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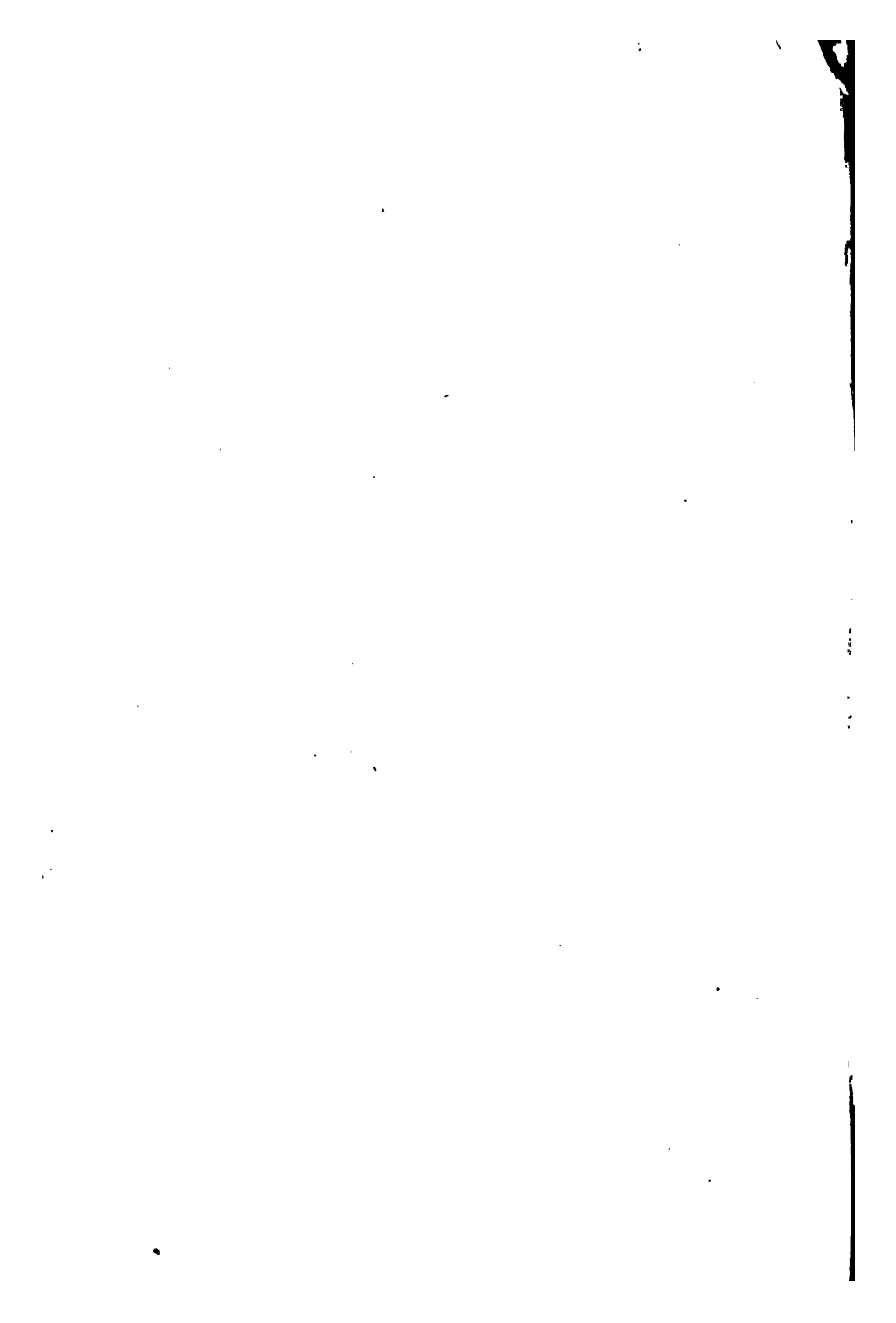
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Reeves



"HONEY"

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

COMIN' THRO' THE RYE

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CINDERS

# "HONEY"

BY  
HELEN (MATHERS) Reeves.

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# “ HONEY ”

## CHAPTER I

“All the bodies of the universe are allied by sympathies  
or natural antipathies.”

“*Miss Honeybel Bury*”

I LOOKED at her, startled at the unsuitability of her name, for there was honey neither in her glance nor on her lips, and beauty at that moment she had none, unless she had deliberately veiled it with the sullenness that enveloped her as with a cloud.

“You do not wish to dance?” I said, though the nod she had thrown at me was in the affirmative ; and then I glanced down at her, and saw that she was trembling, but if from temper or emotion, I could not tell.

“I would like,” she muttered, “to be shut up in a room lined with looking-glasses, and

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plenty of crockery, that I might smash them all."

"Perhaps it could be managed," I said, "but not here and now. Do you often feel like that?"

"Often, in town; not in the country."

"Then why don't you stay there?"

She frowned, looking up at me quickly, but her face was no longer sullen.

"Do you think time is ever wasted if you are happy?" she said, with apparent inconsequence, as we sat down in the conservatory to which I had piloted her.

"And yet," I said, "many girls would think a good floor, good music, a suitable partner——"

I paused. Perhaps it was my age that had upset her.

"I can't help being old, you know."

"You were just dragged up to me," she said, "and you looked quite as unwilling as I did; and you are not old."

"And still," I said, "my appearance coincided with your wish to smash looking-glasses."

"The wish was there long before," she

said quickly. "I cannot stand heat and crowds, and want to be in the country. So, in their hearts, do all these poor capering wretches. The very air is flat to-night, with no electricity of human enjoyment in it!"

I nodded, for I had felt it myself. Floor, lights, music, flowers, and the girls' frocks, even the men, were all right, yet there was a subtle lack of gaiety about the whole thing, that proclaimed youth as stale, when it should have been lusty and full of go.

"They are all pretending," she said, "and life's too short for it. Our mothers never did. Do you?"

"Often," I said, with an angry energy that astonished even myself. But I did not mean in the way that she did.

"Then why are you here?" she said. "Women are beggars, not choosers. But men—I don't believe you like it any better than I do."

"A tyrannic sister-in-law," I murmured, at which she laughed, just as if she knew Mary well.

"Why can't we have pointed roofs, instead of ugly flat ceilings to our houses," she said,

glancing up discontentedly, "like the old English folk, who, if they could not get arched roofs, loved to make them pointed, with polished timber beams on which their eyes rested, as if looking upwards through a tree? It was about the only comfort they *had* got when they left their beloved forests, and were obliged to suffocate within four walls. But at Burghfield we have forests and pointed roofs too."

Her voice softened, and told me one thing, that Burghfield, wherever that place might be, held her heart.

"If I were in the country to-night," she said, "I would sling my hammock in the garden, and sleep in it."

I looked at her more closely, knowing that her restlessness meant pain ; and it is one of the worst signs of the age, that people cannot and will not endure pain of either mind or body. They fly it, drug it, but they will not face it open-eyed.

"You would not go to sleep," I said, "and you would want someone slung in another hammock to *causer* with."

She coloured brilliantly.

“You have found me out,” she said ; “but I do not *causer* with everybody. I thought that you—you——”

“I am a good listener,” I said, and she darted me a quick, indignant glance, and was silent for a full minute, thus giving me an opportunity of noting the promise of her mouth.

More a dryad than a beauty she was, with that wreath of green leaves on her brown hair, framing the brown oval of a small face—scornful, proud, virginal—that wanted woods for its background, and seemed to resent the anachronism of being set in a town conservatory.

I have a keen eye for details, and noted that the colour of the leaves repeated itself delightfully in the necklace that ran like green, living fire round her neck ; all the rest of her was white and gauzy as the robes of Titania herself. But suddenly she disappointed me, going nearer to feminine malice than I expected of her.

“I don’t believe there’s a bit of paint and powder left in all London to-night,” she said ; “it’s all *here*.”

I shook my head, but she only threw up hers, and went on defiantly—

"They're so groovy," with a wave of her hand towards the dancers. "The world is their circus-ring, and they canter and amble round and round it, and jump through their paper hoops, smirking for applause; but they never get off the track—they would be lost without Society's crack of the whip! Sometimes the women break out in little tails to their jackets, called *basques*—and they must all have tails, or die (it's really a revolt to prehistoric times, and quite explainable); sometimes they wear tassels over their left eye—and there's no authority for *that*; and now the old boat-shaped hat has come in, with cascades falling down their backs—sheep! sheep! Are you groovy, too?" she added abruptly.

Here she had me on the raw, and I moved impatiently. But she was very quick; if she made a wound, she tried instantly to heal it, and with a winning little air that justified her name, she said—

"I'm sorry—you don't *look* it—but, being a doctor, I suppose you can't help it."

I started, trying to remember if I had been introduced with any prefix to my name.

“You dislike my profession?” I said.

“I’ll tell you a story,” she said. “Someone was dying, with four doctors standing round him. He asked one of them what complaint he was dying of. ‘We shall find that out at the post-mortem,’ said the man.”

I laughed.

“That is an old wheeze,” I said.

“No.”

She had turned very white.

“My mother died while the surgeons were quarrelling downstairs over some point of professional etiquette,” she said. “And the lessons your dead mother’s face does not teach you, God Himself cannot,” she added under her breath, but recovered herself quickly.

“A wider humanity and less red-tape,” she said, “would become the noblest profession in the world.

“‘We are travelling home to God  
In the way our fathers trod,’

“at least that is what I heard a lot of broad-arrow-dressed rascals singing in church one

morning in Portland gaol—and that is what you doctors are doing. You are not half as progressive as they are in America."

I frowned, for I was beginning to suspect the little termagant of being flippant as well as clever, and clever women tire me; yet I liked the unconscious way she looked me in the face, and the subject she had happened to hit on interested me.

"Your war-cry should be Humanity! and not individual aggrandisement," she said. "And if you think because you have a row of letters after your name——" she paused, then added, "public opinion has got out of its swaddling clothes, and nowadays thinks for itself—and pretty sharp, too. It judges by results only—doesn't care a fig if you are physician to royalty, troubles nothing about you as a man, or your degrees either—only asks 'What can he do? Can he cure me?' And, if he can, they flock to him."

"But how are they to know of our results?" I said. "We are like Kipling's Bobs—do not advertise."

"No, only the so-called heads of the profession may do that. When the Duke of



Bumbledom has a pain in his big toe, or the Marchioness of Tippleary has an attack of nerves, every paper paragraphs the name of the doctor called in to them ; but woe betide the lesser ones who get into print ! ”

“Common souls pay with what they do, other souls with what they are,” I quoted. “Some soldiers are set to fight, others to dig trenches ; but it is good work, every bit of it, all the same.”

“But you are a born fighter,” she said ; “you would like to do in hot blood, what you slowly and painfully do in cold.”

I was silent, suspecting Mary of breach of confidence. Who but she knew my customary mood of revolt, of hatred of the chains that bound me in my profession ?

“The surgeon of the future,” said the girl musingly, “will seek truth everywhere, find it even in shams and popular errors ; he will despise nothing, learn as he goes, use as he goes for the benefit of humanity ; he will not keep one eye on his patient, the other cocked for the list of Birthday honours ! And I’m not sure there is not something in those Faith Healers’ religion, for faith heals physically,

when there is no organic disease; it so buoys up a poor creature, lifts it so completely above all mundane worries, that the patient is supremely happy, therefore well. Of course," she added apologetically, "it wouldn't have that effect upon people with backbones, but how many have any?"

"You, for one," I said. "And woman was made out of a rib, you know. Backbones are for men."

She flashed me an indignant glance, and by now I had discovered that there was meaning in the latter half of her name, though expression had probably much to say to it. It struck me then that only a blind man might dwell with her in peace, so perpetually changing was the stormy-weather-chart of her little brown face, though the many notes in her voice would probably enlighten him as to her moods.

"Do not vex your youth with riddles," I said. "Most of us make that mistake. We clamour, protest, rebel. It is only time that deadens our voices—our only time of content is when we cease to cry out, and compose ourselves to wait quietly for the end."

“And you have not reached that stage of content yet,” she said quickly. “Oh! Roosevelt’s gospel appeals to me so tremendously,” she went on warmly. “‘I wish to preach,’ he said, with snapping teeth and blazing eyes, ‘not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the Strenuous Life, the life of toil and effort, of labour and strife—to preach that highest form of success, which comes, not to the man who desires more easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from hardships, or from bitter toil; and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumphs.’”

“But I thought,” I murmured, “that we were not to have any triumphs—only to labour in the cause of humanity? Supposing we go and fight for supper—that is all Society comes out for really—I for you, and you for me?”

She laughed, and we went down—fought, and won, and parted; parted on my side at least with regret, and the desire to meet her again.

## CHAPTER II

“So seems the life of man, O King, as a sparrow’s flight through the hall when a man is sitting at meat in wintertide, with the warm fire lighted on the hearth, but the chill rainstorm without. The sparrow flies in at one door, and tarries for a moment in the light and heat of the hearth fire, and then flying forth from the other, vanishes into the wintry darkness whence it came. So tarries for a moment the life of a man in our sight, but what is before it, what after it, we know not.”

I WALKED round to Brook Street one afternoon to look up my sister-in-law, Mary Cassilis, whom I had not seen since her ball, and whom I had greatly missed during her absence abroad during the winter and early spring.

I think Mary genuinely liked me—for I filled a want; probably there is nothing a widow feels the lack of so keenly as the masculine dust-bin, into which she has been accustomed to shoot all the conversational and other rubbish that no one else will put up

with. And my brother had been a docile creature, heaven-born to marriage, as not one man out of a million is, though you always felt that he was merely an annotation to Mary's text.

Her cool drawing-rooms rested me ; the absence of many flowers, the prevalence of growing things, so that green was its prevailing atmosphere, pleased my taste, and I sank into a deep chair while Mary put me through my paces in a way astonishing in so frail and elegant a person.

“ Ben,” she said, “ you are nearly twenty years younger than I am, and ought to be my son instead of my brother-in-law ; if you had been, you would be a swell G. P. now ; babies are *always* in season—or if you object to them, have gone in for something to eat or drink, or boots or clothes, things people can't do without, you know, *that's* what pays. Poor men shouldn't try to run philanthropy shows—it's a rotten, false, undignified attitude for the men who must earn a living-wage, or go to the wall, to be called an “ honorary ” surgeon—he should be paid, and paid well—it's all wrong, I tell you. See the order, the

luxury even, the flowers, the money lavished on the patients in the hospitals, and yet you, and the other men who cure those people, and keep the whole thing going, and without whom the whole fabric must collapse, are not paid one farthing !”

“We get valuable experience there,” I said.

“Experience ! And while you are sticking your silly noses in the air, and giving your best years and energies to doing gratuitous work, your landlord takes the roof from over your head, and you find yourself star-gazing in the street !”

“In excellent company,” I said. “Men with the money instinct are usually detestable.”

“But it brings a man peace, and a down bed at the last,” said Mary. “It’s mediocrity, not genius, that blends with the spirit of the age. There are no great men now,” she added sadly, “they are all dead, and we don’t grow the breed any more. Yet how scarce they were — those glorious names that are household words to us—how rare they seem, when in this great city, we see an endless procession of millions of men, and not one

half-dozen among them all, whose names will live when this century is out !”

“Fame, like success, is mainly the product of the imagination,” I said. “Failure has its joys, and promotes peace and quiet.”

“Shame on you !” cried Mary indignantly. “If talent abounds, genius has fled from our midst, because we are not strenuous enough, because we work for gold ; the ancients and Elizabethans worked for immortality. In science we have made great strides, but have we added anything tangible to the store of great poetry, of great prose, in the cupboard (there is not enough to fill a temple) of Fame ? Energy, power, is what is demanded in vain in this sickly, self-conscious age.”

“Oh, let us be happy, and blow strenuous endeavour,” I said lazily, “especially in hot weather.”

“Rubbish,” said Mary ; “such opinions suited your brother Ernest, because he hated responsibility of any kind. That’s why he married me. He thought that food dropped ready cooked into a plate before him, and clothes blew on of themselves ; and he never mastered the intricacies of a cheque-book, or

the everyday business of life. So absent-minded, too! When I heard of a woman who was at the Military Tournament, and in her joy at the relief of Mafeking, turned round and violently shook the biggest nose nearest to her, I thought it was just the thing Ernest might do on provocation, and forget to apologise."

I agreed that it was quite possible.

"And one night, after I and the servants had all gone to bed, he went out to post a letter with his lighted bedroom candlestick in his hand!"

"He must have been thinking of Diogenes," I said, "who lit a candle in the daytime, and went through the streets saying, 'I am looking for a man.' If he had lived to be old——"

She sighed. "It's *so* hard to bring up our second-childhood children properly! But I miss him," she went on sadly. "To be strong, really strong, you must have someone to lean on you; then your back stiffens, you stand foursquare to the winds that blow. You must not, dare not weaken. But once he is withdrawn, often you collapse, and fall yourself."

"But perhaps he is better off," I said.



“Heaven”—and I quoted a great authority—  
“has great rewards for the husbands of talkative women.”

“You always pull me out of the pit of sentiment,” she said, half ruefully, as indeed I did, for Mary’s moods were not always as bright now as they had been formerly.

“By the way,” she said, “how did you like Miss Bury?”

“Better than in my youth,” I said, “for my grey powders were always given me in honey when I was a child. Is not Miss Bury the girl you stay with in Devon, and who keeps foxhounds?—an unfeminine sort of person, as I always supposed.”

“It’s the prettiest thing you ever saw—the girl in pink, with the pack round her,” said Mary. “You would have met her long ago, only she hated town so much, she never came to it till after she met Holford.”

“She is very Irish,” I said, “if she said that. And who looks after her in the country—a duenna?”

“She never felt the want of one. Honey lives her life out of doors; every man, woman, and child in the country is her friend.”

"She lives the ideal life—that of a sporting squire," I said.

"Ben," cried Mary, "you great muscular, outdoor chap—made for your sins a surgeon—I do believe you would rather be a labourer earning twelve shillings a week in an open-air life, than thousands within four walls."

"Yes," I said, "to work hard, to eat and drink hard, to sleep hard—there are worse lives. Exercise your muscles well, and all that rot about love doesn't come in," I added, with a flier at Mary's pronounced disapproval of my bachelorhood. "But how does Holford affect her?"

"I suppose I may as well tell you," said Mary. "I shall probably want your help later on. She met him in Devonshire; he was staying at one of the frisky houses in the neighbourhood. Had his violin, of course—is by way of being a clever man—imagine his effect on a little girl who had never been in love—while her effect upon *him*—did you notice her jewels?"

I threw back and remembered the delightful note of green, struck twice about her, and nodded.

“You know,” said Mary, “your brother never gave me very much jewellery, and I was glad of it. When a man does that, it’s usually a sop thrown to his wife to hide how much he is giving to the others. But Honey’s emeralds give me wicked sensations.”

“She struck me as having points of view of her own,” I said. “I like her unexpectedness.”

“There are too many dead-alives in the world,” said Mary; “moribunds, like the flies that in autumn strike you coldly on the cheek. Death won’t take ’em, life don’t want ’em; meanwhile they afflict *us*. Honey is *alive*. There are three things that sharpen you up, if you have any wits to sharpen—physical suffering, mental pain, and travel. The second is what ails her.”

“I thought her spirits were uneven,” I said, and waited for enlightenment.

“When you do what is within your power,” said Mary, who loved the byways of conversation, “Nature looks on pleased and happy; but when you try to do more, the instinct of self-preservation asserts itself, and cries ‘Stop!’ And because you don’t, or can’t,

spoils your spirits and your temper, and you worry other people, while everybody exclaims what a brute you are."

"I am still waiting," I said resignedly.

"I would rather trust a man than a woman," said Mary meditatively, "because he smokes his pipe, and thinks and thinks, but says nothing. He never *expects* anything of a woman, and is never astonished at anything she tells him. Now women's bitterness towards women is because they are always expecting good from them, and are angry when they don't get it."

She leaned her smart grey head back against the chair, (and grey hair makes a delightful combination with blue eyes and a fair skin), and considered me maliciously.

"It has put Honey on the defensive," she said, "and spoiled her manners; and as I said to her once, 'Never be rude to anybody, because you have to be so disgustingly civil afterwards, to rub out the memory of the affront.' The man who is master of his likes and dislikes never ruins his trousers by overmuch kneeling! But she is self-willed to a degree. Ah, my boy, we all thought our-

selves such damned fine fellows when we were young !”

“She struck me as not running in her true form,” I said, “yet as having somehow got close to the eternal verities. By intuition, of course ; it could hardly be experience at her age.”

“You’re wrong. One bad man will educate a girl quicker than fifty good ones. We women build a shrine, and are so occupied in sticking all our best jewels in it, that we don’t properly examine what we are going to put inside, and lo ! one day we find we have placed a leper in it, and he grins at us, but he won’t come out.”

“You mean that Lawrence Holford—Holford, the musician—who is in prison for killing Hammersley—is Miss Bury’s lover ?” I cried impatiently.

“Yes, but it really was an accident. His sentence was a light one ; he comes out soon.” (And Mary nodded significantly.) “I was abroad when it happened, so could be of no use to the poor girl. She has taken a house in town, to be near him.”

“But I haven’t heard the story yet,” I

objected. "Did he kill Hammersley on her account?"

"He persuaded Honey the quarrel was about her. But it was her wealth that attracted him, as it attracted Hammersley, who was a man of low tastes. I feel sure they fought over another woman."

"Miss Bury loved Holford?" I said.

"What a question! The nicest women always love the worse men, and the worse men naturally like the women who are as bad as, or worse than themselves."

"Good God!" I said, "how do you account for it?"

"Temperament partly. Also Holford's unlucky 'accident' has brought out all Honey's finest qualities: unselfishness, devotion, pity; and once rouse the constancy of a perfectly loyal woman, and you get a coat of mail that turns aside every blow and thrust of truth. Ben, it is all a question of what we can do without. If a woman could consciously deny the charm of a bad man—say 'No' to it—she would be all right; but she won't. Instinct may warn her, but Nature wins, and the girl often goes open-eyed to her ruin.

It's the most terrible sight on earth—a young, beautiful life fouled and obscured by a mistake in marriage, by a moment of idiocy, of error of judgment, that is annoying and irritating enough in business or ordinary affairs, but in the vital scheme of happiness, becomes tragic, awful, bearing crimes in its breast.”

“Can't anything be done?” I said.

“Nothing,” said Mary smartly, “but to make her fall in love with yourself. She won't look at a man; but she'll *have* to at you, because you are my brother-in-law.”

I shook my head. The woman who had passed through the hands of a Lawrence Holford was not for me. Very few men want temperament in a wife; and among my married acquaintance the amazing fact had often struck me, that what a husband admired most in his wife before marriage, displeases him most afterwards.

“Ben, you are a fool!” cried Mary in a rage. “Doesn't Amiel say that ‘without passion, man is a mere latent force and possibility, like a flint that awaits the shock of iron before it can give forth its spark’?”

“I don't want sparks struck out of me,” I

said. "I would much rather be a damp lucifer, left in peace. Once the one sex invades the privacy, and confuses the brain and senses of the other, all is disorder."

"Go to Korea," gibed Mary as I departed, "where a miserable bachelor of forty is forced to wear the despised pigtail of boyhood, while the engaged youth of eight proudly rolls his hair into a top-knot!"

I laughed, and went away.

Liberty is sweet, and I envied no man his domestic happiness, for happiness exacts more penalties even than misery, and I thanked God that I had never let a woman break up my life with her moods, and fads, and exactions.



### CHAPTER III

“The worldly hope men set their hearts upon  
Turns ashes—or it prospers ; and anon  
Like snow upon the desert’s dusty face  
Lighting a little hour or two, is gone.”

WHEN once you have fixed your mind on an especial person or circumstance, the very stones in the highway will rise up to testify to some new fact concerning them, yet I was startled when, dining with Golightly at his club that night, Lawrence Holford’s name came up, and I got a grip of his character that a year of talk with Mary would not have afforded me.

We men are mostly inarticulate and disinterested in our friendships, but we can find a rousing word or two for a scoundrel, and sinners all as we were in the room that night, there was not one present who did not, roughly speaking, resent sins against humanity. And the breaking up of many

women's lives for one man's pleasure came under that category.

And when men count a man a disgrace to themselves, he has reached the full measure of his degradation, and there is no deeper depth for him to plumb.

Holford's imprisonment was not called "bad luck," as indeed it was—the man had gone unpunished over so many worse things, that to be caught when probably not guilty only showed ironically as rough retributive justice.

"Now personally," said Golightly, who was a famous artist, "I don't trouble about my character at all. I am contented to be judged by my work—most of us are. And if our colours don't come out in the public wash—and the public has got into the way of washing on its own account—doesn't send it to the cleaners, otherwise critics—we are generally all right. But Holford's an out-and-out bad egg."

"Played the violin like an angel," said Fred Singleton, "looked like one—you know that slight, graceful, spiritual type—ought to have been a High Church parson, and

waved his lily hand from the pulpit, with beauty waiting for him afterwards in the vestry. Hard as nails, but looked frail—and pity’s almost as strong as love with some women.”

“A jolly sight stronger, you mean,” growled Golightly. “The brute will be out soon—free to begin his tricks over again—if he isn’t torn in pieces by the women who will fight for him at the prison door.”

“What kind of women?” I inquired.

“The best and the worst. Naturally he prefers the latter.”

“Anyone in particular?”

Golightly shrugged his shoulders.

“If he and Hammersley quarrelled over a woman, you bet she wasn’t a nice one. I heard there was a really good, pretty girl somewhere in the country whom Holford was going to marry—for her money, of course—but no one seems to know her name.”

“And if *she* is at the prison door when he comes out, and the others—which do you back to win?” I asked cynically.

“He’ll marry the girl and go back to the—carrion,” said Tom promptly.

"But the girl must have friends," I said indignantly. "Can't they stop it?"

"Probably they don't know," and Tom shrugged his shoulders. "That sort of thing is very often only known among men. Hammersley belonged to this club before you joined, and often brought Holford in, whose talk was as callous as his life."

The room had emptied while we talked, some of the men had gone to whist, others to the play, balls, or opera. Golightly and I alone were left, at one in our love of peace and hatred of society, and we were likely to be left undisturbed for some time.

"The papers never give you the real inside of things," I said. "Tell me the true version."

"Well, it happened *here*, you know, in this very room, but I don't believe in ghosts. Holford and Hammersley were smoking and talking, the other men had dropped off, just as those fellows did to-night. One of the servants passing the door heard raised voices, and a woman's name shouted, then a crashing fall, and rushing in, found Hammersley lying on the ground, dead, and Holford standing over him."

“And you think?”

“That Holford undoubtedly struck him, but it came out at the inquest that Hammersley’s skull was as thin as an egg-shell, and even a slight blow would smash it. Holford swore that Hammersley had attacked him, slipped, and being a heavy man, had fractured his skull where it was thinnest, just above the ear; but even allowing for its being an accident, and also taking into account the judge’s proclivities, Holford got off lightly—six months as a first-class misdemeanant—and I’ve no doubt the women have seen to it that he wants for nothing in gaol. He will be out in a month or so.”

“Did the name of the woman they had quarrelled about come out in court?”

“No. Holford somehow got at the waiter, and——”

“But you know it?” I exclaimed, struck by his tone.

Golightly nodded.

“I made it my business to know. Once I did the man a good turn, and——”

“The name was?”

Golightly shook his head.

"It was one of the usual names of women of her class," he said; "take your choice of them. Men never fight over a good woman, and as I heard Holford once remark, 'It's a far greater crime to be untrue to your mistress than your wife.'"

I muttered a bad word.

"Some clever chap said life was a falling and catching ourselves. I would add, a slipping and getting up again, but Holford has given up even *trying* to catch himself."

"But how did he live? How could he afford such amusements?"

"I should say," said Golightly, "by the easy method of getting money out of one woman, and spending it on another! He has better men to keep him company," and Golightly ran over certain names well known to the public. "His profession was music—undoubtedly the man loved it, and was a good artist—any rudiment of conscience he had went into his Art. Strange thing that Art," went on Tom musingly, "beginning with a music that came out of the winds and the sands of the desert, interpreted by the tribes of Judah who wandered across it, and which is

accountable for such later psalmody, as in its yearning and pathos has influenced Christian musical sentiment, and religious thought—indeed, all the later developments of musical thought, and musical emotion. And these musicians play the very devil with women. I mean, of course, the second-rate women.”

I thought of poor Miss Bury, who was not second-rate, and cursed the imagination that would not let her see him as he was, only as she wanted him to be.

“The brute is interesting,” said Golightly, “because positive qualities of evil are extremely rare. A very wicked or very good person is respectively an abnormality, or a dull freak of nature. Holford is the former, and a woman hates signposts, while curiosity precipitates her towards the dangerous and the unknown. Still, if you live under the laws, you must live *by* the laws, or pay for it; and that man is a fool who, in a civilised country, insists on uncivilised habits. He pays dearly for his pleasure in the long run, and it isn’t worth it. Not, mind you, but that many bad men go on from height to height, and are signally successful; but that

is because their intellect is greater than their failings. Holford will go under because he has not enough brains, and is also extremely indolent."

"I'm afraid I too must plead guilty to that last sin," I said.

"That's because in your profession you are the square peg in the round hole," said Golithly. "All you want is to be a good animal. It's what we all honestly want, we want to be happy. And I'll admit," he went on slowly, "that I'm sorry for you. Now this consulting business—this haggling over fees—is all wrong; a secretary should manage it. This would obviate the absurd attitude of holding out your hand, while pretending not to see what is slipped into it, and finding out afterwards you've got sovereigns instead of guineas. It's all false—false sentiment, false everything; and what is more, my dear boy, it's the day of specialism, when men will pay five guineas for an expert opinion given sharp, for time's more than money to 'em; and the surgeon who makes his own little corner, and is first in it, reaps a fortune. And between those tip-top men, and the



general practitioners there will soon be nothing ; the middle men must go.”

“And I’m hanged,” I said, “if I shan’t be glad to go—be free, like glorious dead Hokusai, who ordered to be inscribed on his tomb, ‘My soul, turned Will-o’-the-Wisp, can come and go at ease over the summer fields.’ Well, I shall wander where I will—homeless, ragged, and bare.”

I trolled out the last words, and Golightly laughed.

“But if you stay, you must develop up,” said Golightly. “The doctors of the past and present generations are almost entirely materialists of the narrowest order, simply relying on the use of drugs and the knife, and of late years on slight sanitary science, with vivisection and bacteriology thrown in. But the doctor of the future must be a totally different individual to the hard, callous, money-grubbing individual, tied down by trades - unionism of the worst type, and whose natural grandeur is distorted and contaminated by what is called ‘professional etiquette.’”

I nodded, for it was true enough.

"The doctor of the future must be a different man. His motto must be 'Advancement in natural research,' and a minute study of the laws of nature and their workings, to enable them to assist nature, through these laws to perform their proper functions; to watch results, not theory. The spiritual elevation of the doctor ought so also to elevate the patient, that he brings to bear forces which would otherwise lie inert, because one of the principal things to assist the highest laws of nature is to bring the highest spiritual forces to work, so as to regulate the lower laws of materialism. The grandeur of the laws of the Great Ruler of the Universe can be the most easily conceived by a man who tries to elevate himself up to the highest moral, mental, spiritual, and physical condition."

"He will be lonely there," I said wearily. "I know that's what doctors ought to be, but I'm hanged if I can take any great interest in them. I met a girl at a ball the other day who talked something like you. Then Mrs. Cassilis began, now it's your turn."

