THE ROMANCE OF HIS LIFE

AND OTHER ROMANCES

By MARY CHOLMONDELEY

NOTWITHSTANDING: A Novel.

MOTH AND RUST: together with GEOFFREY'S WIFE and THE PITFALL.

THE LOWEST RUNG: together with THE HAND ON THE LATCH, ST. LUKE'S SUMMER AND THE UNDERSTUDY.

UNDER ONE ROOF: A Family Record.

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By MARY CHOLMONDELEY

Author of "Red Pottage."

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TO

PERCY LUBBOCK

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Introduction

IN PRAISE OF A SUFFOLK COTTAGE

Most of these stories were written in a cottage in Suffolk.

For aught I know to the contrary there may be other habitable dwellings in that beloved country of grey skies and tidal rivers, and cool sea breezes. There certainly are other houses in our own village, some larger, some smaller than mine, where pleasant neighbours manage to eat and sleep, and to eke out their existence. But, of course, though they try to hide it, they must all be consumed with envy of me, for a cottage to equal mine I have never yet come across, nor do I believe in its existence.

Everyone has a so-called cottage nowadays. But fourteen years ago when I fell desperately in love with mine they were not yet the rage. The fashion was only beginning.

Now we all know that it is a parlous affair to fall in love in middle age. Christina Rossetti goes out of her way to warn us against these dangerous grey haired attachments.

She says :

"Keep love for youth, and violets for the spring."

I had often read those beautiful lines and thought how true they were, but I paid no more

attention to their prudent advice the moment my emotions were stirred than a tourist does to the word "Private" on a gate.

It amazes me to recall that the bewitching object of my affections had actually stood, forlorn, dishevelled, and untenanted, for more than a year before I set my heart upon it, and the owner good naturedly gave me a long lease of it.

Millionaires would tumble over each other to secure it now. This paper is written partly in order to make millionaires uneasy, for I have a theory, no, more than a theory, a conviction that they seldom obtain the pick of the things that make life delightful.

Do you remember how the ex-Kaiser, even in his palmy days, never could get hot buttered toast unless his daughter's English governess made it for him, and later on chronicled the fact for the British public.

There are indications that a few millionaires and crowned heads have dimly felt for some time past the need of cottages, but Royalty has not yet got any nearer to one than that distressful eyesore at Kew with tall windows, which I believe Queen Caroline built, and which Queen Victoria bequeathed to the nation as "a thing of beauty."

One of the many advantages of a cottage is that the front door always stands open unless it is

wet, and as the Home Ruler and I sit at breakfast in the tiny raftered hall we see the children running to school, and the cows coming up the lane, and Mrs. *A's* washing wending its way towards her in a wheelbarrow, and Mrs. *M's* pony and cart *en route* for Woodbridge. That admirable pony brings us up from the station, and returns there for our heavy luggage, it fetches groceries, it snatches "prime joints" from haughty butchers. It is, as someone has truly said, "our only link with the outer world."

The village life flows like a little stream in front of us as we sip our coffee at our small round mahogany table with a mug of flaming Siberian wallflower on it, the exact shade of the orange curtains. Of course if you have orange curtains you are bound to grow flowers of the same colour.

The passers by also see us, but that is a sight to which they are as well accustomed as to the village pump, the stocks at the Church gate, or any other samples of "still life." They take no more heed of us than the five young robins, who fly down from the nest in the honeysuckle over the porch, and bicker on the foot scraper.

The black beam that stretches low over our heads across the little room has a carved angel at each end, brought by the Home Ruler in pre-war days from Belgium ; and, in the middle of the beam, is a hook from which at night a lantern is suspended, found in a curiosity shop in Kent.

My nephew, aged seven, watched me as I cautiously bought it, and whispered to his mother :

"Why does Aunt Mary buy the lantern when, for thirty shillings, she could get a model engine?"

"Well, you see she does not want a model engine, and she does want a lantern, and it is not wrong of her to buy it as she has earned the money."

Shrill amazement of nephew.

"*What!* Aunt Mary earned thirty shillings! How she must have *sweated* to make as much as that!"

I must tell you that our cottage was once two cottages. That is why it looks so long and pretty from the lane, pushing back the roses from its eyes as it peers at you over its wooden fence. Consequently we have two green front doors exactly alike, and each approached by a short brick path edged with clipped box. Each path has its own little green wooden gate. One of these doors has had a panel taken out by the Home Ruler, and a wire grating stretched over the opening, as she has converted the passage within into a larder.

Now, would you believe it? Chauffeurs, after drawing up magnificent motors in front of the house, actually go and beat upon the *larder* door, when, if they would only look through the iron

grating, they would see a leg of mutton hanging up within an inch of their noses—that is in pre-war days : of course now only sixpenny worth of bones, and a morsel of liver.

And all the time we are waiting to admit our guests at the *other* door, the *open* door, the *hall* door, the *front* door, with an old brass knocker on it, and an electric bell, and a glimpse within of a table laid for luncheon, with an orange table cloth—to match the curtains !

I have no patience with chauffeurs. They observe nothing.

That reminds me that a friend of ours, with that same chauffeur, was driving swiftly in her car the other day, and ran into a butcher's boy on his bicycle. As I have already remarked, chauffeurs never recognize meat when they see it unless it is on a plate. The boy was knocked over. My friend saw the overturned bicycle in the ditch; and a string of sausages festooned on the hedge, together with a piece of ribs of beef, and a pound of liver caught on a sweet-briar, and imagined that they were the scattered internal fittings of the butcher's boy, until he crawled out from under the car uninjured. She did not recover from the shock for several days.

To return to the cottage. I am not going to pretend that it had no drawbacks. There were painful surprises, especially in the honeymoon

period of my affections. Most young couples, if they were honest, which they never are, would admit that they emerged stunned, if not partially paralysed, from the strain of the first weeks of wedded life. I was stunned, but I remembered it was the common lot and took courage. Yes, there were painful surprises. Ants marched up in their cohorts between the bricks in the pantry floor. When we enquired into this phenomenon, behold! there *was* no floor. For a moment I was as "dumbfounded" as the bridegroom who discovers a plait of hair on his bride's dressing table. The bricks were laid in noble simplicity on Mother Earth, no doubt as in the huts of our forefathers, in the days when they painted themselves with wode, and skirmished with bows and arrows. I had to steel my heart against further discoveries. Rats raced in batallions in the walls at night. Plaster and enormous spiders dropped (not, of course in collusion) from the ceilings in the dark. Upper floors gave signs of collapse. Two rooms which had real floors, when thrown into one, broke our hearts by unexpectedly revealing different levels. That really was not playing fair.

Frogs, large, active, shiny Suffolk frogs had a passion for leaping in at the drawing room windows in wet weather. The frogs are my department, for the Home Ruler, who fears neither God nor man, hides her face in her hands and groans when the frogs bound in across the matting; and I, *moi qui vous parle*, I pursue them

with the duster, which, in every well organised cottage, is in the left hand drawer of the writing table.

The great great grandchildren of the original jumpers, jump in to this day, in spite of the severity with which they and their ancestors from one generation to another have been gathered up in dusters, and cast forth straddling and gasping on to the lawn. Frogs seem as unteachable as chauffeurs !

Very early in the day we realised that in the principal bedroom a rich penetrating aroma of roast hare made its presence felt the moment the window was shut. Why this was so I do not know. The room was not over the kitchen. We have never had a hare roasted on the premises during all the years we have lived in that delectable place. We have never even partaken of jugged hare within its walls. But the fact remains : when the window is shut the hare steals back into the room. Perhaps it is a ghost ! ! !

I never thought of that till this moment. I feel as if I had read somewhere about a ghost which always heralds its approach by a smell of musk. And then I remember also hearing about an old woman who after her death wanted dreadfully to tell her descendants that she had hidden the lost family jewels in the chimney. But though she tried with all her might to warn

them she never got any nearer to it than by appearing as a bloodhound at intervals. Everyone who saw her was terrified, and the jewels remained in the chimney.

Is it possible that I have not taken this aroma of roast hare sufficiently seriously! Perhaps it is a portent. Perhaps it is an imperfect manifestation—like the bloodhound—of someone on the other side who is trying to confide in me.

Yes, we sustained shocks not a few, but there was in store for us at any rate one beautiful surprise which made up for them all.

One bedroom (the one with the hare in it, worse luck) possessed an oak floor, fastened with the original oak pins. It had likewise a Tudor door, but the rest of the chamber was commonplace with oddly bulging walls, covered with a garish flowery wallpaper.

We stripped it off. There was another underneath it. There always is. We stripped that off, then another, and another, and yet another. (The reader will begin to think the roast hare is not so mysterious after all.)

We got down at last to that incredibly ugly paper which in my childhood adorned every cottage bedroom I visited in my native Shropshire. Do you know it, reader, a realistic imitaton of brickwork? It seems to have spread itself over Suffolk as well as the Midlands.

After stripping off seven papers the beautiful upright beams revealed themselves, and the central arch, all in black oak like the floor.

We whitewashed the plaster between the beams, scratched the beams themselves till they were restored to their natural colour, and rejoiced exceedingly. We rejoice to this day.

But the hare is still there.

Our cottage is on the edge of a little wood. Great forest trees stand like sentinels within a stone's throw of the house. In front of the drawing room windows is a tiny oasis of mown lawn, bounded by a low wall clambered over by humps of jasmine and montana, and that loveliest of single roses scinica anemone. The low wall divides the mown grass from the rough broken ground which slopes upwards behind it till it loses itself among the tree trunks. Here tall families of pink and white foxgloves and great yellow lupins jostle each other, and it is all the Home Ruler can do to keep the peace between them, and to persuade them to abide in their respective places between stretches of shining ground ivy and blue periwinkle ; all dappled and checkered by the shadows of the over-arching trees.

If you walk down that narrow path between the leaning twisted hollies you come suddenly upon an opening in the thicket, and a paved path leads you into another little garden.

This also has its bodyguard of oaks and poplars on the one side, and on the other the high

hedge dividing it from the lane, over which tilt the red roofs of the cottages.

Within the enclosure a family of giant docks spread themselves in the long grass, and ancient fruit trees sprawl on their hands and knees, each with a rose tree climbing over its ungainliness, making a low inner barrier between the tall trees, and the little low-lying burnished garden in the midst. Here ranged and grouped colonies of rejoicing plants follow each other into flower in an ordered sequence, all understood and cherished by the earth-ingrained hands of the Home Ruler.

