preach in vain; no subtle exhibition of doctrines would suffice of itself to allure those who stand outside, were it not that they outside who have come to us have first of all arrived at the instinctive conviction that in the Church is a quality unique; and to that quality the hidden contemplative has been contributing through the slow and silent ages. Here, sir, is Saxby, I believe; and here I change into the local train, in which I shall find, as you observed, plenty of third-class carriages. You two gentlemen are perhaps for London, and will continue your journey together."

"Not if this one of them knows it," said the young officer, with intense conviction, hurriedly getting his rugs and traps together.

"POOR ELEANOR!"

I

THE question is—will any reader put up with a heroine of thirty? If it be assumed that no unmarried woman of that age can be worth writing about, then the case of Eleanor Winton is hopeless. For when she met Sir Oliver Morland for the first time she had already kept (without much fun over it) her thirtieth birthday.

As it happened he caught the first sight of her face in a looking-glass: and the looking-glass was hanging on the wall of a large room in a great London hotel: and in the room a meeting was being held—organized by a society for fostering friendly relations between this country and Germany.

Sir Oliver Morland had come there out of a certain curiosity as to what the speakers would have to say, and what means they would suggest for insuring the amity they both desired and believed in. At the moment when he became aware of the lady's reflected face in the mirror he had just heard a very high ecclesiastical dignitary declare that war between England and Germany was "unthinkable"; but, interesting as that decisive pronouncement was, he found himself at once more interested by the face he saw in the looking-glass.

Miss Winton was making some remarks in a low voice to another lady seated on her left, and her head was turned away from Sir Oliver and towards the mirror; so that though he could only actually see the back of her head he could see her face in the mirror very well. It attracted him at once, not merely by its beauty, though he thought it beautiful, but because it seemed to him quite unusually interesting. Miss Winton was rather tall, and also rather slight, though not thin; her very dark eyes were not black, but of a sort of deep shadowy gray, and while her features were good it was the whole expression of the face that gave a peculiar distinction to it. As the lady beside her turned to answer what she had said, the young man perceived that it was the Duchess of Solway, whom he knew very well; at whose house in Cumberland he was indeed going to stay within the next few days for the coming of age of Lord Rockcliff, her only son.

Catching his eye the Duchess smiled, and nodded, and put on a queer little expression as much as to say, "You here, too: and what do you think of it all?"

Between them, besides Miss Winton, there were two other ladies, unknown to either, who had followed the speeches with severe attention, and had applauded decisively as though that settled it. So at present the Duchess and Sir Oliver Morland could do no more than smile at each other. But after a few minutes he received a little note from her, scribbled on the back of a programme, and forwarded by favor of Miss Winton and the two decisive ladies.

"Come to tea," it said, "and let's talk over this."

Whether he would have gone to tea at Solway House when the meeting ended (with cheers for King George and the Emperor William: with *God save the King,* and without *Deutschland über Alles*), if he had not seen Miss Winton's face in the looking-glass, I cannot say; but it is certain he did go. And it is certain that he found that lady still with the Duchess.

"Well," said he, when she had introduced him to Miss Winton, "I'm sure it was all very nice. Only I wish that Herr Pastor, who spoke so tenderly of his nation's longing for our love, hadn't pronounced it 'loaves'."

"Now, Aunt Elspeth," protested Miss Winton, "if you're going to scoff."

"I'm not. I was merely expressing a wish. I thought it a good meeting. General Pan looked like a lion in a den of lambs. I wonder what *he* thought of it all. Come, Oliver, what are we to say? Is peace now a settled thing forever, and are we to turn the Navy into a fleet of pleasure cruisers—perhaps Cook would buy them?"

"I'm sorry I took you to the meeting," said Miss Winton.

"Well, I didn't particularly want to go. However, I'm glad I did. The speeches were good. But, oh dear!"

"What does 'Oh dear!' mean, Duchess?" Morland asked laughing.

"It means that I wonder how much the Emperor William cares for it all."

"I expect he thoroughly approves," said Sir Oliver.

"So do I," agreed his hostess. "That's just it. He hasn't the slightest desire that we should dream of war—"

"Nor do we," said Miss Winton.

"I'm sure we don't," declared Morland.

"No," said their hostess, "we dream of Peace, and one fine morning he'll wake us up."

Then followed an argument, which need not be repeated here. What concerns us is that they were all very friendly and intimate together; so that when, six days later, Morland and Miss Winton found themselves together again at Solway Court they did not meet as strangers.

He did not see her till he came down from his room for dinner, and when he walked into the long gallery, where it was the custom of the house for the party to assemble before dinner, she was the only other person in it.

He was not much given to consider the details of a lady's dress; but it struck him at once that hers was exactly suited to her: and he was sure that, though her beauty by no means depended on mere adornment, evening dress showed it off much better than the present fashion of ladies' outdoor costume which he happened not to admire.

He made some slight remark on the beauty of the great gallery and its rather famous tapestry: adding, "I have only been here once before. You, I suppose, know the place well."

"I used to." Then, after a moment's pause: "Till yesterday I had not been here for years."

Just then a Miss Chipchase came in, and soon afterwards Sir Oliver had to take her to dinner. She knew all about everybody and was accustomed to talk about people. She read books and looked at pictures (even landscapes when she could not help it), but people were her subject: that is to say people of her own class.

"You," she said at a very early stage of dinner, "are a friend of Rockcliff's, aren't you? You know, he is my godson."

"I know him rather well now, but I have not known him long. You see I'm ten years older and he has only just stopped being a boy."

"He never will stop. Did you know the elder brother, Lord Malbray? He would be just your age."

"No, I never met him. He was killed in South Africa, wasn't he?"

"Yes; just at the end of the war. All the sisters came between him and Rupert, as we called him then. Of course, Rockcliff is only a Baron's title, and it's a little odd for a Duke's eldest son to be only a baron, but, as you know, when anything happens to an eldest son the next one, who steps into his shoes, never takes the same courtesy title."

Morland did know, but was not particularly interested. What Miss Chipchase said next interested him a good deal more. "You were talking to Eleanor Winton before dinner," she went on. "Of course, you know she was engaged to Malbray."

"No, I didn't. I only saw her for the first time last week."

After a moment's pause he added:

"She must have been very young—if Lord Malbray was killed thirteen years ago."

"She was barely seventeen when he became engaged and he was killed three months afterward."

"She certainly does not look thirty now," said Sir Oliver.

"How old should you have thought her?"

"I never gave it a thought till now. . . . I should say not more than five and twenty."

"The fact is," declared Miss Chipchase, "she has looked exactly the same for the last seven or eight years, and will go on looking the same perhaps for another seven. I intend to look the same for the next ten or twenty."

"You couldn't do better," said the young man laughing.

"At all events," asserted the lady, laughing, too, "it's a personal matter; when a woman is five and forty her looks only concern herself, and the public has no right to ask questions."

"I didn't ask any. You told me."

"Certainly; but you ought to have said I only looked thirty-five. Why should Eleanor get all the compliments? Especially as she can't hear them, and wouldn't care sixpence for them if she did."

Morland was rather glad she had got back to

Miss Winton; and, to do her justice, Miss Chipchase was much fonder of talking about other people than of herself.

"Since Malbray died," she went on, "Eleanor has put all that aside."

"All what?"

"Of course you know what I mean. Being so very young, and having only been engaged so short a time, most people thought she would get over it in a year or two, and would probably marry someone else—she was a lovely girl then."

"So she is now."

"Oh, I shouldn't call her a girl. Not exactly a girl. I'm sure she never counts herself as one. And everybody was wrong. I doubt if any man has ever proposed to her during all these years—I don't believe anyone ever got the chance."

"You mean she *didn't* get over it."

"I don't mean that she has been thinking of poor Malbray day and night for thirteen years. Nobody can go on like that. But I'm sure she gave up, for good and all, any idea of marrying. I like Rockcliff very much, but Malbray would have made a better duke and Eleanor would have made a typical duchess."

"Then," said Morland, glancing at the head of the table, "her aunt is not a typical duchess."

"No, of course not," Miss Chipchase agreed, also glancing at their short, and rather plain hostess, "she is only a duchess in real life. Eleanor would have looked like a duchess by Gainsborough or Sir Joshua. What a pity Malbray didn't marry her before going out."

"That," observed the young man without enthusiasm, "would not have made her a duchess."

"No. But it would have made her a countess. And I'd rather be a countess than Miss—Chipchase."

"I don't believe you would a bit. I'm convinced you love being Miss Chipchase."

"Well," the lady admitted, comfortably, "it would depend a little on the Earl. I shouldn't like one who spent all my money, and went off to Monte Carlo or Somaliland to shoot tigers and left me at home to look after the poor people."

"There are no tigers in Somaliland—or Monte Carlo either."

But while he chaffed Miss Chipchase the young man was thinking of Miss Winton.

What the elderly, wealthy lady had told him was quite true; she was always right in her facts. Eleanor Winton had engaged herself at seventeen to her cousin, and from the day of his death had put aside all thought of marriage.

"What I meant," Miss Chipchase observed presently, "was not quite what I said. I don't know that I think so very much of being a countess——"

"Of course not, or you'd be one."