"All sheer waste of time," said Golightly,

as he put out his pipe, and presently we parted, and went our several ways.

I was glad to be alone. It was of Holford's character, of Miss Honey's fate, I was thinking as I walked home.

## CHAPTER IV

“What’s greener than the greenest grass ?  
What’s higher than the trees ?  
What’s waur nor an ill woman’s wish ?  
What’s deeper than the seas ?”

I HAD come to the last of the out-patients at my hospital—a new case, with that indefinable stamp of impurity upon her that you often see on the faces of certain women in Society, only their brave setting of surroundings, and jewels, and clothes half obliterate it—it shows naked in the women of the people.

Smiling, complaisant, porcine, she unwrapped the bandages from her clean, and not ill-shaped hand, and showed me a broken finger, to which I ministered, asking no questions, even as she vouchsafed no information, of how the accident had happened.

She was no longer young. Her coarse features could never have been handsome,

and from her accent she appeared quite uneducated ; yet from the woman as she smiled, and thanked me, there came some emanation of dreadful power that my senses received, and as instantly rejected. Then, as by divination, I thought of Lawrence Holford, that man of unbridled passions who instinctively sought his kind, and when she thanked me by name, I guessed who the woman was who stood before me.

Probably the fellow had spoken to her of Mary Cassilis as Honey’s friend, and she had made the broken finger an excuse to see me, on the unlikely chance of gleaning from me something of Honey’s intentions, or likelier still, of telling me on what footing she stood with him, meaning me to tell the girl.

I resolved on a game of bluff, and said, “You are Lawrence Holford’s mistress?”

A dull red flamed out on her cheek, and completely taken off her guard, she screamed out—

“He killed Hammersley for me—not *her!*”  
And there was the vicious snarl in her voice that the bad woman always has ready for the good.

"It was an accident," I said, and laughed. "You flatter yourself."

"He's mine," she said, "will be mine always!"

She spoke indifferently, as if the ways of men had given her a profound contempt for them. In the eyes of all the famous *cocotes*, whose beauty, or sheer vice, has enabled them to set their heels on the necks of men, you may see the very apotheosis of this poor drab's open contempt.

I held the door open for her to go, and she went, smiling her dreadful, carneying smile to the last, neither reiterating, nor denying, truly the woman had a great power of silence, even if hatred of Honey had for the moment startled the truth out of her.

Looking through the window, I saw her cross the street, where she was joined by a big bully, and the pair walked amicably off together, while cynically I reflected on the fact that to a man of a certain type, the unfaithful woman is worth a hundred loyal ones, and then I went to look at the name and address given by the creature, and afterwards, as I expected, found both to be false.

The pavement under my feet was like molten metal, as cross and irritated, I walked round to Harley Street, and my study seemed a refuge of coolness when I reached it, and getting into a deep chair, sat down to think. Fate was rushing me, and I declined to be rushed. I had my work in the world to do, without mixing myself up in an imbroglio where my opinions would probably not be valued at a groat, one way or the other ; and because a self-willed girl was determined to ruin her life over a scoundrel, was I to cut an absurd figure rushing in to save her, when she did not even wish to be saved ? Mary Cassilis held the brief, and carefully watched the case ; and I knew that if the situation could be saved, she would save it, though to do this, she must be in full possession of all the facts, and more especially of the woman who had come to the hospital that afternoon, and I could not tell her. The woman had come to me professionally, probably aware that the consulting-room is practically a confessional beyond which no communications are suffered to pass ; if I meant to bring her to Honey's knowledge, it

must be in some other way, and I did not see that way.

Presently I opened my letters. One was from Mary, whom I had not seen for some days.

"I am asphyxiated with the heat, and going to the river to cool myself," she said. "Not too far, as I must run up and down; there are some dinner engagements I cannot get out of. Miss Bury is coming, and my orders are, that you pack some flannels and a straw hat on Friday afternoon, and come down to us till Sunday night, or Monday morning. We will lie in a punt, and Honey, who is an expert with the pole, shall take us about." She enclosed the address.

"I won't be hustled along like this," I said loudly and indignantly. Yet Friday afternoon discovered me flowing with a great tide of parched humanity, to the coolness and mystery that lies such a little way beyond the ugly streets and sights of our great city, for men love the river, and its lotus-eating ways.

The rose-covered cottage was empty when I arrived, but when I had got into my flannels, I went through the little garden, and found



Mary Cassilis lost among cushions, and fast asleep in a punt, with Miss Bury beside her, alternately reading and gazing at the water, so that I was beside her almost before she knew of my approach.

She glanced up at me with a look of non-recognition, looked again, then put a finger on her lip, and stepped on to the lawn beside me.

“I did not know you, you looked so young,” she said. “Look at the water, all a-shiver with heat!” And as we watched it, Mary Cassilis cried out, “Ben, come here!”

“It’s drift, drift, drift here,” she said, “from morning till night, and you’ve got to drift with the rest. Nearly all the men I know are down here with their step-wives,” she added in a whisper, as I helped her to rise, “so I’ve told Honey not to bow to anybody, man or woman—not if it’s her own grandfather or grandmother! Now you’ve got to be young and frivolous, mind, and nothing else.”

“I feel demoralised already,” I said, and indeed it ended in my falling asleep later in the punt, my last impression being of a slender white figure swaying to a pole, and

the soft, lapping noise of the water as we glided swiftly down the river.

\* \* \* \* \*

Idling has a deadly fascination all its own, and it flourishes best on those lower reaches of the Thames, where the beautiful, dense woods exhale a subtle miasma that relaxes the moral and mental fibre, till its victims ask nothing but to be let alone, to dream, or to love, or to sleep the hours away at will; yet as it happened, I did nothing of the sort. No mesmeric influence had touched Honey; she was very much awake, very much alive, and a couple of days spent in a punt practically alone (for Mary developed a passion for the lawn, and hardly left it) will bring two persons' dispositions into astonishing juxtaposition, or the reverse, if every moment is utilised.

We talked many things out; though I doubt if Honey had a single accomplishment, yet she had read pretty well everything worth reading, and a better authority on hunting, shooting, and fishing, I never met. Dogs she knew by heart, and loved them—all their faults were on the surface, she said, the

warmth and love, the devotion, were below. Cats she loathed, and triumphantly wore the rudimentary collar-bone, an inch and half long, set as a brooch, of a tiger who had measured eight feet, remarking that it was what she expected of a cowardly big cat!

Now I was at one with her there, for I hated the larger cat's way with men, the smaller with birds. Moreover, if she were a Devonshire woman, I was a Wiltshire man, and now and then we fought over the merits of our respective counties; but once, when she called me a moonraker, I arose in my wrath, for a punt is safe footing, and told the true story of the supposed attempt to fish the reflection of the moon out of a pond, by which a mower fixed the nickname “moonrakers” on his Wiltshire neighbours for ever.

The story goes, that two Wiltshire hay-makers going home from work, espied the reflection of the moon in a pond, and took it for a lump of gold. One took off his boots and stockings, waded in, and tried to lay hold of the glittering prize. It was too deep for his reach, so, seizing hold of his rake, he began to rake the water, and persevered, until

a party of Somersetshire mowers came along and jeered him as a "moonraker"; but he laughs longest who laughs last, for a learned Wiltshire philologist, anxious to remove the slur of stupidity from his countrymen, ingeniously accounts for the opprobrious nickname in this way: "Piple zay as how they gied th' neame o' moonrakers to we Wiltshire vauk becase a pessel o' stupid bodies one night tried to rake the shadow o' th' moon out o' th' bruk, and tuk't vor a thin cheese. But that's th' wrong end o' th' story. The chaps as was doin' o' this was smugglers, and they was a-vishing up zome kegs o' sperrits, and only pertended to rake out a cheese. So the Exciseman as axed 'em the question had his grin at 'em: but they had a good laugh at he when 'em got whoame the stuff."

"That's a story," she said derisively. "And who are your prophets? We have, next door in Dorset, Thomas Hardy, and in my own country, which he seems to have made his own, Eden Phillpotts. You've got nobody."

We fought hard, and liked each other the better for it; and the more I talked with her,

the louder “Back to the land!” shouted in my ear, the more her hatred of the city roused mine. I had always loathed the life of town—that octopus eating up all the life of the country, drawing all into its net; it is the congregation of bodies, the seething emotions of them, that breed not mere animalism, but strange vices, and I hated it all, but it gave me a living-wage, and there, for the present, I must stay.

“I’m sure my ancestors were gipsies,” said Honey confidentially one day; “they *may* have settled down, and tried to be respectable; but it was no good—they burst out again in *me*.”

I wanted to hear about them—I wanted to know what they had done towards the production of this girl, essentially *gamin* unless I greatly mistook her, for full of fun she was, with a perfect genius for fooling, and I will confess that Honey had a way with her, quite innocent, and therefore dangerous, that might have misled a man, possibly it did Holford, and later he might be angry at its cold uptake—but I was not. I should say he was not able to differentiate between the pure

and passionate woman, and the out-and-out bad one, while the cold were not even included in his category ; and that from all I had heard, Honey would be about as adequate to his taste as a perfume, or a glorious sunset, to the satisfaction of an excellent dinner, or a good cigar. From her I got no hint, for she never mentioned his name until the Sunday night, when we were moored under the tree she called her own, and the old, the middle-aged, the unattractive, had miraculously disappeared from the scene, and youth and love, or love's counterfeit, ruled all the dim waterway. A girl's gurgling laugh sounded close ; through the gloom you could see hers and the man's eager face beside it, and a low cry broke from Honey, and her head fell on her knees. I knew then that the mere human longing for his touch, his presence, had pressed her hard, that every dimly seen man she saw that night meant Holford, and that she fiercely envied the girl who had just passed, scattering her happiness as she went.

I knew then that the man had got a physical hold on Honey, vital even in absence, to be remembered so long as body remembered

body ; that is why, when spiritual, moral, physical, and financial ruin have swamped a man, the fibres of a woman will cling to him, and call him lord, and go down into the dust with him, refusing all other life.

And the other, the woman with the broken finger, had got her grip on Holford.

Suddenly Honey lifted her head, and spoke. I have noticed that a girl will speak more openly to a man of whom she is by way of making a comrade than to another woman.

And though I had taken Honey on the lighter side, leaving the explosive, the passionate untouched, I knew that now I was to have a glimpse of the latter side of her nature.

“Perhaps Mrs. Cassilis has told you,” she said, and paused—she had clasped her arms about her knees ; her brown hair and eyes made dark blots against the whiteness of her face and gown—“about Lawrence Holford.”

“Yes.”

“I love him,” she said in a vibrating tone that I had never heard before, and I thought I knew most of the notes in the loveliest speaking voice I had ever heard, “and he loves me.”

I was silent. "Yes," stuck in my throat, and would not out. For a moment she waited, then—

"Mrs. Cassilis does not like him," she said, quick and indignant. "Have you ever seen him?"

"Never."

"Then when you do, you will understand."

Her voice was shy; she dropped her head. It seemed to me a strange world that held maiden's hearts, and man's villainy. The silence was heavy—perhaps she sensed what I was thinking. I half stretched my hand to smooth the brown head so near my hand, and "Poor Honey!" escaped me involuntarily.

"That is what they all say, '*poor Honey!*'" she cried, sitting erect. "It's 'poor Lawrence!' cut off from his kind, living that hideous existence because he would not hear a man speak ill of me."

"Tell me," I said harshly, for the constraint upon me was great.

"It is not nice to—to speak of," she said eagerly, "but Fred Hammersley, the man Lawrence killed by accident, was angry because I had refused him, and spoke slight-



ingly of me at the club before the other men. Lawrence waited till the others had gone, then he and Fred quarrelled—about—me—and—— he kept my name out of it,” she went on proudly, “ though it would have been a justification of the blow he struck. His solicitor came from the prison, and told me all about it. Was it not fine of Lawrence ? ”

I asked her how she came to know Hammersley, and she told me that he had accompanied Holford on that visit to Devon, when she had met her fate in the latter. Evidently both had coveted her money, but the one looked the life he led, Holford did not, and she had only felt Hammersley’s proposals as an insult.

Nothing marked her intense femininity more than the fact that she never felt, or expressed, any horror or regret at the man’s fate. All her sympathies were with Holford ; all her pity was for him. Yet I could express none, remaining silent, and by now I could not see her features, only a white blur of face and gown ; but my enormous pity for her seemed to cry out of the darkness, and hurt her.

"You are very rich?" I said slowly.

"Yes."

"And he is very poor?"

I could almost feel her flush in the darkness. Then she said defiantly—

"Don't you know any better way to try and detach me from him than that? Mary Cassilis has *ground* it into me, all my friends have shouted it, yet other men have loved me for myself, and why not he?"

"That is true, Honey," I said, calling her by her name for the first time; "but for one man your wealth attracts, you will scare away a dozen who would have loved you for yourself."

"That is nice of you," she exclaimed, delighted. "And do you know," she added confidentially, "that sometimes I made Lawrence jealous, for I found out it made him love me more, when other men were dancing after me?"

I thought of the woman going off happily with her bully that day. There was a startling consistency about Lawrence's dealings with two women at opposite ends of the social scale, and both seemed to answer.

“So you are a flirt,” I said aloud. “Sometimes I have suspected it.”

“I thought that you would be different,” she said heavily. “Everyone is against Lawrence. The men are jealous, and the women are all in love with him, and angry because he loves *me!*”

“When does he come out?” I said.

She told me the time was very near, also that she would be at the prison gates to meet him; and I shivered in the warm night. She would find the other woman there, whose face would be such an enlightenment of Holford’s tastes and character as none but the blind could possibly disregard. Yet loyalty is blind twice over, and perhaps still Honey would not see.

“Oh, you *never* loved!” she cried warmly and passionately, “and you will never know now.” And on the instant came Mary Cassilis’ voice calling us in to supper.

## CHAPTER V

“And, struggling spirit, let not worldly gain,  
Nor worldly loss, provoke thy heart to pain,  
For all the burden of such fevered dross  
Will filter through thy wasting palms like rain.”

PAIN is a distinct stimulant to work, to ambition; we work to forget it, are braced by it. Pleasure enervates, stultifies us. And if not exactly pain, I felt so much discomfort at Honey's poor prospects of happiness, that I threw myself into my profession with unusual energy, and did not call in Brook Street till an imperious letter summoned me thither immediately.

I found Mary walking about the drawing-room in great excitement, and this was something unusual, as she had no worries, and ensured peace by caring for next to nobody. I thought at once of Honey, whom Mary really loved.

“That brute comes out to-morrow,” she

said, “and Honey is going to meet him. I want you to go with her,” she added abruptly ; “ my temper is not to be trusted if I saw him, or I’d go myself. She is mad with joy, poor, poor soul ! ”

“ Does he expect her ? ”

“ No, it’s to be a wonderful surprise for him, she says ; but supposing some of the other women have got wind of it, and are there too ? So much the better for Honey. Still, if she has to face humiliation, there must be a man to stand by her.”

I thought of the woman with the broken finger, who, no doubt, had her own means of communication with him, and who would certainly be there ; and I hate scenes, and knew I was in for one next day.

“ Can’t you stop her going ? ” I said. “ If he is anything of a man, he will get some clothes, and come to her straight.”

“ No, she must do it, she says. Histrionic decidedly, bad form certainly, heart is always vulgar. But who is to prevent her ? I can’t, and she hasn’t a man relative in the world.”

“ Does she know you are asking me ? ” I said.

"No ; but she likes and trusts you. She'll probably shrink into a nutshell at the last moment. I'll send round a carriage for you"—she named the hour—"then you can come here, and pick up Honey."

But I protested strongly.

"Why should I be in this?" I said angrily.

"Because you are my representative," said Mary sharply, "and you've got to help an old woman who is in trouble. Boy, you have lost your nerve. You will grow timid in time. And doesn't Amiel say that 'the man who insists on seeing with perfect clearness before he decides, never decides? Accept life, and you must accept regret.' And, after all, he may not be so bad. Oh, we all talk and *talk*, and half the time it's slander and scandal ; but, bless you, we don't mean it! We should be the first to help the people we discuss if they were in trouble ; and when we meet 'em, we try to remember the last awful thing we've heard of 'em, and we *can't*. It's job enough to remember our own, much less other people's failings ! It's like getting up early in the morning, and falling over enraged housemaids' pails, and pluming our-

selves on our virtue. Yes, but how do we know that the snorters may not do something infinitely nobler than ourselves before night?”

“But you—or Honey—will expect me to bring him back in the carriage; and if I don’t take the box-seat, I shall be very much in the way,” I said grimly. “Has it occurred to you that Holford may resent my presence there?—for, after all, neither you nor I are her lawful guardians. But supposing he puts up with me, where are we to bring him?”

“Not here!” exclaimed Mary. “Nor yet to Honey’s house in Green Street—it wouldn’t be decent. Can’t you drop him somewhere?” she added vaguely, and for once her knowledge of life was not equal to the situation. “Of course, I’m not sending my own carriage; I ordered one from an immense distance. I don’t know why I take so much trouble; but—well, you know, we always want what we haven’t got, just as we are mostly paid out, not for what we *do*, but what we don’t do. I have frequently observed that the thing we do from the most unselfish motives turns out badly for all concerned, and a really brutal thing, done slap

against our consciences, has the best possible results. Cheering, ain't it?"

"Then I'll be selfish, and not go to-morrow," I said.

"Yes you will—for my sake. Sometimes I shut my eyes, and try to think that Honey is my child. It isn't the best—but it's the second best. Life is made up of second bests."

I was silent. How the heart of the childless, elderly woman still ached—how the modern wife shirked maternity! I patted her shoulder, and her lips trembled.

"You know, Ben," she said, "I didn't envy Madame — (she mentioned a world-renowned beauty, lately dead, who had worn the yellow peplum of Lydia with a supreme grace) her troops of lovers, but I *did* envy her a lovely little daughter, born when she was fifty-six, when she had married a delightful young man who had prepared himself with prayer and fasting to be *good* enough for her. Ha, ha! Wonderful woman! She was deaf as a post all her life, and, of course, couldn't converse. Never say, after that, Cupid needs a tongue! So it's settled that you take Honey?"



I repressed an angry word.

“I suppose so. My hospital patients are waiting for me now,” and I went away wroth at the part forced upon me.

And not half an hour later, my fear for the morrow was turned to disagreeable certainty, for the woman with the broken finger walked into the hospital. Her hair was more metallic than ever. As usual, she smiled that slow, complaisant smile, while her sleepy, heavily blacked eyes talked language known all the world over without need of words.

“Lawrence Holford comes out to-morrow,” she said, “and I’m going to meet him. Tell *her* to keep away.”

“Who are you talking about?” I said sternly.

“You know her name well enough. I read the papers—you and she were both at your sister-in-law’s ball the other night—and a woman as rich as that, ain’t overlooked anywhere. No looks to speak of” (a shade of animation came into her coarse voice), “not that looks matter with Lawrence—but what pleases him.”

“Are you going to take that great bully

with you who joined you when you left here the other day?" I said.

She started.

"Lawrence was always poor," she said. "He couldn't provide for me as he wished—but he did his best. And he never asked any questions. And I never ask him any either."

"Get out!" I said roughly, for she brought a foul reek into the air that suffocated me. "And don't come here again."

She went away, smiling that mysterious smile to the last, dreadful because it represented the successful force of wickedness, and I knew that the oldest quarrel in the world, of two women, the one good, the other evil, over one man must be fought out by the persons most concerned; and when the man was of Holford's type, I had never seen it end but in one way. He must choose between them, I thought; the middle way, the way of treachery unspeakable, had not then occurred to me, nor, as I now believe, to the drab just gone out.

Meanwhile I came to a decision, and later in the day took an extreme step, and one

most repugnant to my instincts ; but I could think of nothing better in Honey's interests, and, after all, the morrow's events might prove it to have been quite unnecessary.

A closed carriage, unobtrusive, neat, was at my door at the time appointed next morning, and on reaching Brook Street, I found Honey, in spotless white linen and a straw hat, awaiting me.

Perhaps love lit her, perhaps hers was a morning beauty, but looking on her, Omar Khayyám's lines irresistibly occurred to me—

“As thus the tulip from her morning sup  
Of heavenly vintage from the soil looks up——”

was she presently to return hither, fulfilling Omar's last line of the verse—

“To earth inverted, like an empty cup”?

She swept me out of the house like a whirlwind, talking of Holford all the way, of his charm, his loyalty to her, his patience under punishment ; there was that lilt in her voice peculiar to young things who think they have suffered, but have certainly gathered no experience from their sufferings, and she

noticed my silence not at all. The drive was a favourite one of mine, for the Heath beyond was a joy to me ; I never wearied of climbing up and up, into that incredibly purer air, out of the stifling fumes of the great city, or left it without regret. But Honey looked nowhere, said nothing ; it seemed to me but a matter of moments before we were at Holloway Gaol—and the woman was there. Only one. Probably the others did not know his time was up that morning, Almost before we were in sight of the prison, I saw her, and as we drew up at the entrance, Honey shrank instinctively when the other pressed close, and looked right in upon us.

I pulled up the window sharply, and she withdrew a step, one eye seemingly on the prison door, and one on us.

"Poor creature!" murmured Honey. (I had almost said, "What a beast!") "I suppose she is waiting for her man to come out, and she has put on those tawdry red roses in his honour. And I am waiting for *my* man," she added joyously; then she uttered a cry, and down clattered the window, for a man with his eyes cast down, had come out quickly, and

for the first and last time in my life I pitied Lawrence Holford. “Lawrence!” cried Honey, and at the same moment, the woman put her hand within his arm to lead him away, but he freed himself instantly, gave her a look and a muttered word, then sprang into the carriage, shouting out “Home!”

The horses sprang forward; the whole thing passed in a moment; there had been no scene, owing to the cool resource of the man; the situation had been saved, but not by me, and I felt that I could stand no more, but luckily for me, some obstacle for a moment slackened the horses’ pace, I turned the carriage door-handle, slipped out, and escaped.

Still, in the brief moments I had spent in Holford’s company, while he and Honey sat, with clasped hands, looking in each other’s faces, I had made two discoveries—that he was exceedingly handsome, and that he was not a gentleman.

“No man of breeding will ever please her now,” I said to myself, savagely, “and it’s the same with us. Once we enjoy the company of low women, we’re never fit for decent ones; and, what is more, we don’t want ’em.” But

I was angry with Honey that she had not hit the blot in him, though it was one that many otherwise fastidious women do not in a lover; all too quickly they learn the lesson that nothing is to be expected of such an one in his dealings with their sex.

## CHAPTER VI

“And generations pass, as they have passed,  
A troop of shadows moving with the sun ;  
Thousands of times has the old tale been told ;  
The world belongs to those who come the last.”

MARY appeared in Harley Street next morning at, for her, an unearthly hour, and reproached me bitterly with neglecting my duties as chaperon the day before.

“But I know what to expect of a man set to do something he does not like,” she concluded, “also of a bewitched fool like Honey, so I went to Green Street, and waited for 'em. Up came the carriage spanking, out jumped what looked like bride and groom. Judge of their feelings when they flew to the seclusion of the drawing-room to discover *me!*”

I was silent. Poor Honey! so ardent, so true; and I thought of where he had gone straight on leaving her a couple of hours later.

"I brought her back with me to Brook Street," went on Mary. "It wasn't decent receiving him at her house without the ghost of a duenna. And you have *got* to come and dine with me to-night; I want your opinion of him."

"You find him irresistible?" I said drily.

"He is not a gentleman," said Mary; "but every man is his own shop, to attract or repel business, or patients, or love, or whatever he goes in for. And Holford dresses his shop front well, tempts folks (especially women) to look inside, you know. I should call him a cheap man, who does not let himself go cheap. You know the type—good-looking, unscrupulous; has a way with women. When he fiddles, I'm told, they cluster round him like flies."

"Poor girl!"

"Yes, but she's wrong. It's a form of self-indulgence, doing what she likes, with a superb recklessness of consequences. Oh this profligate waste of youth! Also, there's a little conceit in it, as she expects to find in others what seems good to her in herself."

"Can't you let me off to-night?" I said.



“No. But prepare yourself for a ghastly evening, dear boy—though dinners, even without tiresome lovers, *are* dull nowadays. Now a Radziwill feast in 1548 was something *like* life ; gunners and a party of five hundred gentlemen to escort the English ambassador to table, when trumpets sounded, and kettledrums roared ! The first service brought in (I quote from memory, dear boy), jesters and poets discoursed merrily ; loud instruments and soft played very, very musically ; a set of dwarfs, men and women, finely attired, came in with mournful pipes and songs of art—Davids’ timbrels, and Aaron’s sweet-sounding bells, as they termed them. His Highness drank for Her Majesty, ‘the angelical Queen of England,’ her health, and the great princes and ladies every one, their glass of sweet wines pledged. Strange portraitures, lions, unicorns, spread-eagles, swans, and other, made of sugar paste, some wines and spices in their bellies to draw at, and sweets of all sorts cut out of their bellies to taste of ; everyone with his silver fork. . . . Some pastimes with lions, bulls, and bears, strange to behold, I omit to recite.”

When Mary paused, out of breath, I congratulated her on her memory. Yet I would cheerfully have faced those "strange bellies," rather than Lawrence Holford, that night. Nevertheless, eight o'clock found the four of us sitting at a round table, and it is part of the upsidedownness of things, that we stare at each other most persistently and critically, when we are engaged in the utterly inelegant operation of eating.

Honey looked across at him proudly and eagerly, too eagerly, I fear, while he gave her back glance for glance, with none of the reserve of real love about him.

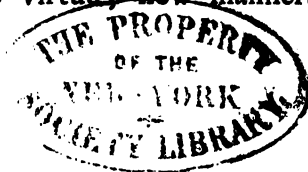
The prison life had made no visible mark upon Holford, or the man's self-conceit lay so deep, that he did not consider any outside accident able to affect his personality, which undeniably was a most attractive one.

Graceful, handsome, with far more of the angel than the beast in his appearance, there was a surface geniality about him, a sunny charm and sweetness that goes oftenest with a kind heart, and in this rough world kindness appeals to us more powerfully, perhaps, than anything else.

If I had not known what I knew, I should not have been hard on Holford. We men take a man as we find him—knowing the excursions and alarms, the invasions of the other sex—so that as a rule we are surprised to find him as straight as he is—not angry that he is no better. Therefore, for the sake of the brotherhood that makes all us men kin, (as women never seem to be sisters), and for Honey’s sake, I would, in despite of Golightly, have given him the benefit of the doubt, but for what the woman had told me at the hospital, and for something that had occurred last night.

Talk he could, and extremely well too, but he would not let anyone else talk, ignoring the woman’s privilege to lead the conversation, which is just one of those trifling matters by which you may know if a man is fit for a gentlewoman to live with—or the reverse.

I thought of Joubert’s dictum, “Manners are an art. They may be perfect, or praiseworthy, or faulty, but they are never of no importance. If virtue leads to conduct, conduct leads to virtue; now manners are an



essential part of conduct. Therefore let us train ourselves in fine, simple, fitting manners, if we would reach the heights of goodness."

Gradually Honey's gaiety was quenched, a stricken silence fell on us who listened; in Mary's eyes was a vindictiveness born of cheery Radziwill reminiscences; Holford alone seemed to enjoy himself immensely.

I saw at a glance how it would be. Honey, with brains and originality, would always have to listen to him. He would never stimulate her, allow her room to grow in; and he would hate her for finding him out, and find his happiness in the company of women too uneducated to be able to argue, or differ with him.

Then—and nothing can be more fatal to a happy fusion between man and woman—they were both of the same colour, dark-eyed, dark-haired—I even suspected some similar points of temperament; but while he had grace, she had distinction—two entirely different matters.

Over our wine, we did not become better acquainted, and I think that from the first he disliked and suspected me, feeling my attitude antagonistic towards him; but when we went

upstairs, all was changed, and I understood better the reason of his hold over Honey and other women.

He took bow in hand, cuddling his violin into his neck as though he loved it, and I closed my eyes, and gave myself up to the only enjoyment that has power to transport us humans out of ourselves, out of the world, to melt us, bone, and flesh, and muscle, into one supreme sense of illimitable joy, of detachment from all human hurt, and fear, and sorrow, the greatest, as perhaps it is the last of the pleasures left to us in this brutal, utilitarian age.

For, unlike the other arts, music leads nowhere, achieves no moral results, just makes us happy, makes us willing to experience under its influence every kind of emotion, no matter how alien to our natures and characters, appealing frankly to, and delighting the senses only, for it is an error to suppose that it inspires lofty and devotional thoughts.

That night he played none but the music of love, from *Cavalleria*, with its sequence of rapturous melodies, its irresistible summoning of our brute delight in melody, passing to

the *Tristan* love-music, then to Massenet's opera of *Samson et Delilah*, so rarely heard in England, with its haunting, exquisite movement—when the sob of passion, scarce heard at first, rises, and swells and soars to its triumphant climax, showing us as by visual sight the betrayer and the betrayed on that tremendous height, repeated again, but in mockery, when Delilah taunts the bound and helpless man.

I moved restlessly, and turned to see Honey with eyes shining like stars; then to Mary, sitting tense and erect, clutching her chair with both hands, all the fire of a dead youth burning in her gaze, so much had a passionate love-number, played by a villain, done for the three of us.

Suddenly Holford threw down his violin, and sprang to Honey, and she to him, disappearing as with one impulse into the other room, and out of sight. I realised how tremendous was the hold he had on her, both as man and musician, then.

Mary, who had now recovered herself, looked at me, and shook her head.

"You won't stop her," she said. "I'm not

sure—if I could shut my eyes tight to his not being a gentleman—that if I were Honey’s age, I might not be as obstinate as she is. But I should insist on his never addressing me, save through his violin. After all,” she added briskly, “I doubt if even the Radzills got better music than that.”

But when, half an hour later, Holford and I left the house, and he made as though he would take the first passing hansom, I touched his shoulder, and said—

“Not yet. The woman must wait. I have a word to say to you.”

*Jekyll* ~~Hyde~~ was gone. ~~Jekyll~~<sup>Hyde</sup> snarled at me out of the man’s face, as at the corner of Berkeley Square I named an address to which he had driven straight on leaving Honey the preceding day.

“And what if I did,” he said savagely, “where do you come in?”

“Nowhere. But Miss Bury does,” I said quietly.

He had himself well in hand now, re-assumed that prepossessing air (hateful adjective, implying falseness) with which he took in so many people.

"You are on the wrong scent," he said glibly. "My visit yesterday was on Hammersley's account. I felt I owed it to him that she should not want. You see, I killed the man—and she was his property, not mine."

He lied bravely; he was of the sort to lie to save his skin or his purse. The words poured over each other as the utterances of truth never do.

"She was quite decent at one time, I believe," he said; "was a shopwoman, or something of that sort; but she drank, and got sacked everywhere. And Hammersley, who was down on his luck—poverty makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows, you know——"

"Talk decently," I said, "if you can. You mean to tell me that Hammersley put up with that offal?"

"You have seen her?" he said quickly. "So you have been playing the spy upon me."

"She came to my hospital with a broken finger," I said. "Her bully was waiting for her outside"—I looked him full in the face,



but he gave no sign—“and she told me to prevent Miss Bury meeting you when you came out of prison, as she meant to meet you herself.”

“Miss Bury would naturally not understand the delicate position in which I was placed,” began Holford, but I called out—

“Indelicate, man, indelicate! Call things by their right name if you can, and stop lying. That drab told me you killed Hammersley on her account—accidentally perhaps—but for her.”