Some few disappointments there are, but many successes. Wire worm may get in. Cuttings may "damp off." Brompton stocks may not always "go through the winter." But the flowers respond in that blessed little place. They do their best, for the best has been done for them. If it is essential to their well being that their feet should be shaded from the sun, their feet *are* shaded, by some well-bred low growing plant in front of them, which does not interfere with them. If they need the morning sun they are placed where its rays can pour upon them.

It is a garden of vivid noonday sunshine, when we sit and bask among the rock pinks on the central bit of brickwork ; and of long velvet afternoon shadows : a garden of quiet conversation, and peaceful intercourse, and of endless, endless loving labour in sun and rain.

I contribute the quiet conversation, and the Home Ruler contributes the loving labour ; and,

while we thus each do our share, the manifold voices of the village reach us through the tall hedge : the cries of the children playing by the bridge, the thin complaint of the goats, the jingle of harness, and the thud of ponderous slow steping hoofs, the whistle of the lad sitting sideways on the leading horse ; all the *paisible rumeur* of the pleasant communal life of which we are a part.

Our village is not really called Riff. It has a beautiful and ancient name, which I shall not disclose, but I don't mind telling you that it is close to Mouse Hold,[1] a hamlet in the boggy meadows beyond the Deben ; and not so very far from Gobblecock Hall. Of course if you are not Suffolk born and bred you will think I am trying to be humourous and that I have invented this interesting old English name. I can only say. Look in any good map of Suffolk. You will find Gobblecock Hall on it near the coast. Riff is only a few miles from Kesgrave Church, where you can still see the tombstone of the gipsy queen in the churchyard. The father of one of the oldest inhabitants of Riff witnessed the immense concourse of gipsies who attended the funeral.

Riff is within an easy walk of Boulge, where Fitzgerald lies under his little Persian rose tree, covered in summer with tiny yellow roses. You see how central Riff is. And, if you cross the Deben, and walk steadily up the low hill to that broomy, gorsy, breezy upland, Bromswell Heath,

[1] Probably originally Morass Hold.

then you stand on the very spot where, a little over a hundred years ago, British troops were encamped to await Napoleon. And a few years ago our soldiers assembled there once more to resist the invasion which Kitchener at any rate expected, and which it now seems evident Germany intended.

We in Riff learned the meaning of war early in the day. Which of us will forget the first Zeppelin raid, and later on the sight of torn, desolated Woodbridge the day after it was bombed : the terrified blanched faces peeping out from the burst doorways, the broken smoking buildings, the high piles of shredded matchwood that had been houses yesterday, the blank incredulous faces of friends and neighbours. No doubt our faces were as incredulous as those we saw around us. It seemed as if it could not, could not be ! We had seen photographs of similar havoc in Belgium and France, but Woodbridge ! our own Woodbridge, that pleasant shopping town on its tidal river with the wild swans on it. *It could not be !* But so it was.

Yes, the war reached us early, and it left us late. Riff suffered as every other village in Great Britain suffered. Our ruddy cheerful lads went out one after another. Twenty-two came back no more.

As the years passed we became inured to raids. Nevertheless, just as we remember the first, so

all of us at Riff remember the last in the small hours of Sunday morning, June 17th, 1917.

I was awakened as often before, by what seemed at first a distant thunderstorm, at about 3 o'clock in the morning.

I got up and went downstairs in the dark. By this time the bombs were falling nearer and nearer. As I felt my way down the narrow staircase it seemed as if the trembling walls were no stronger than paper. The cottage shook and shook as in a palsy, and C. and E. and I took refuge in the garden. M. kept watch in the lane. It was, as far as I could see, pitch dark, but their younger eyes descried, though mine did not, the wounded Zeppelin lumber heavily over us inland, throwing out its bombs. Our ears were deafened by the sharp rat-tat-tat of the machine guns, and by our own frantic anti-aircraft fire. In that pandemonium we stood, how long I know not, unaware that a neighbour's garden was being liberally plastered by our own shrapnel. Then, for the second time, the stricken airship blundered over us, this time in the direction of the sea.

When it had passed overhead we groped our way through the cottage, and came out on its eastern side. A mild light met our eyes. The dawn was at hand. It trembled, flushed and stainless as the heart of a wild rose, behind the black clustered roofs of the village, and the low church tower.

And above the roofs, some miles away, outlined against the sky, hung the crippled Zeppelin,

motionless, tilted. We watched it fascinated. Slowly we saw it right itself, and begin to move. It headed towards the coast, but it could only flee into its worst enemy—the dawn. It travelled, it dwindled. The sea haze began to enfold it. The clamour of our gun fire suddenly ceased. It toiled like a wounded sea bird towards its only hope—the sea.

As we watched it fierce wings whirred unseen overhead. Our aeroplanes had taken up the chase.

The Zeppelin travelled, travelled.

What was that?

A spark of light appeared upon it. It stretched, it leaped into a great flame. The long body of the Zeppelin was seen to be alight from end to end.

Then rose simultaneously from every throat in Riff a shout of triumph, the shrill cries of the children joining with the voices of the elders.

And, after that one cry, silence fell upon us, as we watched that towering furnace of flame, freighted with agony, sink slowly to the earth. At last it sank out of sight, leaving a pillar of smoke to mark its passing.

So windless was the air that the smoke remained like some solemn upraised finger pointing from earth to heaven.

No one stirred. No one spoke. The light grew. And, in the silence of our awed hearts, a cuckoo near at hand began calling gently to the new day, coming up in peace out of the shining east.

The Romance of His Life

I HAVE always believed that the exact moment when the devil entered into Barrett was four forty-five p.m. on a certain June afternoon, when he and I were standing at Parker's door in the court at ——s. He says himself that he was as pure as snow till that instant, and that if the *entente cordiale* between himself and that very interesting and stimulating personality had not been established he is convinced he would either have died young of excessive virtue, or have become a missionary. I don't know about that. I only know the consequences of the *entente* aged me. But then Barrett says I was born middle-aged like Maitland himself, the hero of this romance, if so it can be called. Barrett calls it a romance. I call it—I don't know what to call it, but it covers me with shame whenever I think of it.

Barrett says that shame is a very wholesome discipline, a great eye-opener and brain stretcher, and one he has unfortunately never had the benefit of, so he feels it a duty to act so as to make the experience probable in the near future.

On this particular afternoon we had both just bicycled back together from lunching with Parker's aunt at Ely, and she had given me a great bunch of yellow roses for Parker and a melon, and we were to drop them at Parker's. And here we were at Parker's, and apparently he was out or asleep, and not to be waked by Barrett's best cat-call. And as we stood at his door, Barrett clutching the melon, I found the roses were not in my hand. Where on earth had I put them down? At Maitland's door, perhaps, where we had run up expecting to find him, or at Bradley's, where we had stopped a moment. Neither of us could remember.

I was just going back for them when whom should we see coming sailing across the court in cap and gown but old Maitland in his best attitude, chin up, book in hand, signet ring showing.

Parker's aunt used to chaff us for calling him old, and said we thought everyone of forty-five was tottering on the brink of the tomb. And so they mostly are, I think, if they are Dons. I have heard other men who have gone down say that you leave them tottering, and you come back ten years later and there they are, still tottering.

Barrett said Maitland did everything as if his portrait was being taken doing it, and that his effect on others was never absent from his mind. I don't know about that, but certainly in his

talk he was always trying to impress on us his own aspect of himself.

If it was a fine morning and he wished to be thought to be enjoying it, he would rub his hands and say there was not a happier creature on God's earth than himself. He pined to be thought unconventional, and after drawing our attention to some microscopic delinquency, he would regret that there had been no fairy godmother at hand at his christening to endow him with a proper deference for social conventions. If he gave a small donation to any college scheme the success of which was not absolutely assured, he would shake his head and say : "I know very well that all you youngsters laugh in your sleeve at the way I lead forlorn hopes, but it is a matter of temperament. I can't help it."

The personal reminiscences with which his conversation was liberally strewed were ingeniously calculated to place him in a picturesque light. Parker's aunt says that stout men are more in need of a picturesque light than thin ones. Maitland certainly was stout and short, with a thick face and no neck, and a perfectly round head, set on his shoulders like an ill-balanced orange, or William Tell's apple. We should never have noticed what he looked like if it had not been for his illusion that he was irresistible to the opposite sex ; at least, he was always adroitly letting drop things which showed,

if you put two and two together, and he never made the sum very difficult—what ravages he inadvertently made in feminine bosoms, how careful he was, how careful he had *learnt* to be not to raise expectations. He was always pathetically anxious to impress on us that he had given a good deal of pain. But whether it was really an hallucination on his part that he was hopelessly adored by women, or whether the hallucination consisted in the belief that he had succeeded in convincing his little college world of his powers of fascination, I cannot tell you. I don't pretend to know everything like Barrett.

Parker's aunt told Parker in confidence, who told Barrett and me in confidence, that she had once, on his own suggestion, asked Maitland to tea, but had never repeated the invitation, though he told her repeatedly that he frequently passed her door on the way to the cathedral, because he had hinted to mutual friends that a devoted friendship was, alas ! all he felt able to give in that quarter, but was not what was desired by that charming lady.

And now here was Maitland advancing towards us with one of Parker's aunt's yellow roses in his buttonhole.

We both instantly realised what had happened. I had left the roses at his door by mistake. How gratified she would be when she heard of it !

I giggled.

"Don't say a word about them," hissed Barrett, her fervent admirer, as Maitland came up to us.

"Won't you both come in to tea," he said genially. "Parker's out."

We left Parker's melon on his doorstep to chaperon itself, and turned back with him. And sure enough, on his table was the bunch of roses.

"Glorious, aren't they ? " said Maitland, waving his signet ring toward them.

I do believe he had asked us in because of them. He loved cheap effects.

We both looked at them in silence.

"The odd thing is that they were left here without a line or a card or anything while I was out."

"Then you don't know who sent them," said Barrett, casting a warning glance at me.