"That's better. Now you're getting civil. But it's not civil to interrupt. I do mean this—when a terrible thing happens, like that that happened to Eleanor Winton, I think it's better for her to be really the poor fellow's widow than to be as she was. The widow puts on widow's clothes, and knows how to behave. In the other case it's not so plain, she feels like a widow, but she isn't one. She has to wonder what she must do—how far in widowness she may go, just when she wants to cry her eyes out and think of nothing. She feels the poor dead man belonged to her more than to anyone else in the world, and yet she can't quite show that. She has to measure and weigh her actions, and what his own people—father, mother, sisters—will feel and think. Sir Oliver, if you think of marrying me, and choose to go off to Timbuctoo, or somewhere, pray let us get married before you go."

"But," objected he, laughing very cheerfully, "you said you would not put up with such conduct in your Earl, how could I propose it?"

He laughed cheerfully, but he was not thinking of Miss Chipchase and her jokes. He was thinking of Miss Winton, and wishing that his neighbor would not trail off into these elderly pleasantries. But Miss Chipchase was rather enjoying her semblance of a bold flirtation.

"No," she declared, "that Earl would only have married me for my money: you wouldn't dream of doing such a thing."

"No, I wasn't dreaming of it—till you put it in my head. Now, of course. . . ."

"Well, well," crackled Miss Chipchase, delighted (partly with a *Vol-au-vent,* that was really first-rate), "don't propose here. There's a place under the stairs—in my young days people didn't sit under the stairs between dances: but *autres temps autres moeurs* and we must live up to—the servants' hall. Shall we say under the stairs at half-past ten?"

Though no other guests have been mentioned besides Miss Winton, Miss Chipchase and Sir Oliver Morland, the party at Solway Court was a large one. The Duke's three daughters and the husbands of those ladies were there, and more than a dozen other relations and friends. Miss Chipchase could not talk throughout dinner to Sir Oliver, nor could he talk only to her. But his conversation with the lady on his left has nothing to do with this story. What Miss Chipchase told him has been quoted for the sake of the information it gave him about Miss Winton.

II

"You and old Patty Chipchase were as thick as thieves at dinner," the Duchess declared about an hour after dinner was over. She had Sir Oliver in a corner of the Saloon and was prepared for a little *tête-à-tête.*

"Certainly we were. Our intimacy made rapid strides. She has ordered me to meet her under the stairs at half-past ten to make a formal offer of my hand and heart."

"That won't do at all," said Her Grace. "She's Rockcliff's godmother and must leave all her money to him."

"Yes, she mentioned that—not that she had to leave him her money, but that he was her godson."

"She's a useful person to sit next the first night you're in a house, for she tells you who everybody is and what they've done. That's why I sent you to dinner with her."

"She was talking chiefly about Miss Winton."

"Oh, Eleanor!" And the Duchess shot one swift glance at the young man. "There's not much to tell about her. Everything that was going to happen to her happened many, many years ago."

"Yes," said he, quietly, "Miss Chipchase told me. Then he added: "It seems to me quite odd to hear of 'many, many years ago,' in connection with her; she looks so young."

He spoke gravely, in a low voice, remembering how sad the subject must be to the Duchess herself. For a minute or so she was silent, then she said:

"I wondered if you knew; I'm glad old Patty told you. Eleanor was very nearly being my daughter and her mother (dead even then, when my poor boy was engaged to her) was my favorite sister. Of course we hoped that Eleanor would—she was such a child in years, though not in anything else, when it happened—that she would do as other girls do, and marry some good man who would make her happy; not too soon, but after a year or two."

"Miss Chipchase seemed to think she had never thought of it," he observed, not quite knowing what to say.

"I don't believe she ever has. Oliver, I think that's a mistake. I was his mother: but I don't think one grave should bury two young lives."

Her words were very gently and tenderly spoken, and the young man loved her for them.

"No man," she went on, "even the kindest—and, Oliver, I know you are kind: no man, I think, can tell what it is to a woman to lose her son. But I had my husband left, and my other boy, and our three girls. She had no one. Her mother was gone, her father was gone, and she never had brother or sister. I would have welcomed her here if she would have made it her home—but she would not; partly, I believe, because she dreaded lest her presence should be a standing reminder of my own boy. And she went on living with her other aunt, Colonel Winton's sister, rather a grim old woman; and for years she never even came here on a visit."

Again she paused, and then added:

"You say it sounds odd to you to hear us talking of 'many, many years ago' in connection with her, because she looks so young still. I can understand that. But the truth is, I think, that her clock stopped long ago. She became a woman in one day: and Time has let her alone all these years: perhaps he will let her alone till some other day when she will become an old woman."

"I cannot bear to think of that," Morland answered, simply.

He was not looking at the Duchess, but at the picture her words called up. She, however, was looking at him.

"He is good-looking," she told herself, "and looks good. Honest, manly, quiet, and true-hearted. I like him. So does Rupert, and I never knew him like a man that was not worth it. Rupert isn't clever like his father, or like dear Maurice; but he has wonderful plain instincts about people that never deceive him. If he" (she wasn't thinking of Rockcliff now) "if he likes her, why shouldn't she like him? I'd have trusted one of my own girls to him, and I'd trust her."

Though the Duchess of Solway had married three daughters to men of high name, rank and fortune, she was not counted a matchmaker. But she was a little romantic (in spite of her plump figure and rather red cheeks) and she was uncommonly kind-hearted. She liked her friends to be happy, and she had almost a guilty feeling that Eleanor Winton's chances of happiness should not be simply laid aside because of the great sorrow that had fallen on the girl through her own son's untimely death.

A very beautiful voice was filling the huge saloon with its singularly clear true tones:

" 'Last necht,' " sang the voice, " 'the Queen had Four Maries.

This necht she'll hae but three.

There's Mary Seaton, and Mary Beaton, and Mary Carmichael and me. . . . ' "

"Listen," said the Duchess hurriedly, "I can't talk if she sings that. It makes me want to cry."

Morland did not want to talk. He wanted to listen to Eleanor Winton. He was not altogether Scotch like the Duchess, but he was half Scotch, like Miss Winton, his mother, like hers, having been of a Highland family; and the exquisitely tender pathetic song would have appealed to him even if it had been sung by another voice.

It was the Duchess who spoke, leaning nearer to him and whispering.

"Ah! I remember! Your mother was a Hamilton, and of Mary Hamilton's line. Isn't it marvelous how that girl's cruel death, who died such centuries ago, can hurt us like this? *My* Jacobitism begins with Mary Stuart. . . . Hush!"

Indeed he had not uttered a sound; he was eagerly drinking in the beautiful sad sounds of what he thought was the loveliest voice he had ever heard. Only once before had he heard the song, sung by a man, and it seemed to him much more fit and touching from a girl's mouth.

He could see the singer now, for he had risen from his seat as if out of respect; and he thought that he was only now beginning to grasp fully her grave and singular beauty. It did not seem to him at all strange that no one for so many years had ever thrust in upon her with any new tale of love. What struck him as strange was that in his heart he should have ventured already to have such ambitions.

Perhaps his shrewd neighbor guessed something of his thoughts. When the song was finished, she stood up and said to him:

"Poor Mary Hamilton. . . . Well, our tears can do nothing for her now. She doesn't need them; hers have been dried in heaven hundreds of years before we were born. But that's our way, isn't it? We cry our eyes out about sorrows that have been turned into joys ages ago, and the people that are sad still we leave to themselves."

Upon my word, Duchess of Solway, I thing you were a bit of a matchmaker, after all. But Sir Oliver Morland only thought her a remarkably sensible woman. And Miss Winton knew nothing at all about it.

III

Sir Oliver Morland met Miss Chipchase for the first time at Solway Court on the evening of the last day of June in 1914. He met her again on the morning of the 10th of August following on the broad pavement of Whitehall, within a few yards of the War Office. She greeted him with rather more than the familiarity of an old acquaintance.

"Ho, ho! Sir Oliver," said she. "A little bird has been telling me news of you."

"It's a way little birds have," he remarked cheerfully. "Was your little bird the *Morning Post?*"

"The *Morning Post?* No. Has your engagement been in the *Morning Post?*"

"My engagement!"

"Oh, come! Sir Oliver, I admit I tried in vain to pump old Selina Winton—you might as well pump the Desert of Sahara. How's her niece? How's the other Miss Winton?"

"There's only one Miss Winton. The late Miss Eleanor Winton—poor thing, didn't you know they had put an end to her?"

"Lord! Sir Oliver. Put an end to her? You make my blood run cold. Who did it?"

"It was done," said Morland, lowering his voice, "by a clergyman."

"Goodness! Where?"

"In his church; here, in London, yesterday. I saw her myself just before—and just after, too."

"Sir Oliver, how fearful! Didn't you try to preserve her?"

"No. I knew what he was going to do—I suggested it. I chose the hour and the place. We were accomplices."

"Lord! And what did she look like—before and after?"

"Well, she looked, before the clergyman had done his work, just like herself, like Miss Eleanor Winton. Afterwards she looked like—Lady Morland."

"Come," cried Miss Chipchase laughing, "I've known your mother pretty well by sight for twenty years or more. An excellent lady. But only a most devoted son could think her in the least like Eleanor Winton."

They both laughed, and Miss Chipchase looked so like digging him in the ribs that he recoiled a little.