He muttered an evil word under his breath that boded ill to her when they met, then started off lying again, and doing it so well, that secretly I applauded him, for he had made of the sorry business a fine art. He intoxicated himself with his own persuasiveness, might even have persuaded some listeners less resolute than myself; there was a fluidity of apparent good, and certain evil in the man, each running into the other, most baffling and confusing, so that he produced on my mind an impression as of an octopus or a jelly-fish, impossible to pin in any vital part.

“Now I ask you as a man of the world,” he

concluded, "should I be likely to so imperil myself with Miss Bury?"

I laughed aloud.

"You are no man of the world," I said. "Only weak fools act as you have done—a stout knave does not do half such harm in the world as men like you. Now, mark me. There shall be no double life for Miss Bury's husband—no slinking off from a beautiful home, with a wife whom most men would envy you, to——" I paused abruptly.

"You know the story of the lovely princess, who nightly left her husband's side to seek the swineherd, who returned her love with blows—well, Miss Bury shall not share the prince's fate. Man, I think I know you, and you would be gay, kind even to her, so long as she did not find you out, and left you free to follow your every inclination, unless—and it is one of the few privileges of the outside woman—your mistress was for ever setting you against your wife. But once Miss Bury knew it—and sooner or later sin, like murder, will out—her life would be ruined."

"If you don't believe me," he snarled, all  
~~Hyde~~ ~~Jekyll~~ now, the surface sweetness gone that

hid his callous heart, “have me watched, follow me yourself if you like, or, better still, I’ll tell Miss Bury myself, and make you prove your accusations.”

Now this was a bold move, and my silence must have told him he had scored in what had looked for him like a losing hazard, for if Honey believed him, and the other woman backed him up, where was I?

In trying to save Honey, I should only have lost her friendship, and Holford would deceive her with even greater impunity than before, but a moment’s reflection told me he dared not risk it, that he was playing a game of bluff. Well, I could play it too.

“Miss Bury is a young lady of great character,” I said, “who has definite points of view of her own; also, she has some respect for my opinion, and you would lose her. I should make it my business to place the whole of your past life before her, demonstrate fully that your imprisonment was attributable to this woman, and the direct, if accidental, result of your vicious habits. You’re young yet. Do you know how this life of vice grips you—getting a closer hold on you with every

year, till you come to loathe, to curse, the prison in which you live? But God himself can't get you out of it."

He jeered, and quoted the ordinary habits of men, tried to pour out a cheap flood of second-hand science on the subject; and I knew that it was true, that there were hundreds and thousands of men living his life to-day, just as there are countless women being pushed downwards by their influence.

"Listen," I said, thinking less of the man than Honey's great love for him, and how she would be as bindwood in the dust, if what she clung to were broken. "Give me your written oath not to hold any communication whatever with that woman again, or give her money, or visit her again, and for the present, at least, Miss Bury shall be told nothing about her."

He promised eagerly, and before we parted that night, the paper was in my possession. Yet I had only a deep misgiving, and a feeling that I had somehow bungled the matter, and trafficked to a dead loss with a scoundrel for the price of Honey's happiness.

## CHAPTER VII

“There’s none may lean on a rotten staff  
But him that risks to get a fa’.”

THE world was treating Holford well, and when it found that he was marrying a great heiress, it took them both to its greedy bosom, and raved about the romance of the thing, how he had killed another man for Honey’s sake, yet never given her name away at the trial. As to his mistakes, “that no my Pidgin,” says Society about a rich or influential person’s faults, and passes on, though anything vital to itself—the loss of its lover, or cook, or money, reduces it to a mere jelly of quaking nerves and apprehension. And if men fought shy of him, and he was never seen at the best clubs (indeed, he seemed to have no male friends, nor to want them), women flocked round him whenever he appeared, and he seemed entirely happy. Per-

haps the mere sense of freedom would account for this, and the enjoyment of those material pleasures from which he had been for a time cut off. In any case, the easy good nature of the man, his tolerance and charm, his almost shadowy grace and elegance, were so many letters of recommendation; and had I not known him for what he was, I might have succumbed to the charm of his outwardly sunny and genial character, made allowance for the fatal artistic temperament that did not recognise the boundaries, the limitations, that held ordinary men.

If he had relatives, they were evidently no more anxious to claim him, than he to claim them, for he was never known to mention any; but he knew a vast number of people, and of all conditions, chiefly actors and actresses, artists, journalists, and musicians; indeed, the Bohemian element was very strongly marked in his acquaintance, and knowing Honey's somewhat lawless, gipsy tastes, I was surprised to see how she shrank into herself, and was almost silent when thrown among them. Something impalpable but real came between her and these widely

tolerant friends of Holford's. Their ways were not hers, nor their thoughts ; and, on the other hand, her brown, delicate type of beauty did not stand out vividly enough to satisfy Holford in contrast with the redundant, fair type of “coloured” woman whom he admired, and to whose pronounced attentions he had become accustomed.

There was at times an Elizabethan simplicity and vigour of language about Mary, or rather she called things by their right names, did not pretty-pretty the ugly, mince the base ; and for Holford's female friends she coined the epithets of “fly-blown women,” and “musk-cats.”

Holford knew and resented this, could not fail to see that when Honey went among Mary's friends—well-born, well-bred persons like herself—the best men watched and appreciated her, would have approached her but for his presence ; and Honey, who was very quick of apprehension, and vibrant to the smallest slight to him, saw it all, but set it down to his misfortune in killing Hammersley. So she clenched her little teeth and resolved to *make* the world accept him, the outcome of

this being the determination to entertain largely, and there happening to come into the market just then a house in Piccadilly, looking on the Green Park (she must have trees near her, or die), she fell eagerly into Holford's wish that she should lease it for a term of years, with the option of purchase if she so decided. His refusal to settle in the country, while his work and all his interests in life lay in town, showed to her as independence, and a determination not to live on her, but she opposed his giving one of the big concerts with which his name had formerly been identified; it seemed to her an advertisement, or making money out of his misfortune; and to my surprise, he did not insist, it seemed his aim to agree with her in everything—for the present.

And in that magic month of June, when the country steals laughing and laden with blossom into the great city, and you may steep your senses in the joy of the down-dropping gold of the laburnum, the scented snow of the lilac, when the hawthorn trees ring every note of colour from palest pink to deepest scarlet flame, then, with the full tide



of human life throbbing and pulsing around you, the man you love by your side, is not town a city of enchantment, a place in which to take your pleasure, the blood running swiftly in your veins? Mary's horses took Honey where she willed, often out of town to cool and lovely places to which Holford objected, and this vexed the girl, though she consoled herself by thinking that perhaps he found it as hard to understand and love Nature, as she would to play his violin.

From the first I saw that they had not a single taste in common, but the glamour of this first season in town, of love, of the ease and beauty of a life in which no want went ungratified, entirely precluded serious thought, and if spots on her sun there were, they did not hinder the sun shining brilliantly. She enjoyed everything—from her early gallops in the morning, to the opera or a play at night, and for a while, at least, the town had taken Honey, who, ardent, curious, intellectual, marked time with every moment of her day, as if she felt the time were short for happiness, and she must use up every scrap of it.

In that fever of youth, of love—and how

sweet a fever—what intoxication, what glorious rhythm when life sets like some swift-flowing river to its inevitable goal!—Honey was blind to what everyone else saw plainly enough—that Holford did not love her.

He had none of the little heaven-born courtesies of the man who loves—the offered flower, the surprise, to show her he had thought of her while absent, the eager watching, and welcome when she came; his face never told you that the room was dark in Honey's absence, golden in her presence; the language of flattery and compliment indeed he used, but it never rang true; and when she talked to him of Burghfield, of her beloved woods and garden, he did not even try to understand her.

I knew the type of man so well. He would never teach the woman he married love, for fear of her passing it on to another man—he would keep all that for outside—Honey would always get his second best. He was absolutely incapable of love in its true essence, love demands unselfishness, loyalty, strenuousness; and Holford had not one of these qualities. No one has learned the meaning of

love who has not learned the meaning of sacrifice, and all women to him were merely ministers to his pleasures—he could never regard them in any other light; Holford and music—music and Holford’s pleasures, these constituted his world.

Meanwhile, on the principle that “what the eye don’t view, the heart don’t rue,” Mary’s attitude was studiously detached towards Holford. She doted on his music, admired him as a man, forbore to speak of his moral character; but one day a fit of the spleen overtook her, the immediate cause being the state of her hall-table, and to heaven (or elsewhere) she blew with him all his pretensions to virtue, and this was unfair, as I had never heard him make any.

“Did you see my hall-table as you came in? Do you hear that front bell?” she said to me one day, irritably. “My house is a dumping-ground for all the second-rate women who ever made love to Holford, or he to them, and by November (for, of course, he neither shoots nor hunts) that Piccadilly place will be just a happy hunting-ground for ’em all—with Honey paying the piper!”

"They mean to go in for society?" I said.

"Society?" said Mary, and raised a whimsical eyebrow. "Those born out of it, try once, but seldom twice, to get into it. A millionaire's wife may lure the world to cross her doorstep to hear Melba beyond, but in return rarely gets beyond her invit e's doorstep. So in revenge she annexes another country house or two, buys a few dozen exquisite frocks, with nowhere to wear 'em! If Honey tries to entertain, the best men won't come—the women's best men will—which is not the same thing. The sort to do her good will damn her for Holford. After all, if you *must* look on at the show, it's pleasanter to sit in the stalls than the gallery! Then she is very hospitable, and hospitality's dead—call it ostentation, and have done with it; you don't always find it in the country even, for if people can't 'do you' as sumptuously as alien millionaires, they don't entertain at all. On the other hand, *we* can't afford to accept invitations, the tips are so ruinous, the saucy varlets stare at gold, and barely thank you for paper."

“I’m not sure,” I said, “that Honey has not a better chance of happiness in town for a year or so. She is so extraordinarily vivid—when she has taken in everything worth having, she will be glad to return to the real self she has left at Burghfield. She never brought it to town; at Burghfield she will find it again.”

Mary nodded.

“Till Holford came out, the girl had not a chance of enjoying herself in town. To be without a man to take you about, is like trying to wash your hands without soap—alike futile and irritating. They say virtue is its own reward. Don’t you believe it! It’s damned dull. You *can’t* enjoy yourself without a man. It’s the women who freeze on to the right men, who have a good time, and the men worth having, always freeze on to the wrong women. Here is Holford playing the fool (more or less) with every pretty woman he meets, but he is careful to say to the child, ‘It’s all to your face, Honey, never behind your back,’ and she swallows something down, and actually believes him. She must always be torn two ways—love one

way, shame another—and the man's love goes, her shame in *him* remains."

I felt disturbed. To be sure I saw him but seldom, and there had been no mention of other women in our contract.

"I'm *sure* he's vicious," said Mary. "He has large hips. Nature intended men like that for *cocotes*—only they missed their vocation. There's a suspicious cleanliness about his finger-nails, too, that show they long to relapse into dirt at the first opportunity; and he drinks."

"I never saw Holford drunk," I protested.

"My dear Ben, you hear of a person that 'he can take his glass,' which means that he has a red nose—but never falls on it. Perhaps a coarse woman might lick Holford into shape—but *Honey!* And she makes herself too cheap. She is on the wrong tack with him altogether. Now unpunctuality is one of women's strongest cards—it is always the woman who is a little late, who makes the men a little 'previous.' Honey is always ready—waiting for him even—and a woman waiting to be fetched, doesn't appeal to Holford, but a girl carried off by a brisk *coup d'état* from another man is highly

delectable. You great, shaggy monster,” she broke off irrelevantly, “why don’t you let Holford choose your clothes? He is one of the best turned-out men in town.”

She grimaced as she said it, like one who smells something nasty.

“And then she’s clever,” went on Mary. “And brains are a mistake. They are a store you keep for other people to help themselves from ; and they get the solids, and you all the wear and tear, and broken health. Thank your stars, Ben, you haven’t any ; they aren’t worth it.”

“Thank you, Mary.”

“As well you may, though a true, otherwise a brutally candid friend, is about as comforting as a bald-headed electric light to sit under, when you want to look your very best.”

“See what it is to be a man,” I said. “I fear neither one nor the other.” But Mary was off on her own train of thought.

“The type of woman who lives in men’s eyes and hearts is that which says nothing—merely gives a glance, a kick of the frills, a caress,” went on Mary, for our easy-chairs,

the restful green room, were conducive to prolixity.

"It doesn't to me," I said shortly.

Mary stared.

"I thought it did," she said unkindly.

"Well, the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and every woman her own wig."

"But you don't wear one," I said.

"But I may. Has it ever struck you that half of us women's lives are spent in trying to appear other than (physically) we really are? Now how dignified, how convenable are a man's grey hairs—or ostrich-egg head—how much better they look as they grow older! See a photographic gallery of men, then of made-up women, and judge!"

"I would blush," I said, "but that I never had my photograph taken in my life, and don't mean to."

"There isn't a camera big enough," said Mary; "but what I said just now is true. The great majority of men of remarkable intellect have been also men of distinguished physical attractions; look at the faces of the poets, Shakespeare, Spenser, Sidney—the last, not merely a poet, but soldier and statesman,



was “the hero of Europe at four-and-twenty” —or at the two dramatic collaborators, Beaumont and Fletcher; but one might go on for ever with the list.”

I cast my mind back, Mary spoke truth. I saw passing before me, as the names of great men rose in my mind, a long line of noble and beautiful faces—Dante’s, sad and stern; Goethe’s and Schiller’s, almost godlike in their radiant tranquillity of expression; the wistful smiles of Keats and Shelley; the proud eyes of Byron, more than half-conscious of their own charm; the calm and stately features of Addison; the stolid, strong face of Scott, lit with a winking light of humour; the bright, frank, friendly challenge which illumined the eyes of Dickens, as we see him in the earlier portraits of Maclise; the superb and flawless beauty of Peter Paul Rubens, and of others.

“And we could admire them with all our hearts,” said Mary, “because their faults, however big, never showed! You could no more see ’em than the spots on the sun in a blazing midday! The mistakes made by the few really great women who have lived and died almost completely obliterate their genius. A

woman with vagrant impulses of mind and body almost invariably goes to bits—possibly because she has less brain—fewer great qualities to obscure her faults than a man has."

"So the wedding is to be in October," I said, getting up.

"*Don't* go, Ben," she said, so imploringly that I sat down again.

"Honey behaved beautifully over the postponement; she was as willing as he to have it *here*, this month. Oh!" burst out Mary, "take two shillings that rub together, thin and poverty-struck in your hand, so that you feel uneasily that you have got short measure—that's an unhappy marriage. Feel a handsome, comfortable half-crown in your palm—that's a real marriage, the odd sixpence of happiness makes *all* the difference! And Holford can't furnish that odd sixpennyworth. She can't see it—she just walks about with a bandage tied tight over her eyes——"

"But when it is removed," I said, "it will be removed for ever."

"And she will either die," said Mary, "or there will be a new Honey—with all the bloom rubbed off her—perhaps a wicked

Honey, to smite others even as she herself has been smitten. It's a sin that a Lawrence Holford should have the power to destroy the girl, body and soul!" she added, with intense bitterness.

"He won't," I said.

"But I've seen it," said Mary, "often. As *the husband is so is the wife*, and the corrupting influence to be brought on a girl, malleable, ductile, to the will of a bad man, is not to be calculated . . . and to think," she went on impatiently, "of how a clean, manly fellow might have improved her! A man can help a woman up, or give her a shove down, so much more than a woman can help a man, or demoralise him. She is a poor crock at best, probably the original of the china pipkin that tried to sail down the river with that iron pot—Man; and of course she got broken."

"And clearly you never went sailing, Mary," I said.

"But poor Honey is sailing now," she said sadly, "and Holford bears her a grudge, and will sink her later."

"What has she done?"

"What *hasn't* she? Planked down youth,

looks, money, and heart and loyalty all in one lumping heap at his feet, and the very profusion of her sacrifice stodges him; it becomes *cheap*, not giving him as much pleasure as *he* would feel in giving a penny bunch of violets to another woman."

"Or a bottle of gin," I muttered under my breath, and looked searchingly at Mary, but she seemed quite innocent of any innuendo.

"I hope it's not so bad as that," I said. "I know it requires a noble nature to support great favours."

"Gratitude," said Mary calmly, "is civilisation's own bastard, for Nature won't have her; and what Nature doesn't own, or know anything about is not worth knowing. She gives and takes freely; she smiles and forgets, or how could she do her work properly? To be grateful, presupposes one's dependence on another, and Nature revolts at such tyranny. It is with those who never have done, and never will do, anything for us, that we are at our very best, our very happiest, and most at ease."

I thought of the woman with the broken finger, for whom somehow he had always

managed to find alms. He was of the type that loves constituting itself a woman's earthly providence, to feed and kick her at will.

“The sorry fellow!” burst out Mary suddenly. “A disagreeable incident happened yesterday, but there will be plenty more of them. I was reading here—overlooked in a deep chair—when he and Honey came in together. He was flushed, and at his worst. He has grown careless lately, you know. Suddenly he put his hand in his pocket, and pulled out a handful of letters, and put them into her hand. ‘From that silly Mrs. ——,’ and he mentioned a name. Honey looked at him; I could almost *feel* the prickles of horror that were running up her spine. Then she said—

“‘Would you give *my* letters to another woman to read? Let me tell you that if *you* had written love-letters to someone else before you knew me, and she sent them to me, I would burn them unread. And if’—she paused a moment—‘you have answered these or any others, I hope you will tell me now, for if you died, and I found it out, I should hate, I should despise, your memory’; and she turned away.

"He followed her out to the balcony, and I effaced myself; but if that will not open her eyes, will anything ever? He is used to coarser women, whom such letters might make jealous. But Honey! I *know* he is the sort of man who likes a woman that he can talk vulgarity to. He calls it nature—it sounds prettier."

"Give him rope enough, and he will hang himself yet," I said.

She walked absently to the awned-in balcony, and looked out.

"Here come the lovers," she said. "Holford has his most devoted air—Honey's hat suits her. A woman is a fool who tries a new one on in a becoming light—let her put it boldly on, and go out into the street, and the first man's eyes she meets will tell her if it is all right! By the way, I have a little cat story for you."

Now I always enjoyed Mary's observations of animals; she had especially a half-ironic, wholly-detached way of looking at cats—observed them closely, and declared that while dogs were so transparently honest and truthful as to be read at a glance, cats were so full of

whimsies and subtleties that you found something new in their characters every day, and in the end were harder to unriddle than the sphinx.

“Well——” she stopped as the lovers came in, and I got up to greet Honey. I had long ago dropped the clumsy hand-shaking with Holford that we should reserve only for our friends, and Honey and I met coldly. I don’t think that we had been really at home with each other since that night she had pleaded with me for Holford, and in vain, on the river.

“I was just telling Mr. Cassilis” (I was Ben to everybody but him) “about Mahomet,” said Mary. “You know what a sleek, magnificent creature he is, and his amazing dignity. Well, this morning, as he was sunning himself on the window-ledge of the conservatory, a poor, wretched, white-and-tan she-cat stole timidly towards him, her eyes fixed on him like a slave’s upon her sultan. As she came within his line of vision, he slowly averted his head as at some disagreeable sight—it was precisely the attitude of a person up in the world, turning his back on some chance gutter

acquaintance. He knew perfectly well I was there, and when the poor she-thing encroached still nearer, he gave her such a look as sent her slinking away out of sight; then his eyes met mine, saying as plain as cat's eyes could—

"I'm really very sorry, ma'am; *her* mistake, not mine. I never encouraged her—I can't abide low company!"

"*Snob!*" said Honey, with energy, while Holford looked quickly at Mary, as if he suspected a personal significance in the story; and was telepathy at work—telepathy, that great natural force which we shall some day develop and use as we now use wireless telegraphy—for Honey exclaimed—

"It makes me think of that poor creature who put her hand on your arm that morning, but you shook her off, Lawrence!" she added, with a reproachful gentleness she never showed to me.

"Begging, probably," he said carelessly. "She mistook me for some other poor devil coming out at the same time." But I knew that the man's mind was working on the danger of a coalition between Mary and myself, that he mistrusted the cat story, and believed it to have been prompted by me.



Suddenly he looked up at Honey, and gave her a sunny nod and smile. When I knew him better, I understood that he had been making a mental calculation, and decided that I, being the fool that I was, with some notion of honour, had not told Mary anything, so he had only two fools to deal with, Honey and myself, unassisted by the wits of an astute woman of the world.

As it was, he gloried in the ease with which he deceived us ; it was mere child's play, as he said later. Past-master in the art of deceiving everyone with whom he came in contact, his candid air hid a deeply secretive nature, a relentless determination to pursue at all costs his own pleasure unchecked. From the depths of the blackguardism of his heart he mocked at honest men, having a greater contempt for them than they for him, since all their moves were aboveboard, his out of sight. What is it like—this secret exultation, this pride at having “bested” all those who make for honour and clean living? Only the crooked in mind have it ; yet they gloat over, and would not exchange it for a kingdom.

## CHAPTER VIII

“ Le passé n'est pour vous qu'une triste souvenir,  
Le présent est affreux, s'il n'est point d'avenir,  
Si la nuit du tombeau détruit l'être qui pense.”

POSSIBLY the reason for Holford's choice of rooms was, that the only rule of the Albany is that of the monks of the Abbey of Thelema.

Most people know the old traditions of the place and its celebrated residents : Canning, Macaulay (who wrote his history there), Thackeray (who there indited *Vanity Fair*), and among others, Bulwer and Broughton. Lady Lytton was so touched at the picture her husband drew (when he was supposed to be interviewing publishers) of the dreary time he was having in his old bachelor quarters, nursing solitude, that she posted to town and discovered him nursing “solitude” (the baggage) *on his knee!*

The Albany is indeed the veritable home of freedom, and there is no such liberty to be found on the face of God's earth ; you may live there for years and years, without your neighbour on the next floor evincing the slightest curiosity as to your doings, however extraordinary—indeed, criticism or scandal are unknown. I remember staying a few days with a man in the Albany (he is married now, God rest his soul !) who had a lady visitor late one night, and presently there were indications of serious discord, and I was tumbled out of bed, and called in to arbitrate. Nothing apparently would alter the dear child's deliberate intention of smashing all the ornaments, and personally interested in them as my friend was, he exerted all his persuasive powers in favour of an honourable peace. After considerable discussion, and no slight amount of refreshment, a treaty was concluded, subject to the one condition that our visitor should smash *something*. I watched with considerable anxiety the selection of the doomed chattel, and ultimately had to consent to the sacrifice of one of Bob's best bits of blue. However, all ended well. The appeased maiden, accom-

panied by us both, adjourned solemnly to the courtyard, and there, on the cobble-stones, the blue was duly smashed to smithereens, and we all parted friends. Now the night porters witnessed the whole incident from their lodge, but, believe me, they never moved a muscle, or turned a hair; they simply regarded the whole matter as if it were the most natural occurrence in the world.

Brook Street accounted for pretty well every hour of Holford's day—his nights appeared equally innocent; but there was at times a quiet malice in his eye, a silent luxury of triumph that plainly said no detectives should catch him tripping; indeed, he knew their faces as well as they knew his; he even jeered at them without words, so that they grew to hate him heartily, weary of the lack of kudos in the job, and at last got as tired of making their reports to me, as I of hearing them.

Yet I knew there was nothing else to be done. Perhaps if he got over the first few weeks without visiting the woman, he might break the chain of habit, and give himself a chance, but on the morning after Mary's long

conversation with me, for the first time one of the detectives brought me news, brought it more eagerly perhaps than if he had found a fortune.

“Sometimes by ten-thirty—seldom later than one,” said Dawson, “Mr. Holford returns to his rooms, and appears not to leave them again till between ten and eleven next morning, when he goes straight to Brook Street. I say ‘appears,’ because I have reason to believe that for three or four nights every week, he has left the Albany disguised, and another man has personated him at his chambers.”

I uttered an exclamation, and waited for more.

“A tall, seedy, shabby man, carrying a violin case—evidently a musician, is in the habit of visiting Mr. Holford at his chambers—always after dark—or quite early in the morning. He usually arrives about a quarter-past ten o’clock, waits for Mr. Holford, and leaves again about half an hour after the gentleman’s arrival. At first they both played the violin—and very fine music it was—then one only—but whenever the musician has

been there overnight, he comes early next morning—not unless."

"What is he like?"

"Apparently Mr. Holford's double—a broken-down, shabby double—tall, very dark where he isn't dirty, walks with his head down, and gets past you like a flash of greased lightning."

"Well?"

"It is Mr. Holford who goes out disguised as his disreputable double—it is the musician who stays all night in the Albany as Mr. Holford."

I started up, my pulses racing. At last, at last, it looked as if my apparently hopeless scheme might save Honey. "Go on," I said.

"The disguise is the most perfect thing I ever saw. His own hair, some dirt rubbed in, a few rags, a slouch, and the prosperous gentleman is the outcast. There are several points of difference between them—in short, it's a faked resemblance, not one of feature, but the make-up is simply marvellous, and deceived both Jones and myself. Sometimes the man went out at one end of the Albany, sometimes at the other."

“But surely in broad daylight, when Holford came back as the musician, you could tell the difference?” I exclaimed.

“Yes—once we were looking for it—not before.”

“You followed him, of course?”

“Or I should not be here this morning. I traced him to a house off the Euston Road, to the company of a woman of low character, where he was laughed at as “the old fiddler” by the landlady’s slut of a servant, yet that fiddler sets the tune, and what is not usual in a fiddler, pays the reckoning.”

“Out of Honey’s money,” I thought, with sick disgust.

“He did not suspect that he was followed,” said the detective. “He has hoodwinked us for a whole month, and despised us thoroughly. I can never forgive myself that I did not from the first detect the fraud.”

“You have followed him more than once?”

“In all, on six occasions. I was going to suggest that you should accompany me next time.”

“For what reason? He would recognise me.”

"One disguise is as good as another. I thought—" the detective paused—"that you might be going to take action in the matter. He did not go last night, so he will go tomorrow. He returns home early from Brook Street, on the evenings he visits the—lady."

There was something in the tone that brought the bestial woman up before my eyes, it was for this he had left Honey early on certain evenings to get his beauty-sleep, as he said, and hastened so early away.

"Yes, I will come," I said, and then we arranged the preliminaries, and I was left alone with my triumph—if a triumph it were, that meant the broken heart of a passionately loving, trusting woman.

For, after all, she was to be saved ; she was not to walk the burning ploughshares that every woman must, who throws in her lot with a man who lives a double life, and under such circumstances of treachery and wickedness, as removed Holford altogether from the category of weak men who sin on the moment's impulse, not from deliberate purpose, and who bitterly repent it, even if it do not hinder them from sinning again.



Appeal to him was worse than useless, but cunning and clever as he was, I realised then that the overpowering attraction of vice was stronger in him even than cunning, so that even at the risk of missing the one great chance of his life, he must fall before it.

I dined with Mary the following night, and had never seen Holford in higher spirits. Extraordinarily sweet to Honey, with me he displayed an ease of manner, a sureness of touch in conversation that he had never shown before. It was as if for the first time since our conversation that night in Berkeley Square we met as men and equals, with on my side no superiority of character or position to back me ; and Honey, so resolute to shut her eyes to much in him that went against the grain, was quick to note the greater manliness of his attitude towards me.

As usual, she showed what she felt, and was happy, and being happy was beautiful, with a beauty that left Holford cold, for no inner manifestation of a woman's soul or mind in the least attracted him. Individuality in a woman he hated, and that power of centralis-

ing which makes her the pivot of every company she may find herself in ; he must have something upon which he could stamp himself all over, as a brutal navvy marks his wife's body with his hob-nailed boots, to be quite at ease with her.

But as a means to an end, Honey did very well. It is significant of these straw-men that they always fly at the highest game, annex the smartest, brightest, and richest women ; they never dream of marrying the creatures whose society satisfies them. And Holford valued Honey solely as a fancy article that conferred dignity on its possessor, most valued when most publicly displayed.

Mary looked from one to the other of us, puzzled by some subtle change in the atmosphere ; but other people were dining there that night, and as usual, when he was one of many, Holford shone at his gayest and brightest. And when the women had gone, he moved up close to me, at the foot of the table, and began at once about some alterations in the Piccadilly house that Honey thought necessary, but he did not. And since he stood in the position of prince

consort only to a reigning sovereign, would I use my influence with her not to be extravagant?

“Honey won’t hear of pupils,” he added, with a touch of well-simulated shame on his face, “but I shall work hard at music, and some day hope to produce an opera worthy of her husband.”

I listened grimly. I knew that he had not, never would have, the power of drudgery—of beginning from the very bottom, and climbing slowly and painfully, step by step, the ladder to solid achievement. Something not unlike genius in his own line he had, but the grit to perfect it, the self-control to put aside all enjoyment, to toil while others played—never.

Upstairs later, he played divinely, looking straight before him, Honey and the woman with the broken finger alike forgotten, his face ennobled, made beautiful by his theme, so that he seemed more angel than man as he stood with his back to a great group of palms in the dim, green drawing-room, and it was half-past ten before he was allowed to cease, a quarter to eleven when he and the

other guests left the house, leaving me still there, for I was in no hurry.

I was not due at a certain place for another hour and a half, and when all the guests had gone, Honey came, and sat down beside me, and looked earnestly in my face.

Have you ever kneeled down to look in a dog's eyes when first he comes, a stranger, to your house? Wistful, earnest, they will search yours, probing your very soul to see what you really are, what your meaning towards him is, and kneel there as long as you will, that vigilant question will not relax, and only by his after-conduct will you be able to tell if you have answered his inquiry satisfactorily.

Some such look Honey gave me as she said timidly—

"You like Lawrence better, now that you know him better, don't you, Mr. Cassilis?"

"I think celestial spirits must look like him when they play," I said, and her face changed; she drew back with the gesture of one who, asking bread, is offered a stone.

"There is no one with whom I so much wish him to stand well as you," she said

proudly, “but now I will not speak of him to you again”—yet she did, the next day.

As she rose, and left me and the room, Mary came over, and looked at me with raised brows.

“There is dynamite in the air,” she said. “That fellow overdid his *camaraderie* with you ; if I were a man, I’d watch him—he is up to mischief. So you are going? Well, good night,” she concluded crossly, for the whole situation told on her nerves badly.

But going out I paused a moment, and glanced round at the familiar rooms with their air of graceful existence. How would they look the next night, when the blow had fallen, and Jekyll, the beast, took the place of Hyde, the spirit-man?

When my disguise had been effected, with a rapidity and effectiveness that astonished me, and we had driven through some shabby, but brightly lit streets, for the first time I asked myself what I was going to say to Holford when my hand fell on his shoulder, and he knew that his game was up.

I had hitherto only considered what *he* might do, and came armed, as had the other

men, though as events turned out, only the weapons of ridicule were brought into play.

"I have had some difficulty in bribing the servant," said Dawson, as he rode beside me, the two other men following in a hansom. "I got into the kitchen disguised as a seller of trinkets ; if she backs out at the last moment, and has not left the door ajar, we're done. As a rule, the mistress has her own fish to fry, and is out of evenings."

I moved restlessly. It all sounded too simple, too easy. Holford would surely not let vital stakes go thus unsafeguarded . . . but now the cab stopped, and in a few moments we were at the door of a small, shabby house, precisely like all the others in that dismal street.

The door appeared closed, but yielded to Dawson's touch. He beckoned the two men, and left them outside, then signed to me to follow him.