"Well, yes and no. I don't actually know for certain, but I think I can guess. I fancy I know my own faults as well as most men, and I flatter myself I am not a coxcomb, but still—"

I giggled again. I should be disappointed in Parker, who was on very easy terms with his aunt if he did not score off her before she was much older.

"You are not, I hope, expecting me or even poor Jones (Jones is me) to be so credulous as to believe a man sent them," said Barrett severely. When Maitland was in what Barrett call his 'conquering hero mood" he did not resent these

impertinences, at least not from Barrett. "If you are, I must remind you that there are limits as to what even little things like us can swallow."

"Barrett, you are incorrigible. *Cherchez la femme*," said Maitland with evident gratification, counting spoonfuls of tea into the teapot. He often said he liked keeping in touch with the young life of the University. "One, two, three, and one for the pot. Just so! I don't set up to be a lady-killer, but—"

"Oh! oh!" from Barrett.

"I'm a confirmed old bachelor, a grumpy, surly recluse wedded to my pipe, but for all that I have eyes in my head. I know a pretty woman from a plain one, I hope, even though I don't personally want to "domesticate the recording angel."[1]

"She'll land you yet unless you look out," said Barrett with decision. "I foresee that I shall be supporting your faltering footsteps to the altar in a month's time. She'll want a month to get her clothes. Is the day fixed yet?"

"What nonsense you talk. I never met such a sentimentalist as you, Barrett. I assure you I don't even know her name. But it has not been possible for me to help observing that a lady, a very exquisite young lady, has done me the honour to attend all my lectures, and to listen

[1] I thought the recording angel funny at the time until Barrett told me afterwards that it was cribbed from Rhoda Broughton.

with the most rapt attention to my poor words. And last time, only yesterday, I noted the fact, ahem ! that she wore a rose, a yellow rose, presumably plucked from the same tree as these."

There were, I suppose, in our near vicinity, about a hundred and fifty yellow rose trees in bloom at that moment. Barrett must have known that. Nevertheless, he nodded his head and said gravely :

"That proves it."

On looking over these pages he affirms that this and not earlier was the precise moment when the devil entered into him, supplying, as he says, a long felt though unrealised want.

"I seldom look at my audience when I am lecturing," continued Maitland. "I am too much engrossed with my subject. But I could not help noticing her absorbed attention, so different from that of most women. Why they come to lectures I don't know."

"I think I have seen the person you mean," said Barrett, in a perfectly level voice. "I don't know who she is, but I saw her waiting under an archway after chapel last Sunday evening. I noticed her because of her extreme good looks. She was evidently watching for someone. When the congregation had all passed out she turned away."

"I should have liked to thank her," said Maitland regretfully. "It seems so churlish,

so boorish, not to say a word. You have no idea who she was?"

"None," said Barrett.

Shortly afterwards we took our leave, but not until Maitland had been reminded by the lady's appearance of a certain charming woman of whom he had seen a good deal at one time in years gone by, who, womanlike, had been unable to understand the claims which the intellectual life make on a man, and who had, in consequence, believed him cold and quarrelled with him to his great regret, because it was impossible for him to dance attendance on her as she expected, and as he would gladly have done had he been a man of leisure. Having warned us young tyros against the danger of frankness in all dealings with women, and how often it had got him into hot water with the sex, he bade us good evening.

As we came out we saw across the court that the melon had been taken in, so judged that Parker had returned. He had. We were so tickled by the way Maitland had accounted for the roses that we quite forgot to score off Parker about them, and actually told him what Maitland supposed.

Barrett then suggested that we should at once form a committee to deliberate on the situation. Parker and I did not quite see why a committee was necessary to laugh at old Maitland, but we agreed.

"Did you really see the woman he means, or were you only pulling Maitland's leg ? " I asked.

"I saw her all right," retorted Barrett. "Don't you remember, Parker, how I nudged you when she passed."

Parker nodded.

"She was such a picture that I asked who she was, and found she was a high school mistress, the niece of old Cooper, the vet. She is going to be married to a schoolmaster, and go out to Canada with him. I don't mind owning I was rather smitten myself, or I should not have taken the trouble."

"She has left Cambridge," said Parker slowly. "When I got out of the train half-an-hour ago she was getting in. Cooper was seeing her off."

"Oh, don't—don't tell poor old Maitland," I broke in. "Let him go on holding out his chest and thinking she sent him the roses. It won't matter to her, if she is off to Canada, and never coming back any more. And it will do him such a lot of good."

"I don't mean to tell him—immediately," said Barrett ominously. "I think with you he ought to have his romance. Now I know she is safely gone forever, though I don't mind owning it gives me a twinge to think she is throwing herself away on a schoolmaster : but as she really can't come back and raise a dust, gentlemen, I lay a proposal before the committee, that

the lady who sent the roses should follow them up with a little note."

The committee agreed unanimously, and we decided, at least Barrett decided, that he should compose the letter, and Parker, who was rather good at a feigned handwriting, should copy it out.

Parker and I wanted Barrett to make the letter rather warm, and saying something complimentary about Maitland's appearance, but Barrett would not hear of it. I did not see where the fun came in if it was just an ordinary note, but Barrett was adamant. He said he had an eye on the future.

He put his head in his hands, and thought a lot and then scribbled no end, and then tore it up, and finally produced the stupidest little commonplace letter you ever saw with simply nothing in it, saying how much she had profited by his lectures and rot of that kind. I was dreadfully disappointed, for I had always thought Barrett as clever as he could stick. He said it was an awful grind for him to be commonplace even for a moment, and that by rights I ought to have composed the letter, but that it was no more use expecting anything subtle from me than a Limerick from an archbishop.

He proceeded to read it aloud.

"But how is he to know it is the person who sent him the roses?" said Parker, "and how is

he to answer if she does not give him an address ? Hang it all. He ought to be able to answer. Give the poor devil a chance."

"He shall be given every chance," said Barrett. "But don't you two prize idiots see that we can't give a real name and address because he would certainly go there ? "

"Not a bit of it. He's as lazy as a pig. He never goes anywhere. He says he hasn't time. He's been seccotined into his armchair for the last ten years."

"I tell you he would go on all fours from here to Ely if he thought there was the chance of a woman looking at him when he got there."

"Then how is he to answer ? " said Parker, who always had to have everything explained to him.

"I am just coming to that. I don't say anything in the note about the roses, you observe. I am far too maidenly. But I just add one tiny postscript :

"If you do not regard this little note as an unwarrantable intrusion, please wear one of my roses on Sunday morning at chapel, even if it is faded, as a sign that you have forgiven my presumption in writing these few lines."

"That's not bad," said Parker suddenly.

"Now," said Barrett, tossing the sheet over to him, "you copy that out in a fist that you can stick to, because it will be the first of a long correspondence."

"We've not settled her name yet," I suggested.

"Maud," said Barrett with decision. "What else could it be ? "

The letter was written on an unstamped sheet of paper, was carefully directed—not quite correctly. Barrett insisted on that, and posted it himself.

The following Sunday we were all in our places early, and sure enough, Maitland, who came in more like a conquering hero than ever, was wearing a faded yellow rose in his buttonhole. He touched it in an absent manner once or twice during the service, and sat with his profile sedulously turned toward the congregation. He was not quite so bad profile because it did not show the bulging of his cheeks. As he came out he looked about him furtively, almost shyly. He evidently feared she was not there. Barrett and I joined him, and engaged him in conversation (though we had some difficulty in dragging him from the chapel), in the course of which he mentioned that he had intended to go to his sister at Newmarket for Sunday, but a press of work had obliged him to give up his visit at the last moment.

Poor Maitland ! When he left us that morning, and Barrett and I looked at each other, I felt a qualm of pity for him. I knew how ruthless Barrett was, and that he was doomed.

But if I realised Barrett's ruthlessness, I had not realised his cunning. His next move was

masterly, though I did not think so at the time. He was as cautious and calculating as if his life depended on it. He got some note-paper with a little silver M. on a blue lozenge on it and wrote another note. He was going to Farnham for a few days to stay with his eldest brother, who was quartered there. And in this note Maud—Maitland's Maud as we now called her—diffidently ventured to ask for elucidation on one or two points of the lectures which had proved too abstruse for her feminine intellect. She showed considerable intelligence for a woman, and real knowledge of the lectures—I did that part—and suggested that as her letters, if addressed to her, were apt to go to her maiden aunt of the same name with whom she was staying, and who was a very old-fashioned person, totally opposed to the higher education of women—that if he was so good as to find time to answer her questions it would be best to direct to her at the Post Office, Farnham, under her initials M.M., where she could easily send for them.

I betted a pound to a penny that Maitland would not rise to this bait, and Barrett took it. I told him you could see the hook through the worm. Parker was uneasy, even when Barrett, had explained to him that it was impossible for us to get into trouble in the matter.

"You always say that," said Parker, with harrowing experiences in the back-ground of his mind.

"Well, I say it again. I know your powers of obtruding yourself on the notice of the authorities, but how do even you propose to wedge yourself into a scrape on this occasion? With all your gifts in that line you simply can't do it."

Parker ruminated.

"Ought we to—"

"Ought we to what?"

"To pull his leg to such an extent? Isn't it taking rather a—rather a—er responsibility?"

"Responsibility sits as lightly on me as dew upon the rose," said Barrett. "You copy out that."

Parker copied it out and Barrett went off to Farnham. A few days later he re-appeared. I was smoking in Parker's room when he came in.

He sat down under the lamp, drew a fat letter from his waistcoat pocket, and read it aloud to us. It was Maitland's answer.

It really was a ghastly letter, the kind of literary preachy rot which you read in a book, which I never thought people really wrote, not even people like Maitland, who seem to live in a world of shams. It was improving and patronising and treacly, and full of information, partly about the lectures, but mostly about himself. He came out in a very majestic light you may be sure of that. And at the end he begged her not to hesitate to write to him again if he could be of the least use to her, that busy as he

undoubtedly was, his college work never seemed in his eyes as important as real human needs.

"He's cribbed that out of a book," interrupted Parker. "Newby the tutor in 'Belchamber,' who is a most awful prig, says those very words."

"Prigs all say the same things," said Barrett airily. "If Maitland read 'Belchamber,' he would think Newby was a caricature of him. He'd *never* believe that he was plagiarising Newby. The cream of the letter is still to come," and he went on reading.