"Well, well," said she, "I must congratulate you. But it's very good of me. A jilted woman! You were to have met me under the stairs at Solway, and you never turned up. . . . But, Sir Oliver, I don't like to meet you just here. I hope you're not going in *there*."

She wagged her head towards the War Office.

"But I am," he confessed. "And what's more I must go at once. I have an appointment."

"Poor Eleanor!" cried the really good-natured woman and good-hearted old maid. "Sir Oliver, if you go out to this horrible war and let a German kill you, I shall never speak to you again."

"Why?" asked the young man, holding out his hand, and laughing. "You may get to heaven, too."

But Miss Chipchase, as she pattered on her way, could only go on repeating to herself "Poor Eleanor," and somehow I think the words may have been heard in that heaven to which the young man had made such light allusion as a little prayer for his wife's happiness and his own safe return to her.

Pattering on her way, Miss Chipchase came to the Cathedral, and into it she walked, though no service was going on, and she had very little taste for either religion or architecture. She crept into a corner, and put up a little prayer for the young creatures who had been man and wife so few hours, of whom one, at the inexorable call of duty, was leaving his new-born happiness in God's great hands, to find again, or lose, as He might choose. It is not for me to put down the homely, sincere words of her entreaty;

but we may know what her thoughts were like, and they were something of this sort:

"He has no father. Eh! how he needs one to lead and protect him now. If *I* can pity the poor things . . . surely. . . . She must have suffered enough—all those sad lonely years. Since the other brave lad was taken she has had no one, till now. Not this one, too. Oh, *not* this one too. For mercy, not him as well. To give her the first sip of happiness and take it away, it would be like making a promise and not keeping it. Oh, let it be kept! I know it will. . . . He *must* come back. Wounded perhaps; but alive. Alive; and to live and see his own child. Please, please, please. . . . ."

The old maid (she was ten years older than she had pretended) toddled home; but next day she pattered back: and every day for three months she came to the same shady corner, behind the pillar, in the great dim fane. It became almost a superstition with her—as if to omit it would be a menace to the life she pleaded for. All over England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, all over France and far-off, little-known Russia, millions were doing as she did. She would not let herself off her share. Rain or fog (and damp weather set the rheumatism to active work in her), snow or shine, she crept daily to her quiet unobserved place and made her untiring prayer. She, in worldly things so talkative, never told anyone: only she would come, and plead and plead. Often (for she did say her prayers) she had asked for odd-enough things, for stocks to go up, and money that she did not need to come into her pocket. But now she only asked for the one thing, and left the shares alone.

In the drear November days she read in her newspapers of "Captain Sir Oliver Morland, Queen's

Own Cambrian Rifles"—and his name was among those supposed to have been killed.

"I won't believe it," she whimpered: trying hard not to. "If I had to believe that—I couldn't believe anything any more."

She flung the horrible paper away: and rang for her maid, and demanded hat and outdoor things.

"It's raining, ma'am," the maid objected, "sleeting, and a cold east wind."

"I'm going out. Hold your tongue, Simson; and get me ready. Tell Porkins to whistle for a taxi."

And out she went.

"Wait for me here," she told the driver, as near to the Abbey as she could get. "I shan't be long."

She was not long. But, inside, in her dim, shadowy corner she demanded (almost desperately) in defiance of all logic that it mightn't be true.

Nor was it true. Captain Sir Oliver Morland, a later telegram informed the War Office, was wounded, and had been missing, but was alive, and in no danger of death. But though he kept Christmas with his wife, he had only a left arm with which to raise his glass to drink her health.

"Oh, dear," thought Miss Chipchase, "I should have asked for both arms. However, it will keep him at home, and that's what I meant."

JOHN HARDWICK'S LUCK

I

JOHN HARDWICK was glad enough when his interview with Mary Lavering was over. And that in itself was a circumstance striking enough to merit notice. For a time had been when the difficulty was to make up his mind to leave her. In those days their leave-taking had been wonderfully protracted, and between John's first farewell and his last, half an hour often slipped unheeded by.

Some men have many flirtations; John had never indulged in one. And some are always in love and out again half a dozen times a year. Jack Retallack, for instance, who lived in the same "diggings" with Hardwick, boasted, with some reason, that he generally made one suit of clothes last him through three engagements. But Jack Retallack and John Hardwick were very different men. No one ever called Hardwick "Jack" and no one ever spoke of Mr. Retallack. The latter was a month or two the older, but the grave, rather severe manner of Hardwick made people think him the senior.

John Hardwick was a dark pale man, with rather thin lips, and keen solemn eyes. Jack Retallack had curly, light hair, childish blue eyes, and warm, red lips that were forever smiling. As has been said, Jack had often been engaged, but no one ever expected to hear of his being married. But John Hardwick was a man of whose marriage one would probably hear rather than of his engagement. He had the faculty of keeping his affairs to himself, without conscious effort, or any definite plan in so doing.

Nevertheless, he had been, if not explicitly, to all intents and purposes, engaged to Mary Lavering, and now such engagement was to be entirely at an end between them.

"You have every right to reproach me if you like," he had said, "but I will not allow you to consider yourself engaged to me; and I am going away."

Though he said this he did not expect Mary to reproach him. She was not a woman prone to reproaches, and she knew well that, in spite of his words, John did not really accuse himself of any fault in her regard.

"No," she said, "you could not help loving me, and you could not help making me love you: there was no making, it came of itself—inevitably. Because we were meant to love each other."

John smiled rather grimly.

"That seems a hard destiny, if we are not also meant to marry each other," he observed.

"We are."

He shrugged his shoulders a little.

"We shall certainly marry each other," she said. "Your going away now will make no difference."

"I will not let you hold yourself engaged to me; I may never come back. Certainly I shall not come back unless I have what at present I see no chance of—enough to marry you without your losing anything."

"John, why will you persist in that? What do I care for the things I should lose? I would give them up to be your wife to-morrow."

"It is no use. I will not marry you—neither to-morrow nor in twenty years' time, unless I can give you a home fit for one who has had such a home as yours . . . Good-by."

"I will not say Good-by." . . . And you, are *you* to hold yourself engaged to *me?*"

"I will marry no one else . . . Good-by, Mary."

"Nor will I marry anyone else but you. So we are still engaged, wherever you go."

"No, Mary, we are not engaged. Will you say 'Good-by'?"

"I will say anything else. I will say 'Farewell,' and I will say 'God bless you'; you cannot make me say 'Good-by'."

"I would rather be blessed by you than by anyone on earth, Mary. But say 'Good-by,' too. It is only a contraction for God be with you!"

"God be with you, dear. I do not like contractions; I will not say good-by."

II

Whether she would say good-by or not he was gone, and for a long time she was to see him no more; nor was it at all likely that he would write to her. Nevertheless, Mary Lavering neither pined nor grew pale. Her nature was loyal and steadfast, and she had a steadfast trust and patience.

As for John, his disposition was averse, almost equally, from despair to sanguine confidence.

In his heart he intended to marry Mary, and knew that in spite of all difficulty he would do it. But at present there seemed no chance of it.

He had never known what to expect from his uncle (the only relation he had ever known), but he had certainly expected something considerable. The old man, so far as he knew, had no one else to leave his money to, and he was reputed to be rich. Old Reuben Hardwick had lived sparingly, but it was universally said that he did so out of miserliness, and not at all from poverty. "All the better for John," people said; and the young man himself had heard something of their whisperings. They had never seemed very fond of each other; in fact, old Reuben loved nothing but money, and his nephew was not of a specially affectionate disposition. One would have needed a very affectionate disposition indeed to grow fond of Reuben Hardwick!

John Hardwick had for two years lived at Furzedon Regis, and had only visited his uncle from time to time. For Galeham, in the fens, was a hundred miles off, and the young engineer had neither time nor money to spare. Nor were two such men likely to correspond much by letter.

And now old Reuben was dead, and it did not seem that his nephew was to be any better off for it. The old man had died suddenly, and search where they would, no will could be found. Nor was any money to be discovered, though the mattresses and chair-seats of the cottage at Galeham were popularly supposed to be stuffed with Bank of England notes.

It was after old Reuben's funeral that John Hardwick went back to Furzedon, and told Mary Lavering that there must be now no engagement between them. He had allowed himself to fall in love with her believing that he had good prospects; his prospects had now receded into the dimmest distance.

Immediately after his departure from Furzedon, John Hardwick applied for a position abroad, and the reply he received was encouraging, though he was informed that no appointment could be hoped for quite at once.

Then he went down to Galeham in the fens to wind up the simple affairs there that remained to be attended to. There was to be a sale of furniture of the cottage, and as the cottage itself had been his uncle's it was to be sold also. As next-of-kin, the proceeds would be his, but these were not likely to amount to much. In spite of their professed belief that the armchairs were padded with bank-notes, no one would be likely to bid the value of one banknote for any one of the chairs.

III

John Hardwick reached Oxham at half-past three, and he had then to drive in a spring cart four miles across the fens to Galeham. It was a cheerless and chilly drive. A sulky, black wind came driving in from the low coast, bringing with it the moaning of the wintry sea. Bad weather was brewing up, and the gulls were blown in upon the land; they wheeled and screamed in the ghastly gleams of pale, level sunlight, over the deathly fens, and behind all was the solemn murmur of the German ocean.