The passage was dimly lit, the stairs were roughly carpeted ; we passed noiselessly up, past the first floor to the second, where light showed under the crack of a door, and voices could be heard within, the low murmur of a

man's, the carneying tones of a woman—the woman with the broken finger.

Then came the chink of glass against glass, partial silence, and motioning Dawson to remain without, I opened the door, shut it behind me, and advanced to the table where the man and woman were sitting with a gin bottle and glasses between them, both staring aghast and speechless at the sight of me.

Suddenly the man clapped on his head the hat that lay on the table beside him, but I went up close, and putting my hand on his shoulder, stooped down, and looked in his eyes.

I looked in his eyes . . . and something, that yet was not fear, ran through my body from head to heel ; the man's eyes were brown, not blue ; the man was not Lawrence Holford.

A peal of half-tipsy laughter broke from the woman's lips that seemed to have no meaning, but the man jumped up, a sorry figure of rags and dirt, and said humbly—

“Were you wanting me, sir, that you have followed me here?”

Clearly he thought I was a constable, after

him for some minor offence, and he looked so abject and frightened, that whether Holford's tool or no, I could have found it in my heart to pity him.

"This is my place," said the woman coarsely, "clear out!" and she got unsteadily to her feet, and pointed to the door.

"My mistake," I said, in a high, staccato voice—"wrong house—front door open—good evening!" and I let myself out.

Dawson followed me in silence downstairs, and into the street, where the others waited, and it was not until we had found a hansom, and were seated in it, that I spoke.

"The face was Holford's," I said briefly, "the eyes, the dirt, the rags were the musician's."

I spoke harshly, bitterly. Was he in the swim with Holford? Had Holford with Honey's money bought over the man to let me into this humiliating trap, so that I was doubly sold? Yet with these detectives a neat *coup* has a price far above money.

"Come to me to-morrow morning," I said. "I don't feel disposed to spend any more money over this business."



“If you don’t mind,” said Dawson quietly, “I will go on with this job on my own account. Good night, sir,” and he stopped the cab, called up his subordinates, and I went on my way alone.

Well, Holford and I had tried our first real “fall,” and he had beaten me; and if hitherto he had seemed to me a sorry fellow, with only the amazing courage of the man who preys on women, knowing they cannot hit back, he showed now as a lusty rogue with a sense of humour, and a power of grappling with unexpected circumstances that almost commanded my respect, certainly my earnest attention.

Honey must be saved by other measures, but for the present I could not see what those measures might be.

## CHAPTER IX

“Only—but this is rare—  
When a beloved hand is laid in ours,  
When, jaded with the rush and glare  
Of the interminable hours,  
Our eyes can in another’s eyes read clear.  
When our world-deafen’d ear  
Is by the tones of a loved voice caress’d—  
A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,  
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.  
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,  
And what we mean we say, and what we would we  
know.”

**E**ARLY the following morning I got a note from Holford—“Don’t forget that you have promised to take Honey round to our new house to-morrow morning, and do, my dear fellow, persuade her out of spending a great deal of money on a person who really is not worth it.”

He signed himself “Yours sincerely,” and I knew then that he did not mean to tell Honey of my attempt to trap him the preced-

ing night ; that he meant to affect total ignorance of it, and confidently reckoned on my playing my part with as much histrionic skill as he did himself.

Now a month ago, I should have refused to leave my patients for a morning's saunter over an empty house, but lately my routine work had failed to grip me. Life palpitant, urgent, claimed my attention ; the marionettes of the world were forked wood and springs no longer, but real flesh and blood, and all my care, all my thoughts, converged on Honey's fate.

My appointment with Dawson was for one o'clock. Eleven found me at Brook Street, and Honey waiting, exquisitely dainty, as usual ; but that fresh morning look with which she had greeted me on the morning of Holford's release had vanished—a shadow seemed to have passed over her, dimming even that lustrous eye of youth which, in its very untiredness, its thoughtlessness, so draws our eager gaze. On the road, for we went by way of the Park, I found that she had points of view, was a practical idealist in her way.

“Oh, if I were king,” she cried, as we came to Hyde Park Corner, “I would throw

open those triangular spaces of pavement yonder, cover them with little tables, provide them with refreshments, have a band to play just inside the Park; and how the public would throng there of summer nights! I would illuminate and serve certain parts of the Park the same. Last of all, I would make our grand Embankment an open-air house for the poor, and every man should have his 'Bock,' and every woman should knit, or sew, or sit idle, and be happy; and wherever the streets are wide enough to put chairs and a table outside a shop, I would put them. Oh, it's the having no choice between the public-house and the squalid home, it's the human contagion that brings about so many murders, so much crime, that would be lost in the open air!"

When I found that she would take away early strawberries from pampered gluttons, and feed poor children and struggling women with the proceeds of them, I accused her of being a Socialist; but she only laughed, the colour rising in her clear brown cheek till all faces turned to her as she passed, some because they knew her and her story, others for sheer

pleasure; and by the time we reached the house looking on the Green Park, all her late coolness to me had vanished.

She cried out to me not to pass under a ladder, for she was superstitious, and I liked her for it—it is the women who have no scruples, and no fears, of whom we men are afraid—and we passed into that most important thing of all in a great house, a beautiful square hall with galleries running round, and excusing herself to me, Honey was at once plunged into confabulation with the foreman. It was one of Honey’s charms, that she never felt herself misunderstood; she talked to everybody precisely alike—shop girl, great lady, servant—she did not differentiate their modes of life or habitat; they were just men and women—no more, no less, to her. We cannot take our houses about on our backs, or our money-bags, or our power, but we can be gracious, we can contribute our mite to the happiness of the chance acquaintance of the moment, or we can add our stone to the vast cairn of weariness in the world; and Honey never contributed that stone.

Presently we climbed by wide, shallow stairs

to the galleries, and passed through empty, echoing rooms, others in which workmen swarmed; but the farther we went, the slower grew her steps, and at last she stopped short.

"Mr. Cassilis," she said, "did you ever receive an anonymous letter?"

"Never."

"I got one," she shivered, and I knew that her blithe looks had been all a pretence that morning.

"Tell me," I said, and for answer she drew it out of her white frock, and gave it me.

I had never seen the writing of the woman with the broken finger, but I knew her mind; and the language, the matter, and the spelling of the letter were worse—not a word, not an expression in it, but would have suited herself, but never Honey. For that infamous epistle bridged the two extremes of womanhood, just as in person, outside the prison, the woman and Honey had stood at opposite poles of human society, and the blood rose to my brow as I read it.

Silently I gave it back, and Honey said—

"It is someone who loves Lawrence. Perhaps the very woman whose letters I would

not——” she stopped abruptly, and coloured warmly.

“He can’t help it,” she went on quietly, and it struck me then that the woman who covers a man’s contemptibleness up, is like the Spartan boy who allowed the fox to devour his vitals, thinking that he alone knew ; but, alas ! all the world saw his torn body, and his sacrifice showed for what it was—sheer stupidity, otherwise loyalty to his gods.

Bravery may sometimes become a misleading trick, and honesty itself droop, when a woman holds a shield up between herself and the thing she will not see in the man she loves ; but the screen is only between her and him, the lookers-on laugh, and see the game.

“Burn it,” I said curtly. “Put it where the vile creature should be who wrote it ; or, stay, perhaps Holford might be able to trace it by the handwriting.”

This was a maladroit and cruel thrust. For a moment she winced under it, then pulled herself together, and it struck me then that Honey’s character was like one of those indistinct handwritings that you have to look

past, not *at*; but once you have grasped its chief characteristics, you can always read its message, and I read it now.

By degrees she had emerged to me out of the obscurity in which I first saw her, so, etched in little by little, she came to fill out the masterly strokes of the most human type of woman—loving, wilful, forgiving, passionate, good, but not too good; and for the lovely weakness of her mouth, that so contradicted the width of brow, I, for one, could forgive her.

As in a vision, I seemed to see her Holford's wife, with the inevitable soil and smirch left on her that he brought from degraded women. I saw her first tarnished, then defiant, then taking one of the hundred byways by which good women go to destruction, so that the man is able to shout out to the world, "Look! see what a beast she is! Isn't she excuse for anything?"

And the world does not know, or care, of the thousand offences against her that have made her what she is; it shudders, passes on, and the man's phlegm enables him to look calm and handsome, with all, even the good



women, pitying him, for a man never comes to the end of his tether ; a woman reaches hers in a single false step, and even if the good and pure reach down to her, she is—broken.

Up to now, any harm Holford might have done Honey had been instinctively thrown back by her. But would this always be so?

“I would not insult Lawrence by showing him such a thing,” she said. “Nor shall I let Mary see it. But you are big and kind”—she hesitated—“and it hurt me so, I felt I must cry out to somebody.”

“Whenever you want to cry out, send for me, and I’ll come,” I said, and then we drew near to one of the windows, and looked out.

“Mary says the Green Park is lovely in late May,” said Honey ; “that she never saw redder fires kindled in the country than among these trees in spring. But I want Burghfield in spring,” she broke out. “And in August, too. Couldn’t you persuade Mary not to go to Marienbad this year? It’s all a whim, and vanity,” added the girl, smiling, “because she is so thin, and looks so nice among those human mountains of adipose tissue!”

"Everything is a matter of comparison," I said; "fat, beauty, worth, money—brains even."

"I should like to make this into a music-room," she said, as we came to a lofty, wide apartment at the back of the house; "but Lawrence won't let me."

"There are so many other rooms," I said.

"Yes, but they have no acoustic properties. He might write his great opera there if—if he were encouraged, and made comfortable."

How was I to tell her that she based everything on a miscalculation of the man, that, granted his vices, he had not the qualities, the grit, that made for success? I think that already she knew it, that every day brought them spiritually more out of touch, and only the physical attraction remained; but Nature has her own reasons, drawing with cords where man's laws are useless as ropes of sand, and the cords held yet.

"Lawrence wants me to hold a salon here," she said, as we retraced our steps. "But I tell him that no one—not even the wife of a great political leader—could do it nowadays."

I shook my head, and told her of a great

lady's house only a few doors away, where at night the roar of conversation (the floors being uncarpeted) sounded like an animals' tea-party in the Zoo.

“But it isn't a salon at all,” I said; “it's a place to bawl, and enjoy oneself in. If Mme. Récamier came to life, no one would attend her evenings.”

“It will have to be music,” she said, and I wondered if music, played to a crowd of adoring women, ever filled the poor heart of a musician's wife yet.

I looked at my watch. Time had passed quickly—Dawson must be waiting for me at that moment. I took Honey back in a hansom, and on the way we passed Holford in another, he looked handsome as usual, and kissed and waved his hand to her.

## CHAPTER X

“The shallowest water makes maist din,  
The blackest pool the deepest linn.”

**D**AWSON was used to eyes—he studied them oftener than men’s disguises, so he read my mistrust, and resented it so deeply, that I began to doubt if he had stood in with my quarry over the business of last night. But anyway, the combination of the man, the woman, and the musician against me was strong enough without the detective, and in view of the fact that Holford was leaving town almost immediately with Honey and Mary Cassilis, I paid off Dawson and his satellites, who, after all, had done their part. For if by superb cunning Holford had worsted me, and I could not bring his guilt home to him, still I knew what I knew, and he knew that I knew it, and I regarded my money as well spent, and did not regret it.

Well, I must fight him with other weapons, or resume the use of the old ones later. Meanwhile, Dawson repeated his intention of not losing sight of Mr. Holford, and went away, feeling that to be tricked by an amateur was one of the bitterest moments of his life.

When he had gone, I sat for a long while reviewing the situation. After all, was the woman as stout a foe to reckon with as I thought?

That anonymous letter—that savage striking in the dark at the whiteness it loathed, and was jealous of, argued either fear of Honey’s influence as a wife over Holford, or the malignant shout of triumph with which the letter concluded, “Why, you are no better than I am!” revealed new depths of baseness in Holford that I had not adequately gauged.

For what if this letter were but a horrible shadow cast before of his intention, if the woman’s mind had been a slide upon which he had projected his thoughts as acts accomplished? What if all the proof in the world of his infidelity and worthlessness would not untie the knot that bound him to Honey now?

No—a thousand times no! She sprang before my eyes, a slim, brown creature, who did not physically attract him—a woman at once pure and passionate, who did not appeal to his taste. Hitherto it had been easy to him to let her alone. Her changeful face, her supple grace, were beyond him, yet she had the line of beauty from head to heel, and to me, always suggested those lovely bronzes of long-limbed, graceful creatures who poise themselves on a bough, or swing on the edge of a crescent moon, that we buy and place eagerly in our homes to remind us that the wild, untamable joyousness of youth and life still exist.

I paced the room restlessly, debating whether I would trust Mary—but no, we could not keep the knowledge out of our faces; we should exchange glances, and nothing escaped Holford. It was better far that he should believe her to remain strictly neutral, as she had appeared to be from the first, making the best of a bad business. Neither could I reveal to Honey the whole truth; the girl still loved him, the time was not yet ripe for her detachment; she would only hate me, and

believe *his* story, for I had no proof. More, I had overnight proved conclusively that my doubts of him were mistaken.

Indeed, had he played then the strong card he held in his hand against me, and boldly denounced me a spy, he would have cleared me from his path for ever ; but cunning and strategy were his forte, for open warfare he had neither stomach nor skill. Moreover, knowing his own base heart, he mistrusted Honey's. This is the one great disadvantage of the knave, and often proves his ruin, that he never reckons on the fidelity and worth in others, that he does not find in himself.

I went round to Mary when I had made a pretence of lunching, and found her alone. It was only when she spoke of the cool pine forests of Hungary, to which she was going, of her longing for them, that I realised how hard on her my errand would have been, even if Honey were her daughter.

“Mary,” I said, without preamble, “I want to keep Holford and Honey under my own personal observation. I am going to ask you to give up Marienbad.”

“Ben! My frocks!” And Mary's en-

larging and horror-struck blue eyes unrolled vistas of fresh cambric gowns, that the outdoor life abroad demanded in dozens.

"I can't come with you," I said; "and you will know half the people there. Honey and Holford will inevitably be thrown much in each other's society—alone. They must not be alone."

For a while she looked at me silently, for she was great in her way. When the last of her frocks had trailed out of sight, she said—

"Then we will go to Burghfield."

"Thank you."

"Honey loathes going abroad—it was only to please me." Mary sighed. "Now I am glad to do something to please her—and you. But let me tell you, you are an old-fashioned man, at heart a sultan, and crassly unprogressive. Yet I believe in safeguarding our women—not against honest men, but against scoundrels. Nature fights the girl, and Nature mostly wins in the long run."

She searched my eyes again, then said vexedly—

"So you won't trust me. Some man's idea



of honour, I suppose. But how can I help you if I am kept in the dark?”

“You can help me very much—and her,” I said. “You have been a strict duenna; there has been no careering about together, after the fashion of modern maid and man. Well, in the country be stricter still—till I come.”

Her eyes flashed, she raised her delicate brows, then smiled delightedly.

“After all?” she said. “Oh, I am quite at your service.”

I shook my head.

“It is for Honey, not myself,” I said. “The day I see her free of Holford, will be the happiest in my life.”

“And the hour in which she becomes your sweetheart will please me far better,” said Mary quickly.

“You understand,” I said, “that you are to keep them somehow in sight? I mean no affront to Honey, but I have reasons.”

The door opened, and Holford came in, wearing his sunniest and most charming air, and he greeted me cordially, kissed Mary’s hand—an attention singularly disagreeable to

her, as the face she made indicated—looked round for Honey, then suggested that he should fetch her from where she had been lunching.

"No, no," exclaimed Mary quickly, then added—

"I am giving up Marienbad, we go to Burghfield instead."

He started, would have looked at me had he not checked the intention, then said easily—

"That will be delightful. When do you go?"

"To-morrow."

"I may come too?"

"Of course."

"And you," he said, turning to me, "when do you join us?"

"Almost immediately," I said, "if Miss Bury honours me with an invitation."

He smiled. As I turned away we exchanged glances.

## CHAPTER XI

“A little while upon this grassy steep,  
A little while, and under it we sleep ;  
And though we live, and love, and sink to rest,  
The burning stars their circling vigils keep.”

**B**URGHFIELD was no show place, only a long, low, irregular, many-windowed white house half hidden in ivy and creepers, facing south, and it was perhaps because many generations of the Burys had lived there so quietly, that Honey, the last of the line, was rich. She had clearly inherited their simple tastes, and for the last two years, since the death of her mother, she had lived there alone with her old servants about her, and it was perhaps on account of this independence of attitude that in the neighbourhood she was called “the Young Squire,” just as her father had always been the Squire.

In the drawing-room, over the fireplace, was a superbly painted picture of her, mounted

on a jet-black horse in the midst of her pack, her scarlet coat striking a vivid note of colour in the white room, her eyes lovely and eager under the black velvet of her huntsman's cap—this, this was Honey's true self.

I thought of those gloomy, echoing Piccadilly rooms, of her rage in Mary's ballroom, of how impossible it was that any life but the outdoor one, could long claim this brown gipsy, and knew that it was as I had told Mary, and that I should come to know the girl here, as I had never done in town—here in her home, where you met traces of her childhood and early youth in every room of the quaint, old-fashioned dwelling; any other place would be a house to her only.

She inherited all the tastes of the Squire, her father, who had been a handsome fellow, and rattling good sportsman, quick-tempered, I gathered, and kind-hearted, a great contrast to the brown shred of a wife whom he called "Gipsy," and from whom Honey inherited her brown skin, and suppleness of limb. He had died, as he wished to die, of a broken neck in the midst of a glorious run in the hunting-field, carried over the one awful

moment in a full riotous tide of life that hardly recked of the break between one existence and another, and Gipsy had died willingly enough a year later upstairs, while the surgeons quarrelled over her case below.

And the longer I stayed at Burghfield, the more I realised the solidity of Honey's position as a landed proprietor, the less I coveted Holford's rôle of prince consort. A man must love Honey very much, or very little, to accept the position—and she would require a beating at least once a week (to begin with) to establish the proper relation between husband and wife, and Holford would deceive, but he would not beat her.

Holford frankly hated the place, reviled the soft, humid air that brings such roses to Devonshire women's cheeks, that fills an Exeter ballroom with beauty, but, alas! crumples them all too easily; but it was part of the price he had to pay for what he wanted, and all grudgingly he paid it, for in country life he did not shine.

Honey's neighbours were mostly people who lived happily in their beautiful country houses, had the bad taste to dislike city life, and

managed to exist without the greedy, gambling, screaming, half-dressed, half-drugged, half-drunk crew that represents a certain section of town society.

If these poor local people were never wildly, inordinately gay, at least they were never dull; the men had their fishing, hunting, and shooting, the women their graceful occupations and hobbies; and Mary delighted in the simple, honest country people, with clean faces and honest tongues, who had quite easily simplified their lives, and curtailed their wrinkles, by never pretending, and pretending is like bandaging a limb out of its true proportions—it makes a warp—you feel it later, when you want the habitual use of it.

Sometimes they had grey hair like her own, sometimes brown like Honey's, or black like Holford's, but the sun never discovered red, green, and blue tints in them, and their detachment from outside interests was so profound that often (and these were the happiest homes) they had not read the morning's newspaper. These people *lived* their lives, did not break the drums of their ears trying to hear about other people's, and smashing themselves up

imitating them, and I admired them for it. On the other hand, Holford heartily disliked and despised them, and as the mistress of the one fast house in the neighbourhood, where he had met Honey, and who spent most of her time in town, was now at Homburg, there was no Bohemian company to be had, and he literally pined for that society with a “flavour” about it, not to be had at any other place near by.

There was, indeed, metal more attractive than Honey within the gates of Burghfield at that moment, but having made one big mistake, escaping its consequences by a miracle, he meant to run no further risks till after he was married—or so I judged.

And the neighbours did not like him. He did not take the trouble to exert here the surface charm that carried him so far in town, and even if the women tolerated him, the men did not.

When he denounced hunting as a wilful attempt at suicide, pitied the fox, and suggested a red-herring trailed across the country for the field to ride after, as equally efficacious, he went near to being murdered on the spot,

and this total indifference to sport, to hardy effort, or endurance of any kind, cut Honey deeper than anything he had yet done; when a girl begins to blush for her lover, blushing for her own bad taste in choosing him, is within appreciable distance.

So the country hated him as one man, but this dislike had nothing to do with his imprisonment for the manslaughter of Hammersley. Snobs there may be in the country, but there is also more human nature than in that bleak fortress of Town, where every man's hand is against his neighbour, and no one cares what he does, or is, or is not, or what becomes of him; and these Devonians were kindly enough to regard Holford as a man who had met with an unfortunate accident that might have occurred to better men than himself.

What they *did* resent was the carelessness of his attitude towards her, and the men who had honestly loved and wooed her—the "beef and beer" men, as Mary had unkindly called them,—longed to kick Holford, if their faces were any index to their feelings.

Now I admit that Holford, as a penniless



man marrying a great heiress, who was surrounded by her own attached and critical court, was in a galling position, but instead of pitying him, we men at least pitied the courage of the man who tried to support the intolerable situation.

Only a great, an unselfish love could carry a man with dignity through such an ordeal, but Holford was so sure of Honey, he had won and kept her so easily, that he did not take the trouble to conciliate her friends, the more especially as he said openly he did not mean to come to Burghfield for more than a few weeks out of the year.

And Honey could not be indifferent to the fact that her servants—as had Mary’s—disliked him heartily. They bore him no malice for his “accident” with Hammersley, but these clear-eyed rustics cut through the frosted sugar, and finding no cake beyond, resented it. Honey saw it all, her pride instantly ranging itself on the side of Holford; but it was his lack of real tenderness towards her, that took the spring out of her step, and the light out of her eyes, and her beauty depended very much on her mood. If unhappy, all her charm was

dimmed, even her grace of body affected, and the bubbling-over quality of youth in her arrested. Out of the whole world, Holford could not have found a human instrument out of which so many notes of pain, as of joy, could be drawn as Honey. Brave she was, and only those who knew her well, suspected the effort beneath the gay word and glance, the *gaminerie* that made her so popular, and so sought after as a companion; but by now I knew her character pretty well, and I thought that very gradually, as one who, starving inch by inch, ceases at last to have any desire for food, her desire that Holford should love her as she wished to be loved, as her own love had at first demanded, was leaving her.

I don't think Holford had ever given Honey's looks a thought—certainly their eclipse escaped him. Beauty is what a man of his type does not exact in his wife, but insists on as a right in the wife of his neighbour. A still larger class of men, usually good-looking, concern themselves chiefly with a woman's powers of pleasing, and with her looks not at all. Her very plainness has an attraction, if reserved solely for the man

she loves; but if Honey had been able to thoroughly please Holford, she would have displeased herself very much indeed. He openly rebelled at accompanying us to what he disrespectfully called “local hen-fights,” for it was the time of garden-parties, when at least fifty women foregathered to every man, some of them so pretty, and young, and fresh, that it made one really sorry to reflect that their bloom would pass, their charming little faces widen and wrinkle, yet that they would never have one single chance of marriage.

Mary remarked one day that if George Sand lived nowadays, she would have to advertise for her lovers, while Catherine of Russia might have sent her chamberlains to scour the country in vain for handsome young men! She also congratulated herself on the fact that when *she* was young, there were enough men to go round, and some of the girls looked eagerly, almost enviously, at Honey, then at Holford, who invariably made a bee-line for the most pronounced woman present, and allowed her to make love to him in a way that curled Mary’s nose in disgust, and sometimes

brought a shadow to Honey's mobile, expressive face. At the last of the parties, the one given at Burghfield, this behaviour of Holford's was especially marked, and I felt certain that he loved to make her look small before people—it was part of the brutal breaking-in process he had practised so successfully with other women, for the human, like the other animals, never forget where the whip has scored deep into the quick of them, or the hand that wielded it so relentlessly.

"I always punish one woman by going off to another," I overheard him say once; and it gave the man's character in a nutshell.

But I think that one cause of his ill-humour, apart from knowing himself watched by me (that annoyed him most), was that his music had no real power over these people; they listened to him politely, feeling as if they were in a concert-room, and that presently the artist would depart with his violin to his own Bohemian, spasmodic life, that could never infringe on theirs, or become in any sense a part of it. The persons who laboured with pen, or brush, or voice, or musical instrument, were very interesting, no doubt; but

these well-born landed proprietors, too sure of themselves to be proud, or to have an undue regard for wealth, admired artistes most at a distance, and, unlike town hostesses, desired no nearer acquaintance with them. I think that in some vague way they felt that genius of any kind must be naughty; that like the great physician who, after an exhausting day or difficult consultation, always ordered his butler to bring up a bottle of his best port, so the great orator, or violinist, or poet, or rainbow spinner, having been carried by his art to heaven, must, when he feels virtue gone out of him, demand the best port for the satisfaction of the animal.

Now this is radically wrong. The manner of your life affects your life and health, no doubt; but morals have nothing to do with an artiste's results, that are born of great moments of clarity and insight, of a power beyond and above itself. I do not agree with someone who said that “all intellectual acquirements are poison which are not consistent with, or even the direct outcome of, moral worth. Moral worth is the very source of life; it is, so to speak, the grass, whilst intel-

lectual attainments are the birds and flowers in God's meadows."

I hold that a man as a man, should be completely dissociated from his work, and in his public capacity not be made to suffer for his private faults. Bad geniuses we have had, and good ones, but the very worst, or the very best, of a great man scarcely touches his great work ; and if he have bequeathed ever so little to the intellectual treasure-house of the world his sins should be ignored—they are not ours, but his own private business. Only Holford was not great ; his faults were greater than he.

## CHAPTER XII

“ I think the vessel that with fugitive  
Articulation answer'd, once did live  
And drink.”

SOMETIMES I got Mary to myself for a pow-wow—and I always enjoyed it, for occasionally she said the things I wanted to say for myself—only a woman has so many words for everything, and a man only two or three.

One afternoon, when she felt no inclination to sleep, we sat in two deep chairs beneath the shade of the copper beech ; the long, white house stretched far behind, and before us the lawns, and beyond them that gently shimmering sea of myriad-tinted summer leaves that meant the woods.

“ It's so nice to smell green things, and be rid of musk-cats,” said Mary, who all her life, purely as a matter of taste, had kept clear of ladies of easy virtue, and uneasy husbands. “ The line dividing the *belle pécheresse* of town

society from the *demi-mondaine* is nowadays so slight that the thread dividing them is invisible. Each gets current coin, and the Society woman a great deal more than the other, with which to pay her gambling debts (her gigantic and swindling dressmaking bill is paid by the man as a matter of course), and it is not strange that many men infinitely prefer the other world, finding it less expensive, and to their minds more honest than the woman received at Court, who goes on her way with all the insolence of the true *cocote*, heedless of men's contempt so long as she can rouse women's jealousy—

“‘Dans les draps d'un Agent de Change.’

The only shame she knows, is not to be all through alike, and a thirty-five-guinea frock hides silken, or fine batiste, or gossamer underwear, of which the camisole may have cost from six to eight guineas, the knickers two-thirds as much, and the petticoat a third as much as the dress itself. Add to this a corset costing five guineas, garters at two guineas, a lace petticoat at eight guineas, stockings at a guinea a pair, shoes at thirty shillings, and



one becomes aware that a really well-dressed woman is an expensive luxury. Even if one is ‘rationally’ inclined (as few really dainty women are) and dispense with the lingerie and the lace petticoat, the result is not so materially different.”

“Spare me,” I murmured, “you often mistake me for an old woman.”

“I shouldn’t talk to you if you were. If it’s bad with men, it’s worse without ’em! Some intrepid female said the other day that women’s clubs resembled a great ‘Zoo,’ where all sorts of disagreeable types were on view. Most of the ‘types’ jumped on her, of course, but a good many of us admired her sincerity. For, you know, most of us are terribly insincere. We show our teeth in a smile when we meet each other, and if the other’s frock is all wrong, or her face sallow, we grin again, but heartily, to ourselves, as delighted as we would be enraged if she looked charming!

“In time,” I said grumblingly, “this hypocrisy and pretence will become real, and the actual honesty and truth of character now merely dormant in women, will become extinct.

Chivalry is *not* dead in men, it only slumbers ; but there must be truth in women's voices to awaken it—not a slipshod murmur of *double-entendre* and innuendoes that we laugh at, while privately resolving never to marry the girl who makes them. Now, thank God, Holford never succeeded in inoculating Honey with his love for restaurant and midnight-supper life, where the worst women, the most careless men, are to be found nightly—taking us back to the days of the Corinthians and their disreputable female companions."

"History repeats itself," said Mary. "When Society has swung to its extremest limit of licence and immorality, there will be a sharp rebound ; they will go out of fashion. We shall be Puritans all for a time ; then gradually, very gradually, enlarge our borders, and become again as we are now. Sin's as catching as murder ; only advertise it enough, and it'll be copied, and written about, and fashion-plated till we begin to think the whole world is composed of sinners—which it isn't. In the suburbs you will find the truest men, the best wives, and the most devoted family life in the kingdom—in fact,

the upper and lower middle - class are the saving of the country. We don't always believe in them, because we don't see them in print.”

“And a good job too,” I said.

“Still,” said Mary, with one of her quick changes of mood, “those other women are wise in their generation ; they get *movement*—do not sit down and stagnate. If you don't want love, or disease, or worry to catch on to you, keep moving, always moving—you may be tired, but you won't be ill of it !”

“Is that why Honey is so restless ?” I said.

“Ah ! Poor Honey !” said Mary in an unconcerned tone, for which I could have beaten her. “I almost think Marienbad would have done as well as Burghfield,” she said rather plaintively. “Our duties as gooseberries are *nil*. I heard from a friend there this morning. She says Ann Sutcliff, who is eighty-two, is there, taking the baths and waters—she must be having a final wash up before the resurrection ! Did I tell you they put old Cissy Oxshott, who weighs sixteen stone, into a bath of almost boiling water last year at Homburg ? The man who told me looked

quite *cross* when he saw me laughing, and asked what I found amusing in the poor soul's being par-boiled. 'I'm so sorry,' I said, 'but I was thinking what a lot of water it would take to boil her!'

"So that's how you earn your reputation for being a hard-hearted woman," I said.

"Yes," said Mary complacently, "any reputation but your *real* one, you know. Elsie Tufton has gone in for sun-baths—hired a moor in Devon, and walks about for hours 'mid nodings on'! Of course, there's a picket out of sight somewhere—to keep people off."

"Rattling good thing for her," I said. "If I had to change my religion, I'd be a sun-worshipper."

"And I," cried Mary eagerly. "The sun in the heavens is like love upon earth; when you've got both, it's a case of

" 'God's in His sky,  
All's *well* with the world.' "

But it doesn't last. The Final Cause is economical in this way, that it makes you happy at one period, ornamental at another, useful at a third—but it doesn't give you the whole bun all at once."

“The sun,” I said doubtfully, and frowned. “Yes, perhaps it’s a good simile. From all I’ve heard, love is like that, the cold dawn, the preparation, the warmth—the warmth that becomes too great, perchance, and we throw aside our wraps ; then gradually it blows chill again—how glad we are then of our wraps, otherwise our philosophy, our courage ! for now the sun has gone to warm the other side of the world ; it cannot remain with us, even if it would, always. I have made up my mind to stay at the cold sunrise stage, and hold on to my wrap tooth and claw, not to perish of cold, soul and body, as I have seen so many other misguided men do, and all for love of a girl.”

Mary looked pityingly at me, then quoted—

“‘And tell me how Love cometh ?  
 He comes unsought, unsent.  
 And tell me how Love goeth ?  
 That was not *Love* that went !’