Maitland patted the higher education of women on the head, and half hinted at a meeting, and then withdrew it again, saying that some of the difficulties in her mind, which he recognised to be one of a high order, might be more easily eliminated verbally, and that he should be at Farnham during the vacation, but that he feared his stay would be brief, and his time was hopelessly bespoken beforehand, etc., etc.

"He might be an Adonis," said Parker. "He'll be coy and virginal next."

"He'll be a lot of things before long," said Barrett grimly. "Get out your inkpot, Parker. I'm going to have another shy at him."

"You're *not* going to suggest a meeting! For goodness sake, Barrett, be careful. You will be saying Jones must dress up as a woman next."

"Well, if he does, I won't," I said. "I simply won't."

I had taken a good many parts in University plays.

"The sight of Jones as a female would make any man's gorge rise," said Barrett contemptuously. "I know I had to shut my eyes when I made love to him at 'The Footlights' last year. I never knew two such victims of hysteria as you and Jones. Suggest a meeting! Maud suggest a meeting! What do you know of women! I tell you two moral lepers, unfit to tie the shoestring of a pure woman like Maud, that it takes a Galahad like me to deal with a situation of this kind. What you've got to remember is that I'm not trying to entangle him."

Cries of "Oh! Oh!" from the Committee.

"I mean Maud isn't. I am, but that's another thing. You two wretched, whited sepulchres haven't got hold of the true inwardness of Maud's character. Your gross, assignating minds don't apprehend her. Maud is just one of those golden-haired, white-handed angels who go through life girthing up a man's ideals; who exist only in the imagination of elderly men like Maitland, who has never seen a woman in his life, and who does not know that unless they are imbeciles they draw the line at drivel like that letter. Bless her! *She's* not going to suggest a meeting. He'll do that and enjoy doing it. Can't you see Maitland in his new role of ruthless pursuer—the relentless male? No more easy conquests for

him, sitting in his college chair, mowing them all down like a Maxim as far as—Ely. He's got to *work* this time. I tell you two miserable poltroons that this is going to make a man of Maitland. He's been an old woman long enough."

"All I can say is," said Parker, ignoring the allusion to Ely," that if the Almighty hasn't a sense of humour you will find yourself in a tight place some day, Barrett."

My pen fails me to record the diabolical manner in which Barrett played with his victim. It would have been like a cat and mouse if you can imagine the mouse throwing his chest out and fancying himself all the time. Barrett inveigled Maitland into going to Farnham, and accounted somehow for Maud's non-appearance at the interview coyly deprecated by Maud, and consequently hotly demanded by Maitland. He actually made him shave off his moustache. Parker and I lost heavily on that. We each bet a fiver that Barrett would never get it off. It was a beastly moustache which would have made any decent woman ill to look at. It did not turn up at the ends like Barrett's elder brother's, but grew over his mouth like hart's tongue hanging over a well. You could see his teeth through it. Horrible it was. But you can't help how your hair grows, so I'm not blaming Maitland, and it was better gone. But we never

thought Barrett would have done it. I must own my opinion of him rose.

And he kept it up all through the long vacation with a pertinacity I should never have given him credit for. He took an artistic pride in it, and the letters were first rate. I did not think so at first ; I thought them rather washy until I saw how they took. Barrett said what Maitland needed was a milk and water diet. He seemed to know exactly the kind of letter that would fetch a timid old bachelor. But it was not all "beer and skittles" for Barrett. He sorely wanted to make Maud stand up to him once or twice, and put her foot through his mild platitudes. He wrote one or two capital letters in a kind of rage, but he always groaned and tore them up afterward.

"If Maud has any character whatever," he sometimes said, "if she shows the least sign of seeing him except as he shows himself to her, if she has any interest in life beyond his lectures, he will feel she is not suited to him, and he will give his bridle-reins—I mean his waterproof spats—a shake, and adieu for evermore."

Barrett eventually lured Maitland into deep water, long past the bathing machine of adieu forevermore, as he called it. When he was too cock-o-hoop, we reminded him that, after all, he was only one of a committee, and that he had

been immensely helped by the young woman herself. She really looked such a saint, and as innocent as a pigeon's egg.

But Barrett stuck to it that her appearance ought, on the contrary, to have warned Maitland off, and that he was an infernal ass to think such an exquisite creature as that would give a second thought to a stout old bachelor of forty-five, looking exactly like a cod that had lain too long on the slab. I could not see that Maitland was so very like a cod, but there was a vindictiveness about Barrett's description of him that I really think must have been caused by his romantic admiration of Parker's aunt, and his disgust at the slight that he felt had been put upon her. She married again the following year Barrett's elder brother's Colonel.

Barrett hustled Maitland about till he got almost thin. He snap-shotted him waiting for his Maud at Charing Cross station. And he did not make her write half as often as you would think. But he somehow egged Maitland on until, by the middle of the vacation, he had worked him up into such a state that Barrett had to send Maud into a rest cure for her health, so as to get a little rest himself.

When we met at Cambridge in October he had collected such a lot of material, such priceless letters, and several good photographs of Maitland's back, that he said he thought we were

almost in a position to discover to him exactly how he stood.

He threw down his last letter, and as Parker and I read them, any lurking pity we felt for him as having fallen into Barrett's clutches, evaporated.

They showed Maitland at his worst. It was obviously that he was tepidly in love with Maud, or rather that he was anxious she should be in love with him. He said voluntarily all the things that torture ought not to have been able to wring out of him. He told her the story of the woman who had quarrelled with him because he did not dance attendance on her, and several other incidents which meant, if they meant anything, that there was something in his personality, hidden from his own seaching self-examination, which was deadly to the peace of mind of the opposite sex. He was very humble about it. He did not understand it, but there it was. He said that he had from boyhood lived an austere, intellectual life, which he humbly hoped had not been without effect on the tone of the college, that he had never met so far any one whom he could love.

"That's colossal," said Parker, suddenly, striking the letter. "Never met any one he could love. He'll never better that."

But Maitland went one better. He said he still hoped that some day, etc., etc., that he now

saw with great self-condemnation that if his life had been altruistic in some ways, it had been egotistic in others, as in preferring his own independence to the mutual services of affection; that he must confess to his shame that he had received more than his share of love, and that he had not given out enough.

"He's determined she shall know how irresistible he is," said Barrett. "I had no idea these early Victorian methods of self-advertisement were still in vogue even among the most elderly Dons."

"Hang it all!" blurted out Parker, reddening. "The matter has gone beyond a joke. We haven't any right to see his mind without its clothes on. You always say the nude is beautiful. But really—Maitland undraped—viewed through a key-hole, sets my teeth on edge."

"Undraped? you prude," said Barrett. "What are you talking about? Maitland is clothed up to his eyes in his own illusions. "He's padded out all round with them back and front to such an extent that you can't see the least vestige of the human form divine. Personally, I don't think he has one. I don't believe he is a man at all, but just a globular mass of conceit and unpublished matter, swathed in a college gown. The thing that revolts me is the way he postures before her. 'Malvolio and his garters isn't in it with Maitland. Good Lord! Supposing

she were a real live woman! What a mercy for him that it's only us, that it's all strictly *en famille*. I always have said that it's better to keep women out of love affairs."

"How did you answer this?" said Parker, pushing the last letter from him in disgust.

"I let him see at last—a little."

"That it was all a joke?"

"No. That I—that Maud, I mean—cared. She did not say much. She never does. She mostly sticks to flowers and sunsets, but she gave a little hint of it, and threw in at the same time that she was very much out of health and going abroad."

"That'll put him off. He'll back out. He would hate to have a delicate wife. He might have to look after her, instead of her waiting hand and foot on him."

"We shall see," said Barrett. "Her last letter was posted at Dover."

"Well, mind! It's got to be the last," said Parker decisively. "I had not realised you had been playing the devil to such an extent as this. I had a sort of idea that you were only one of a committee. And what a frightful lot of trouble you must have taken. I suppose Maud was always moving about so that he could never nail her."

"Always, just where I was going, too, by a curious coincidence. And her old aunt is a

regular tartar ; I don't suppose there ever was such a typical female guardian outside a penny novelette. But she is turning out a trump now about taking Maud abroad, I will say that for her. They remain at Dover a week. I've arranged for it. I knew you two would wish me to feel myself quite untrammelled, and, indeed, I wish it myself. Then we'll hand him the whole series, and see how he takes it ; and tell him we've shown it to a few of his most intimate friends first, and your aunt, Parker—she'll nearly die of it—and that they are all of opinion that it's the best thing he has done since his paper on Bacchylides."

Neither of us answered. In spite of myself I was sorry for Maitland.

A few days later Barrett came to my rooms. We knocked on the floor for Parker, and he came up.

Then he put down a letter on the table and we read it in silence.

It was just what we expected, an enigmatic, self-protecting effusion. Maitland was hedging. He had evidently been put off by Maud's illness, and talked a great deal about friendship being the crown of life, and how she must think of nothing but the care of her health, etc., etc. ; and he on his side must not be selfish and trouble her with too many letters, etc.

"Brute," said Parker.

"There's another," said Barrett.

"You don't mean to say you wrote again. There's not been time."

"No. *He* wrote again. He doesn't seem to have been perfectly satisfied with the chivalry of the letter you've just read. He's always great on chivalry, you know. And it certainly would be hard to make that last letter dovetail in with his previous utterances on a man's instinct to guard and protect the opposite sex."

Barrett threw down a bulky letter and—may God forgive us—Parker and I read it together under the lamp.

"I can't go on," said Parker after a few minutes.

"You must," said Barrett savagely.

We read it through from the first word to the last, and as we read Parker's face became as grave as Barrett's.

It is an awful thing when a poseur ceases to pose, when an egoist becomes a human being. But this is what had befallen Maitland. The thing had happened which one would have thought could not possibly happen. He had fallen in love.

I can't put in the whole of his letter here. Indeed, I don't remember it very clearly. But I shall not forget the gist of it while I live.