The man who drove Hardwick was a stranger from Lincoln, and made no conversational efforts. As for John, he was by nature a silent man, and he was latterly more and more preoccupied. Ten weeks ago he had come down like this to Galeham, summoned by the telegram announcing his uncle's death, and like this he had been driven over the fens from Oxham. He was thinking of that now.

He had been shocked after a fashion, and even to some extent grieved, by the sudden news of the death of his only kinsman. He had come down in no merry mood, but he had, he knew, been unable to avoid remembering that his uncle's death would, as he took for granted, improve very materially his own worldly position, and enable him to propose immediate marriage to Mary Lavering.

That was early in September, and the afternoon had been hot and sunny; the sea had lain ever so blue then beyond its saffron belt of sand, panting in the blazing heat.

The cottage that his late uncle had occupied was on the Oxham side of Galeham, and stood by itself half a quarter-mile outside the village, so that John

Hardwick's arrival was noticed by none. He got down, and the man handed down his bag, was paid, and with a brief greeting turned his pony's head back toward Oxham.

John stood, half idly, half absent-mindedly, watching him as the cart grew smaller and smaller, on its way across the straight and level fen road. Then he turned in to the cottage.

It was much as he had seen it last, except that the flower-plot outside was more untidy, and the whole air of the place more woebegone.

There was an old deaf caretaker who did not hear his arrival; he found her in the kitchen peeling potatoes, and she told him she had lighted a fire in the parlor. But he found only a black grate with a poker stuck up against it, and a few charred, and evidently damp, sticks under the coals.

He bade her light the fire again and see that it burned up. Meanwhile he would walk out for half an hour; on his return let tea be ready.

He met scarcely anyone in the village; it was a straggling, windy place, with no sign of life, and Hardwick returned from his walk a little colder and a little more depressed. In dull and solitary silence he had his tea, and then followed a dull and solitary evening. At eight o'clock the old deaf caretaker brought him a chop and the potatoes he had seen her peeling. When he had finished she removed the tray (she had not thought it necessary to lay the table) and brought him a bed-candlestick. She bade him good night, and informed him that she had got ready the old master's bedroom for him, as the other let the rain in and she wasn't rightly sure what the weather would keep like. At ten o'clock John Hardwick himself went to bed, not because he was sleepy, but because it was better than sitting alone in the dingy parlor downstairs.

He was not at all a fanciful man, or superstitious, but it did occur to him that the last man who slept in that bed had never wakened, and after he had put out the light he lay thinking of that lonely ending of a lonely, unloving life.

And when he slept his dreams followed the current of his last waking thoughts. It was natural enough that they should, except that he was a man who scarcely ever dreamed at all. And now his dream was clear, and unconfused and very definite. The old dead man in whose bed he lay was by his side, and pointing with tremulous hand to a certain scene or picture, and, as he pointed, his lips moved, as when one who is tongue-tied by some great and sudden shock strives to speak and can but form the words with silent and unsounding lips. The scene to which he pointed his claw-like, quivering fingers was this:—

Upon a point of land, jutting far into a rock-strewn sea, there seemed a grove of tropic trees, tall palms, and date trees, sandal wood and tree ferns, and between the emerald branches flashed the sapphire sea. Strange birds slid down from bough to bough, blue and gold and scarlet, and midmost of all, up rose one huge tree, whose like the dreamer had never seen before. Its leaves were shaped like the fingers of a giant hand, and they were of a wondrous crimson, the bole, tall and scaly, was ruddy brown, the flowers alone were green, and these were trumpet-shaped, and of a heavy fragrance, the sleeper could smell plainly in his dream, a deathly, overpowering odor such as he had never smelled. It was all so living and pictorial that our John-a-Dreams could seem to hear the sighing of the sea along the shore, the calling of the birds of gold and blue, the rustle of the leaves upon the strange and unfamiliar trees. And still the old dead man would point and point, and seemed beside himself that John failed still to see what the quivering fingers indicated.

But presently a large red bird, so like the leaves in color that, sitting still among them it had passed unnoticed, slid shrieking from its perch and fluttered to a branch below. And John now noticed where the bird had been around a white object half hidden among the ruddy leaves, and to that he understood at length the old man pointed. As he dreamed the sleeper seemed to be raised up and close to the object which at first he could neither see nor understand, and now he found it was a naked skull, a whitened death's head, fixed upon a branch of the unknown tree and staring with empty eyeballs forever out across the hot and panting sea. But were they empty—those cavernous sightless spaces? Nay, in one there gleamed a lurid crimson light, as though the hollow had been fitted with a crystal globe of blood, a horrible, wicked eye of fiery crimson.

For ever so long this dream had seemed to last when John awoke. He struck a light and looked at his watch to find that it was half-past one. He remembered that it was the hour fixed by the doctors as that of old Reuben's death. The body had been found at half-past seven, and had then, as the doctors asserted, been lifeless for six hours.

IV

The writer trusts that it will be admitted that he has not described an imaginative or romantic man. Certainly not an impressionable and superstitious one.

Nevertheless, John Hardwick, as he lay absolutely wide awake, told himself frankly that the situation was peculiar—peculiar, and somewhat "eerie," as it is generally called. Outside a low-sobbing feeble gale crept round the solitary cottage, and then went on its way, out among the lonely fens. Otherwise there was dead silence, nay, not dead silence, for on the stairs close beside Hardwick's door, an old clock ticked loud and solemnly; the same clock that had ticked deliberately out the old miser's life; that had ruthlessly struck his death hour. Many a time, no doubt, in the sleeplessness of age, he had lain awake as his nephew lay now in his bed, listening to its weary monotone.

Oddly enough, in such a man, John Hardwick was convinced that his dream was no dream at all in the common sense. He never dreamed. And this had been not like any dream. He had been a witness, an actual living witness, of some distant scene, distant but real, and actually existent, as he felt quite certain. Hardwick was a man roughly practical and un-ideal of temperament, nevertheless he was convinced, and, with a singular directness, he hit at once on something very near the truth.

He was certain that there was, somewhere on the earth, such a place as he had seen, with such birds and trees and shore. And that the last sleeper in that bed had, in the supreme moment of his dissolution, had that scene pictured on his brain, and in his heart, the young man felt convinced. And this, he admitted to himself, was rather gruesome, for it brought the old dead man and his own living self into so odd a relation now; into a rather ghastly and altogether unusual telegraphic connection—the living with the dead, in the very place of death of the dead person.

Ultimately John Hardwick slept again, and dreamlessly, as was his wont. But when he awoke in response to the old deaf caretaker's loud banging at his door, the dream was not forgotten. Nor did he, as we shall see, ever forget it.

V

Much sooner than he expected John Hardwick received the offer of an appointment. It appeared that the native ruler of the Suleiman Islands wished to build roads in his dominions, and even a light railway in the principal island, and had been persuaded by the British Resident at his court to entrust the work to an English engineer. The Suleiman Islands are a long way off, and the largest of them is nearly bisected by the Equator. They are numerous and scrappy, so that the work to be done was not likely to be important. Otherwise it would doubtless have been offered to an older man with more reputation.

John Hardwick was given a week to make up his mind, and he did actually accept the appointment within twenty-four hours.

He lodged within a minute's walk of the British Museum, and as soon as he had read the letter conveying the offer of the appointment he put on his hat and walked over there. Leaving his stick at the entrance he marched into the library and wrote out a demand for "Encyclopædia Britannica," latest edition, Vol. SOL to SPA. It was brought, and he turned to Suleiman Islands and set himself to find out something about them.

The Suleiman Islands, he learned, are 365 in number (what important group of islands is not?), and lie all within the first parallels of north and south latitude; Jehar, the largest and seat of government, being divided into two nearly equal parts by the Equator. It is also divided by a range of mountains of some altitude, so that the climate of the capital situated near their summit is less torrid than would be expected. Many of the islands are very small, some mere coral islets of a few acres in extent. They are governed by a native sultan, nominally under the suzerainty of the Sultan of Johore, but actually independent. Owing to the geographical position of the archipelago, combined with the mountainous character of the larger islands (which are volcanic and not coralline in origin), the fauna and flora are singularly varied. Higginsia Maniflorens Rubra, found nowhere else on the globe, is a native of these remote islands of the Pacific.

As Hardwick left the Museum he was accosted by an acquaintance from the country, Jack Retallack, who seemed unreasonably pleased by the chance meeting.

"I'm going in," explained Retallack, "to consult an authority concerning a plant I found the other day." Hardwick knew he was a botanist, and had always rather looked down on that science in consequence. Like many rather solemn men, he mistook the other's boyish light-heartedness for flightiness.

Hardwick told him of the offered appointment.

"Suleiman Islands!" said Retallack, meditatively, "that's where Higginsia Rubra Maniflora grows. If you come across it I wish to goodness you would send me home a seed or two if you can find any. But it's very rare, even there, and they say it seeds only once in twenty years."

"What's it like?" interrupted Hardwick.

"Well, I can't describe it, never having seen it. But there's no mistaking it, if you do see it, for the leaves are blood color, and are shaped like an outspread hand. The flower—when you catch it in flower—is enormous, and of a brilliant parrot green like a long green trumpet; the seed is as big as a pigeon's egg, or nearly, and is ruby color, much the color of the leaf."