What a *splash* in love you’ll go one of these days, you silly old Ben !”

I said that I always admired the courage of a man who thought he had only got to marry a woman to make her happy. Doubts

on that point didn't seem to incommode him in the least. *I* should have qualms.

"I don't know," said Mary slowly, with eyes turned inward on some vital memory of which Ernest probably never knew. "In real love one scarcely thinks of the object as a possible sharer in it; the knowledge of it goes through you like fire, and you tingle with its strength, are thrilled with its ecstasy, you love, and your love is your own."

I was silent, stroking her hand, and thinking of my shadowy dead brother. Well I knew that for her, there never had been a glowing heart-fire warming her, bone and body and spirit—only embers to sit by, in which a little life yet lingered. Never before had Mary lifted even a corner of the veil that hid her heart, and I wondered what cause had broken down the barriers, made her even for a moment desire that sympathy which is the motive power of life, for which every one of us more or less hunger, from the millionaire down to the beggar in the street.

"If ever you marry, Ben," she said, "keep up the illusion; it is the only thing we women really want of you. But you won't. You see,

Ben, illusions are at once the rest and unrest of life—as life is the greatest illusion of all ; and the man who grips life fast, because he realises that it *is* an illusive thing, to be lived as much for others as himself, is not only noble, but great. For oh, my boy, the fairies and bogies of our childhood were very real ! We meet 'em all again as we go through life ; and they can make things very beautiful for us, or very ugly, just as our luck goes. All the things we fight for—fame, position, influence—are not real, they are only part of the illusion of life ; they don't hinder the scythe of death, they don't buy love, or anything worth having.”

“What a value you set on love!” I said. “And to hear you talk in town, one would imagine the word had never found a place in your dictionary.”

“My dear boy, love in young people is a lovely thing ; in the old it's indecent. I don't want to be indecent. But depend on this, that every true woman, however tortured, however she revolves like a squirrel in a cage, in ceaseless revolt, in continual forgiveness, comes back to this—that she wants her

own man, only one, but he must be all her own. And how infinitely she prefers that man to be her husband, and not her unlawful lover! A certain amount of enjoyment, one way or another, is necessary to a perfectly healthy human animal, and Nature has a way of levelling up things by helping herself when unjustly defrauded of her rights, and not always from the right quarters. Honey must love, and be loved, or she will deteriorate frightfully, as other women have done before her. Ben, don't you think that the fatally hurt in life's battlefield are those who won't go down under it, or seek aid? They go about their work stricken, and are vain-gloriously proud. But they die—*they die*; and he who lives longest, laughs longest. Fighting sometimes costs too much."

Her voice opened a gate. Turning suddenly, I saw in her face something that had been there that night Holford played his love-music in Brook Street.

"He is dead?" I said abruptly.

"Yes.

"He has outsoared the shadow of our night—  
Envy, and calumny, and hate, and pain;  
And that unrest which men miscall delight  
Can touch him not, nor torture him again."



“ He died before Ernest ? ”

“ A week after. But we might not have been happy. Most of you men are inconsistent, and this is the sort of woman you want,” said Mary, talking fast and flippantly, to regain self-control. “ She must be essentially domestic—keep house exquisitely, know every wrinkle of good housekeeping—yet extremely brilliant in conversation ; and cut out every woman who comes along, thus gratifying her husband’s proprietorial instinct. She must be shy and pure as a dove, yet as splendid a lover as Cleopatra’s self when he is in the mood for love ; beautiful, and she doesn’t even know it ; adorned with every seducing lure, yet a vestal virgin. Helpless and dependent, strong and self-reliant, no advanced woman, but strikingly up to date ; silent, yet eloquent ; amazingly practical, and the soul of sentiment. Can you wonder that in trying to catch her, man wanders through devious and forbidden paths ? ”

“ He may make her the excuse for his divagations,” I said, “ but no sane man expects to find her. A man wants a good pal—good temper, sincerity, and pluck are the

main things he insists on. And she mustn't nag — there's always another woman who doesn't."

"And what *she* insists on most, is that she gets the companionship for which she married. 'He gave her his time,' said someone once, speaking of a real lover. Eloquent words! He gave her the very best out of the whole world that a man can give."

"But how is he to work hard to provide her with the luxuries she loves, and yet spend most of his time beside her?" I said. "Believe me, Mary, you women are unreasonable."

"No," said Mary, "because love is the prologue that leads up to the great rôle of motherhood. Supposing you men had to prepare and pass for the one great vital examination on which your happiness, your success in life, your very health depended, would you not attach enormous importance to it? But where is Honey?" she added, with an abrupt change of conversation.

"Holford is asleep," I said laconically.

She laughed. Her mask was well adjusted now; probably she would never allow me another peep behind it.

“Faith has its drawbacks,” she said, and frowned. “Honey simply *won't* see evil in anybody. What is that Annette woman doing here? I'm convinced she is Holford's creature, brought to do any dirty work for him he wants done, and form a combination against us. But my maid keeps her eye on the jade, who has already set the servants' hall in a roar.”

I heard a laugh, very faint, but spiced with mischief, at a distance, and turning, saw Annette's face at an upper window—saucy, round, and young, with the perennial youth of women born without consciences, and an enormous appetite for pleasure, that their good looks allow them amply to gratify. “And she has her eye on us at this moment,” I said. “It's a hateful state of things, each one of us spying on the other—Honey excepted; it almost spoils this place. But I don't see how it is to be bettered, at least for the present, and every day, every hour, helps. Insensibly she is finding him out all along the way—his essential cheapness, his limitations; and when the moment to apply that knowledge comes, it will merely be the

light that flashes out from a long-smouldering fire."

"Ben," said Mary, putting her thin hand on mine—and I was startled to see how thin it had grown—"don't go away."

"Mary, my dear," I cried, "are you well—quite well?"

In her delicate summer gown she seemed to look frailer than ever, and I wondered if her ceaseless watchfulness over Honey were beginning to wear her out.

"Confound these tiresome girls!" I said angrily. "If you get any thinner I shall take you away, and leave Honey to her fate."

"Honey is my joy," said Mary, "and will never fail me. She declares there are unexplored depths of villainy in her character, but I never saw 'em—and I should love her just the same if I did. It is the heat that is trying me——"

"Who said 'Honey'?" sang out a gay voice in the distance.

"Come out and take your own part," said Mary, "Ben is pitching into you."

"I call that mean," I said angrily. "What holes you female *fripsons* do let a man into!"

“That’s a good word—*fripou*,” said Mary. “Why *will* the French annex every word that exactly expresses what miles of English ones won’t? To describe one’s sins wittily almost excuses them, but to describe them in French, absolves you entirely.”

But I had moved away to a distance, and lit my pipe before Honey came out. She wore a muslin gown the colour of an apricot on its under side, and her cheeks were the colour of the fruit on its riper one—she looked well. Her nerves were now completely under control, and, no longer swept on a wave of emotionalism beyond all the boundaries of everyday life, her real nature had passed from under eclipse.

She did not come easily to Holford’s beck and call, or wait upon his moods as she had done in town; and shyly as she had wooed him there, now she did not woo at all. Also, she made Mary’s duties and mine easy by never seeming to wish to be alone with him; and he being of the same mind, there was no friction, no apparent strain in the relations of any of us.

Snatches of the women’s talk came to me

while I sat apart, but presently Honey's voice rose—she was hotly taking up the cudgels for a poor girl in the village who had come to grief, and was being stoned by family and friends alike for her fault.

"They say," cried Honey, "that it is women who hound down women, will not give them a chance—only shout to them through a stone wall; but oftener men denounce women to their wives, and mothers, and sisters, when they find the unhallowed creature near them. The most vindictive enemies of women are the men who have made them what they are. Oh, it is not fair, not fair! We should not blame her, but be kind to her; *no* woman should be punished for a first fault. Why should this natural love to *one* only, represent deadly sin? Were not Nature's laws made before man's? I would give that girl exactly the same start in life as the pure ones. If she did wrong afterwards, knowing the penalty, then I would punish her, but not before. And if women tempt men, punish *them*, not the men. No natural instinct can be wrong, any more than hunger and thirst, or the instinct of self-preservation; it is only when

deliberately abused that it is wrong”—she stopped abruptly, a little discouraged by Mary’s face.

“My dear,” said Mary, “the laws were made by men *for* men, but also for us women ; they work out for our good in the long run.”

“I don’t know,” said Honey. “The bud swells, effloresces, fructifies, ceases, yet we forbid a woman to do the same. We call such fructification a crime . . . will not allow her to remain, in good and in evil, part and parcel of the natural life, for it is Nature ! Love, *love* excuses all ; it is the sun of hearts, as the sun in the sky awakens Nature, and every woman should be forgiven who has sinned, not from greed, or out of wickedness, but because she loved unselfishly. ‘To her that loved much, much shall be forgiven.’”

“Hear, hear !” said Holford, who, unobserved, had come up behind them. “If I had my way, all women should have equal rights, equal liberty, in matters of love, with men.”

“And the children, what is to become of them ?” cried Mary, white with disgust as she sprang to her feet.

"They should be brought up by the State," he said.

"You dare to say that"—she cried passionately—"and before Honey?"

"Love is all you women think about," he began sullenly, then stopped, startled at something he saw in Honey's face, and of which I believe the girl was quite unconscious as she turned, and walked slowly into the house.



## CHAPTER XIII

“But often in the world’s most crowded streets,  
But often in the din of strife,  
There rises an unspeakable desire . . .  
A longing to inquire  
Into the mystery of this heart which beats  
So wild, so deep in us—to know  
Whence our lives come and where they go.  
And many a man in his own breast then delves,  
But deep enough, alas! none ever mines . . .”

THERE came a burst of extraordinarily hot weather, and as we let the neighbours, and they let us, severely alone, we got into the habit of all going different ways after luncheon till tea-time—Mary to her boudoir, where she pretended to read, but really dozed, Honey straight to her own suite of rooms, whither I sometimes saw her steward wending his way, and Holford to a deep slumber on a Chesterfield in the library.

I sometimes thought it accounted for the man’s outward easy serenity of temper, and

inward callousness of heart, that he could sleep at any hour, and for any length of time—round the clock, if let alone—and that he wakened with difficulty; and this argued a phlegm, a coolness that made him an awkward adversary. It is the wear and tear of nerves, and restless nights, that play a man false, and often deliver him into the hand of his enemy.

Thus Holford, who slept and ate half his life away, and never made any strenuous effort at honest work from one week's end to another, who was calloused through and through to the needs and sufferings of others, might conserve himself to a hundred if accident did not take him off—or a jealous rival.

There was an extraordinary strength of indolence, of waiting power, about the man, his silent circumventions, his reserves, gave one at last an uncanny sense of fear of him, and I knew how one day it would come upon Honey that she really knew him as little, perhaps less, as in the first hour that they met; that he was a perfect stranger in mind and heart, would be to the end, as the man who never trusts his fellows always must be.

There is a pride, at once the noblest and the falsest, that makes a woman hide her wounds, and swear there are none. It is noble in its conception, it is false in nature, where all is frank, aboveboard, and you take your punishment standing; you have only made a little mistake, there is no real harm done. Nature wipes the slate clean, and begins again; often she makes huge blunders, over-producing one year, absolutely barren the next; but she goes serenely about her business all the same, and prospers.

Now the glory of Burghfield was its woods; mile upon mile they spread, spread even to a forest, and I am at one with Ruskin in his love of trees, and many charmed hours I spent in the shade of these, or wandering through dim green alleys, where nothing stirred save the tiny forest animals, who shrank away at my approach. The loneliness, the vastness of it all, the freedom from impinging human bodies as in the city life, gave me an intense pleasure, and I shut my eyes to the cruelty of the under-side of all this beauty, to the minor tragedies that went on here, as in every other part of creation.

Strangely human are these beasts and birds in their antipathies, their fancies; you will see the weasel stalk some particular rabbit out of a host of others, just as some men will grimly pursue an especial enemy to ruin and death, all the others looking on, and rendering no assistance, aware that they themselves are in no danger, and with the trades-unionism of animals, affording no sanctuary to the hunted stranger, while protecting vigilantly their own tribe.

Rooks will savagely chase a stranger couple out of their settlement, and destroy their nest; or if one of their own kind brings home a bride from another rookery, the pair are ostracised, and forced to build in an outlying tree. A hawk will pass with disdain birds that are in easy reach, to seize those that he fancies. But it is the crow who is the real murderer of the wood; with his long, stout, pointed beak he splits open skulls as with a chisel, and fledgling partridge, rabbit, leveret, chicken, all are one to fierce Jem Crow. Corsican in his vengeance is he too, for having tasted one member of a brood, he remains in the same place till he has polished off the lot,

and everywhere his presence is regarded as sinister—an omen of ill luck.

But one day I found that the solitude, the loveliness of these woods, was no longer my own, for suddenly I chanced on a boy, swinging along in tanned brown leather breeches and gaiters that had seen much hard wear, and made no attempt at smartness; only the limbs in them were supple, and full of a fleeting, airy grace that startled me, and made me think of a greyhound just slipped from his leash, flashing in the sunlight to his goal. The boy's cap, pulled well over his eyes, concealed his features, but did not hide the reddish hair that straggled from under it; there was a curious lack of breeding, of race, about his head that flatly contradicted his classic line of body, and soon I found him deficient in manners, for when we both diverged on a certain point of those green aisles, he looked at me, scowled, and turned about as if to flee.

“Stay!” I cried, and put my hand on his arm, firm and slender under its white cambric shirt, the only touch of daintiness about him, “I love these woods, and you love them too. I often lose my way in them; I may

want you to guide me out ; let us enjoy them together."

The boy turned unwillingly, and showed an inharmonious face, set in a grimace—red brows, dark eyes, a tanned skin ; and putting a finger to his lips, signed himself dumb.

"Deaf?"

He shook his head—almost with a look of pity. One does not want a tongue in the woods—only eyes and ears, and a soul into which to translate the messages of the senses ; so much I had long ago learned for myself, before I went to the city at sixteen.

"But *I* can talk," I said, "and will be glad of a listener."

He had recovered himself, and walked beside me with an assurance and swagger that travestied the lithe, unconscious grace with which he had moved when he believed himself alone.

"You know these woods well," I said, and the boy nodded his shaggy thatch in a way that said how much preferable they were without my company, than with it.

The colour of his hair, the way it grew, interested me. I smiled as I said—

"The Squire has given you leave?"

An indignant sound—a hand smacked suddenly on his lips, and a toss of the red head, was my only answer.

"Don't let's quarrel," I said. "You may know some better bits than I do, but I doubt it. I wonder how many miles there are of it?"

He shrugged his shoulders, with head averted; to grimace every time he looked at me was clearly too much trouble. I knew that he was only waiting the first opportunity that presented itself to elude me, and it came quicker than I thought. Pointing so suddenly in an opposite direction that involuntarily I turned my head, he resolved himself into a tree, or hid behind one, but though I beat the ground for some time, I found no trace of him.

I lay down at last, and fell asleep, dreaming that the youth had come back to pelt me with nuts, and was late for tea, at which Honey presided, more feminine and more frilled than I had ever seen her.

Holford, too, was more awake than usual, and on his best behaviour, and under the

copper beech tree, on a lawn where all the other trees made deep curtsies with their long skirts, we drank tea, and talked amicably as we rested at peace in our long deck-chairs.

I saw that through half-shut eyes Holford was watching us, and in his cheap way labelling me as his unsuccessful rival, for he did not in the least understand the frank *camaraderie* between Honey and me; what a man is incapable of himself, he seldom or never credits others with. Yet there must be something queer about a man who does not, when with a young girl, feel the wrong he does her in being what he is. All her young graces, her budding perfections, her shyness, all her hopes and illusions, the eagerness with which she makes her one throw for happiness in love—oh, may God strike us dead if we defile it all!

Holford and I were both too old for Honey, watch two young lovers together, and you will know what I mean. There is no strain, there are no heroics; it is just the instinctive flower of love in all its grace and abandon, and all the matchless purity, and passion, and loveliness of it are caught and limned by one



masterhand in the immortal Eros and Psyche, and gazing upon it, we say, “when Love was young,” with wry lips and aching hearts. If only some bright, handsome youngster would come along, Honey might be saved from Holford and happy yet, but neither in town nor country had I seen a fitting mate for her up to now.

Presently Honey began to “rag” me about my clothes, just as Mary often did. I never saw two women more fastidious about such matters, and Holford’s extreme good taste stood him in good stead with at least one of them.

“Did you get them ready-made?” inquired Honey impertinently. “Rolling on the grass may mellow them, but can’t possibly alter their atrocious cut!”

“They are very good clothes,” I said contentedly. “And what is the use of my friends having nice grass if I mayn’t roll on it? A very odd thing happened in connection with these clothes——” I stopped abruptly. I had formed the habit of making only impersonal remarks before Holford, so I got no further, though Honey was curious, and

begged in vain for the end of the story, which was this.

Coming from town but ill-equipped for the country, I had gone into Exeter a day or two after my arrival, and ordered a suit of grey clothes from a local tailor, but saw such surprised glances exchanged by the assistants that I inquired the reason, and was told that a gentleman who bore an extraordinary resemblance to myself had just ordered a suit precisely like mine, and barely left the shop before I entered it. In short, when they saw me, they thought he had returned.

Now this seemed a case of real resemblance, quite unlike the faked one between Holford and the musician; but the Norse type is always cropping up, and one big, blue-eyed, bearded man is very like another, so there was nothing surprising at my having a double in Exeter, probably I had hundreds knocking about the world at that moment.

We talked of other things, with that absence of zest peculiar to us when Holford was present, but I saw that he suspected something, was watching me closely, and I began to suspect Jew blood in him, in his baffling

silences, in his brilliant capacity, that began but had not patience to finish, that, in a word, was not creative ; above all, in the spirit of revenge, the burning fire of vindictiveness, the deadly policy of “an eye for an eye,” the tardiness of forgiveness, to be found so long as the world endures in all men and women whose veins contain one drop of Eastern blood.

I knew that he hated me, and brooded over the injury I had done him by finding him out—he would be even with me yet if he got the chance. But if he had all the contempt of *finesse* for honesty, and underrated me from every point of view, since I wore no women’s scalps at my girdle, and had no following, not even in my own profession—yet I saw that my refusal to divulge the “odd incident” of the grey clothes worried him ; possibly the devil had warned his own, given Holford some instinct of the part those despised clothes were afterwards to play in his destiny.

Meanwhile I was thinking of the brown boy of the woods, who knew them better than I did, and would certainly elude me, or

stay away ; but the following day, by sheer good luck, I happened upon him, sitting lonely and disconsolate under an oak, nursing his chin on one knee. I affected not to notice his melancholy, and throwing myself down on the grass, talked to him of Nature, of birds, of beasts, of men, of all, God wot, that I had never dared to tell since childhood, without fear of interruption and ridicule.

We lamented that Richard Jefferies had died before introducing a fresh system of colour-language by means of natural objects. Pine-wood green, larch green, spruce green, wasp yellow, humble-bee amber, butterfly blue—these were a few of the colours he was to give in the new dictionary that he alone, not the men who write scientific books about Nature, leaving Nature out, could have compiled.

Like him, we had failed to find the inner meaning, the soul of the wild flowers in the meadow ; what their message was from God to us, they as eager to tell, as we to hear. We had puzzled over the screed written on birds' and butterflies' wings, and in the sky colours ; and we agreed that the rune of the running brook, the great diapason of the ocean, some-

times spoke to us in a way we *thought* we understood, but could not be sure.

On one point we were certain, that if in some particulars, sport is cruel, it is not the quarry men love, so much as its surroundings, the exhilarating sights and sounds, the scents, the health and vigour they breathe in during those long tramps; and no man ever learned from books what the least clever, but appreciative man learns from Nature. That is why good sportsmen are rarely morbid or immoral men; they have too just a sense of proportion, are too strong and clean of mind and body to seek for, or find happiness in, false conditions of life.

The boy listened with his nods, his shakes of the head, his frowns, and eloquent brown hands, more poignant of meaning than most fools' speech, and so we came to a tacit understanding there, under the greenwood tree, and thither I hastened daily as to refreshment, to that mute comprehension of gesture, of glance, of heart communing and understanding, till at last I began to wonder why speech had been ever invented. For surely Eve was dumb, and spoke in glances, signs, tremors, gestures,

by the grace of the young slim body, not yet choked by gluttony and lusts of the flesh.

Would dogs be half so dear if they could talk to—argue with us? It is their dumb affectionateness we love—and their letting *us* talk. But oftener the boy and I sat silent and listened to the long susurrus of sound, among the trees, soothing as sound of ocean on a summer's night.

We could never have enough of it—never, of the sun and the shadows that touched us so lovingly, creeping from knee to shoulder, from shoulder to chin, warning us that it was time to go; and gradually it came to pass that only the perfunctory part of me dwelled in the house, and talked with the inmates of it—all the soul and the heart of me lived in the woods, companioned by one dumb, graceful boy.

We talked—he in his own way—we talked of the odour of the earth and the trees; of the balsam of health that is in every green leaf; of how the smell of the oaks is every whit as good as those pine forests abroad to which invalids hurry when ill; of the habits

of the birds, the forest animals, even of fish ; of all the things, in short, that made the unwritten education of hardy man when he was a migratory animal, and moved with the seasons, not the weakling, dry-nursed and pushed by the law in a perambulator, that he is to-day.

One day the boy sprang up, and, with a gesture of defiance towards Burghfield, beckoned me to follow him, leading me out of the forest by ways unfamiliar to me, till abruptly the scenery changed, and instead of the mystic green sunlight of the woods, we were out on the moor, in the midst of racing cloud-shadows, with our feet on the ling, that rolled up to meet us in great billows and waves of purple like a sea. And there we cast ourselves down, and let the sunlight and the savour of the distant sea do its work upon us, and in that elastic couch, with the hum of the bees all about us, I fell asleep, and when I wakened out of that heavenly, dreamless slumber, the boy was gone, and close beside me a tiny bunch of white heather for gift.

I told them at dinner where I had been, and asked Honey and Mary to come with me next day ; but Mary begged off, the walk was too long for her, and there was no carriage-way.

Honey looked at Holford, who declined, looking intently at me, and it ended in a flat silence in which I vowed to go alone, not once, but again and again, though I doubted if, like the thrush and his song, I could

"Recapture  
That first fine careless rapture"

of the boy and I, as we walked over the ling together.



## CHAPTER XIV

“Under the greenwood tree  
Who loves to lie with me.”

THE boy grew impertinent. Apparently familiarity with my mind, that overflowed to so ideal a listener, had bred contempt. He took to contradicting me in his own way, while the mischief in his eye bespoke a nature essentially unruly and uncontrolled; and I longed to shake him, and ask how he dared treat my thirty years with such scant respect.

“I wish you would dye your hair,” I said one day, and whistled softly. “You are so entirely in tune with the woods—all but your hair—of course, in autumn——”

The boy gave an indignant little flounce of the shoulder towards me, but otherwise vouchsafed no sign.

“Red-haired people have such dreadful

tempers," I said. "Now the young Squire—did you ever meet her?—has the temper of an angel."

The shoulder turned towards me shook so ominously, it might have betokened a body shaken by weeping, but I knew better, and laughed; for, as a sensible comrade (no Rosalind), this brown boy of the woods appealed to me as no frilled woman ever had done, ever could, and I jealously counted every moment of a companionship that before long must come to an end; and, for all his impertinences, I think the boy counted them too, though I could not get him to again take me to the ling.

I judged that he was not happy at home, that he only lived his real life, was his real self in these woods, for he was nearly always sad when we met, gay when we parted, though not a moment did he linger after a certain hour. But it is always the unexpected that happens, and, long before it should have done, our happy time came to an end.

Holford, who had retired to the library as usual to sleep, woke early, and wandering into the forest, found its coolness grateful, and,

perhaps guided by my voice, approached us. Ourselves unseen, we saw him coming, and instantly the boy sprang up, fleeing for dear life, and in a second Holford was after him, the boy's habiliments did not deceive him, his eye, trained to the observance of such matters, caught a womanish curve in the gaiters and breeches, and pink with sleep, a thoroughly refreshed human animal ready for any female sport that presented itself, instinctively he pursued it.

I saw it all from where I lay, and the boy overtaken, there was a quick, fierce struggle, a ringing smack on the cheek—then Holford stood alone, the red wig in his hand that had always excited my ire.

Then I laughed, so silently that even the forest things (whose hearing is as a great sounding-board on which even a breath is registered) alone heard me. But Holford presently saw me, and came over, throwing away the wig as he did so.

He laughed softly.

“Really,” he said, “for a man of such high moral character to take advantage of me while I sleep, to——”

"Improve my acquaintance with Honey," I said calmly.

"I know that petticoats never attracted you," and he laughed again. "Of course, I saw it was Honey at a glance——"

"That's a lie," I said; "you thought it was a woman—not *the* woman. And what is more, she knows it."

"I haven't molested her much," he said, with a sneer that almost made me knock him down where he stood.

"No, thank God, she never attracted you. The man who loves garlic has no taste for delicate fare. A *gentleman* takes care of a woman—shields her even against herself; the where, or the how, or the when of being with her alone, doesn't matter a jot, or if she wears breeches or petticoats; potential wife and mother—that is his way of looking at her, and she is to be trusted with him. But to a hound like you, every moment with a woman, from a lady down to a poor girl, is apparently lost, if not used for your own pleasure—God pity you such wretched conquests! You think that you, and you alone, can teach love; some day you will find out that there

are millions better than you, who by self-control have reaped women's love and honour.”

“Curse you!” he cried savagely. “You have been following me about. I saw you yesterday—in Exeter——”

For a moment I was silent; evidently he had met my double, and I would let him believe that I had followed him, for evidently he had been up to no good.

“You mean when you called on Miss ——” I paused, and looked him straight in the eyes, then turned on my heel, and left him there; and if he had sped after me, and given me a coward's blow in the back, I would have preferred it to the guilty silence that followed my departure.

But I felt it a physical impossibility to sit down to table with him that night, (and surely the afternoon's adventure had opened Honey's eyes to his true character, and she would break off the engagement,) so I dined at the village inn, only returning to Burghfield when apparently all but the servant who admitted me, had retired to rest.

“Take care of the morning, and the evening will care for itself,” says the proverb, though

the people who enjoy the splendid early-morning hours, rarely display of evenings the morbid liveliness that distinguishes the persons who are seldom thoroughly awake till luncheon. Honey was at her best in the morning, Holford at his worst, and at breakfast especially, he was either sulky and silent, or actively contradictory, laying down the law and the prophets (and to allow intelligence to no one but oneself is the surest proof of mediocrity in man or woman), and sometimes when he unloaded his second-hand trash on Honey, she had much ado not to catch my eye.

On the morning following the adventure in the wood, it was particularly noticeable that she would not look me in the face, and as Holford did not look at her, I concluded his explanations overnight had not been wholly to her satisfaction.

He was particularly funny on this occasion, instructing us all about the science of war, of which he knew absolutely nothing, save what he read—not in the least realising that books and newspapers are the dissemination of lies. Practical men know how different a thing looks on paper to a thing actually done—*i.e. work-*

*able*—and they never read; they go and do it, or get someone who knows the ropes, to show them the way.

Superficially book-learned he was, and the knowledge acquired was something like what women get from cookery books—nothing at all, unless they have a practical ground-knowledge of the culinary art.

“*We* mean to carry this war through, no matter at what sacrifice of blood and money,” he remarked, while Mary’s eyes twinkled enjoyingly; and I understood why men cordially disliked Holford, he did so give away the whole male show. His egregious vanity blinded him to the fact that when a woman does begin to laugh at you, you must prove you have more fine than ridiculous qualities if you mean to keep the whip-hand over her, but Honey rarely let him see what was in her mind, and she did not let him see now.

“Try a blockhouse for a month, Mr. Holford,” said Mary, with that subacid in her voice that she kept exclusively for the people she disliked. “Hear what Edgar Wallace says.”

She reached for a newspaper, and read out, "To-night a commando may attempt to rush the little post. To-night rockets may rush skywards from a dozen blockhouses as a commando changes its direction, and the man with the gun and his friends who are catching flies inside, may be fighting for their very lives. Perhaps not to-night—to-morrow, or the next night—or never. That is the horror of it all, the constant watching for the enemy who will not come—everlastingly on the alert for events that will not happen. Waiting, waiting, waiting, with a white-hot bowl of a sky overhead, and a sizzling, shimmering, blistering desert around.

"Blockhouse Street is a street to remember in your prayers—a deadly, soul-destroying, damnably dull street of galvanised iron prisons, in each of which are six prisoners waiting for execution."

"A man should have resources in himself," said Holford. Then catching something similar in Mary's and my expressions, his mood changed, for he was quick to feel any wound to his self-conceit, and he turned sulkily away, and Honey's face fell. One of



the saddest sights in the world is a bright creature under the eclipse of a bad man's influence, and the petty power of a scoundrel over a noble nature, is surely a sight to make angels weep.

## CHAPTER XV

“Self-interest is but the survival of the animal in us.  
Humanity only begins for man with self-surrender.”

HOLFORD disappeared after breakfast, and the atmosphere at once lightened, and our spirits rose. Later I was attracted by shouts of laughter to Mary’s morning-room, where Honey was reading out from a newspaper what she called a Berliner’s bill for repairing the frescoes of a church.

When the bill was disputed, he produced in court the following items :—

	Dollars
“1. Corrected the Ten Commandments . . .	3.02
2. Embellished Pontius Pilate & put new ribbons in his hat . . . . .	5.12
3. Put new tail on rooster of St. Peter and mended his comb . . . . .	3.20
4. Replumed & gilded left wing of Guardian Angel . . . . .	4.18
5. Washed servant of High Priest & put carmine on his cheek . . . . .	5.12
6. Renewed Heaven, adjusted the stars & cleaned the moon . . . . .	7.10

7. Reanimated flames of Purgatory & restored lost souls . . . . .	Dollars 3.05
8. Rebordered the robe of Herod & readjusted his wig . . . . .	4.00
9. Put new spotted dashes on son of Tobias & dressing on his socks . . . . .	2.00
10. Shoeing Balaam's Ass . . . . .	3.02
11. Mended shirt of the Prodigal Son & cleaned his ears . . . . .	4.00
12. Put earrings into the ears of Sarah . . . . .	2.04
13. Put new stone in David's sling, enlarged the head of Goliath, & extended his legs . . . . .	3.00
14. Decorated Noah's Ark . . . . .	3.00
Total . . . . .	<u>51.85</u>

“Of course, he won his case hand over fist. Think of the moderation of charging only three dollars two cents for correcting the commandments, and only twice that paltry sum for adjusting the stars and cleaning the moon! Now here's something cheerful. A man died, and over him they wrote: 'Here lies Thorp Corp.' When his wife died, they added a letter or two, and it ran: 'Here lies Thorp's Corpses.'”

Mary laughed, then quoted softly:—

“She came with her garland all in the May morning,  
Her face shining fair as the milk in the pail,  
But Death walked behind her with yew and with cypress  
And Death turned her away to his house in the vale.”

"Can't you *see* her," cried Honey, "in her fresh cotton gown? And I like the brevity, the enormous field of love covered in the exclamation—

"O Aprile month!"

with no name, no date on the black vault.

"Here lies the body of Andrew Haste  
Now in the ground doth go to waste ;  
If Mr. Haste you ever did see,  
Ye'll know what a terrible waste it be!"

continued Honey. "He had a great body, you know, and wanted an intolerable amount of slumber!"

"Here's a poem-picture for you," said Mary.