After he had despatched his other letter he told her the scales of egotism had suddenly

dropped from his eyes, and he had realised that he loved for the first time, and that he could not face life without her, and that the thought that he might lose her, had possibly already lost her by his own fault, was unendurable to him. For in the new light in which now all was bathed he realised the meanness of his previous letter, of his whole intercourse with her : that he had never for a moment been truthful with her : that he had attitudinised before her in order to impress her : that he had always taken the ground that he was difficult to please, and that many women had paid court to him, but that it was all chimerical. No woman had ever cared for him except his mother, and a little nursery governess when he was a lad. During the last twenty years he had made faint, half-hearted attempts to ingratiate himself with attractive women : and when the attempts failed, as they always had failed, he had had the meanness to revenge himself by implying that his withdrawal had been caused by their wish to give him more than the friendship he craved. He had said over and over again that he valued his independence too much to marry, but it was not true. He did not value it a bit. He had been pining to get married for years and years. He saw now that to say that kind of thing was only to say in other words that he had never lived. He had not. He had only talked about living. He abased himself

before her with a kind of passion. He told her that he did not see how any woman, and she least of all, could bring herself to care for a man of his age and appearance, even if he had been simple and humble and sincere, much less one who had taken trouble to show himself so ignoble, so petty, so self-engrossed, so arrogant. But the fact remained that he loved her ; she had unconsciously taught him to abhor himself, and he only loved her the more, he worshipped her, well or ill, kind or unkind, whether she could return it or not.

We stared at each other in a ghastly silence. I expected some ribald remark from Barrett, but he made none.

"What's to be done ? " said Parker at last.

"There's one thing that can't be done," said Barrett, and I was astonished to see him so changed, "and that is to show the thing up. It's not to be thought of."

We both nodded.

"I said it would make a man of him, but I never in my wildest moments thought it really would," continued Barrett. "It's my fault. You two fellows said I should go too far."

We assured him that we were all three equally guilty.

"The point is, what's to be done ? " repeated Parker.

"I've thought it over," said Barrett, putting

the letter carefully in his pocket, "and I've come to the conclusion it *must* go on. I have not the heart to undeceive him. And I don't suppose you two will want to be more down on him than I am."

"If it goes on he'll find out," I groaned.

"He mustn't be allowed to find out," said Barrett. "He simply mustn't. I've got to insure that. I dragged the poor devil in, and I've got to get him out."

"How will you do it ? "

"Kill her. There's nothing for it but that. Fortunately she was ill in the vacation. He's uneasy about her health now. I put her in a rest cure, if you remember, when he became too pertinacious, and I was yachting."

"He'll feel her death," said Parker. "It's hard luck on him."

"Suggest something better then," snapped Barrett.

But though we thought over the matter until late into the night we could think of nothing better. Barrett, who seemed to have mislaid all his impudent self-confidence, departed at last saying he would see to it.

"Who would have thought it," said Parker to me as I followed him to lock him out. "And so Maitland is a live man, after all." We stood and looked across the court to Maitland's windows, who was still burning the midnight oil.

"You don't think he'll ever get wind of this," I said.

"You may trust Barrett," Parker replied. "Good-night."

Barrett proved trustworthy. He and Parker laid their heads together, and it was finally decided that Maud's aunt should write Maitland a letter from Paris describing her sudden death, and how she had enjoined on her aunt to break it to Maitland, and to send him the little ring she always wore. After much cogitation they decided that Maud should send him a death-bed message, in which she was to own that she loved him. Barrett thought it would comfort him immensely if she had loved him at first sight, so he put it in. And though he was frightfully short of money he went up to London and got a very nice little ring with a forget-me-not in turquoises on it, for the same amount he had won off us about Maitland's moustache. I think he was glad as it was blood money in a way (if you can call a moustache blood) that it should go back to Maitland.

The old aunt's letter was a masterpiece. At any other time Barrett's artistic sense would have revelled in it, but he was out of spirits, and only carried the matter through by a kind of doggedness. The letter was prim and stilted, but humane, and the writer was obviously a little hurt by the late discovery that her dear niece had concealed anything from her. She returned

all the letters which she said her niece had evidently treasured, and said that she was returning heartbroken to her house in Pimlico the same day, and would, of course, see him if he wished it, but she supposed that one so busy as Maitland would hardly be able to spare the time. The letter was obviously written under the supposition that the address in Pimlico was familiar to him. It was signed in full. *Yours faithfully, Maud Markham.*

Barrett got a friend whom he could rely on to post the packet on his way through Paris.

I don't know how Maitland took the news. I don't know what he can have thought of his grisly letters when he saw them again. But I do know that he knocked up and had to go away.

There is one thing I admire about Barrett. He did not pretend he did not feel Maitland's illness, though I believe it was only gout. He did not pretend he was not ashamed of himself. He never would allow that we were equally guilty. And when Maitland came back rather thinner and graver, we all noticed that he treated him with respect. And he never jeered at him again. Maitland regained his old self-complacency in time and was dreadfully mysterious and Maitlandish about the whole affair. I have seen Barrett wince when he made vague allusions to the responsibility of being the object of a great passion, and the discipline of suffering.

But he *had* suffered in a way. He really had. And when the Bursar's wife died Maitland was genuinely kind. He shot off lots of platitudes of course ; but on previous occasions when he had said he had been stirred to the depths he only meant to the depth of a comfortable arm-chair. Now it was platitudes and actions mixed. He actually heaved himself out of his armchair, and exerted himself on behalf of the poor, dreary little bounder, took him walks, and sat with him in an evening—his sacred evenings. To think of Maitland putting himself out for anyone ! It seemed a miracle.

After a time it was obvious that the incident had added a new dignity and happiness to his life. He settled down so to speak, into being an old bachelor, and grew a beard, and did not worry about women any more. He felt he had had his romance.

I don't know how it was, but we all three felt a kind of lurking respect for him after what had happened. You would have thought that what we knew must have killed such a feeling, especially as it wasn't there before. But it didn't. On the contrary. And Maitland felt the change, and simply froze on to us three. He liked us all, but Barrett best.

The Dark Cottage

The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed
Lets in new light through chinks that time has made.
Edmund Waller.

Part I

1915

John Damer was troubled for his country and his wife and his child.

At first he had been all patriotism and good cheer. "It will be a short war and a bloody one. The Russians will be in Berlin by Christmas. We shall sweep the German flag from the seas. We are bound to win."

He had stood up in his place in the House and had said something of that kind, and had been cheered.

But that was a year ago.

Now the iron had entered into England's soul, and into his soul. He had long since volunteered, and he was going to France to-morrow after an arduous training. He had come home to say good-bye.

He might never come back. He might never see his Catherine, his beautiful young wife, again,

or his son Michael, that minute, bald, amazing new comer with the waving clenched fists, and the pink soles as soft as Catherine's cheek.

And as John Damer, that extremely able successful wealthy man of thirty, sat on the wooden bench in the clearing he suddenly realised that, for the first time in his life, he was profoundly unhappy.

How often he had come up here by the steep path through the wood, as a child, as a lad, as a man, and had cast himself down on the heather, and had looked out across that wonderful panorama of upland and lowland, with its scattered villages and old churches, and the wide band of the river taking its slow curving course among the level pastures and broad water meadows.

That river had given him the power to instal electric light in his home, the dignified Elizabethan house, standing in its level gardens, below the hill. He could look down on its twisted chimneys and ivied walls as he sat. How determined his father had been against such an innovation as electric light, but he had put it in after the old man's death. There was enough water power to have lit forty houses as large as his.

Far away in the haze lay the city where his factories were. Their great chimneys were visible even at this distance belching forth smoke,

which, etherealised by distance, hung like a blue cloud over the city. He liked to look at it. That low lying cloud reminded him of his great prosperity. And all the coal he used for the furnaces came from his own coal fields.

But who would take care of all the business he had built up if he fell in this accursed war ? Who would comfort Catherine, and who would bring up his son when he grew beyond his mother's control ?

Yet this was England, spread out before his eyes, England in peril calling to him her son who dumbly loved her, to come to her aid.

His eyes filled with tears, and he did not see his wife till she was close beside him, standing in a thin white gown, holding her hat by a long black ribbon, the sunshine on her amber hair.

She was pale, and her very beauty seemed veiled by grief.

She sat down by him, and smiled valiantly at him. Presently she said gently.

"Perhaps in years to come, John, you and I shall sit together on this bench as old people, and Michael will be very kind, but rather critical of us, as quite behind the times."

And then had come the parting, the crossing, the first sound as of distant thunder ; and then interminable days of monotony ; and mud, and lack of sleep, and noise unceasing ; and a certain gun which blew out the candle in his dug-out

every time it fired—and *then*! a rending of the whole world, and himself standing in the midst of entire chaos and overthrow, with blood running down his face.

"I'm done for," he said, as he fell forward into an abyss of darkness and silence, beyond the roar of the guns.

Part II

1965

It was fifty years later.

Michael's wife, Serena, was waiting for her husband. The gallery in which she sat was full of memorials of the past. The walls were covered with portraits of Damers. Michael's grandfather in a blue frock coat and light grey trousers. Michael's father, John Damer, ruddy and determined in tweeds, with a favourite dog. Michael himself, not so ruddy, nor so determined, in white smock and blue stockings. Michael's mother, beautiful and austere in her robe of office.

Presently an aeroplane droned overhead, which she knew meant the departure of the great Indian doctor, and a moment later Michael came slowly down the landing steps in the garden, and entered the gallery.

"The operation has been entirely successful," he said.

They looked gravely at each other.

"It seems incredible," she said.

"He said it was a simple case, that all through those years while Father was unconscious the skull had been slowly drawing together and mending itself, that he only released a slight lesion in the brain. He has gone back to Lucknow for an urgent case, but he says he will look in again in a couple of days time if I let him know there is an adverse symptom. He said he felt sure all would go well, but that we must guard him from sudden shocks, and break to him very gradually that it is fifty years since he was hit at Ypres."

"He'll wake up in his own room where he has lain so long," said Serena.

"Has the nurse changed yet ? "

"Yes. We made up the uniform from the old illustrated papers. Blue gown, white cap and a red cross on the arm."

"We had better get into our things, too," said Michael nervously.

"The blue serge suit is on your bed, and a collar and a tie. I found them in the oak chest. They must have been forgotten."

"And you ? "

"I will wear your Mother's gown which she wore at your christening. She kept it all her life."

A few minutes later Michael, uneasy in a serge suit which was too tight for him, and his wife in a short grey gown entered the sick room and sat down one on each side of the bed. The nurse, excited and self-conscious in her unfamiliar attire, withdrew to the window.