VI

John Hardwick accepted the post and went out by the next boat; his friend at the Colonial Office cabling out meanwhile that he was being sent; his credentials he took with him. From London to Singapore by P. & O. took thirty-three days, and that was a day short of the advertised time. At Singapore he had to wait five days for the "ditcha" that was to take him on to the Suleimans. Unlike the P. & O., this was two days behind its time, so the five days became, in the result, seven.

The voyage in the coasting steamer was unspeakably wearisome. After the luxury and space of the great liner, with its round of amusements and host of pleasant companions, the dirty, rickety "tramp," ill-found and scarcely seaworthy, seemed a dingy and unclean prison. Hardwick was the sole passenger, and the skipper and his mate were no sort of companions for a gentleman; they were both half-castes, and surly, scampish-looking ruffians at that. But there is little traffic to the Suleimans, and John Hardwick knew there was no choice; a somewhat taciturn man, he took refuge in silent isolation.

On the fifteenth day (the voyage was to take twenty or twenty-one) the least experienced sailor could not have failed to see signs of mischief brewing, and two hours after sunset the tornado broke. From the first Hardwick was certain that with such a craft they would never weather it. Nor was he, as it turned out, deceived. The captain was more than half-drunk, the mate almost beside himself with terror, the crew (and the vessel was shamefully undermanned) might have been decent fellows in better hands, but were nearly useless as it was.

The darkness was indescribable; a palpable, material blackness, like the ancient darkness of Egypt. At the most hopeless hour of night, two hours after midnight, the ship struck and began almost instantly to sink, sliding back into deep water.

John Hardwick was a splendid swimmer, but whither should one swim, in such utter blackness and in such a sea! Apart from the question of actual fear there was something unearthly in striking out thus into the impenetrable blackness. But the water was at least warm, and above all things, it was necessary to get free of the sinking craft.

More, as we say, by luck than management, Hardwick was carried in the direction where alone lay any hope of safety. After what seemed an age, but was really less than a quarter of an hour, he suddenly felt a beach beneath his feet, and, scarcely able to believe in his deliverance, he climbed a steeply shelving shore and was on land. Still the driving foam drenched him, and the appalling din of wind and wave and breaker continued to daze his numbed senses.

VII

Day broke slow and sullen, but the tornado had passed upon its way, and hour by hour the maddened, tortured sea grew calmer.

When it was fully light John Hardwick ventured to move and look about. He was on an islet not more than half a mile in breadth, and not a mile in length, but comparatively high at its eastern end, behind which the sickly light was growing. It was thickly clothed with trees, and a corona of rock islets, some supporting a single palm, some quite naked, wreathed around it. Of the ship there was no sign whatever, nor of any of its crew scarcely a sign yet, even of its wreckage.

John Hardwick clambered up the steep and rocky shore, and walked inland, partly to stretch his stiffened limbs, partly out of a natural curiosity to see more of his solitary domain. Perhaps some of his late companions might be there hidden among the trees or out of sight upon the other shore. But by noon he had found no one, and was finally convinced that he had the island to himself. It had, however, a large population of land and sea birds; the former of strange and gaudy brilliance of plumage; and there were myriads of a small and pretty animal of the gazelle tribe, but scarcely bigger than a hare.

Growing at last very hungry he made a nutritious meal of sea-fowls' eggs, of which there were thousands all along the shore. He had to eat them raw, and this he found distasteful, but at least, he thought, there seemed no fear of actual starvation. He had seen several good springs of fresh water, and there were abundant fruits, so he was without present anxiety. Concerning the menaces of the future, John Hardwick was not liable to anxiety. After his meal he rested for a while, then continued his explorations. In the center of the isle there rose a mound topped with a bald green patch, free of trees or bush, and toward this he bent his rather aimless steps. He was soon there, and the beauty of the outlook repaid the brief exertion. The sapphire sea lay all about to east and west and north and south, but eastward and northward it was set with countless emeralds, islets like his own of varying size and form.

The gloomy dawn had brightened to a moon of cloudless heaven and broad and golden sunshine. John Hardwick flung himself down upon the smooth turf and thought upon the strange destiny that had set him here alone, the sole monarch of an unpeopled kingdom in the tropic sea. What was most strange was that he had an odd sense of familiarity with it all, as though the scene were in truth familiar.

Just beneath him, almost overgrown with brush and tangle, was a jutting spire of coral rock. It was tilted, as it were eastward, and, but for the surrounding growth, would have cast a shadow like the index of a sundial.

Some idle impulse made the young man descend and examine it more closely. He began to tear away from it the circling bonds of creeping plants that had flung themselves about it, and presently, deeply cut into the eastern face of the rock, he came upon two letters, carved indubitably by a human hand; the letters were R.H. They were very familiar initials to him—those of his old uncle's name, Reuben Hardwick.

Oddly enough, a red flush mounted to John Hardwick's dark pale face, as he stood staring at the carved letters in mute surprise. He was quite certain that no hand but the old miser's had cut them there: common as the initials were he recognized their form and character.

His unforgotten dream again asserted itself, and the unromantic practical man was convinced of his destiny, of the strange web of fate that had brought him hither. He recognized in all his surroundings the island of his dream.

He set his back against the rock and looked straight before him; his gaze showed him the eastern promontory of the isle almost hidden by a rising knoll five hundred yards away. Thither he made his way, and gaining the summit of the knoll, he saw beneath him, blazing amid the tangled green of the tropic foliage a blood-red patch of color. His heart beat as he made his way toward it, and five minutes later he saw before him the very scene of his dream. High overhead towered the blood-red tree, with weird leaves like the spread fingers of a ghastly crimson hand, and great trumpet flowers of brightest parrot green. Close beneath was the sapphire glancing of the sea, the saffron belt of sanded shore, and, all about, the flashing of the strange birds, blue and gold and purple, that slid from bough to bough, and cracked the hot silence of a tropic noontide with their astonished chatterings—for a quarter of a century no human eye had looked upon the scene; the oldest parrot of them all had never seen a man.

Suddenly as John Hardwick gazed upward into the mysterious red-leafed tree, a bird, also of the parrot kind, but of almost the same sanguine tincture as the foliage of the tree, spread its wings and fluttered down from the perch where it had sat weirdly watching the strange invader.

Behind, gleaming white among the red, was a death's head, staring for ever towards the rising sun. A lambent weird flame of crimson fire seemed to pour from one eye-place; the other was dark and vacant.

It was no easy matter to climb the tree and sit where the bird had been upon the lofty branch, but Hardwick did it, and when he stood again upon the ground he held in his almost trembling hand a huge roundel of liquid, crimson flame, the Ruby Eye, the largest ruby in the world.

VIII

For five weeks John Hardwick lived alone upon the isle and the presence of the Great Red Eye became hateful to him. There was the ever-present sentiment of Fate's mockery that had given him a kingdom and a king's wealth, and taken all else away. And there was the horrible weird stare of that unwinking eye of flame.

Nevertheless he was not one of those who having in so strange a manner found such a gem would fling it away or lose it.

And at last his lonely abandonment came to an end. One morning, seated on the mound at the center of the isle, he saw rising out of the southern horizon, a gleaming sail; and hour by hour it grew, till an hour or so before sunset it was close to his seagirt territory. His signals had been seen, and rescue and escape were close at hand.

At length a boat put out, and he went down to meet it. He had nothing to pack up, nothing to take away, except one round stone, not larger than a bantam's egg, and yet, tattered and ragged as he was, he knew, as he walked down to the shore, that he had hidden among his rags much greater wealth than that of the owner of yonder trim yacht, whoever he might be.

The yacht was English, and the castaway met with an English welcome and, as the cruise was one of pleasure only, and restricted by no necessities of time or destination, the good-natured owner at once declared that he would take Hardwick to Jehar, and this accordingly was done. The British Resident listened with interest to the account of Hardwick's shipwreck and five weeks' residence upon the coral island; but his welcome struck John as being the reverse of warm.

"The truth is," he explained, when the tale of adventure was finished, "your arrival is a serious embarrassment to me. I did not expect you."

"You guessed I had been wrecked, and did not expect to see me alive!" said Hardwick, his dark face flushing angrily.

"The fact is I did not expect to see you at all. I was absent when Garstang's cable arrived; as soon as I got home I cabled to him to stop your departure. Hearing no reply, I supposed I had been in time; I did not know you had been so prompt."

"To stop my departure! Had you any objection to my appointment?"

"None whatever. But the Sultan had. He refused at once, and peremptorily, to sanction it."

"Refused? And why?"

"That I cannot tell. At first he made no objection at all. But on the following day he sent for me, and stated his determination not to employ you; nor will any persuasion alter his decision."

"Can I see him!"

"I scarcely know. I will ask him."

The Resident went at once to the palace. In an hour he returned.

"I have induced him to grant you an interview; it was with great difficulty. You had better come at once before he changes his mind—before he has time to see his mother."

John Hardwick stared.

"I am sure," said the Resident, "that it was some machination of the old Begum's that made him turn against you in the beginning. He was perfectly well disposed at first. She is a bigoted and very superstitious old woman, of a very strong character; clever, determined and politic, but utterly retrograde, and anti-European. She has persuaded the Sultan not only to refuse to ratify your appointment, but also to relinquish the engineering plan altogether.

As they arrived at the palace the Resident added: "You will, of course, be reimbursed for your loss of time, and all that, and generously, you may be sure; the Sultan is immensely rich and most open-handed. So, to do her justice, is Aijamand Begum."