"Here lies the body of Madeline  
Wrapped to the throat in a shroud of green :  
Daisies her jewels here and there,  
A bud at her foot, a bud in her hair.  
Her eyelids closing, her hands laid down,  
Her sweet mouth silent, her tresses brown  
On either side her placid face ;  
Christ of His mercy send her grace!"

"We don't write them like that nowadays," said Honey, "or thus—

"Here lies a miller :  
Each working day  
He went as white,  
As blossoming May :  
A goodly thing enough to be  
If thy soul doth keep thee company."

Her voice trailed off on the last words, her eyes were fixed. I wondered if she were thinking of Holford, and of the discrepancy between his outward and inward man.

Then she hummed a tune, and cried—

“‘Mistress Mellor hemmed a shroud  
For this stranger beggar-man;  
Peter Sexton digs his grave  
Comforting as e’er he can.  
Just rags and bones and greenish ’ee  
Were all this beggar was, pardee!’”

She brought out the “pardee!” with a rousing emphasis, and looked me very impudently in the face, as if the epitaph were intended for me.

“No rags,” I murmured; “I plead guilty to the ‘greenish ’ee’ and the rest.”

“By the way, Honey,” said Mary, “you’ve forgotten to provide us with a ghost—you’ve done everything else very well indeed.”

“We never had but one,” said Honey, “a housemaid who walked in her sleep.”

“Talking of sleep-walking,” said Mary, “I read somewhere the other day, that this is an age of Somnambulism and Blood—the latter in our delight to murder and destroy, the

former because we are walking, as it were, in our sleep, apparently unaware of the life we lead, and the spectacle we present. And I can quite imagine," she added reflectively, "that some of us would cut a very poor figure indeed—taking a stroll without our 'transformations,' and wiggies, and so on. If anything, I mean to be a spirit—the natural enemy of the hairdresser. But talking of spirits," and she chuckled, "here is an experience intended for the Psychological Research Company, that was never read! Sarah (my cousin, you know) was outside an omnibus in Bond Street, and when it stopped at the corner, she saw her spouse standing below on the pavement. She called out, 'Thomas! Thomas!' and he heard the voice, but thought it was a spirit, and sat soberly and sadly inside the 'bus, picturing her with angel's wings, while her fat form nearly brought the roof in upon him! As he got miserably out, her fairy footfall was heard on the stair, and looking up, he saw her—tableau!"

Honey laughed, yet I saw that she hardly listened—her thoughts were far away.

"You know, my dear, if you call spirits

when you want 'em, they'll come when you don't want 'em. Ben, do you remember my dear old Admiral, who at seventy, told me he was keeping spirits for his old age? But, oddly enough, he went in for the other kind, and asked me to go with him to a spiritualistic séance, where his dead wife was to be rung up for a chat. But I flatly refused. ‘My dear man,’ I said, ‘supposing you got married again, and your first wife was always turning up—so very awkward, you know—don't be a silly.’ And three months after, he married a pretty girl of twenty! But she water-chuted, and switchbacked, and raced the poor old darling about so, that he died quite suddenly, before he had time to begin brandy and whisky! Now, my dear child, I have letters to write, and must turn you and Ben out.”

Honey rose unwillingly, and would have escaped me in the hall, but I caught her hand, and said—

“Come to the woods, I want you.”

Once away from the house, her mood changed, and stuffing her little fist into her mouth, she said—

“Ben—you *knew*—all along?”

"Yes, I knew. You couldn't disguise your hands, you know, and the turn of your head."

"I'll tell you something," she said, nodding. "If you found *me*, you also found *yourself* in these woods. I was turning you all the time inside out."

For a while we walked in silence, then suddenly she cried out—

"Oh, how *dared* he!"

"Love hath eyes," I said drily.

"For other women!" she flashed out. "He did not know that it was I—though he pretended last night that he did. Ben, I'm not sure but that what we call pluck—refusing to own up to a hurt to our heart and pride—isn't a form of untruth; and even if I lied to the rest of the world, I couldn't lie to you—if I never knew before, I know now what truth is—but I won't go back—I won't—think how the County, and all his enemies, would rejoice! Think of all he went through for *me*!"

I was silent, but my brain worked like lightning. Should I tell her the whole truth, now, this moment? Was my influence with her stronger than his? I knew that it was not; that did he choose to put out his whole



strength to keep her, I should be swept aside like tow, and I dared not risk anything that took her from under my own personal observation.

“Ben”—she paused, and looked at me eagerly—“I suppose it’s *our* fault—the women’s, I mean—and you men can’t help it. It’s—it’s a sort of universal love on your part, isn’t it?”

I had not the heart to laugh, so said gravely,

“You may carry it too far, Honey—to find excuses for”—I hesitated—“men. We all want discipline. Once we fall out of the ranks, do not obey our invisible colonel, we mostly go to the wall.”

“What colonel?” said Honey instantly.

“Some call him Conscience, some Principle, some Self-Control, others Humanity,” I said slowly; “but when we have tiptoed up to his height, we have achieved moral greatness.” She nodded. I think love, and the partial falling out of love, had taught her many things during the past few weeks.

She breathed a sigh of relief as we went further into the green coolness, and presently

we sat down with our backs to a giant beech, and gazed before us.

"Now you are in tune with the forest," I said quietly. "You were out of the picture before."

She shook her head.

"I did not want any of you to know," she said. "But I must belong to myself, have a little time to myself, as I did before Lawrence came into my life. The older servants in the house, and the gamekeepers knew, but I never wore a wig," she added, with a resentful glance at me, "till all of *you* came here!" Then she coloured, as the rank inhospitality of her words struck her.

"Couldn't you trust me just the same, whether you were dressed as a boy or a girl?" I said.

"Yes—*you*," she said. "Oh! it is you bears who look so grumpy and rough, who really handle us so gently," she added, very shyly. "It is the cruelties of the tender from which we shrink."

Abruptly I turned the conversation into those grooves that we had lately followed, when as silent, listening boy, and I as eager

lover of Nature, we had sat under this very tree, and I had been happier then than at any time of my life before. But now she spoke, and I realised that she had forgotten all I knew of Nature. I never met anyone so wise in country lore, and I have my own idea that on some minds, Nature inscribes all she has of truth and loveliness ; and I knew that town life, and all that was written on her mind and memory there, must fade almost immediately, and this woodland, earth-soil life be once again the heart and soul of her.

It struck me then, that Honey had no hobby ; that either she was acutely miserable in uncongenial surroundings, or supremely happy in just being alive, in drinking in all the beauty of the world ; and I thought she was wise not to try and do things she could not do but ill, and that there was sound sense in a famous man's exclamation on reading some masterpiece, “I could not have done it better myself !” and who admiringly wrote his own initials over the author's.

Honey had all Nature for her pleasure-ground, would never be a strutting, conceited human wretch, stung by the gadfly of re-

production. She would never smart under the scorn of Sappho, addressed to one born and reared outside the royal purple of Fame.

"Thou wilt lie dead, and there will be no memory left behind

Of thee and thine in all the earth—for never didst thou bind

The roses of Pierian streams upon thy brow ; thy doom  
Is writ to flit with unknown ghosts, in cold and nameless gloom."

She seemed to guess my thoughts, as indeed she often did, and said—

"I am glad I wore that red wig, and met you here, for I know you now. I used to blame your lack of ambition—your silent, discontented plodding between the shafts of your profession ; but I see now that the making of an indoor man is not in you ; you must lie close to the earth, toil and reap on it, or you will die unfulfilled."

"It is true," I said. "Don't tell Mary, but in the autumn I cut the whole thing, and depart with my few pounds and a knapsack for Canada. It was Mary who had all the money, you know, Ernest had next to none."

"I am sorry," she said, and there was a sound in her voice that I have heard in the

voice of the homeless, who, walking far in search of a night's shelter, find the friend absent who would have taken them in.

“Will you be happy in that Piccadilly house?” I said. “If for a time the town takes you, your heart will always be here.”

She fell silent at that, then said presently—

“Lawrence has promised that I shall be here frequently during half the year; but it will be the summer half, as he hates the country in winter, and I am giving up the hounds,” she added in a lower key.

“You have already done so?”

“Not yet.”

“Wait,” I said, and for a while we did not speak. Our eyes and ears were filled by the multitudinous shades of green, the subtle wandering airs, the undercurrent of life in the forest.

“How dull, how tame all pictures are after this!” she said presently; “and yet Art must find a place in our life. Who was it said that ‘Art is not the fancy or caprice of an individual. It is the mighty voice of God and the universe, as heard by the chosen spirit, and repeated in tones of harmony to mankind.

Should that omnipotent voice strike too directly upon the mortal ear, it would stun and suspend all human action, even as Pantheism crushed the ancient oriental world.'"

"And I thank God," I cried heartily, "that I am not one of those unhappy chosen spirits—a mere medium for painfully passing on to others what the normal man absorbs in sensations of pure joy—but I suppose the poor beggars can't help it. Something snatches the pen out of the writer's hand, inscribes words that are immortal; the artist's brush moves without his volition, and accomplishes something great; an orator thrills his hearers with words that startle him as not his own; and we *know* these voices are inspired, but we don't envy them. Even with music, that snarer of men's souls——" I paused abruptly, then slurred on—

"And as to books—you read a good deal? Your bookshelves are well filled."

"Yes, but not indiscriminately. Apart from the classics, there are books that are interesting, yet you can never for one moment feel that you are in the company of a gentlewoman or a gentleman—there are others that

please you intensely, though the matter may not be extraordinary, because the suave company of the writer delights you; and no matter what his characters say, it is he himself who is talking to you all the while. Do you remember Matthew Arnold on the making of a book?”

“I think so. Didn't he say ‘there are three things to be learned of the ancients—three things which it is notably important for an author to know: the all-importance of the choice of a subject, the necessity for accurate construction, and the subordinate character of expression.’ Well, the ancients' recipe is not often followed nowadays.” We slid into discussions of our favourite books, of a thousand things of interest to us, and thus we spent a couple of happy hours; and I would not hurry or spoil them by telling Honey that, hidden by a distant tree, Holford was watching us during the latter part of the time.

## CHAPTER XVI

“Hid in the silver clouds  
The sworded legions move,  
What shall his hate  
'Gainst legions prove ?”

**H**OLFORD'S was that base quality of love (and by it you may know the false from the true lover) that is only excited by another man wanting, or stealing what he happens to desire ; in a word, he genuinely admired the bad woman who deceived him, despised the one of whose loyalty he was assured, and Honey had made a distinct leap up in his estimation by her unorthodox meetings with me in the forest, by her cold acceptance of his apologies for chasing her. He changed his tactics, became the ardent, devoted lover of those earliest days when he had stormed, and carried her heart by assault, neglected his sleep of afternoons, and was for ever scheming to get her alone with him, a



scheme that Honey only faintly seconded, and that Mary and I perpetually defeated.

Did his warmth, his simulated passion come too late?

Had he for one hour even, been unselfish, loved her better than himself, he yet might have won; but the man of cold heart, of many passions, is true to no one, and to him there may come a time when he cannot starve a woman any longer, or hurt her any more, for her power of loving is gone, and where there is no demand, supply is wasted. But no one knew what Honey felt and thought in those days, though I knew afterwards that it was just touch-and-go with her. For he put out his whole strength, called forth all his vast experience with women, to bind her to him, to make her forget everything on earth but that he loved her, that she loved him, that heaven was to be found alone in each other's arms; and he had that deadly “knack” with a woman, equivalent to a bad woman's “way” with a man—long practice had given him a sure efficiency, and ruthless Nature, that takes no heed of human wills, or even moral antipathies, works on her own lines, and when

the man in the man called to the woman in the woman, would Honey go ?

Closely I watched the contest, growing keener each day between the flesh and the spirit in her, and Holford in love was a man transformed ; he even transformed Honey, so that in his eyes she became lovely, alluring ; up to now her safety had lain in the fact that she did not tempt, had no bodily attraction for him, but now his senses were stirred—if she too caught fire, who should come between them ?

He had never realised, as I had done, the mingling of good and recklessness in Honey's character, of strength and weakness ; he had been blind to that occasional look in her eyes of which Pope was aware, when he made his famous remark about a female rake ; and though the poet put the blame on her heart, it was upon her glance, I feel sure, that he really based his opinion.

Mary groaned now and then at the constant use of her as gooseberry, but I showed myself rudely indifferent to Holford's hint that my room was better than my company. Roughly speaking, Mary mounted guard over Honey

in the house, and I out of it, yet with such a past-master of subterfuge and treachery, I could never feel that the girl was safe, and my vigilance never slackened by night or by day.

If I went with Honey to the woods, Holford would come too, for now the man was jealous, less sure of Honey, and certain that I was his rival; but there he was wrong, the truth being that I loved Honey, but was not in love with her. With all his heart and soul he hated me, and perhaps women can never realise the savage joy men take in cutting each other out, the possession of the quarry being infinitely less to them, than the indulgence of a fierce primal instinct.

I encouraged him in the idea that I was trying my hardest to win Honey from him, and she saw exactly what I was doing, and wickedly played into my hands, revenging herself in a purely womanish way for the many slights he had shown her in his flirtations with other women.

And once I had got into the swing of the game, I played it with zest, omitting no smallest opportunity of scoring over him, playing on all his weak points, making him look ridicu-

lous as often as possible ; and when a man is a mass of self-conceit you are sure to hit him somewhere, no matter what stick you may take to beat him with.

Honey and I would sit and talk, and talk of the subjects that interested us, and Holford would lie on the grass beside us, looking sulky and handsome ; oftener still, go fast asleep, so that he counted for nothing at all with us.

And now time and the days alike drew in. We were almost at the end of August, and after a few days among the partridges, I must go back to my patients and hospital, leaving Holford, who could not shoot, to the derision of the neighbours. I seemed to have done nothing here ; I had been merely happy, Honey's position towards Holford was practically unaltered, but one night something happened.

We had had the usual music, and were strolling in the garden, when suddenly I missed the girl's white gown and Holford, and stood still, looking about for them.

It was a night for love—a night of perfume, of moonlight, of every potent influence that sets heart swaying towards heart ; and suddenly

in the distance I heard a muffled cry, a half-sob . . . in that moment I realised that Honey was in danger . . . perhaps the fine defences she had kept between them were down . . . and he had been drinking—the hour, the music, the night—all were against her. Loudly and imperatively I called out on her, not moving a step, for she must free herself of her own will, not mine . . . and for a moment my heart stood still, my pulses thundered; then she came running to me—breathless, lovely, a torch on fire, kindled by a base man’s passions, and almost fell at my feet in the greatness of her trembling.

“Ben!” she moaned in a stammering whisper; “Ben, you called me. Oh, thank God that you called me!” And with that was gone, and Holford was beside me, his face black in the moonlight.

“Curse you,” he said, “for your interference! Are you going to marry Miss Bury, or am I?”

“Neither of us, I should say.”

He gave a falsetto laugh that had every quality of offensive caddishness in it, and said,

"Only, you see, she happens to love *me*, not you."

"Don't call it love," I said, and left him, for I could not trust myself. Nor could I face Honey that night.

I must give up the shooting, and Mary and I would take the girl to town the following day. But if her own heart had turned traitor at the last, not I, or any other could save her.

Hardly noticing where I went, I presently came full upon the French maid, Annette, in a shrubbery. She turned quickly at sound of my footstep, and smiled as at one expected; then, seeing my face, uttered an exclamation, and ran back to the house.

For whom was she waiting—one of the men-servants or Holford? I disliked the woman, any coalition between the two, boded harm to Honey; but though I lingered, hoping Holford would appear, I saw no one; and presently, through the open window of the smoking-room, I saw him sitting half asleep, his cigar out, and brandy and soda on a table beside him.

Looking closer, his attitude did not strike me as a natural one. He was pretending

sleepiness, and why but to put me off my guard? Annette and he were concocting some scheme of villainy that night, to which the scene in the garden with Honey may have been only a prelude, and for a moment I thought of taking Mary into my confidence, but abandoned the idea; and before returning to the house, I had made my plans for the night.

Honey had so far escaped him, but I began to see where Annette came in, and the meaning of her presence there; for if Holford once succeeded in compromising Honey with Annette's knowledge, no earthly power could save the girl from becoming his wife.

The corridor upon which the principal chambers at Burghfield gave, had at one end an oriel window with fitted seat, and heavy velvet curtains, partly drawn. Behind these latter I sat down, and presently saw Honey and Mary Cassilis approach, linger awhile at Mary's door, then kiss and part, Honey coming on alone to her room, the long, supple lines of her arms and bosom showing like pale bronze against the darker shade of her gauzy gown. Nymph of the woods, not

brown boy, was she then, and in her eyes a look of shame, as if sin, not Nature, had lately touched her . . . yet glad withal, as at a danger narrowly escaped, a danger that she had never realised, till brought face to face with it that night.

She passed me close on going into her room, and I heard her shut the door, but no key was turned; keys had never before been needed at Burghfield.

Gradually all sound in the house ceased. The servants had gone to their own wing, Holford remained below; thus passed an hour. Then the light of his candle struck the wall at the head of the staircase, and soon he came into sight.

\* \* \* \* \*

Looking back on that night, I see its events flung like black shadows on a clear blind, for it was all dumb-show; the few whispered words did not affect the movement of the play, either to forward, or to hinder it.

Stretch the curtain—watch the shadows. First, Holford's handsome figure, a little unsteadily, crosses the blind. He seems to



peer downward here and there, really at the doors ; pauses at one, then disappears into his own room, and the blind is dark—there is an interval of time.

Once again the blind is clear, and Holford's furtive shadow is stealing very gradually, stealthily as a forest animal who braves danger at every step, towards something in the distance. He lays his hand on a door handle, and as he turns it, another hand closes over his. . . . I see the figures of two men mingle in silent, breathless combat ; one wins, and thrusts the other before him down the corridor into a room . . . and locks him in. Hardly has he disappeared when a graceful Parisian shadow appears, that holds up its hands, protests, would advance, but is driven back, hands to ears, shuddering and terrified.

Once more all is dark. The next silhouette is of a maiden, peacefully sleeping. It vanishes, to show a man without, watching ; then all clears away . . . the shadow-play is at an end.

## CHAPTER XVII

“Blossom of hawthorne whitens in May ;  
Never an end to love’s true sway !

“Blossom of hawthorne fades in June ;  
I shall be tired of my true love soon !

“Blossom of hawthorne’s gone in July ;  
Sweetheart, I must be off—good-bye !”

“IT strikes me,” said Mary at breakfast next morning, “that we are conjugating the verb ‘to girn.’ I girn, thou girnest”—she nodded at Honey—“*he* girns”—looking at me—“and if we are all going to girn together, Heaven save us from Bedlam ! Because that jade Annette has run away in the night, and Mr. Holford has urgent business that takes him to Exeter, pray, are we all to behave as if we were conducting our own funerals ?”

I protested against the verb as applied to Honey, who was quiet indeed, but by no means cast down.

“Where did you get the woman?” said Mary. “I always knew there was something wrong about her—her linen was far better than mine!”

“You know that Lawrence asked me to take her,” said Honey coldly. “She had lived with one of his friends; and she did my hair beautifully in town.”

“And her own,” said Mary. “I fancy she has been more mistress than maid.” Here Mary jumped to conclusions, and a woman’s jumps (when mounted on fancy) easily include the whole world, while in the rock of the saddle, truth is jerked out of her. “I wonder if she and Holford have eloped together?”

“Oh!” cried Honey, with heaving breast, “because he killed a man—for me—because he has been in prison, you are all down on him, you all have a kick at him; and I—I love him all the more for being down in the world! Faults he has, but I wish he had more, that I might forgive them all! Soon he will be the master of this house, and, meanwhile, not a word shall be said against him in it!”

Wilder words trembled on her lips, but

choking them down, she rose, and left the room.

I had never before seen Mary look so badly. For a moment I thought she was going to faint.

"What can we do?" she cried. "The first thing he will do is to clear us out; if an angel came down from heaven, he would not convince her. Even if she knew of last night, the scoundrel, she would forgive him. Ben, all our work and his carelessness is undone—he has got her back."

So Mary knew—had known all along. I felt cold with the thought that but for an accident—for Mary's and my care—Honey might have gone down, down in the swirl of passion that closes round maidens' hearts and lives. Their bodies may afterwards come to the surface, indeed, but they are dead in all that life holds dear, and of good repute.

"You wouldn't trust me," said Mary, "so I played my own game. Annette is one of the women who adored Holford before the bother with Hammersley. She intrigued to come here as Honey's maid, to do any devil's work he wanted; and I pretended blindness, and

helped her, while you went blundering on, trying to trick him of some other woman. Silly Billy! don't you see what her share in last night's business was? To find him with Honey. It was timed to a moment, as Honey would have made short work of him; *but* her reputation would have been ruined, and she would have been forced to marry Holford.”

I sat staring, amazed at Mary's duplicity, her cleverness, though she took my idiocy as a matter of course.

“His influence over women is simply enormous,” said Mary. “Look at Honey—she thoroughly despises, yet loves him! Now in the garden last night——”

“Oh, do you know *that* too?” I exclaimed.

Mary smiled pityingly.

“My dear Ben, I've had my finger on Honey's pulse the whole time. When he has had melting moments towards her, she has not known it, or been annoyed at one of his *bêtises*. When she has melted, he has not been in the mood—last night both melted at the same moment. ‘Brethren, if our hearts betray us’—it should have been ‘sisters.’ Well, you cut in and spoiled that game, and

then he played his last black, dishonourable card ; but now I think he is gone for good."

"You were watching last night?" I said.

Mary nodded.

"I have seen too many of those tricks played at the expense of my sex—especially in country houses—not to keep my eyes and ears open," she said. "I saw and heard everything that passed."

"His game is not up," I said. "You forget that she is absolutely ignorant of last night's occurrences, and she is angry with us both. She will believe *him*."

"It's all your fault," said Mary irritably. "You never put any real back into the affair ; you could have got her away from him by just lifting up your finger, and you wouldn't. Don't you suppose she has found out that one can do almost anything with a gentleman, but is always pulling up against a blank wall with a man who isn't?"

"Only she happens to love Holford," I said.

"You like the girl more than you think," said Mary sharply, "or why didn't you go abroad, as usual, instead of coming here?"

When a man's happy, he won't stir. He only travels when he is wretched.”

I shook my head in a way flatly discouraging to her suspicions.

“You suit each other. After all, is happiness in marriage a question, not of love, but suitability? Honey is at her best when you are by, you are at yours when she is there; you stimulate one another, and in the right way. Ah, my boy, most of us have at least once in our lives said ‘no’ in our pride to the thing we most passionately coveted!”

“I might just as well have stayed away,” I said angrily, and got up and walked to the window, where I uttered a sharp exclamation that made Mary turn in her chair to see what had startled me, and there, through the open window, we saw Holford walking in the garden with Honey, who, pausing to pluck a rose, fixed it in his button-hole, smiling up in his face the while.

The room in which we sat, the scene without, were essentially English and homelike, and I thought of all the happiness missed, of all that might have been theirs had Holford been a true man, as it was, the scene jarred.

Mary shrugged her shoulders.

"What are we to do?" she said. "There's no power on earth will part a man and woman when they are in the mind to be together, and just now Honey's mood is one of especial tenderness towards *him*, and anger against me. If she had not given her word to me not to marry him secretly, he would be taking her to a registrar in Exeter this very day."

"I had thought of that," I said, greatly relieved; "but Honey's word is her bond."

"Nothing will separate them," said Mary, "but some proof of his badness, so overwhelming, so flagrant, that she *could* not overlook it; and he is much too clever to give her that chance. I watched him pretty closely with Annette, but all the love-making was on her side, not his."

A servant entered with a telegram for me. In real life, as in love, it is only the impossible that happens, and when we supposed Holford gone it was written that he should return, and I depart.

"Come at once—DAWSON."

"No answer," I said.



“More secrets?” said Mary, and raised ironical brows. “You had better tell me—it saves time.”

“When I have something to tell, I will,” I said, and walked in a brown study out of the room, and into the drawing-room, its many windows giving on enchanting views, and stood staring at her portrait.

Freshness, purity, simplicity, culture—these struck the keynote of Honey’s home, as loyalty of her character, were all to be laid waste by the man into whose eyes she was at that moment looking in the garden?

“I must go,” I said aloud. I did not shrink from the scene inevitable with Holford if I remained, but my soul did sicken at the futility of it. “When I come back I may have something to tell you,” I said. “Meanwhile guard Honey well.”

“When *didn’t* I?” snapped Mary. “Set a man to catch a man, and—but I won’t waste breath on you. When do you return?”

I shook my head. After events proved that I did well not to fix a date.

“There is a train in three-quarters of an

hour," I said. "Will you ask Honey if I may have the dog-cart to take me to Exeter? I shall only take a handbag."

Honey came running at the news, all anger forgotten, and begged me to hurry back as quickly as I could.

"To-night, if possible," I said, knowing that she would tell Holford. Then I wished her good-bye, kissed Mary, and was off.

## CHAPTER XVIII

“Work thou within, we’ll work without,  
And I’ll be sworn we’ll set thee free.”

**B**UT though I drove fast, I barely caught my train. As I ran along the platform the stationmaster, holding open a carriage door, uttered a sharp ejaculation as I sprang in, and, rooted to the spot, stared after me literally as if he had seen a ghost.

I had brought nothing to read. There were three other people in my compartment, two men and a nondescript. As far as the waist it was a man, then it sacrificed itself to a petticoat. One felt that with those features, that short hair and moustache, it would have been more honourable to wear breeches. And yet this mistake of Nature—and Nature is constantly making these mistakes—changing the sex at the last moment, when she has formed the character for the sex that isn’t, was to render me yeoman’s service later in the day.

We were going at a tremendous rate of speed, when I sprang up with an impulse to stop the train, just as if I were touching an electric button to summon a servant, for suddenly I saw the truth, that Dawson had not wired to me at all—Holford had got me out of the way by a trick.

Meanwhile I landed in the lap of Nature's mistake, and she shot me cleverly, and without spleen, back into my own seat.

"I had forgotten something," I said, for the eyes over her moustache were honest, and she nodded comprehendingly, and returned to her flask and sandwiches.

Suddenly there came a g-r-r-r, a tremendous vibration, as the brakes were applied to the length of the train—a breathless sensation, as of being shot from a catapult to destruction, then a crashing and splintering, a furious earthquake in which for a moment I saw the blue sky above me, then—nothing.

It might have been a matter of eternity, or only a few moments between ; but what I saw next, was a black moustache hovering anxiously above me, and, glancing round, found myself in a cottage bedroom plastered with coloured

prints, while a lamp in the distance informed me that the time was night.

“That’s right,” said my neighbour of the train, and then I saw that her head was bandaged, and became aware that mine was aching badly.

“The doctor has just gone,” she said. “He wasn’t sure you would wake up—here.”

“There was a smash, I suppose,” I said; “but I can’t remember.”

An expression of pain—pure womanish—crossed her manly features as she said, “Axle broke. It was very bad; I never saw anything worse. My name’s Jebb, Sarah Jebb. We somersaulted through the roof together, and fell into a field, clear of the wreck, and they brought us in here.”

“Your head?” I said, looking at the bandages.

“Only gashed—no fracture. But *you’ll* have to be careful.”

“I must let them know at Exeter,” I said, struggling to get up.

“Man alive!” she said, “it’s midnight, and we are on the outskirts of a village, with probably no telegraph office for miles. Now,

when you have taken this sleeping - draught, I'm going down to the living-room ; knock on the floor with this stick if you want anything, but I think you'll sleep."

I drank it down, noting the shakiness of my hand, and again there was an interval of unconsciousness that seemed to me much longer than the first one, though it was only a matter of hours.

I came out of it to see Sarah Jebb sitting beside me, spectacles on nose, reading a newspaper with great interest ; but the moment I opened my eyes, she knew it, and felt my pulse as my hand lay on the patchwork counterpane.

"Good !" she said. "Now you shall have some breakfast." And she went to the door, and called to someone below ; and the sound of clinking cups and saucers, and the smell of food rose up to me so gratefully, that I knew I was not going to die just yet.

"I'm as right as a trivet," I said. "I hope you are in less pain, and slept well."

She nodded in a casual way, as if scalp wounds came all in the day's work.

"It seems a special correspondent was in the train," she said. "More extraordinary

still, the yokel here takes in a newspaper, and it's actually delivered by twelve o'clock. The disaster was worse than I thought," and she shook her head. "Twelve killed, forty severely injured. I will read you the list of the killed. 'Mr. Ben Cassilis——'"

"What!" I shouted; "but I'm *here*."

Sarah Jebb looked puzzled, and read further down the paper—

"'He had not a scrap of anything on him by which he could be identified,'" she said, "'but a servant who had waited on him at Burghfield, and was in the same train, swore to him as Mr. Cassilis.' Have you a double?"

I nodded. By this time Mary Cassilis would have heard of my supposed death; so would Honey, so would Holford, and the thought of him gave me pause. If he had summoned me to town on a fool's errand, it was because he had an especial reason for getting me out of the way; if he believed me dead, he would be off-guard, and I would have a better chance of defeating him; and as he did not know of the existence of my double, he would suspect nothing. Even if

the Exeter man had friends there, it would take some little time to prove his identity, therefore town, not Exeter, must be my destination.

I had barely formed a rapid plan of campaign, when an apple-cheeked old woman brought in my breakfast of home-cured bacon and new-laid eggs, served on delft, but both that and the pewter were spotlessly clean and bright, and I ate with appetite.

Her accent told me that I was in my own county, and as a matter of fact, we were only a few miles from Salisbury. When I ascertained from her that the next fast train would leave for town in about an hour, I told her to get a conveyance of some kind to take me into the town, and she went to see about it; but Sarah Jebb looked grave, and begged me to see the doctor before I left."

"I am a surgeon myself," I said. "Why not travel up with me?—and I can give an eye to your bandages if necessary."

She laughed at the tables being thus turned upon her, and after a hasty toilette, and a recompense to my hostess, I climbed beside Miss Jebb to the spring-board of a jolting-



cart, and away we bumped and banged into Salisbury.

I was weaker than I thought, and glad when the train came up, getting into a carriage as quickly as possible. There was a wait of some minutes there, and a rush of people to the refreshment buffet; and as I idly watched them returning to the train, suddenly Holford's figure emerged with startling distinctness, seeming to advance right upon me.

I drew back, but he passed on; it had been sheer luck that he was not looking in my direction, and my chances of getting even with him ruined, and I felt myself trembling with excitement at my narrow escape.

He look'd eager, alert, like a man full of good tidings, also like one about to do something he especially desired; and I said to myself, “Going to the woman with the broken finger—he loses no time.”

Well, I was going too.

We had a quick run up, almost silent as regarded my kind friend and myself, but before we got to Waterloo, I begged the loan from her of a large square of black silk she had in her bag, and in promising to return it, gave

her my name and address, and asked her some day to come and see me.

She started at the name, but made no comment; lent me the square, and watched me tie it over my head, and under my chin, in such a way that only the tip of my nose was visible, yet still she expressed no surprise. In short, I found her of quite consistent manliness and reticence throughout, and the grip of her hand at parting was manly too.

I remained in the carriage till Holford had passed, then, guessing correctly that he had no luggage, got into a hansom not far behind his, and telling the driver to keep the other in sight, followed him to the house off the Euston Road where Dawson and I had been so fooled by him a few weeks previously.

He must have wired from Salisbury, for I saw a coarse face look out from an upper window as he approached; and as he sprang out, with my stick I signalled my driver to go on, and left the street by the other end, knowing well enough what I wished to do next—only time was against it.