The old, old man on the bed stirred uneasily, and his white beard quivered. His wide eyes looked vacantly at his son, as they had looked at him all Michael's life. Serena, with a hand that trembled a little, poured a few drops into a spoon, and put them into the half-open lips.

Then they held their breath and watched.

John Damer frowned. A bewildered look came into his vacant eyes, and he closed them. And he, who had spoken no word for fifty years, said in a thin quavering voice :

"The guns have ceased."

He opened his eyes suddenly. They wandered to the light, and fell upon the nurse near the window.

"I am in hospital," he said.

"No. You are in your own home," said Michael, laying his hand on the ancient wrinkled hand.

The dim sunken eyes turned slowly in the direction of the voice.

"Father," said the old man looking full at Michael. "Father ! well, you do look blooming."

The colour rushed to Michael's face. He had

expected complications, and had prepared numberless phrases in his mind to meet imaginary dilemmas. But he had never thought of this.

"Not Father," said Serena intervening. "You are forgetting. Father died before you married, and you put up that beautiful monument to him in the Church."

"So I did," said the old man, testily. "So I did, but he is exactly like him all the same, only Father never wore his clothes too tight for him and a made up tie—never."

Michael, the best dressed man of his day, was bereft of speech.

"You're a little confused still," said Serena. "You were wounded in the head at Ypres. You have been ill a long time."

There was a silence.

"I remember," said John Damer at last. "Have they taken the Ridge?"

"Yes, long ago."

"Long ago? Oh! can it be—is it possible? Have we?"—the old man reared himself suddenly in bed, and raised two thin gnarled arms. "Have we—won the war?"

"Yes," said Michael, as Serena put her arms round his father, and laid him back on his pillow. "We have won the war."

John Damer lay back panting, trembling from head to foot.

"Thank God," he said, and in his sunken

lashless eyes two tears gathered, and ran down the grey furrows of his cheeks, and lost themselves in his long white beard.

They gave him the sedative which the doctor had left ready for him, and when he had sunk back into unconsciousness, they stole out of the room.

They went back to the picture gallery looking on the gardens, and Michael gazed long at the portrait of his grandfather in the blue frock coat.

"Am I so like him ? " he said with a sort of sob.

"Very like."

He sat down and hid his face in his hands.

"Poor soul," he said. "Poor soul. He's up against it. Do you know I had almost forgotten we had 'won the war' as he called it. There have been so many worse conflicts since that act of supreme German folly and wickedness."

"Not what he would call wars," said Serena. "He only means battles with soldiers in uniforms, and trenches and guns."

"How on earth are we to break to him that his wife is dead, and that I am his son, and that he is eighty years of age, and that Jack is his grandson."

"It must come to him gradually."

"In the meanwhile I shall take off these vile clothes and get back into my own. Serena, what can a made-up tie be, and why is it wrong ? "

Michael tore off his tie and looked resentfully at it at arm's length. "It is just like the pictures, it seems correct, and it fastens all right with a hook and eye."

"It is the first time your taste in dress has been questioned, and naturally it pricks," said Serena smiling at her husband. "It is lucky Jack did not hear it."

"I don't know who Jack inherits his slovenliness and his clumsiness from," said Michael. "Why on earth can't he sit on his smock without crumpling it. I can. He may be a great intellect, I think he is ; he takes after my mother, there is no doubt, but he can't fold his cloak on his shoulder, he can't help a woman into her aeroplane, and he is so careless that he can't alight in London on a roof without coming down either on the sky doorway, or the sky-light. He has broken so many sky-lights and jammed so many roof doors that nowadays he actually goes to ground and sneaks up in the lift."

Serena was accustomed to these outbursts of irritation. They meant that her nervous, highly strung Michael was perturbed about something else. In this case the something else was not far to seek. He recurred to it at once.

"Will Father ever understand about Jack and Catherine? Will he ever in his extreme old age understand about anything?"

"His mind is still thirty," said Serena. "The

Iceland brain specialist said that as well as Ali Khan, and all the other doctors. That is where they say the danger lies, and where the tragedy lies."

"But how are we to meet it," said Michael walking up and down. Presently he stopped in front of his wife and said as one who has solved a problem!

"I think on the whole I had better leave the matter of breaking things to Father entirely in your hands. It will come better from you than from me."

And the pictures of the various wives of the various ancestors heard once more the familiar phrase, to which their wifely ears had been so well accustomed in their day from the lips of their lords, when anything uncomfortable had to be done.

* * *

So Michael left it to Serena, and in the weeks which followed she guided her father-in-law, with the endless tenderness of a mother teaching a child to walk, round some very sharp corners, which nearly cost him his life, which, so deeply was her heart wrung for him, she almost hoped would cost him his life.

With a courage that never failed him, and which awed her, he learned slowly that he was eighty years of age, that his wife had died ten years ago, at sixty, that Michael was his son,

and that he had a very clever grandson called John after him, one of the ablest delegates of the National Congress, and a grand-daughter called Catherine. She tried to tell him how they had lost a few months earlier their eldest son, Jasper, one of the pioneers of a new movement which was costing as many lives as flight had cost England fifty years earlier.

"He failed to materialise at the appointed spot," said Serena, "I sometimes wonder whether his Indian instructor kept back something essential. The Indians have known for generations how to disintegrate and materialise again in another place, but it does not come easy to our Western blood. Jasper went away, but he never came back."

John Damer looked incredulously at Serena, and she saw that he had not understood. She never spoke of it again.

* * *

As the days passed John, fearful always of some new pang, nevertheless asked many questions of Serena when he was alone with her.

"Tell me about my wife. She was just twenty when I left her."

She grieved for you with her whole heart."

"Did she—marry again? I would rather know if she did. She would have been right to do so in order to have someone to help her to bring up Michael."

"She never married again. How could she when you were alive, and in the house."

"I forgot."

"She hoped to the last you would be completely restored. All the greatest doctors in the world were called in, and they assured her it was only a question of time. Wonderful discoveries had been made in the Great War as to wounds in the head. But they only gradually learnt to apply them. And the years passed and passed."

"It would have been kinder to let me die."

"Did doctors let people die when you were young ? "

John shook his head.

"They are the same now," she said.

"And I suppose Catherine spent her life here, caring for her child, and me, and the poor. She loved the poor."

"She cared for you and Michael, and she worked ceaselessly for the cause of the oppressed. She battled for it. She went into Parliament as it was called in those days, as soon as the age for women members was lowered from thirty to twenty-one. She strove for the restriction of the White Slave Traffic, and for safeguarding children from the great disease. Some terrible evils were abated by her determined advocacy. But she always said she did not meet the same opposition the first women doctors did a hundred years ago, or as Florence Nightingale had to

conquer when she set out to improve the condition of the soldier in hospital and in barracks, and to reduce the barbarities of the workhouses."

"I should have thought she would have been better employed in her own home, that she would have been wiser to leave these difficult subjects, especially the White Slave Traffic—to men."

"They had been left to men for a long time," said Serena.

* * *

The day came when he was wheeled out into the garden in the old mahogany wheel chair which his father had used in the last years of his life.

Serena was sitting beside him. When was she not beside him ! Michael, at a little distance, was talking to two of the gardeners.

"Why do Michael and the gardeners wear smock frocks and blue stockings ? "

"It is so comfortable for one thing, and for another it is the old national peasant dress. We naturally all wish to be dressed alike nowadays, at any rate when we are in the country, just as the Scotch have always done."

"I remember," said John, "when I was a small child a splendid old man of ninety, Richard Hallmark, who used to come to church in a smock frock and blue worsted stockings and a tall black hat. His grown-up grandsons in bowler hats and ill-made coats and trousers looked

contemptible beside him, but I believe they were ashamed of him."

His dim eyes scanned the familiar lawns and terraces of the gardens that had once been his, and the wide pasture lands beyond.

It was all as it had been in his day. Nevertheless he seemed to miss something.

"The rooks," he said at last. "I don't hear them. What has become of the rookery in the elms ? "

"They've gone," she said. "Ten years ago. Michael felt it dreadfully. Even now he can hardly speak of it. I hope, Father, you will never reproach him about it."

"Did he shoot them ? " asked the old man in a hollow voice.

"No, no. He loved them, just as you did, but when he installed the Power Station he put it behind the elm wood to screen it from the house, and he did not remember, no one remembered, the rookery. You see rooks build higher than any other birds, and that was not taken into account in the radiation. At first everything seemed all right. The old birds did not appear to notice it. Even the smallest birds could pass through the current it was so slight. But when the spring came it proved too much for the fledgelings. They died as they were hatched out in the nest. Then the old birds made the most fearful outcry, and left the place."

"There has always been a rookery at Marcham," said John, his voice shaking with anger. "I suppose I shall hear of Michael shooting the foxes next."

Serena did not answer. She looked blankly at him.

* * *

Presently John asked that his chair might be wheeled up the steep path through the wood to the little clearing at the top. Michael eagerly offered to draw the chair himself, but John refused. He had been distant towards his son since he had heard about the rookery.

Serena, with the help of a gardener, conveyed him gently to the heathery knoll, just breaking into purple.

John looked out once more with deep emotion at the familiar spot in the golden stillness of the September afternoon.

"I sat here with my wife the last afternoon before I went to the front," he said in his reedy old man's voice. "The heather was out as it is now."

His eyes turned to the peaceful landscape, the wooded uplands, the river, the clustered villages, and far away the city and the tall chimneys of his factories. As he looked he gave a gasp, and his jaw fell.

"The factories aren't working," he said.

"Yes, dear, indeed they are."

"They're *not*. Not a sign of smoke. It used to hang like a curtain over the city."

"Or like a shroud," said Serena looking fixedly at him. "It hung over the grimy overworked mothers, and the poor grimy fledglings of children in the little huddled houses. The factories consume their own smoke now."

"There was a law to that effect in my time," said John," but nobody obeyed it."

"No one," she agreed. "No one."

As he looked it seemed as if a cloud of dust rose from the factories, and eddied in the air. As it drew near it resembled a swarm of bees.

"What on earth is that ? " he asked.

"It is the work people going home to the garden city behind the hill. It would not do for them to live near the factories, would it ? The ground is marshy. There are five or six streams there. And the gas from the factories has killed all the trees. What was not good for trees could not be good for children."