The Sultan, a young man of three and twenty years of age, received the Resident with distinction, Hardwick with courtesy, but coldly, and with evident displeasure. Hardwick was interested and pleased with the young potentate; his skin was fair, and the character and expression of his face was earnest, dignified and noble. But it had some elements of weakness. To the great surprise of the Resident the Sultan withdrew into an inner cabinet and signed to Hardwick alone to follow him.

Then he spoke in a low, cold voice, courteously, but without any smile of encouragement or politeness.

"The Resident has told you that I have refused to sanction your appointment. I will tell you why. Afterwards you can, if you choose, tell him. I would not tell him, for I have no desire to prejudice him against you, who may be an innocent man. As soon as I have given this explanation I shall expect you to return to the British Residency and not leave its precincts till you can be deported, which will be in a few days, from my dominions."

Hardwick was astonished, and looked it.

"And what," he inquired calmly, "is your Highness's objection to me?"

"My objection is first of all to your name. Many years ago there came to the court of my father an English adventurer called Roo Ben Ardwick. Your name is also Ben Ardwick."

"Excuse me, it is John Hardwick. But Reuben Hardwick was my uncle."

"You admit it! Well, that man won the entire confidence of my father, but he abused it; he stole from the treasury the Great Eye, the talisman of our dynasty; a ruby that in itself was worth a hundred kings' ransoms, and was the amulet, the loadstone of our royal race. He stole it and escaped in a coasting ship, but Fate followed him. The ship was wrecked and he was, no doubt, drowned; but with him the Great Eye of Suleiman sank also to the secret depths of the ocean. Were it known among our people, we might lose the very throne itself, for the old prophecy saith: 'Till the Red Eye sees no longer the line of Suleiman shall reign on the islands of the sea.' If our people knew that the Great Eye had sunk into the dark ocean, they might rise against us, as abandoned by Fate."

Hardwick listened with a quiet interest.

"And your Highness thinks that my name is evil-omened; that I might bring you further loss and trouble."

"Perhaps," the young prince answered patiently. "At any rate, your name is insufferable. It must not be heard here. As for your loss. . . ."

"Nay, I have lost nothing. If you send me away I might go richer than I came. But . . ." he thrust his hand deep into his breast and drew forth a leathern bag. "Your Highness," he said, "I am come to repair, not to complete the loss that came with my uncle. How he passed his youth I know not. That it was passed in outlandish countries I often heard. But that he was not drowned I know. He had the character of wealth, but showed no signs of it. He died, and I should have been his heir, but he seemed to leave nothing for me to inherit."

Then John Hardwick, in a few concise sentences, told the prince his story, and ending it drew from its leathern bag the huge Red Eye of Fire.

"One of my name took away the stone," he said, "and I give it back again."

"And you give it back thus! When no one guessed of its existence, when you could so easily have taken it away forever; when you have been so poorly treated by us here. You give it back, and you make no conditions!"

"It is yours," said the Englishman quietly. "How can I make any condition?"

The Sultan smiled gravely.

"You are like a prince," he said, "and I am also a prince."

The British Resident was called to their counsels. With him the Sultan spoke aside for a few moments, then the Resident turned to Hardwick.

"His Highness decides to carry out the engineering works as he at first intended, only on a much larger scale, and only on condition that you undertake them; he offers you two thousand a year for five years and a retaining fee of twenty thousand pounds down."

A PRELUDE IN WINTER

I

"It's silly," said Rupert de Grandmaison to himself, "but it's true—I've lost my way: if there can be said to be any way . . ." and he peered through the gathering dusk to left and right, straight ahead, and turned to look backward, as he had done twenty times already, with as little result as ever.

"'Oh, Salisbury Plain is bleak and bare,'" he quoted to himself, also for the twentieth time, adding, "I wish I could say (like the Reverend Thomas Ingoldsby),

'At least so I've heard many persons declare
For to tell the truth I've never been there.'

"I'm there, and just at present I'd as soon be somewhere else. What's it going to do next—snow or rain?"

As to that, at all events, he was not long in doubt, for the snow presently began, and the dim light that remained was soon swallowed up in it.

"It's silly enough to be lost, but it's worse than silly to find oneself benighted as well—'*de-cidedly awkward,*' as the cow said when the train ran over her. No train hereabouts, though. No anything. The last tree was half an hour ago, and the last house was an hour before that: and the old deaf man in it couldn't understand where I wanted to go because I told him I was quite ready to go anywhere if he would kindly tell me the way there. . . . Quite Canadian this: ought to seem homely, but it's a bit *too* homely when nobody seems to have a home anywhere round."

Nevertheless the young soldier did not look much depressed. His face was cheery, and so was his voice, and so was his way of walking: some people have a dismal manner of walking that you can notice a quarter of a mile off.

"Well," he said, "I'm determined to get *somewhere:* England's such a scrap of an island anyway, that if you stick to it you must get to the sea if you walk straight on. I wonder if I shall strike Southampton or South Shields."

"One thing Salisbury Plain isn't," he confessed, "and that is, flat. One is always going uphill, unless one's going down, and it's generally up. I wonder if there's anything particular at the top of *this* hill?"

After seven or eight minutes he found that there was a shepherd there.

"If I keep straight on shall I come to anywhere?" Rupert shouted, not because there was a high wind to speak against but because he concluded that the shepherd would certainly be deaf.

"Straight on which way?" asked the shepherd.

"Any way," said Rupert obligingly. "I'm not particular."

"If ye aren't particular ye'll probably lose yersen," observed the shepherd.

"I've done that. Is there anything *that* way, for instance?" (jerking his head to the right).

"There's Enver *that* way. 'Enver in the Wild Down, nine mile from any town.' It's six mile."

"This, then, is clearly not a town. I had come to that conclusion myself. And, *that* way?" (With a jerk of his head to the left.)

"That way there's Winterbourne Money-Koran—"

"Sounds like an Arab settlement on the Stock Exchange," thought Rupert.

"Money-Koran (Monachorum) 'cause there was monks ther' once when there was such things. I live ther': it's two mile—and better."

("And worse," thought Rupert.) Then aloud: "Is it big? Is it a big place?"

"It's about as big as Shipton Regis—but the church is bigger, twice bigger. The first 'ouse you comes to on the road is Updown Manor."

"Oh! On the road, is it?"

"On the road to Winterbourne Money-Koran: it ain't azackly on no road. It stands back. There's a avenue to it."

Rupert had plenty of money, and the shepherd did not look as if he had any. He gave him half a crown.

"Winterbourne Money-Koran," observed the shepherd, anxious to give the stranger as much as possible for his money, "is a tidy-size place. There's a bank an'all—Wilts and Dosset Branch. Opens Toosdays and Fridays from ten to two pea*hen*. You'll see Updown Manor, there'll be lights and all."

"Besides the bank (this is Saturday P. M.) is there an inn at Winterbourne?"

"There's two inns at Winterbourne Barons—the Swan and the Regent. . . . "

"How far to Winterbourne Barons?"

"Better'n seven mile. At Winterbourne Money-Koran there's the George, only 'is wife's dead, *she* is, died o' Thursday, bin ailin' a long while, and might 'a died anywhen. And there's two publics, the Ring o' Bells and the Blue Pigeon. *They* lets beds, but the George is the best. Quality stops there."

II

A mile further on Rupert came to a gateway, on each side of which were square pillars with stone balls on the top, and on the top of the stone balls were thick caps of snow. But it had stopped snowing now, and the moon was up.

A dozen yards from the gate was a motor, and it was motionless.

"What a bore!" said a gentleman with a young voice who had apparently been walking round the motor, "to be hung up just at your own gate!"

"I'd rather be hung up at my own gate than five miles away," declared the lady, who had been the only other occupant of the car, in a voice that was also young and full of good temper and cheerfulness.

"I'll go up to the house and get Peter—if he has got back from fetching second post letters," said the young gentleman, "and we'll have to push it home. You'd better sit still, Clarissa. You'll only get your feet wet trudging through this snow."

"Can I help you to push?" suggested Rupert, coming up close to them.

"You're very kind," said Clarissa.

"Oh, I'm used to it! I had a car of my own at home, and it had to be pushed sometimes."

Clarissa and her brother both perceived by the stranger's voice that he was a gentleman; they also guessed by the very slight tinge of American accent and by his uniform that he was one of the Canadians.

"It would be uncommonly kind of you," said Clarissa's brother.

Rupert declared that it was not a bit kind, and started pushing.

"I expect," he remarked, "that the water's frozen. I don't believe there's anything more the matter with it."

"I wish," said Clarissa's brother, "it had waited to finish freezing another four or five minutes. . . . " And he started pushing, too.

Rupert was rather glad it had not waited; he liked Clarissa's voice.

The car yielded to their pushing, and moved quite amiably.

"I'd better get out," said Clarissa. "I make it heavier."

"You'd better sit still," said her brother.

"Your weight doesn't make the slightest difference," said Rupert.

"You can get out *now,*" said Clarissa's brother, when they had reached the front door of Updown Manor. "Perhaps this gentleman will help me to take it round."

"Certainly," said Rupert; then laughing, "I'm Sergeant Grandmaison, of the hundred and thirtieth Duke of Connaught's Canadians."