For only one thing could cure Honey now—to bring her face to face with the woman and

Holford together, and Honey was in Devonshire. Even if I wired immediately it was utterly impossible for her to catch the 6 train, arriving at 10.30, and on the morrow he would probably return to Burghfield, and so the opportunity would be for ever lost.

All the luck had been on Holford's side up to now, but, for once, the stars in their courses fought with me, and strange and unexpected was the news that awaited me in Harley Street, where I was taken for my own ghost. I could not but think then, that the dead show their wisdom in not returning to earth, once they have departed, for my housekeeper alone visibly rejoiced at my appearance, and handed me a telegram received by her from Mary Cassilis only a few minutes before I arrived. It said that she and Miss Bury were returning to Brook Street by the 4.15 train from Exeter, as though Mr. Holford had gone by an early train to Salisbury to identify the body, and thence to town, she preferred to make all arrangements for the funeral herself.

Now it was unlikely that Holford, alighting at Salisbury, and continuing his journey by the 12.5 (the very train in which I was), knew of

this sudden resolve of Mary's to come up, so with any sort of luck I should find him where I had left him, and thought that I had my quarry safe at last. He was not likely to take the woman out to dinner—for one reason she reflected no credit on his taste, for another, he was too crafty to do anything to endanger his position with Honey; and he might easily be recognised.

I partook of some food, for I was still shaky, and my head none of the clearest; then I wired for Dawson, hardly expecting to find him in town, but he came at once, being a genius in the matter of self-control, and the taking of no holidays. He was a little distant—he had not forgiven me for mistrusting him—and it gave me a shock to find that he had been watching Holford on his own account in Exeter. He knew all about Annette, and he had at first misunderstood her presence at Burghfield, but later on he had suspected a plot against Miss Bury, in which Annette was to assist. Holford was very unpopular in the county, and it was perfectly well known that he did not in the least care about Honey, only her fortune. He had kept up a corre-

spondence with the lady of the broken finger, but after his scare in the Albany ran no risks, and had not since visited her. Dawson had seen the account of my death in the railway accident, and regretted it as a point scored to Holford.

I laughed at this; the depth of the man's animosity to me showed how the wound still rankled of my doubts of him, and I frankly begged his forgiveness, upon which he met me handsomely, and we quickly made our plans for the night.

“The woman is in the same place,” said Dawson. “He prefers to keep her under his thumb, knowing that all he gives her goes in drink, or on her bullies. But he pays her landlady regularly—and the same servant is there, and will admit me. I will be at the house from nine till ten to-night. And if this case,” he said in departing, “which has been one of the most baffling and unsatisfactory ones I've ever had the handling of, is cleared up through your supposed death, sir, then you'll have reason to bless that double of yours all your life.”

“Poor chap!” I said to myself, as I took a

turn or two up and down the room. But my spirits had risen, and suddenly I thought of pretty, witty Nell Gwynne, who, when the manager came to carry her off the stage after she had stabbed herself, jumped up, and exclaimed angrily, "Hold! are you mad? You damned, confounded dog, I am to rise and speak the epilogue!"

Well, I was dead—apparently, yet I was going to speak an epilogue, the epilogue of Holford's play that night; Honey was saved, and my heart sang.

I took Mrs. Mistle with me to Waterloo, that I might not startle Mary by a sudden appearance before her. It was just possible that from the stationmaster at Exeter she might learn of the case of mistaken identity, for I understood now the meaning of that official's scared look when, having seen my double get into one part of the train, he saw, as he supposed, the same person boarding it from another direction.

But when Mary's train came in, and from a distance I saw her get out, so shrunken, so grief-stricken, that I barely recognised her, I knew that she had heard nothing; then I

looked at Honey, and saw that her brown face was all disfigured with weeping, and tears of gladness came into my own eyes that I had two such women to care so deeply whether I lived or died.

I saw Mrs. Mistlely make her way to them, and Mary turn towards her in silent recognition; then, at the light that broke on their faces as the woman spoke, I ran to them, and in a moment both were in my arms.

“Ben—my boy, my boy!” cried Mary.

She had utterly lost self-control, sobbed and stammered helplessly; the shock, the boundless relief, had followed each other too swiftly to enable her to pretend, and I got them into a cab, leaving Mrs. Mistlely to follow with maid and luggage, and we drove away holding each other’s hands, one of us too deeply moved to speak, the others dizzy with that most stupendous miracle earth affords—the return to us living, of what we passionately mourned as dead.

“We saw it in this morning’s paper,” said Mary disjointedly. “Then came a wire from James, who was taking a holiday, to a fellow-servant corroborating it. Holford offered to

identify body, and arrange everything, but Honey and I could not rest, and followed."

"My double was in the train," I said, "actually wore clothes of the same pattern, made by the same Exeter tailor. Honey, do you remember your insults to those grey clothes? James saw his body, and leaped to conclusions—the special correspondent did the rest."

When we had calmed down somewhat, and were nearing home, but still Honey's and Mary's little hands were holding my great fists fast, I said,

"Holford does not know you have come up?"

"No."

Honey spoke, coldly, curtly, producing that effect of harshness to those present, while intending it for the absent, that is one of women's ways all the world over, and I saw that she was angry with Holford. Perhaps he had rejoiced too openly over my supposed hurried exit from life, and afterwards I knew that this had been the case, his malignant exultation had for once made him act truth, and she had hated him heartily for it.



We fell silent after that, driving through the half-deserted town in the hot August night, for by now it was close on nine o'clock, and time pressed. But Honey was exhausted with emotion and travel, and must eat before I took her through the night's ordeal.

“Little girl,” I said, drawing her aside when we had got into the house, and the servants were pressing round their mistress, “there is work to be done to-night, and you must ask no questions, but put yourself entirely in my hands, and do it, will you?”

She was very pale as she looked steadfastly at me.

“Yes,” she said.

“Then you will at once wash away this dust, get something to eat, then come with me.”

She nodded. Her lips were very white; her eyes very steady—all spelled Holford.

To me the issues of that night seemed tremendous as those of a great battle, a battle in which she was bound to lose all, yet in cold blood I was leading her to nameless shame and defeat, and my heart failed me as I looked in her brave eyes, and turned away.

## CHAPTER XIX

“ But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar  
Retreating to the breath  
Of the night-wind down the edges drear  
And naked shingles of the world.”

I SOUGHT Mary, who alarmed me by her pallor and look of collapse, and for a brief moment she leaned her head against my shoulder, and I felt her body trembling violently.

Now I am a dense person, but somehow I felt then that a woman must always stand alone, save for such fugitive touches; that her father leans on his wife, her brother on *his* wife, her son will look to his sweetheart for his happiness, and all she can hope to win, to keep her happy, is the stranger-husband she has beckoned to her side, though if he die, or fail her, what has she of love, or joy, or comfort?

“I think one must die to learn how rich in love one is,” I said, as I kissed her, and then, very quickly, for time pressed, I told her where Holford was, and that I was taking Honey to the place where he and the other woman were; also that if Dawson did not effect for us a silent entry, I would force my way in openly.

Mary shuddered.

“It’s savage, it’s incredible,” she said in a convulsion of horror, “Honey in such a scene as that . . . some women would die, but she will not—only be scarred cruelly to her dying day. And men don’t like women scarred by their fellow wild beasts,” she added in her old discursive way, then remembered, and kissed my hand tenderly.

“Better be honourably scarred than dead spiritually,” I said. “Here she comes. Kiss her, Mary, and pray for her; she will want all your prayers.”

Honey had removed all signs of travel, and her frock of brown cambric and chocolate lace, her hat, the bunch of deep orange roses tucked in her belt were all fresh as her own young womanhood, and I knew that her

indefinable air of race and breeding would exasperate to the point of madness, the gutter-bred woman to whom we went.

The girl was too brave to wince when Mary's tears fell on her face ; she had herself completely in hand as we drove swiftly away, but as we went, I could not but think of that other drive we had taken together, when, all exalted with love, and joy, and pride in Holford, we had gone to meet him . . . and now what were we doing but track a mean hound to his lair ? For it came to this : I was taking her in cold blood to behold her degradation, to see her love put violently to the death, nor knew I if it were so deep in her heart's fibres, but in killing it, she killed herself.

It was impossible that she should know what lay at the end of our journey, but her imagination was keen, and perhaps she fancied worse things, for once she said quietly—

"He is dead?" Then, as I shook my head, she made no further question, and all too quickly we were there—Dawson stood by the door, and a touch from him set it wide. When I had paid the cabman, I took Honey's hand, and said—"Come !"

As we climbed the dingy stairs, I heard voices above, louder this time than on the last occasion, coarser too, as Holford's voice was more unconstrained even than the woman's, for he had let himself go.

The door stood partly open. Whom had they to fear? For Ben Cassilis was dead, Honey in Devon, Dawson's claws were cut, the woman of the house a paid dependant, and Holford's whole base nature broke out, and revelled, and wallowed in the triumph of the orgy of that hour.

Through the aperture (ourselves in darkness) we saw the woman sitting on Holford's knee, with the easy comfort of long habit, and the mark of the beast was on both their faces. Gross she was, and bland; the great coarse nostrils, the upturned nose, reeked of the pavement. The remains of a vulgar feast were on the table, a black bottle and glasses were at his elbow.

“Now I'll have no nonsense, mind,” he was saying. “I'll put you into a decent place, but the first time I find you out, you'll clear.”

The woman laughed.

"Then you'll have to come often," she said.

"I will," he said, savagely and thickly. "She talks too much ; it is a relief to get to you. I hate a clever woman."

She purred over him in her own feline, sensual way, and for a while they discussed the extent of Honey's fortune.

"I wonder what *she* is doing now?" she said. A low woman always loves to talk familiarly and impudently of the clean one.

"Howling for that dead fat-head, very likely," he said. "They were as alike as two peas in a pod—green, confiding idiots. Neither of them had ever seen life. He looked no different dead, to when he was a live, overgrown vegetable."

"Curse him!" said the woman impartially, and freed an arm to pour herself out some more gin. "Lor', his face, when he found old Willie instead of you! But a fine man," and she nodded approvingly and tipsily.

She appeared to me quite consistent in her methods of dealing with Holford. Her atrocious blandness, her complaisance, her habit of always agreeing with him, of en-

couraging the very worst in him, alternated with fits that roused the brutal, possessive instinct in the man, as now.

“Well, he’s *dead*,” said Holford exultantly. “And I’ll come here, or to the new place, when I like, and how I like. *She* won’t listen to anybody, and once we’re married, it doesn’t matter if she does.”

“She’s a silly, conceited fool,” jeered the woman. “She actually swallowed it when you told her you killed Hammersley for *her*—not me.”

“The brute had no right to sneak round after you when my back was turned,” said Holford in a sullen fury. “The Bury woman may have as many men after her as she likes; a wife’s one thing, a mistress is another.”

The woman laughed again. She had him fast in the mortice of habit; she would loose her hold of him when death broke it, or to please herself—not before.

“And if you have a kid?” she said, with a kind of spurious jealousy, for it was so clear—and perhaps this was the most galling to Honey—that she felt none.

It was in her infidelity that she had the

surest hold on Holford—just as frequently, not a woman's faithfulness to him, but his infidelities to her, constitute a wife's strongest claim on a man.

"And if you have a kid," repeated the woman, "can't you hear?"

"All the better—I'll be out with you every night."

"Good job both ours died," said the woman gloomily, for she was fast reaching the tipsily lachrymose stage.

"Awful good luck, especially as they weren't mine."

The woman laughed. For sheer brutality Zola himself could not have beaten the scene, if Honey had been an angel from heaven, she would not have had a chance with this man and this woman, with their violent passions, and completely dehumanised hearts.

"I'll send her down to Burghfield for half the year," he said. "And you can always come to Exeter when I am forced to be at the cursed place."

And then—then they talked Honey, and in their talk, all their black grudge against her came out, for they felt for her all the



hatred that fine qualities arouse in the base ; and she saw herself through the lens of two coarse minds, all that was most precious in her derided, her every action travestied, muddled, exaggerated, out of focus ; and she went through the double shame of seeing herself thus, and my seeing her also.

Looks, character, temperament—they took her over every inch of the ground, devastated and laid bare the very holy of holies of her thoughts, to which a woman admits the man she loves. And if Honey blenched, it was with the sheer physical horror of the thing—her spirit, the hand that held my hand never faltered ; beyond the whiteness of her cheek she gave no sign.

“It was child’s play deceiving the idiot. I’ve been *more* than a match for her !” Holford concluded in triumph ; and then Honey let my hand go, and stepped forward into the room, and faced them.

“You are right,” she said ; “you have been more than a match for me.”

She had the look, the clear address, the pure voice and intonation that marked the gulf between her and the creature clutching

Holford's neck, and he made an effort to rise, but Honey held her hand up—never had I seen her look so proud and beautiful—and silenced him.

"Do not move. You are worthy of each other, and you"—she addressed the unspeakable woman—"are more than welcome to him! Ben——" I came to her side, and at sight of me, the blood, and bone, and muscle of the man seemed to dissolve—he thought me dead—he had *seen* me dead, and he suddenly buckled up, his head fell over on the woman's shoulder, and I dragged Honey out, and pulled the door sharply to, before a heavy fall shook the house.

I think Honey was blind; even with my arm to hold her up, she groped her way out . . . but when we were half-way home, she spoke.

"Oh! my God," she said in a strange, cracked voice (would the youth ever come back to it?), "how many poor girls are drifting, have drifted to the fate from which you have saved me! . . . I saw it all in a flash, like a play in which scene rapidly succeeds scene, with no waits between. . . . I seemed to hold

my little baby in my arms—and I *love* children—and he off with her, the pair jeering at me, talking me over . . . what did she do with those poor children—kill them? I saw my home smirched and soiled, he coming from her to me. . . . Oh! he would have taken me to church—I might have been the mother of his child, but I would never have been wife, I should never have had a husband; whatever I did, would have been wrong. . . . Ben, if it had been *you* that died, my life must have been a foul, living hell!”

It was true. I had seen it so often. Ripple after ripple, wave upon wave, I had seen joyous girlhood, glorious womanhood, advance gaily on the rock of manhood, only to be dashed back broken.

Ignorance, Nature, love, flung these women on that rock; the corrupt, the subtle, never braved it. Honey was only one of millions, and I had seen many lives beaten out in that way, therefore had I tried to save her.

I had never known a woman but I had found some good in her; I had never known a man who was not partly brute, and more or less unfair in his dealings with women, who

was not, according to his mood, too tender, or too hard upon her.

"Mary is ill," I said, as we neared Brook Street, and I held Honey's hand fast. "For her sake, try and think, not of what you are suffering to-night, but of what you have escaped—that all men are not blackguards because you have had the misfortune to come across one."

Her hand tightened on mine. She did not speak again, and when we arrived, she got out quickly, and walked without assistance into the house, where confusion reigned, for in our absence Mary had been, and was, very ill, and her doctor was now in attendance on her.

They would not admit me, but when I saw him, he, after the manner of doctors, flouted me in a case that was not surgical, and merely said there was no further danger, and left. But when I saw Mary, the colour of her lips, the smell of certain drugs, told me that it had been a seizure of the heart; yet she refused to be tragic, or admit that anything was really amiss, inquiring eagerly as to how Honey and I had fared, and of all that had happened that night, growing visibly stronger as she listened.

At the end of the story she nodded her head with intense triumph and satisfaction, as if I had brought her the very best news in the world.

"Let her come to me," she said presently, and I went away as Honey entered, not daring to look in her face.

## CHAPTER XX

“A spirit intense and rare, with trace on trace  
Of passion, impudence, and energy.  
Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck.

A deal of Ariel, just a streak of Puck.”

HONEY came out of that awful experience cured, and took up a workable, everyday life where she had laid it down ; was once more the Squire, and, looking the County squarely in the face, declined to listen to its rejoicings at her escape, though I knew that she thanked God for it without ceasing.

The sordid, hateful page of Holford, that intrusion of another world on hers, was torn abruptly out of her life, and with it, the cessation of that struggle between physical attraction, and mental disgust that had distracted her throughout the brief period of her engagement to him, though the terror of knowing what she had so narrowly missed would remain with her to her dying day.

If her vanity had been equal to Holford's, which was like a great wound that embraced him from head to heel, so that he would compass heaven and earth to be revenged on the enemy who bruised it, she must have suffered much more keenly, but she had always been too busy fulfilling herself to look in a mirror, and see how she looked while doing it, and a nature so elastic was bound to recover itself quickly.

It was as though her mind were a palimpsest, on which was inscribed a touching and beautiful story, noble too, if very human, and Holford had rubbed those characters out, writing himself all over the page ; but lo ! he had ceased to write, and the original screed came up clear and vivid, and the later inscription faded away as if it had never been.

Moreover the strong-souled, the stout-hearted, who are aware of the dignity of life, the value of time, who have their part as good citizens to play in the game, do not pause for useless lamentations ; and I admired the way Honey took up her burden, and carried it lightly, affecting there was none.

Mary, who rapidly recovered from an ill-

ness that she angrily called a *bêtise*, went back with Honey to Devon, where the girl's fears for her were a smart stimulant to rid her of humiliating thoughts ; and when I went down for a few days late in September, I not only enjoyed excellent sport, but also the cheery evenings when we three sat together after dinner by the fireside, with no dissonant presence to disturb our happiness.

Since last I had been there, my anger, or perhaps only a sense of the futility of things, had left me. Complete serenity had returned, and I walked as to a marching tune, though I saw no victory for myself, ahead — that Honey's battle had been won, contented me.

The whole place breathed a different atmosphere now Holford was out of it, and Mary became once more her old diverting, inconsequent self, or at least the self she had shown before the mask had been pulled aside, and her unexpectedly great affection for me revealed, as well as her great delicacy of health.

Fat women have to be as careful in their conversation as their clothes (I once heard Mary say they've *got* to be casual in their lovers), a *risqué* speech from them is coarse-



ness unadulterated ; but a slender, graceful woman may say appalling things without turning a hair, or making you turn one either—and Mary always amused, never shocked even the “unco guid.”

Voice, manner, dress—all carried out the witty, impersonal attitude, yet at the back of it all, you knew the woman was good, felt that a deep swirl or undercurrent of life was always at work, for the most outwardly candid women are always the most reserved of heart, and like most people who seem to say everything, she really said nothing at all.

Now this is baffling and irritating to ordinary man, who is obviously sulky or glad, but seldom pretends to what he does not feel ; yet for all her gaiety, I noted a change in Mary. Was the tired spirit in her growing clearer—the spirit at first too full of life and individuality, that for ever “came out by the same door where in it went?” Now it seemed to me, that other doors were opening to her that had been closed before, and one day a mighty *travailler* in souls had remarked to me of her—

“Thank God, she’s on the right platform !”

just as if she were catching an excursion train to heaven.

One night, as we sat before the great recessed fireplace, the blazing logs piled high in the dog-grate, and illuminating our faces, leaving the oak-panelled hall in shadow, she held forth on a variety of topics, and in the first place declared she found human nature pretty much the same all the world over—furtively contumacious.

"We are all, more or less, like the bhoys of Slattery's Mounted Foot, fond of

" 'Playing rebel tunes  
*Cautiously* on the dhrum. '

Sometimes we forget, and play too loud ; then we are found out, and punished," she said.

"But if you do a thing that is wrong, and you know it, it doesn't matter how many other people know," said Honey.

"My dear child, don't we all frankly despise our neighbours—criticise the shape of their double chins and stomachs, their choice of wives, and children, and pictures, yet lay out our lives to please 'em ?"

"That you never did," cried Honey in-

dignantly. “Nor do I. Nevertheless, if one-half the things we regret and fear in sleepless hours of the night, were printed for our friends to read, there’s hardly one would survive the shock to his friendship. Most people’s lives are remorse for yesterday, fear for to-morrow. What a *rest* death must be !”

“One would think to hear you talk that you have lived a life of undetected crime,” I said.

“I’ve been selfish ; perhaps that’s the worst crime of all. And I haven’t put my share of love into the general pool ; I mean I have only loved to please myself, not others.”

“Love is good,” I said slowly, “but is it the whole of life ? Someone has said that as it now stands, love is the thread of interest upon which we string the beads of life—some dark, some glittering. Surely the new genius will discover that life itself is the thread, and love only one, though perhaps the most beautiful, of the beads.”

“Ben,” said Mary, “you are just like a shaggy, blundering Newfoundland, and when you do think of anything, it’s sure to be wrong. And the man who said that, was even more wrong than you are.”

"We are all," I said, "self-conscious individualists, who hear in the busy mart no voices stronger, more melodious, than our own. This overbearing, tyrannic self-consciousness refuses to allow us to absorb life, and the things of life, from some higher ground than that which we ourselves occupy. And why should you try to grab the whole necklace?" I added grumblingly. "A woman's always wanting something she hasn't got."

"But that's a woman!" cried Mary. "What you said is all right for a man, but where do the woman's other beads come in? That *one* bead to her means home—the family life, the little high chair close by the mother's side, the young things growing up, the old growing down to them. All the other beads are of glass, slip through her hands, and are broken."

Honey's eyes were shining. I seemed to hear the passion of her voice as she cried out on that dreadful night, "I *love* little children."

"When her youth, and the lost gold of her hair, oh, magic! come back in her children," said Mary, "how can you reckon that a woman has lost everything? None of the other beads

give you back these. After all, is the life eternal for us *here* on earth—in *our children*? If so, I shall have none.”

“Now you are wandering from the point, as usual,” I said, sticking to my text. “I still maintain that love is all very well in its right place—a part of life, not the whole. Let a man *for the time* abandon himself entirely to it, just as to fighting, or money-making, but don’t ask him to surrender the inmost recesses of his heart. There must be a wise reserve, and a woman will grow to love it, to respect it. Entire nakedness of soul is no more attractive than that of body; it requires a veil between to satisfy our sense of beauty, and for my part, I don’t want beauty and luxuries of that sort—they make one ‘soft,’ unfit for the struggle of life.” I spoke roughly, brutally even, but there should be no mistake about it, that when I passed out of Honey’s life, as I shortly would, she should have no delusions about my entire indifference—save as friends—to all the women I had ever known.

“Man is not meant to be happy,” I continued, “but if he have progressed one single step up, instead of down, he has done his work

well—he has left his mark on posterity; for he has not only contributed his one perfect fragment to the mosaic of life, but his supreme effort towards the right will reappear from time to time in countless generations."

"He won't if he doesn't marry the right woman," said Mary crossly. "The whole question resolves itself into whether he and she suit each other—are complete contrasts in colouring and disposition——" she stopped abruptly, but looked neither at Honey nor at me. "Also," said Mary, "the woman who reduces her worries to adjectives, not commentaries on the vices of her husband, is a jewel, and undoubtedly the original person named in the Bible whose price was far above rubies. Though, after all," she added discursively, "the Book of Lamentations was written by a man!"

"And when Job described himself as being poured out like water, he certainly had the Flu," cried Honey, eager to divert the conversation into safer channels.

But Mary was not to be switched off in this fashion, she always followed her mood. "The fatal honeymoon should be abolished,"

she said. “The word is derived from the old Teutonic custom of drinking honey wine, ‘hydometel,’ for thirty days after a marriage. Attila the Hun is said to have died from drinking an inordinate quantity of this very intoxicating liquor at a wedding-feast—and I wonder how many romances have been killed by the moon without the wine since?”

Honey did not try to guess, nor did I, and Mary went on—

“But, after all, the wives of Attila and his crew, got a grasp of their husbands’ characters at the very beginning, that they must have been fools indeed if they did not utilise afterwards—for most men are only natural when they are drunk! Drink up to a certain point abstracts a man’s mind, he becomes his real self. That is why some of the finest literary work has been done under influence of drink or opium—if the man’s mind were essentially great, be it understood, not unless.”

Instinctively I thought of Holford, of how it is in the way a man takes his wine that you may know him. At a certain point, a gentleman is at his best and mellowest ;

a glass too much or too little, and his **full** flavour is missed. But Holford **never** reached that point of perfection; he became first affectionate, then morose, after that his manners failed entirely, and the breed of the man came out. Then my mind reverted to something in Mary's last speech, and I said—

"Why do you women always crow over anything in a man that puts him in your power? Are we always to assume the attitude of adversaries to each other, with only brief truces for real or pretended love?"

"Oh, women are all right," said Mary unkindly. "Her attitude is always one of tenderness towards you wretches—it's man who makes all the trouble. It's my belief the great Protagonist has long ago declined the responsibility of the strutting biped by which He spoiled, hoping to complete creation. The creature has got clean beyond Him, and is amenable to no will but his own—as it is, he is the misshapen product of his own laws. Undoubtedly he *had* a place in the original scheme, but has deliberately lost the way, or doesn't even try to find it again."

"*Mary, Mary!*" cried Honey in horror,



“I never knew you really spiteful before—  
and at Ben’s expense, too !”

“Ben’s a fool,” said Mary sharply, and her  
tone would have really vexed me, but that  
I held the key to her exasperation ; “and  
what’s worse, some day he’ll marry one, for  
no woman of taste and sensibility will ever  
look at him.”

“Thank God !” I said heartily. “Long  
ago I made my choice of the two heroines in  
Jane Austen’s book. Sense will cook my  
dinner, and make my shirts in the back-  
woods.”

Mary turned white. She faltered out—

“*Backwoods ?*”

Honey flashed me an indignant glance, and  
I said,

“Some day, Mary, perhaps.”

“Is there no hope that you’ll ever like, or  
be a success in your profession, Ben ?” said  
Mary wistfully, for the dear woman had  
cherished ambitions for me, as women will  
for their nearest male belongings.

“None,” I said. “I don’t believe in  
medicine—I hate surgery, having nerves and  
—a heart. It is only the butcher who will kill

ful  
ever  
time  
his  
be  
o

patient after patient on the hospital table, and shout 'Next, please,' with perfect indifference, who has a chance of acquiring skill as he goes, and becoming a successful, we will not say a great surgeon. Then the jealousy, the radically opposite opinions of any two doctors or more on any one case—all are disheartening features of a really noble profession, and I have more than once thought of chucking the whole thing, and trying my luck abroad."

"So that is where the cooking and shirt-making wife comes in," said Mary, making a plucky stand against the shock my slip of the tongue had given her. "She won't be good to look at; the working hand is not the boudoir one, and lots of daintinesses will go by the board till you won't even miss them—God help you! Still, the woman provided with frills and soaps and scents has to pay. We all pay in the long run."

For a while we were all silent, then Mary broke out—

"There's a lot in luck, or why does everything fall into the lap of one man, and a better than he, become a bone that Fate gnaws at till his dying day?"

“But I don’t mean to be gnawed at,” I said, and kissed her thin hand. “I mean to be a rattling good animal. Honestly, I’ve tried to be clever, and I can’t.”

“If you were my son,” said Mary, retaining my hand, “you would not leave me, but stay to tuck me safely up in my last little bed.”

“My dear,” I said, “if I were your husband, I should stay. If I were your son, I should have to go.”

“Do you remember Buchanan’s lines on his mother’s death?” she said, and repeated them—

“When the life-thread was spun  
From the blood in her breast,  
She look’d on her son,  
Smiled, and rocked him to rest.

“How swift the hours run  
From the east to the west!  
Erect stood the son,  
And the mother was blest.

“Yet, lo! all is done!  
(’Twas, God, Thy behest!)  
In his turn the grey son  
Rocks the mother to rest!

“All is o’er, ere begun!  
Oh, my dearest and best,  
Sleep in peace till thy son  
Creepeth down to the breast!”

I heard a low sound, but before I could tell if it were the sound of Honey weeping, the girl had crossed over, and hidden her face on Mary's shoulder.

"The two most beautiful things on earth," said Mary dreamily, "are the baby's smile to its mother, and, in second childhood, the mother's smile to her child. The dawning recognition, the exquisite content, there is nothing to touch them."

For a while she smoothed Honey's brown head, looking over it at a picture of "Gipsy," dimly seen on the wall.

"How happy she looks! . . . It must be nice to go before the wine in the cup sinks low. Yet it's humiliating to reflect that we may go through the supremest spiritual suffering—die a thousand deaths from unsupportable anguish—yet recover, while a slight accident to our physical machinery will hurry us out of the world, often without pain, at a moment's notice. That is the ideal death. But those who go slowly—I have my own theory about them: that when we say they wander, we lie. The barriers are down; what they once loved and lost is *near* . . . the

hand beckoning to the shadows in the room, calls to itself real people in the old likeness that they knew, more and more real as death brings them closer. Else why that look of joy on the faces of those who go conscious, as at a face that we do not see, but they *know*? How could they look like that for strangers?”

For a while the silence was unbroken save for the little flame-sounds in the burning logs, then Mary said—

“Why should not the gates of the spiritual world be thrown wide, and a flood of light from scientific investigation illuminate the dim obscurity which now surrounds our future life? We take by faith nowadays what some day may be verified by exact knowledge.”

“I’d rather take it on faith,” I said.

“And the idiotic thing is to think that we matter when we go,” said Mary briskly. “We don’t—everything goes on just the same as before. After all, what is life?—

“‘A little rule, a little sway,  
A sunbeam in a winter’s day,  
Is all the proud and mighty have  
Between the cradle and the grave.’”

## **"HONEY"**

But I knew she mattered a great deal to Honey when I saw the girl's averted face, as, without wishing us good night, she hastened away.

## CHAPTER XXI

“ Say not ‘ a small event ’ ! Why small ?  
Costs it more pain than this ye call  
A ‘ great event ’ should come to pass  
From that ? Untwine me from the mass  
Of deeds which make up life, one deed  
Power shall fall short in, or exceed ! ”

**L**IFE may be a mission, or it may not, but God and Nature never intended it to be a martyrdom, and when Honey came up to Mary early in November, I found her an infinitely more lovable girl than when I knew her first. She faced the music in town with apparently as gay an unconcern as she had faced the country ; she was at her best, and her original bent of character showed itself, now that the paralysis of her will in the struggle between her better and lower nature were over.

There is a spiritual beauty, a beauty of suffering, of a struggle through pain to a higher one, that will shine through the clay

and glorify it, until, as one of the greatest painters long ago said, often such spiritual grace becomes the only form of loveliness that satisfies our eyes, making mere beauty of form and colour distasteful to us.

Some such charm had come to poor Honey lately, together with a keener sensibility to the suffering of others. It is when we have lost the selfish serenity of perfect health, when we are nervous, trembling to each suggestion of pity, of kindness, that we feel for others, because we feel for them through ourselves; but when we are well and happy, often our nerves are of steel, and our sympathies are calloused through and through.

The best men in Mary's set, shy of the house in Holford's time, closed round Honey, and quarrelled over her, not for her wealth, as many of them were far richer than she, but because they had the wit to see her worth and naturalness—it was the disposition, the heart of her, that shone through her body, and gladdened every soul with whom she came in contact, for men will always prefer a woman who feels deeply, to one who carries a cherry-stone in her breast.



I was a great deal in Brook Street during those November and December days that her brightness, and the company she brought about her, made to pass so cheerily ; and it amused me to watch the play, observe the humours of her court, and Mary delighted in doing so also, and never felt out of it ; she did not speak of age, or growing old, she was young inside all the way along.

“ You see,” as she remarked one day, “ I’m not like Sarah, who was lamenting the other day, that she could not go to the furrier’s, and come up perfectly fresh and new, as her sables do under the rattan ; and I don’t, like so many people, feel that the excessive exuberance of youth exasperates me by its waste, because, you know, I started with such a lot myself, and it has lasted well out.”