"They all lived there in my time. It was handy for work. There was always a great demand for houses. I know I had to build more."

Serena's eyes fell.

The flight of aeroplanes passed almost overhead followed by two enormous airships waddling along like monstrous sausages.

"Are those Zeppelins ? "

"They are aero busses built on the German

models. They superseded the ground electrics a few years ago. Those two are to carry back the workers who are more or less deficient, and can't be trusted to fly an aeroplane; the kind of people who used to be shut up in asylums. They can do sufficient work under supervision to pay for their own maintenance. We group with them the hysterical and the melancholy, and people who can't take the initiative, and those who suffer from inertia and tend to become blood suckers and to live on the energies of others. Their numbers grow fewer every year."

* * *

Serena and Michael talked long about his father that night.

"But surely he must have seen it was a crime to house his factory hands like that."

"He didn't seem to. You see he compared well with many employers. He doesn't know—how could he, that his generation let us in. We paid their bill. All the wickedness and the suffering of the great black winter had their root in the blindness and self-seeking of his generation and the one before him."

"He's never been the same to me since he found I killed the rookery. What's a rookery to a thousand children reared in a smoky swamp. What will he think of me when he hears that I stalked and shot the last fox in the county?"

"He must not hear it. We must guard him,"

said Serena, "and I pray that his life may not be long. It can't be, I think, and we have been warned that any sudden shock will kill him. I wish he could have a joyful shock and die of it, but there aren't any joyful shocks left for him in this world I am afraid."

"Have you explained to him that his grandchildren are coming home to-morrow from the Rocky Mountains ? "

"I have told him that they are coming, but not that they have been in the Rockies. He might think it rather far to go for a fortnight's fishing."

"Serena, what on earth will Father make of Jack. Jack is so dreadfully well-informed. I hardly dare open my mouth in his presence. Jack says he is looking forward to meeting his grandfather, and realising what he calls his feudal point of view."

"Jack only means by that expounding to his grandfather his own point of view. I don't think your Father will take to him, but he will love Catherine ; she is so like your Mother, and *she* never wants to realise any point of view."

* * *

Jack arrived first with his servant and a large hamper of fish. The air lorry followed with the tents and the fishing tackle and the mastiffs.

"But where is Catherine," asked Michael, as Jack came in pulling off his leather helmet and goggles.

Jack grinned and said with a spice of malice : "Catherine fell into the sea."

"She didn't ! " said Serena. "That's the second time. How tiresome. She always has a cold on her chest if she gets wet."

"Where did you leave her ? " asked Michael.

"In mid-Atlantic. We kept to the highway. It was her own fault. I warned her not to loop the loop with that old barge of hers, but she would try and do it. She was fastened in all right. I saw to that, but her stuff was loose, and you should have seen all her fish and kettles and the electric cooker shooting out one after another into the deep. It was in trying to grab something that she lost control, and fell, barge and all after her crockery into the sea. I circled round—that is why I am a quarter-of-an-hour late—till I sighted one of the patrol toddling up, old Granny Queen Elizabeth it was. Catherine wirelessed to me that she was all right, and would start again as soon as she was dry and had had a cigarette, so I came on."

Catherine arrived an hour later, full of apologies about the lost crockery, and the electric cooker, and was at once put into a hot bath by her mother and sent to bed.

* * *

After the arrival of his grandchildren John spent more and more of his time in the clearing in the wood. He shrank instinctively from the

sense of movement and life in the house, and his sole prop, Serena, seemed unable to be so constantly with him as before.

He was never tired of gazing at the gracious lines of the landscape. Perhaps he loved that particular place because he had sat there with his wife on their last afternoon together, perhaps also because, in a world where all seemed changed, that alone, save for the cloud on the horizon, was unchanged. He was at home there.

Jack took a deep and inquisitive interest in his grandfather which made him often stroll up the hill to smoke a pipe on the bench near him. Sometimes John pretended to be asleep when he heard his grandson's whistle on the path below him. He was bewildered by this handsome, quick-witted, cocksure, bearded young man who it seemed was already at twenty-three a promising Fatigue Eliminator, and might presently become a Simplyfier. His grand - daughter, Catherine, he had not yet seen, as she was in quarantine owing to a cold, and the Catarrh Inspector had only to-day pronounced her free from infection.

"You sleep a great deal, Grandfather," said Jack, coming so suddenly into view that John had not time to close his eyes. "Don't you find so much sleep tends to retard cerebral activity? "

"I don't happen to possess cerebral, or any other form of activity," said John, coldly.

"Do you mean you wish er—to resume the reins? Father and I were talking of it last night. Everything he has is yours, you know, by law."

John shook his head, and looked at his powerless hands.

"Reins are not for me," he said.

"Well, in my opinion, grandfather," said Jack, with approval, not wholly devoid of patronage, "you're right. A great deal of water has passed under the bridge since your day."

"This clearing in the wood is the same," John said. "That is why I like it, and my old home looks just the same—from here."

There was a moment's silence while Jack lit his pipe.

John suddenly said, "I put in the electric light. My father never would hear of it, but I did it."

He thought it was just as well that his magnificent grandson should know that he had done something when he held the reins.

"That is one of the many things I have been wishing to discuss with you, grandfather. You installed electric light in the house and stables and garage, but there was power enough to light a town. While you were doing it, why didn't you light the church and the village as well?"

"I never thought of it."

"But it must have made you very uncomfortable to feel you had not shared the benefit of it

with the community. The village lies at your very gates. You must have hated the feeling that you had lit yourself up, and left them in the dark. It was essential, absolutely essential for your workers' well-being that they should have light. Even in your day the more intelligent among the agricultural labourers were beginning to migrate to the towns. We only got them back by better conditions in lighting and housing, and facilities for movement and amusement."

"Electric light in cottages was unheard of in my time," said John. "It never entered my head."

"Just so," said Jack. "That seems so odd, so incomprehensible to us unless we can seize the feudal point of view. You confirm the classics on the subject. I have questioned numbers of very old men who were in their prime before the war like you, grandfather, but I have not found their opinions as definite as yours, because they have insensibly got all their edges worn off so to speak by lifelong contact with the two younger generations. Your unique experience is most interesting. Never entered your head. There you have the feudal system in a nutshell. No sense of communal life at all. I'll make a note of it—I'm compiling a treatise on the subject. You were against female suffrage, too, I remember. I've been reading up

your record. You voted several times against it."

"I did. I consider woman's sphere is in the home."

"Just so. That was the point of view, and there is a lot to say for it considering the hash women made of power when first they got it, though not so enormous a hash as the Labour Party. You know, I suppose, we've had three Labour Governments since the great war?"

"I always prophesied a Labour Government would come, and I feared it. I knew they had not sufficient education to rule. No conception of foreign policy."

"Not an atom. I agree with you. Not a scrap. Thirty years ago most of our rulers hadn't an idea where India was, or why we must complete the trans-African railway in case we lost control of the Suez Canal. They actually opposed it. They nearly piloted the Ship of State on to the rocks."

John frowned.

"Now what I want to know is," said Jack, extending two long blue stockinged legs, and enjoying himself immensely, "why instead of opposing female suffrage you did not combine to place the franchise on an educational basis, irrespective of sex; the grant of the vote to be dependant on passing certain examinations, mainly in history and geography. Or, if you

were resolved to delay as much as possible the entrance of women into politics, why didn't you give better national education. You did neither. You let loose a horde of entirely ignorant and irresponsible men and women out of your national schools. You say you foresaw that a Labour Government was inevitable, but you don't seem to have made any preparation, or taken any precaution to insure its efficiency when it did come."

John was silent.

"They were also hostile men and women," continued the young man. "That was the worst of it. Were you at Lille when you were fighting in France?"

"No."

"Well, the East Lancashires were. They were all miners, and the thing that interested them most was the devastated mines, ruined by the Germans in their retreat. And they saw the remains of the bath houses at the pit heads. Those baths had been there before the war. Every miner could go back clean to his own home, instead of having to wash in his own kitchen. Grandfather, you owned coal-mines. Why didn't you and the other coal-owners put up baths at the pit heads? You would have liked it if *you* had been a miner. And just think what it would have saved your wife. The English miners got them by threats after they had

seen the wrecks of them in France. But why didn't the English coal-owners copy French methods, if they hadn't the imagination to think them out for themselves? Why did they only concede when they could not help it? Reforms were wrung out of the governing class in your day by threats and strikes. That is what, for nearly thirty years, ruined our class with Labour when it came into power. Why didn't your generation foresee that?"

"We didn't see the danger," said John, "as you see it. Everyone can be wise after the event."

"Just so. But if you couldn't foresee the danger, why didn't you see at the time the *justice* of their claims, men like you, grandfather, who fought for justice for the smaller nations? It seems to me, the national characteristic of the upper classes fifty years ago must have been opposition to all change, a tendency to ignore symptoms which really were danger signals, and an undeveloped sense of justice. . . ., which only acted in certain grooves. The result was the uneducated came into power, embittered, without a shred of confidence in the disinterestedness of the educated. The Commonwealth—"

"The what?"

"The Commonwealth—you used to call it the Empire—nearly went upon the rocks."

Jack's young face became awed and stern and

aged, as John had seen men's faces become when they charged through the mud in the dawn.

"I was in Liverpool," Jack said, "all through the Black Winter. It needn't have been. It never, never need have been if there had been justice and sympathy in England for Labour forty years before. But there was not. So they paid us back in our own coin. We had no justice from them. My God! I can't blame them."

Serena, coming quietly up the path, saw the two men looking fixedly at each other, both pallid in the soft sunshine. The same shadow of suffering seemed to have fallen on the beautiful young face, and on the old one.

"You must not talk any more," she said to John, casting a reproachful glance at her son. "You are over-tired."

Jack took the hint, kissed his mother's hand, and walked slowly away. He was deeply moved.

John shivered. A deathlike coldness was creeping over him, was laying an icy hand upon his heart. He turned to his sole comforter, Serena, watching him with limpid grieved eyes.

"Your grand-daughter, Catherine, is coming up to see you in a few minutes," she said, trying as always to guard him against surprise. "How cold your hands are, Father. I could not let her see you till she had been disinfected after her chill for fear she might give it to you."

He was not listening.