"Oh, indeed," said Clarissa's brother.

"De Grandmaison de Vieil Cartel?" suggested Clarissa, who knew all sorts of things. A Grandmaison de Vieil Cartel had fought against Wolfe at Quebec, and been taken prisoner, and the English had noted his bravery and good conduct.

"No, madame, de Grandmaison de Ste. Pelagie. The Grandmaison family of Vieil Cartel were our cousins—a hundred and fifty years ago."

"When you have been so kind as to help Bruno to take the car round, you will come in, won't you? Our father and mother will wish to thank you——"

"For nothing!" said Rupert. "But I shall be honored."

"And you must have a drink," said Bruno. When the two young men arrived in the Oak Parlor, Clarissa presented the stranger to her mother, who looked like her sister, and a very pretty sister, too.

"This," said the girl, "is M. de Grandmaison, who helped to get us home. Do you say 'Monsieur' in Canada?"

"In the Army here we do not. I am simply Sergeant Grandmaison."

He could not help wondering how old, or rather how young, the young lady's mother could be. Clarissa was tall, and might be twenty, her mother looked less than thirty. In reality Clarissa was only eighteen and her mother was eight and thirty.

"Where *were* you going?" asked Clarissa, "you were on the road to Winterbourne, and no camp lies that way."

"All the same I was going to Winterbourne. I had lost my way, and a shepherd told me there was an inn there. Only 'his wife,' the *George's* wife, 'was dead.' Still, I meant to try the George."

"Mrs. Viney *is* dead," said Clarissa's mother, "and the funeral is not till to-morrow. Bruno, take Mr. de Grandmaison into the dining-room and look after him. Then bring him back here."

As soon as the young men were gone she went to her husband in his study and told him all about it. By the time Bruno and Rupert got back to the Oak Parlor she was back there, and her husband was with her. He had heard her report, but liked to see things with his own eyes; apparently they satisfied him. For almost as soon as the young Canadian had been introduced to him he said:

"Must you go back to your camp to-night? I understand you were thinking of finding the George at Winterbourne and putting up there?"

"Yes, I was. No, I have leave till to-morrow night."

"Then stay where you are. We shall take as good care of you as they would at the George."

Rupert told himself that all this family were alike in one thing, a singular and attractive cordiality. They were not otherwise much alike. Bruno and Clarissa were not like each other, nor had either any great resemblance to their father or mother. Clarissa was rather small, and very fair, whereas her mother was tall, and had a quantity of very dark hair, her eyes were a deep brown, and her skin, not in the least sallow, was of a rich olive tint; Bruno was tall, and darker than his sister, but he had not her blue eyes, for his were almost black. His father was a handsome man, with slightly aquiline features; he looked about five and forty.

Rupert admired in both the ladies a delightful graciousness that he was sure was more than the mere graciousness of *manner;* something that was not simply an external of breeding, but sprung from some interior quality of themselves. At first he had been inclined to imagine Bruno less friendly, but now he could see that it was only a greater shyness, for, big as he was, he was quite a boy, younger, as Rupert presently found, even than his sister.

"Lady Oldershaw told me," said Clarissa's father, when Rupert's staying at Updown had been settled, "that you were a Canadian; and now, of course, I can see it by the letters on your shoulder. From what part of Canada?"

"From Quebec, sir."

"I suppose, then, that French is your language."

"Oh, yes; but if French is my mother tongue, English is my mother's tongue. She is American—from Philadelphia."

"Ah," quoted Clarissa, " 'Boston for what you know. New York for what you've got: and Philadelphia for who you are.' "

"You know that saying! I've often heard my mother quote it," said Rupert.

"Clarissa," declared her brother, "knows everything. We call her *Mademoiselle Sait-Tout."*

"The truth is," remarked her father, "Clarissa has a wonderful memory for things that don't matter. She is a *repertoire* of quite useless information."

"I think she remembers charmingly," said Rupert. "I assure you we were brought up in deep reverence of Philadelphia pedigrees. My mother was of Scotch descent, and her name was MacAdam; I understand the clan made its first descent on the lowlands from the Garden of Eden."

"Perhaps," said Lady Oldershaw laughing, "we are relations, for *my* mother was also a Miss MacAdam and also Scotch, and if she were here she would suffer no gibes about the clan, I can tell you. Her chieftain was the MacAdam of Kilcani."

"Oh, I've heard of him," cried Rupert, "but my mother's great-grandfather came to America from a place called Gleneden—after the garden, no doubt. He was the youngest of seven sons and he would have had the second sight, only *his* father was the eldest son, instead of being only the seventh."

"And haven't I often heard of the Glenedens!" said Lady Oldershaw. "They and the Kilcanis were always at feud except when they proclaimed a short truce to harry the McGregors. We *are* cousins, you see. What is, please, Madame de Grandmaison's Christian name?"

"Jean," said her son.

"There! And so was *my* mother's: both Jean MacAdam. Bruno there is going into the Scots Guards, but my mother will only think him half worthy of it, because he is not Alastair as she wanted him to be. However, we *have* an Alastair, as you shall see, and a David too, *and* a Jean."

In fact he saw very soon, for five minutes afterwards they came in, two boys of twelve and ten, and with them a little girl of eight. They were escorted by a young lady to whom Lady Oldershaw said, "Please don't go away, Ninette. Here is a sort of compatriot of yours (and of mine too!) I want to introduce you—Mademoiselle Marchand, this gentleman is Mr. de Grandmaison who has come all the way from Canada to fight for England and for France—and to look for his mother's relations."

III

Mademoiselle Marchand was not at all like the traditional French governess of British fiction. She was neither sallow nor lean, her eyes by no means suggested little shallow drops of ink, and were far from being beady or sharp. She had not thin, tight lips, nor was her glance shrewish and crafty. Her complexion was bright, as were her rather large, deep hazel eyes, and her abundant hair was of a brilliant auburn. Her mouth had a sensitive expression, and her glance as it rested on the children was full of friendly kindness. And, if her manner was a little shy, it had not the shut up, compressed suggestion of the fictional French governess. As a matter of fact, she was among very friendly, kind people, whose kindness she fully deserved. Presently they were all talking French together, and Rupert, though not surprised to find Lady Oldershaw and Clarissa speaking it perfectly, had not expected that Bruno and his father would be so fluent. Clarissa, on her side, was a little amused to note that, though the young Canadian spoke French without the least tinge of American accent, his English had a distinct Trans-Atlantic savor.

The entrance of Mademoiselle Marchand had brought Rupert himself to a third stage of impression. At first he had told himself that Clarissa was exactly the person to fall in love with. Then he saw her mother, and told himself laughingly that it was impossible not to fall in love with *her*. And finally Mademoiselle Marchand had arrived.

That young lady—he was sure she could not be one and twenty—was not so brilliantly beautiful as either his hostess or her daughter, and she had not nearly so much to say. Her dress was less picturesque than Lady Oldershaw's white tea-gown and quaint white mob cap with pale blue ribbons; and it somehow lacked the distinction of Clarissa's: still it was not *governessy,* and managed to avoid the sort of aggressive neatness that young ladies in her position are apt to affect as a point of conscience.

Mademoiselle Marchand was certainly less striking than the other two ladies; all the same Rupert, who had been immensely interested as well as fascinated by Miss Oldershaw and her mother, was soon even more interested in Mademoiselle Marchand. Her silences were clearly not stupid, they were merely modest and youthful; and, while they gave no suggestion of a watching reserve, they often made him wonder whether this quiet girl was not *thinking* more than any of the talkers. He was French enough to think no worse of a girl for talking rather too little than too much.

"Monsieur!" demanded Jean abruptly. "Have you killed any Germans yet?"

"Bloodthirsty child!" said her mother. "Don't you know there are no Germans on Salisbury Plain?"

"There's Fräulein Schmidt at the Selbys', and she shut me in a dark cupboard when I went to tea."

"Mademoiselle," said Rupert laughing, "we don't kill ladies."

"No, of course. But you could put her into a Condensation Camp."

"'Concentration,' Jean. Poor old Fräulein Schmidt! If she was shut up in a Concentration

Camp," said Lady Oldershaw, "you'd want to go and take her all your toys."

"I'd take her," said Jean, "the old dolly with tow hair because she squints, and says 'ya' when you squeeze her waist, like a German. And she's spotty. And her clothes won't come off. And when we buried her and dug her up there was a worm in her shoe."

"Jean, I'm shocked. Mr. de Grandmaison will think you learn these ungenerous sentiments from your mother, and it must be Mademoiselle—Ninette, I did not think you were so truculent."

Certainly Mademoiselle Marchand did not look truculent. But Rupert laughed and said:

"For my part I think Jean's old dolly would be quite good enough for the Boche lady. We French and Canadians have a more wholesome abhorrence of Germans than you English."

"But you don't make war on old governesses," said Lady Oldershaw.

"No. But we are not so trustful as you are. An old German governess *may* be an old spy; all spies are not young and lovely."

"You are encouraging Jean in her iniquity! Poor Fräulein Schmidt! She's a very harmless, not very engaging, maid, who has seen better days—her father was a Prussian general."

"Ah!" laughed Rupert. "He ought to have left her better provided for."

"But he didn't. So she earns her bread: and what on earth could she spy on here—in all this empty plain, where in her walks abroad she can see nothing but sheep?"