If she grew frailer daily, her spirit but burned the brighter, and brave Honey would never by look or word, even to me, admit that Mary was not very well indeed, only I saw how jealously she guarded her against fatigue, how vigilantly she watched her. I could not believe that this was the belligerent, passionate girl, at odds with the whole world,

I had first met in that very house, a wreath of green leaves above her wilful brow, her red mouth curved into scornful anger with the world, and every thing and person in it, save Holford.

And yet—and yet—did Honey ever come to love me, I knew that with her temper and mine, we would have to come to close grips at last, before we settled down into good lovers and working comrades.

And if Mary's eyes sometimes asked me an earnest, even pathetic question, I had no answer to give her, though I would have given much to comfort her, for to her had come the time when, no longer measuring her powers by her desires, and over-estimating them, she said, "I *will* do this and that," she became as a little child, depending on the love and pity of others, knowing that she would not depend in vain.

But her intellect burned bright and clear, and there was no outward sign of disease upon her. She wanted light and laughter up to the very end, and, as she confided to me, anticipated death with that same eager curiosity which had distinguished her life, her only

fear being lest blindness fell on her, so that she might miss the actual moment of passing, that she might not be able to *see*.

And if Honey watched Mary, Mary watched the girl in those brief eclipses when the sun did not shine, nor love, and life was horrible, for Honey had that eerie possession—call it a gift, or a curse, as you will—of mental vision, of being able to call up before her, vivid as life, the scenes through which she had passed ; and often her eyes were blank, the girl gone, the seer living over again the agony of one shameful hour.

Then the blood would mount hotly to her face, her hands would clench, and I knew that the bitterness of her mortification was indestructible, unassuaged ; that she found it impossible to drink the cup of humiliation to the dregs, and be in her proud, careless self-respect, as sure of herself as she had been before.

Holford’s name was never mentioned in Brook Street. Personally we never saw, never heard of him ; but Dawson kept him in sight on his own account, and from time to time enlightened me as to that gentleman’s pro-

ceedings. Incidentally I heard that the woman with the broken finger had deserted him to set up house with her favourite bully, that Holford made no pretence of resuming music lessons, but was to be seen about with an *èblouissante* and richly gemmed Jewess (she wore no gloves) of fifty-five, who kept him too short of pocket-money to enable him to stray far from her side. The most decent members of the massed battalions of his female friends regarded him coldly, for he not only had no money, but it was felt that his losing Honey, and, incidentally, a perfect house in which to entertain them, was due to some especial piece of stupid villainy on his part, and while they admired him as knave, no one pities the mistakes of a fool. He had been clever up to a certain point, then bungled, obeying some universal law that mostly evens things up between rascals and honest men. Still, he yet might have pulled round, righted himself (for men are not as leopards with their spots: they can, and do, change their moral ones if they will to do it); but a man's up-bringsings tell in later life—it takes strong wings to cleave the murk out into the open,

and Holford did not even try. He had always done the things that he liked to do first, and those that he *had* to do last, and there was not time for both, so the costly game had spelled ruin in the long run.

Honey had found a purchaser for the Piccadilly house—everything seemed to be just as before Holford came into her life, save that she was equipped with a band of new lovers, and if she had been only a little less true, less straight, she would have had all these men by the ears in a trice. I think that sometimes the temptation was great in her to play with their affections—perhaps because the love of the many, will sometimes drive out the rankling shame of the desertion of the one—but she always pulled up in time.

I teased her one night before Mary had come down to dinner about her adorers, but Honey asked me indignantly, did I think there could be any danger in men who remained in town during the hunting and shooting season?

“You forget the autumn Session,” I said, “and that several of your poor sheep are in the House, and forced to remain here.”

"Then they should pair," said Honey crossly; "silly creatures, rung in and out of lobbies like schoolboys, and wasting immortal time!"

Then I realised how great a sacrifice the girl had made in giving up all her winter delights to come and take care of Mary; but I believe she always felt responsible for her friend's break-up, since it was through Holford I took that fatal journey to town. And certainly no child of her own could have been more tender and devoted than was this child of a stranger to Mary, who, if she went no longer into Society, still received quietly, and rejoiced in drawing a crowd about Honey, and dressing her most beautifully on all occasions.

Sometimes the two women would come round and dine with me, and Honey would go on investigating tours, peeping into my books; on one occasion returning to tell me confidentially that she had found out the reason I had not made a success of my profession—it was because I sported a beard, and all the heads of it wore naked chins!

I told her I had known it all along, but could never be quite clear whether laziness or

atavism—all my forefathers had worn beards—were answerable for my sticking to it, but I meant to stick.

“Gigantic creature!” she cried, swinging her slender foot as she perched high on the arm of Mary’s chair, “you frighten your patients. I always get out of the way when I see you coming, for fear you will walk over me.”

“And you,” I said, “some day, earth will relinquish its slight hold of you, and you will ride away on a broomstick, or swing into the sky, curved in the sickle of the moon; or be blown like thistle-down over the rim of this world into the next, and there will be no more Honey for town and country bees.”

“But you would be a country bee,” she cried eagerly, “if you could, wouldn’t you?”

I nodded. The Burghfield life had bitten deep into me, confirming old tastes, and making more intolerable than ever this city life, where your hand is against every man’s, and every man’s hand against you. The miles of closed and shuttered houses at night, with here and there the hovering, terrified shapes of the homeless, bring home to you, perhaps more

forcibly than anything else, the cruelty of those laws within which the prosperous safely dwell. Not a day but I longed for the soft Devonshire air, the round as man, of such an active existence as Honey lived among her neighbours and dependants, fulfilling herself all the way along.

"I'm afraid I am very selfish," said Mary. "But I don't like country doctors ; my own is used to me, you know ; and damp—the country is always damp in November—kills me."

Honey twined an arm round Mary's neck, and stooped down to look deep in her eyes ; her own were true, true and tender then, as no other eyes I ever saw ; then she fell to stroking Mary's face softly, and Mary closed her eyes, smiling as one secure and happy under the touch of those gentle fingers.

"It's just like stroking little young birds' feathers," said the girl softly, and then we saw that Mary had suddenly fallen asleep ; but Honey went on with those birdlike touches, her face sad, yet beautiful, as the faces of ministering women are. Very white and shadowy looked Mary, with her blue eyes



closed, hair and dress exquisitely dainty as usual ; but I dared not meet Honey’s eyes, and so for a while the room was silent as the grave.

Mary presently awoke as quickly as she had fallen asleep, and vowed that Honey, by her passes and incantations, had bewitched her. Presently she sent the girl for a book out of my library that I knew had never been in it, and turning suddenly to me, said,

“ Ben, you love Honey, why will you not speak ? ”

“ Honey is rich. I am poor,” I said. “ If it were the other way round——”

I paused.

“ But you *do* love her,” insisted Mary.

“ For her bravery, for her unselfishness, for the way she has faced the world, flung the dead past behind her—but Honey the woman? Even if we were equal in fortune, even if she loved me—and I have no information on that point—I am not sure that I would dare *let* a woman come into my life.”

“ Cold - blooded . monster ! ” cried Mary, addressing the ceiling. “ While you’re deciding the amount of genuflection she is to go

through to win you, another man will cut in, and carry her off."

"She will not be in a hurry," I said equably, and just then Honey peeped in, remarking that having been sent out of the room on a fool's errand, she would be glad to know if we had quite concluded our conversation about herself.

"Mary," I said, "is anxious that you should marry. Now you have dancing after you a sample of pretty well every profession, or way of killing time—which do you prefer?"

Honey laughed, standing tall and slim before us, her hands lightly clasped behind her back.

"I will have men to make love to me," she said, "men to make wretched, men to put me through every pleasant thing I want to do; but I will not spoil it all by marrying any one of them. I will live my life on the lines of a man as much as I can, but I will not be as wicked as a man, though, to tell you a secret, I have only just missed being very bad indeed! If I make a face"—she suited the word to the deed—"I've got half a dimple in my chin; if

it had been a whole one, I should have gone helter-skelter to the dogs!”

There was a fine colour in her brown cheek, she carried her head high, then she suddenly exclaimed—

“Oh! I would never dare to begin to be bad, for if I did, I should never stop!”

## CHAPTER XXII

“Came the relief : ‘What, sentry, ho !  
How passed the night thro’ thy long waking ?’  
‘Cold, cheerless, dark—as may befit  
The hour before the dawn is breaking.’

“‘No sight ? No sound ?’ ‘No ; nothing save  
The flower from the marshes calling ;  
And in your western sky above  
An hour ago a star was falling.’

“‘A star ? There’s nothing strange in that.’  
‘No, nothing ; but, above the thicket,  
Somehow it seemed to me that God  
Somewhere had just relieved a picket.’”

**T**HUS waned November and December,  
and on Christmas night, after the  
happiest of evenings with Honey and myself,  
Mary died in her sleep.

It was Honey who found her, lying with  
face peacefully framed in the hollow of the  
arm curved over her head, her blue eyes  
closed, and a smile on her lips, lovely,  
elusive, that seemed to mock us with its

exceeding happiness, to pity us even that we were living, to forbid our tears as a wrong done to that shining immortality which she had put on in such glad haste. . . .

Yet as we stood beside her, Honey wept like a forlorn child, for she was young, and she had lost her friend and counsellor, and there were none to replace her, I, least of all, and when Mary lay like a little white ivory saint in her snowy casket, with the flowers she loved scattered sparsely about her, and violets in her waxen hands, Honey sat beside her for hours together, “learning lessons,” as she called them.

Cold, cold, were Mary’s lips and little chin, but Honey never shrank from them. She could not have enough of that silent company, and came away unwillingly to eat a little, to sleep less, and at early morning, at darkest night, she was found beside her friend, with no tears in her eyes—rather a glad shining, so eloquent was Mary’s face of a joy she had never known on earth—Mary, who had been so careless, so flippant of speech, but—who had kept her ideals.

Many, many things Mary taught her in

those quiet hours ; many a film was brushed away from Honey's mind, many a snare from her feet. Words she had spoken, deeds she had done, did not ring true to her then ; and in this close companionship with death, life showed clearer to her, and the meaning of true love, and many other matters to which she had been purblind, thinking she saw. Of the good that came to her then, of the right influence it was to exercise on her after-life, who shall measure its strength and value ? Wayward she might be, and often passionate, but the real worth of her would be founded henceforward as on a rock.

Sometimes I came, and sat beside her ; we rarely spoke, only looked at our beloved, and almost smiled with her for company—it was as though she wanted us to share her happiness, to tell us her curiosity was satisfied, and she *knew*. And as we sat there together, perhaps, like Honey, I too "learned lessons" from Mary.

But once Honey spoke.

"You see," she said very softly, "she pretended, dear Mary, she was ashamed to let people know how good she was, and how

tender her heart, so she sharpened her tongue, and often said bitter things, when she must have wept if she had said kind ones. She preferred that she should be thought worldly, heartless, anything but her true self—as she is now.”

We looked for a while at Mary’s face, and I knew that Honey spoke truth.

“And I must not pretend,” said the girl. “Any good that is in me must shine out to the world, to those I love ; and the bad that is in me, I must not try to cover it up, or call it by other names. I must not pose—to pose means to try and appear something that one is not, something intended to confuse and deceive. You never posed, Ben ; you never will—you are too true. That is why Mary leaned on you, and loved you.”

To both of us the pang was great when the moment of parting came, and hidden away was the face upon which no shadow of change had come, and only the peace had deepened. And presently we took her to where her last bed was made, and sorrowfully we left her there, and went back to the house that seemed one eager, hushed waiting for the sound of her step and voice.

Her will was read by the lawyer in the library, and though many of Mary's relations were present, no one seemed surprised or angry when it became known that she had left me the whole of her large fortune, with the exception of legacies to her poorer relatives and servants.

I looked across at Honey, who sat with wan cheeks, and downcast eyes, too absorbed in her grief to even notice or rejoice at my good fortune; and with a thunderous rush of pulses I suddenly realised all that she had become to me—all that I had not dared to *let* her become to me till now.

Perhaps the end of the story was clear then to all the others present, for warmth and good wishes were in their eyes and hand-clasps as they departed; and with the last of them went Honey, and I saw her no more that day, nor did I wish it, so short a time had our friend departed in stealth, never to return to us.

"O Death! O Time!—the wicket and the approach." Gently indeed had the wicket been unlatched for our Mary.

I did not see Honey again, as she left early



next morning for Burghfield. Yet I did not hold her guilty of discourtesy in leaving me with no word of farewell, nor did I write to her. In the wood, where she had found her true self, where I had found mine, where we had talked out our hearts, and revealed ourselves the one to the other, I would seek her when the right time came, and we would plan out our lives together.

All my life I had shirked love, denied the necessity of it. Well, one woman will bring home to you what a million others cannot, and it seemed to me that my first real falling in love with her had been when she stood up to her sorrow, and faced it open-eyed, without drugs or sedatives, coming out of the ordeal a better woman than she was before.

In my own room later, I read the sealed letter from Mary that the solicitor had given me, and as if I were already used to calling Honey mine, wished that she were with me to read it too.

“Ben,” it said, “I never would say that prayer in church about sudden death, because I always hoped it would be mine. When you read this, I trust I shall have had my wish.

I *know* that I shall be happier than you ever knew me—and better. I am not one to hedge, but I have always felt that when everything else had failed me (as it has not) I should come to this peace, this blind reliance on an invisible friend who will never leave me. . . . 'And we are one day nearer Thee' sometimes haunts me . . . if only it may be so. . . . I have always found something wanting—does not this longing point to another and fuller existence, of which we all dream, yet no human eye hath seen?

"I have been happy, Ben, and I have loved, but I have not known that supreme joy when body, heart, and soul leap all together to the one man in the fulfilment of perfect love. Sometimes the body is drawn through the senses; sometimes the heart, through pity; often the mind, through keen intellectual sympathy; but seldom indeed do they fuse in one supreme consummation, yet so I dare to think it may be with you and Honey. You loved her all the time, and did not know it, and she loved you most of the time, and did know it—that was the only difference. And don't forget to tell her every day that you love

her ; you men never realise that it is a miracle recreated to the happy woman each time you tell it. And fight selfishness—less in you than most men, but what you have, you must unlearn, lest you teach it to Honey, who never knew it. You have been a happiness and a comfort to me for many years—I have leaned on, and trusted, and loved you, and so good night, dear Ben, and may God keep you and our Honey safe till we meet again.

“MARY.”

## CHAPTER XXIII

“And then

A man becomes aware of his life's flow,  
And hears its winding murmur ; and he sees  
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.  
And there arrives a lull in the hot race  
Wherein he doth for ever chase  
That flying and elusive shadow, rest.  
An air of coolness plays upon his face,  
And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.  
And then he thinks he knows  
The hills where his life rose,  
And the sea where it goes.”

**L**ONG before Honey saw me I saw her, a vivid spot of scarlet in the dazzle of the whiteness of the woods, and I smiled at the vanity that had made her, when no hunting was possible, decide to look her most audacious and fetching in my eyes, in the garb that she knew became her best.

It was three o'clock, hour of brightest sunshine in the short winter's day, as it was the happiest I had ever known in my life, and

light as my heart fell my footfall on the crystal carpet of the woods. The long vistas of trees were of fretted white lace, diamond spangled; the thin pure air acted on my blood like wine, strengthening each fibre of my body, making the keener my joy, and though her back was turned towards me, I saw her tremble, knew that she knew I was nigh.

She stood by the tree where as boy she had averted her face, but drunk in each word of my discourse, and I passed round it, then put my hands on her shoulders, and looked in her eyes.

“Ben,” she stammered, “Ben” . . . and then I took her close in my arms, and there, where we had come to a true understanding of each other’s hearts, we entered into our kingdom of love.

“And Time was not,  
And all the world stood still.”

Did I say I had forgotten women and their ways? I had never known them, till Honey’s arms clasped my neck, till her soft cheek pressed my bearded one, flower-soft lips and cheeks striking the vivid note of her scarlet

coat, while the love in her dark eyes was too lovely, too deep for any words.

"It is a fine hunting morning," I said presently, and we laughed, and came out of heaven, and hand in hand paced the woods that had put on gala robes solely for this wondrous occasion.

We fell at once into Love's usual cross-examination—of how Love first came to us, of where; of all the torments and joys the tricky little rascal had cost us, while at the same moment Father Time, wagging his head, calculated how long our happiness might last.

"I leaned on you; I admired you all the way along," said Honey slowly. "Insensibly you taught me what a true gentleman should be—what a man who is not a gentleman never can be; but I did not *love* you till I heard you were dead. And you?"

"I believe I never forgot you," I said, "from the moment you expressed an ardent desire to smash crockery, to the one when I knew Mary had left me her fortune. Anyway, out leaped the imprisoned giant, and I don't think he has done growing yet."

She put up her hand to smooth my cheek.

“You did that to Mary,” I said, “and looked higher than the trees. God bless her!” And Honey’s lips moved, and for a while she rested very still, with her face hidden on my shoulder.

“Somehow it seems as if we had stepped over her grave to our happiness,” she said, but there were no tears in her eyes, nor in mine; no minor note could quench the glory of our exceeding happiness in that hour.

“What is joy?” I said. “Seize it—cherish it—guard it jealously, lest it escape you. Sweet, I have been snatched out of prison, out of a groove that would have completely demoralised me in the long run, for a surgeon’s work makes him either very human, or very inhuman—and I was fast becoming inhuman. I am set a free man on this green earth that I love—I have everything—best of all, you. But, Honey,” and I took her little face in my big hands, and kissed the brown and scarlet oval of it, the wicked, true eyes, “I shall be often away, shooting, hunting, fishing, coursing—there are both our estates to look after—you will be long hours alone, but you’ll always know I’ll come back.”

"And that is the gist of it all, that you **will** come back," said Honey softly. "A woman will endure all else, but for the man she **loves not** to come back—that's her ruin. And *I* hunt, too! Only you must be Master **of** Hounds now, instead of me."

I shook my head.

"At Garstan, perhaps, not here"; and I'd never make half such a dashing one, for she was a radiant figure in the scarlet and white and black of her hunting livery.

"But, Honey," I said, and held her at arm's length, "for you and I to shake down well together, to be real pals, some things are essential."

I paused, and Honey's eyes danced.

"Life is very much like the crowded London streets, orderly so long as man and beast keep their tempers, make way for one another; but individuality, temper, selfishness, mean a smash. So it is with life. When the invisible policeman within us holds up his hand, we must obey him, or smash somebody, or ourselves. So if we are to be comrades, dear, we must make room for one another all along the way."



“Go on,” said Honey, her eyes still full of *diablerie*.

I floundered a little.

“I shall love you,” I said, “but you must not expect me to tell you so every hour and every day of the year. If I may suggest it, you will practise a little faith in these matters, because you may be sure that my acts will be all right.”

“Anything more?”

Honey’s little white teeth showed in a way reminiscent of a certain brown *gamin* I remembered, and for a moment I lost the thread of my discourse to shut her lips down on those impertinent mockers of my threnody.

“You must never open my letters,” I said, “and I shall never open yours.”

“Marriage,” said Honey demurely, “seems to be a succession of ‘dout’s’ for a woman, and ‘what he ought to do, and doesn’t,’ for a man. Still, woman,” and she murmured softly—

“‘Oh, the gladness of her gladness when she’s glad ;  
 Oh, the sadness of her sadness when she’s sad !  
 But the gladness of her gladness  
 And the sadness of her sadness  
 Are nothing to her badness when she’s bad !’

So perhaps it's just as well to *try* and make me behave !"

I pinched the frustrated dimple in her chin, and said—

"And you mustn't nag, and you mustn't argue."

"I won't ; I'll *do* it," cried Honey instantly.

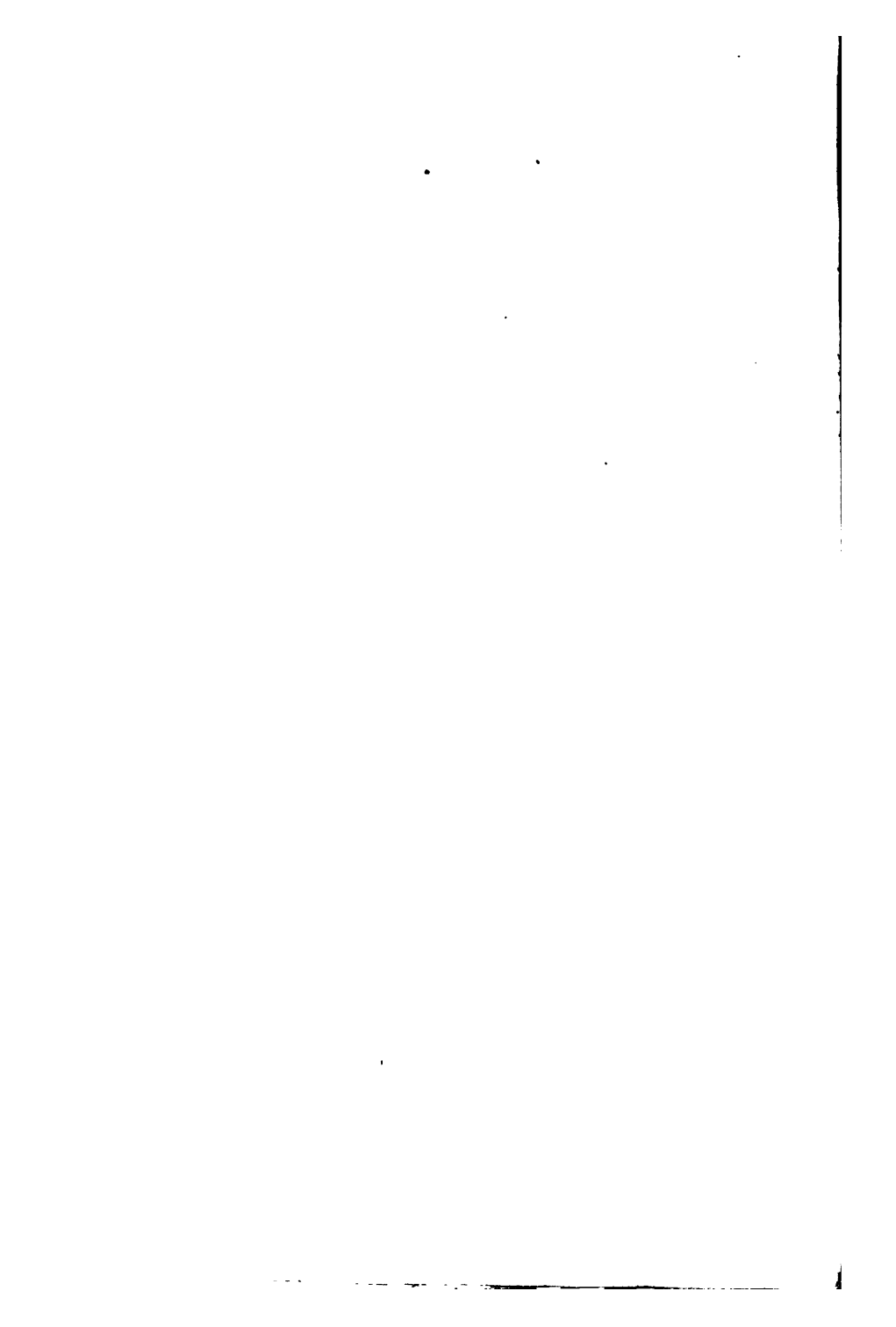
"And I won't have you love the children better than you do me," I said, determined to punish her for her impudence ; and I did, for the velvet peak of her huntsman's cap came down swiftly as the dark curtains of her eyes, to hide her blushes, and she meekly remarked that she thought she would like to go home.

Arm in arm we stepped blithely out, and I supposed her reduced to a proper frame of mind, but presently I discovered her with head turned away, shaking violently.

"I—I was thinking," she said, "how—how handy that great beard of yours will come in when I am angry, and have a mind to pull it !"

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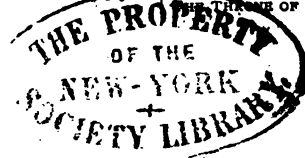
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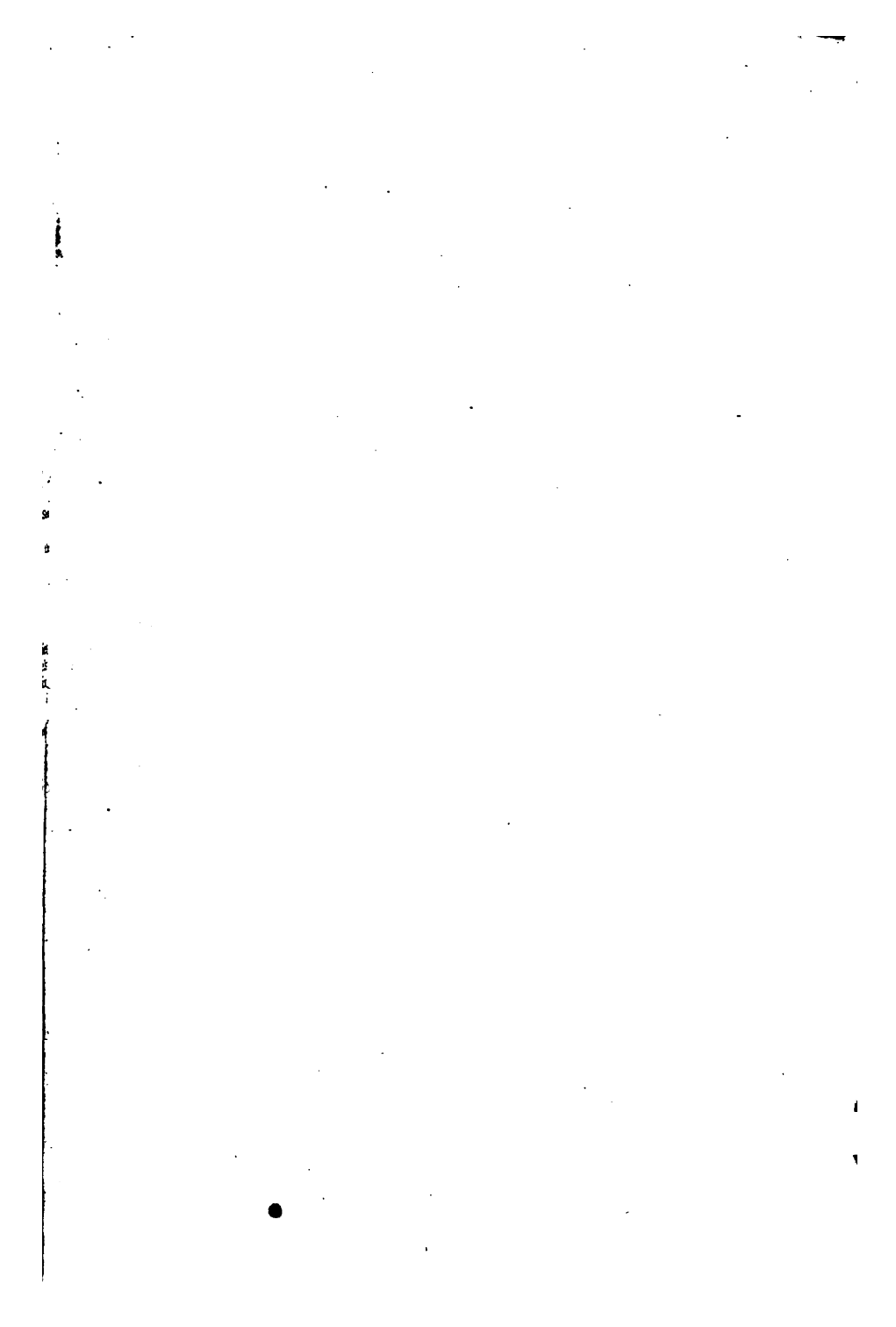
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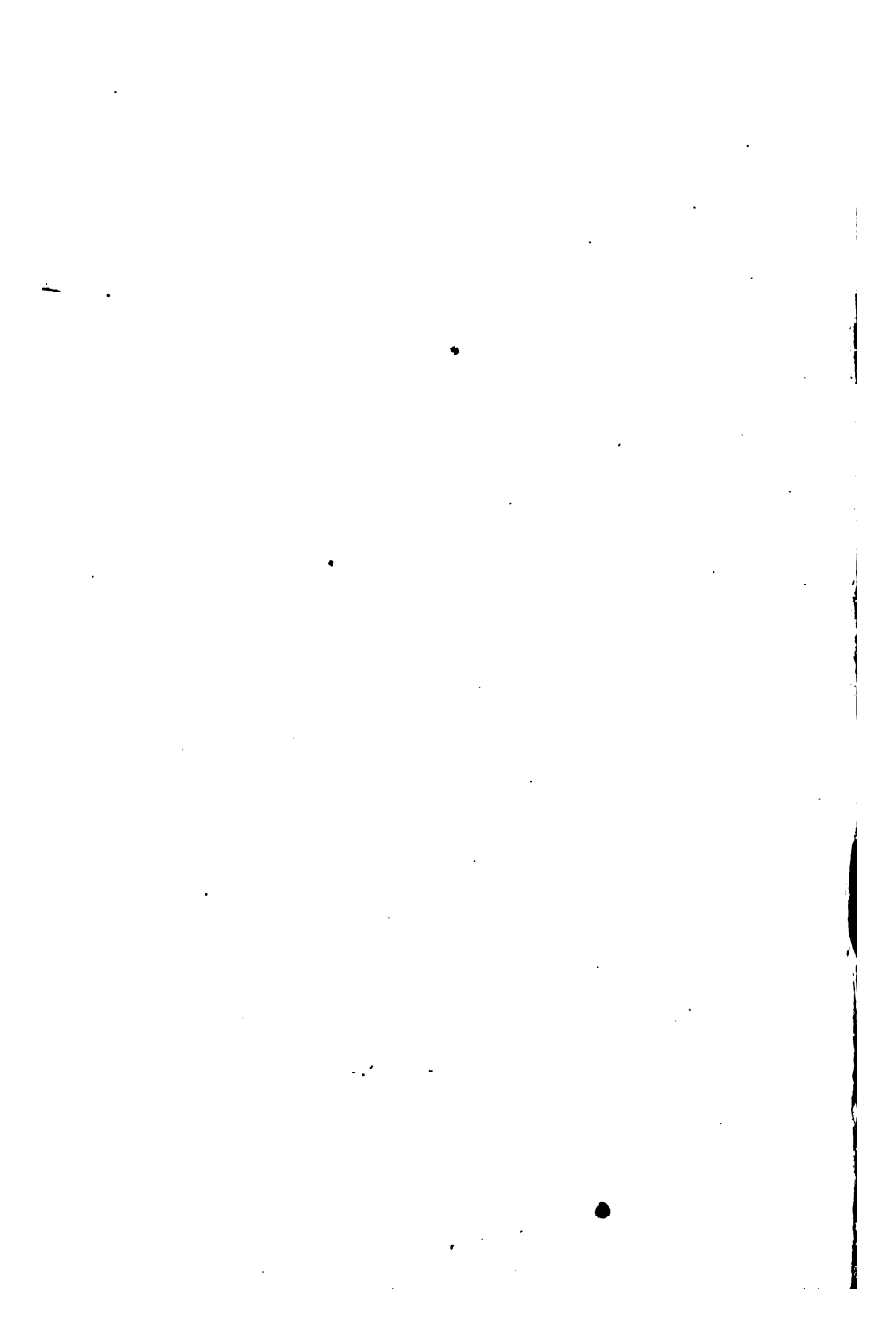
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