"That depends on where she walks," observed Rupert. Lady Oldershaw laughed, and Bruno chipped in:

"And Sir Heracles Selby is a general, and his son is an aviator: after all, Mum, she *might* hear a thing or two."

"And," observed Mademoiselle Marchand quietly, "Fräulein's dear brother, August, is a Prussian Colonel. Perhaps she writes to him all about the sheep."

Rupert looked amused: Lady Oldershaw looked slightly displeased.

"Look here!" she said, "I don't like it. Fräulein Schmidt has eaten our salt, and I don't admire this sort of joking. She has been with the Selbys ever so long—"

"Nearly two years," observed her husband maliciously, "and before that she was with Sir Timothy Redtapp (of the War Office): she evidently likes official personages."

"Voila!" murmured Mademoiselle Marchand.

And Rupert laughed openly.

"Lady Oldershaw," he pleaded, "don't be angry! No doubt your Fräulein Schmidt is an exemplary personage, as the daughters of all Prussian Generals, and the sisters of all Prussian Colonels, ought to be. But prejudiced creatures like me and Jean would not mind shutting her up in a cupboard."

"She'd make it," cried Jean with decision, "very stuffy—that cupboard."

Bruno and Rupert laughed again, and Clarissa did not frown, but Lady Oldershaw observed severely:

"Jean, your remarks bear in upon me that it is your bedtime. I shall now ring for Nursey."

"Oh, Mummy," entreated Jean, "one other weeny, teeny ten minutes, and I'll take Fräulein Schmidt when she's condensed, my best dolly who shuts her eyes when she lies—"

"Jean!!"

"Down!" shouted Jean, "and says 'Papa! Papa'!"

"In memory," suggested Rupert, "of the Prussian General."

Lady Oldershaw rang the bell firmly.

"No teeny weeny ten minutes for you, Jean. Mr. de Grandmaison ought to be sent to bed too."

"Nursey," cried Jean demurely, when a very pleasant-faced comfortable woman appeared at the door, "you're to take us (the officer and I) to bed."

"I'm not an officer . . ." said Rupert.

"Why not?" demanded Jean, really interested, but with a calculating eye on the clock.

"Nursey," said her mother, laughing, but fully alive to the maneuver, "take Miss Jean *at once.* Mr. de Grandmaison can stay."

IV

Though Sir Bertram and Lady Oldershaw were people of what is called "rank and fashion" they did not send their French governess to sup in a lonely schoolroom while they dined with their family. At dinner all their children, except little Jean, were present, and Mademoiselle Marchand sat between Rupert and Bruno. Certainly she had not so much to say as Lady Oldershaw; and, except when the conversation was quite general, as it mostly was, she talked more to Bruno than to her other neighbor. Still Rupert retained his conviction that her quietness and comparative silence was no sign of dulness.

"Before the war," Sir Bertram told him, "we were all great politicians here. Clarissa was our Tory. Bruno our fervent Radical. Their mother and I endeavored to improve our minds and derive instruction. Alastair gave a general but unreliable support to Bruno, and David was on Clarissa's side when he could make out what she was driving at.

But now it's the Millennium, and the strife of parties is ended. We are all simply English people and keep our abuse for England's enemies."

"So it is with us," said Rupert. "We Canadians are all English too—French Canadians or English, it is all the same."

"If I had two hearts, one should be English," said Ninette.

"My dear, it's a good thing you haven't," laughed Lady Oldershaw. "The one that she has, she added to Rupert, "is too big for her body."

Rupert hardly knew why it gave him undoubted pleasure to hear this tribute: but it certainly did, and he told himself that the praise was simply and cordially given. They were evidently, all of them, very fond of the girl, and that in itself seemed to him high praise. For, friendly, as they all were, they had a certain shrewd directness, and he did not fancy them likely either to praise or to like indiscriminately.

After dinner Lady Oldershaw and Rupert had an opportunity for some short talk that was more confidential.

"Ninette," said she, "is such a good girl: it would be natural for her to be very much depressed, and no one could blame her if she were distrait and melancholy, but she is always the same cheerful person. Her home is in the war zone, in fact in a district where the worst fighting is going on. Many of her near relations have been taken prisoners and she has no news of them. The houses of others are occupied by German Officers. Her father is dead, but the uncle and aunt with whom she used to live have their home very near the fighting line, and from day to day one never knows whether their village may have fallen into the enemy's hands. When the war broke out she was about to leave us, for Alastair and David will soon be too big for her, and have to go to preparatory schools, and she is too advanced and clever to be a mere nursery governess to a tiny tot like Jean. But the war came, and her home must be with us till it ends. She herself would like to go, because she would wish to share any danger or hardship that may fall in the way of her uncle and aunt who brought her up. She is a very brave girl, and most unselfish. But M. and Madame de le Grange-Brune wrote begging of her to stay in England and we insisted."

"I know that name. At school I had a friend called René de la Grange-Brune: his people came to Canada under Louis XVI."

"Before the Revolution it was a great name in France. But during it they lost everything, and they are poor enough now. Her father was an officer, and poor too, but he was very handsome, and I have seen his portrait: she is rather like it. I am going to make her sing—Clarissa has a finer voice, but she can't sing like Ninette."

Rupert was rather surprised at first to notice that Mademoiselle Marchand did not choose any French song, but old-fashioned English and Scotch ballads. But he had no notion how touching and beautiful they could be: and to him they were very far from being stale or hackneyed.

"Sing," begged Lady Oldershaw, "'Rappelle-toi'?"

It is not a young girl's song: but a folk-song, in *patois,* supposed to be that of a very old peasant, crooned by a fireside in winter to a wife as old as himself. Unlike the modern song of fashion it was very long, and had a patient monotony, for the air scarcely varied with the verses: but it had a whole life-story in it, and rang every change of idea from childish innocence and youthful hope to the tender wistful resignation of lonely age.

"Dost remember?" it asked, "when we were little chits together, thou, *ma mie,* and I? Our play in the quiet, sunny village street, our naughty truant wanderings in the fields, when I made thee daisy crowns, and thy brother Jacques married us in play, in the cathedral of the woods. *Rappelle-toi, ma mie, rappelle toi?* Dost thou mind when we grew bigger, and thou grewest shy (but I not)! And thou wouldst feign to see me not (and I seeing naught but thee!) as we walked home from Vespers through the little street. *Rappelle-toi, ma mie, rappelle toi?* Mindest thou of our wedding, and the little home I had for thee, and the little garden where I set flowers for thee, in the sweet-scented summer evenings after my other work was done? But other flowers blossomed on our very hearth, and they were sweeter, fragrant of our love? *Rappelle-toi, ma mie, rappelle-toi?* Then God looked from heaven down on them, and some were too lovely for our little corner in the world, and He asked for them, and transplanted them, *Rappelle-toi, ma mie?* But He left us Jean and Philippine, and Marie and Raoul, and He blessed them and made them strong, to work like us, and they found each a mate (as thou foundest me, and I thee) *Rappelle-toi, ma mie?* And in the Great War Raoul fell, and Marie's husband Jacques, and our tears fell with the snow, *Rappelle toi, ma mie?* And now their children are gone home after their play by our warm hearth, but thou art there, *ma mie,* I can hear thee; though my eyes are blind, I can see thee, for thou changest not, and in my heart thou standest as at first, *ma mie;* I am thine, and thou art mine, *Rappelle-toi, rappelle-toi, ma mie?*"

To make of a theme so simple, as old as the heart of man, what Ninette made of it, seemed to Rupert a sheer wonder. He did not wonder that no one spoke when she had finished, that the only compliment they gave her was their silence, and the look upon their faces.

The modern drawing-room song is so often a brief, but almost desperate wail of passion: earthly enough: in Ninette's song there was no passion, and no despair, and it was not sad but tender and wistful. And it was full of love, not the wild love of an hour and "after that the dark," but of a love as long as life and stronger than death.

After a while they asked her for more folk-songs of her own *pays* in the *patois* of her people: and she sang many. They had in common with each other the same quality of purity and sweetness, simplicity and tenderness, but they were very various. Some were very gay and joyous, with the fragrance and light of flowers and young summer: others had the patience of winter, but its bracing vigor too. There were young men's songs and girls' songs, and songs such as the women sang over their washing of linen together in the stream by the village: hunting songs as well, and odd monotones, but never tedious, songs such as the plowman sang aloud to their horses as they paced the long furrow.

Rupert hardly noticed—no one with any real appreciation would have thought it worth while to notice—that Ninette's voice was not in itself remarkable. She could not have done much with songs requiring any great range, nor could she have sung to any purpose in a large hall; her gift was not that of power but of sympathy, not of the throat and chest but of the heart.

Rupert had heard plenty of great singers, and had liked it very well; he would be well enough content to hear them again in some huge opera house, but he would not have cared to be obliged to hear any one of them daily, in his own home. He thought it would be almost a grace, more than a mere pleasure, if he could listen to Ninette in his own home all his life.

He lay awake long that night, and the echoes of those tender, simple songs of a poor and patient people sounded not merely in his ears but in his heart.

"For me," he thought, "the world can never contain but two people, and . . ." He knew already who, henceforth, would be for him the other one.

PRINTED BY BENZIGER BROTHERS, NEW YORK

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