"Serena," he said feebly. "The world is not my world any longer. I am a stranger and a sojourner in it. All my landmarks are swept away. I wish I could be swept away, too."

Serena took his cold hands in hers, and held them to her breast.

"Father," she said, "unless you and countless others, all the best men of your time had given your lives for your country, we should have no country to-day. You bled for us, you kept it for us, for your son, and your son's son : and we all honour and thank you for what you have done for us."

John Damer's eyes looked full at her in a great humility.

"I see now," he said, in his thin quavering voice, "that I only died for my country. I did not live for her. I took things more or less as I found them. I was blind, blind, blind."

She would fain have lied to him, but her voice failed her.

He looked piercingly at her.

"Did the others—all those who never fought—there were so many who did not fight—and those who fought and came back—did they live for her, did they try to make a different England, to make her free and happy—after the war ? "

"Some did," said Serena, "but only a minority."

She saw his eyes fix suddenly. His face became transfigured.

"She's coming up the path," he said, in an awed whisper. "Catherine is coming."

Serena followed his rapt gaze and saw her daughter coming towards them in a white gown, her hat hanging by a ribbon in her hand, the sunshine upon her amber hair.

"Catherine," said the old man, "Catherine, you have come to me at last. You said we should sit here together when I was old. You've come at last."

And he, who for fifty years had not walked a step, without help, raised himself to his full height, and went to meet her with outstretched arms.

They caught him before he fell, and one on each side of him supported him back to the bench.

He sank down upon it, blue to the lips. Serena laid the trembling white head upon her daughter's breast. The bewildered young girl put her arms gently round him in silence.

John Damer sighed once in supreme content, and then—breathed no more.

The Ghost of a Chance

"Yes, but the years run circling fleeter,
Ever they pass me—I watch, I wait—
Ever I dream, and awake to meet her;
She cometh never, or comes too late."

Sir Alfred Lyall.

"The thing I don't understand about you," I said, "is why you have never married. Your love affairs seem to consist in ruining other people's. I was on the verge of getting married myself years ago when you lounged in and spoilt my chance. But when you had done for me you did not come forward yourself, you backed out. I believe, if the truth were known, you have backed out over and over again."

Sinclair did not answer. He frowned and looked sulkily at me with lustreless eyes. He was out of health, and out of spirits, and ill at ease.

The large, luxurious room, with its dim oriental carpets and its shaded lights, and its wonderful array of Indian pictures and its two exquisite rose-red lacquer cabinets, had a great charm for me who lived in small lodgings in the city near my work. But it seemed to hold little pleasure for him. I sometimes doubted whether anything held much pleasure for him. He had just

returned from China. The great packing cases piled one above another in the hall were no doubt full of marvellous acquisitions, china, embroideries, rugs. But he did not seem to care to unpack them.

"Did I really spoil your marriage?" he said listlessly. He looked old and haggard and leaden-coloured, and it was difficult to believe he was the magnificent personage who had diverted Mildred's eyes from me ten years before.

"Don't pretend you didn't know it at the time," I retorted.

His behaviour had been outrageous, and I, with my snub nose and crab-like gait, had been cast aside. I could not blame her. He was like a prince in a fairy tale. I never blamed her. She knows that now; in short, she knows everything.

"No, my pepper pot, I won't pretend I didn't know it. But I thought—I had a strong impression—I was mistaken, of course, but I thought that—"

"That what?"

His face altered.

"That it was *she*," he said below his breath.

I stared at him uncomprehending.

"She looked like it," he went on more to himself than to me. "She had a sweet face. I thought it *might* be she. But it was not."

Silence fell on us.

At last I said :

"Perhaps you will be interested to hear that she and I have made it up."

"I am," he said, and his dull eyes lightened, "if you are sure she is the right woman ; really sure, I mean."

"I've known that for eleven years," I said, "but the difficulty has been to get the same idea firmly into her head. At any rate, it's in now. I've tattooed it on every square inch of her mind, so to speak. If I had been let alone she would have been my downtrodden, ill-used wife, and I should have been squandering her money for the last ten years. I shall have to hammer her twice a day and get heavily into debt to make up for lost time. Why don't you marry yourself, Sinclair ? That is what you want, though you don't know it ; what I want, what we all want, someone to bully, something weaker than ourselves to trample on."

"Don't I know it ! " he said. "I know it well enough. But how am I to find her ? "

"Marry Lady Valenes. I'm sure you've made trouble and scandal enough in that quarter. Now old Valenes is dead you ought to marry her ; and she's more beautiful than ever. I saw her at the opera last night."

Sinclair stared straight in front of him with his long hands on his knees. His face, thickened

and coarsened, fell easily into lines of fatigue and ill temper.

"What is the use of Lady Valenes to me?" he said savagely. "What is the use of any woman in the world, except the right one?"

"Well, you acted as if she was the right one when her poor jealous old husband was alive. It's just like you to think she won't do now he is dead and she is free."

He was silent again.

I was somewhat mollified by the remembrance that I had got Mildred, the most elusive and difficult of women, firmly under my thumb at last, and I said:

"The truth is, you don't know what love is, you haven't got it in you to care a pin about anyone except yourself, or you would have married years ago. Who do you think you're in love with now?"

"The same woman," he said wearily, "always the same."

"Then marry her and have done with it, and turn this wretched museum into a home."

"I can't find her."

"What is her name?"

"I don't know."

"Just seen her once, I suppose," I retorted. "A perfect profile sailing past in a carriage under a lace parasol. And you think that's love. Little you know."

I expanded my chest. Since I had come to terms with Mildred, some thirty hours before—and I had had a very uphill fight of it before she gave in—I felt that I was an expert in these matters.

"Chipps," said Sinclair. (Chipps is not my name, but it has stuck to me ever since I was at school.) "Chipps, the truth is, we are in the same boat."

My old wound gave a sudden twinge.

"No," I said. "No. We aren't. I'm not taking any water exercise with you, so you needn't think it. Mildred and I are walking on the towing-path arm in arm, and I don't approve of boating for her because I don't like it myself. So she remains on dry land with me. In the same boat, indeed!"

"I meant, we were both in love," he said with the ghost of a smile, "if your corkscrew advances towards matrimony can be called love. I did not mean that we were in love with the same woman."

"I don't care if you are *now*. I did care damnably once, but I don't mind a bit now. Do your worst."

"The conquering hero, and no mistake," Sinclair said, looking at me with something almost like affection, and he put out his hand. "Good luck to you, old turkey cock."

I shook his hand harder than I intended, quite warmly, in fact.

"Why don't you marry too?" I said. "It would make all the difference to you, as it has to me."

We seemed suddenly very near to each other, as we had been in the old days ; nearer than we had ever been since he had made trouble between Mildred and me.

He looked at me with a kind of forlorn envy.

"I cannot find her," he said again.

The words fell into the silence of the large, dimly lighted room.

And perhaps because we had been at school together, perhaps because I had no longer a grudge against him, perhaps because I was not quite so repellent to confidences as heretofore, and he was conscious of some undefinable change in me, Sinclair said his say.

"I fell in and out of love fairly often when I was young," he said. "You've seen me do it. But at the back of my mind there was always a deep-rooted conviction that I was only playing at it, and the real thing was to come, that there was the one woman waiting somewhere for me. I wasn't in any hurry for her. I supposed she would turn up at the right moment. But the years passed. I reached thirty. As I got older I began to have sudden horrible fits of depression that she wasn't coming after all. They did not last, but they became more severe as I gradually realised that I could not really live without her, that I was only marking time till she came.

"And one summer night, or rather morning, ten years ago, something happened. You need not believe it unless you like, Chipps. It's all one to me whether you do or you don't. I came home from a ball, and I found among my letters one dictated by my young sister saying she was very ill and wishing to see me. She was always ill, poor little thing, and always wanting to see me. She was consumptive, and she lived in the summer months with her nurse in a shooting-box high up on the Yorkshire moors, the most inaccessible place, but she liked it, and the doctor approved of it. I used to go and see her there when I had time. But that was not often. I had made provision for her comfort, but I seldom saw her.

"I laid the letter down, and wondered whether I ought to go. I did not want to leave London at that moment. I had been dancing all night with Mildred, and was very much *épris* with her. Then I saw there was a postscript in the same handwriting, no doubt that of the nurse. "Miss Sinclair is more ill than she is aware."

"That settled it. I must go. Once before I had been warned her condition was serious, and had hurried up to Yorkshire to find her almost as usual. But, nevertheless, I supposed I ought to go. I felt irritated with the poor little thing. But as my other sister Anna was married and out in India, I was the only relation she had left in England. I decided to go.

"In that case it was not worth while to go to bed. I sat down by the open window, and watched the dawn come up behind Westminster. And as I sat with the letter in my hand a disgust of my life took hold of me. It looked suddenly empty and vain and self-seeking, and cumbered with worldly squalid interests and joyless amusements. And where was the one woman of whom I had had obscure hints from time to time? Other women came and went. But she who was essential to me, who became more essential to my well-being with every year—she never came. I felt an intense need of her, a passionate desire to find her, to seek her out. But where?

"And as I sat there I felt in my inmost soul a faint thrill, a vibration that gradually flooded my whole being,and then slowly ebbed away. And something within me, something passionate surrendered myself to it, and was borne away upon it as by an outgoing tide. It ebbed farther and farther. And I floated farther and farther away with it in a golden mist. And in a wonderful place of peace I saw a young girl sitting alone in the dawn. I could not see her face, but I recognised her. She was the one woman in the world for me, my mate found at last. And I was consumed in an agony of longing. And I ran to her, and fell on my knees at her feet, and hid my face in her gown. And she bent over me, and raised me in her arms and

held my head against her breast. And she said, "Do not be distressed, I love you, and all is well."

"And we spoke together in whispers, and my agitation died away. I did not see her face, but I did not need to. I knew her as I had never known anyone before. I had found her at last.

"I had never guessed, I had never dreamed, I had never read in any book that anything could be so beautiful. It was beyond all words. It was more wonderful than dawn at sea. I leaned my head against her and cried for joy. And she soothed me as a mother soothes her child. But she was crying too, crying for sheer joy. I felt her tears on my face. She needed me as I needed her. That was the most wonderful of all, her need of me. We had been drawn to each other from the ends of the earth, and we were safe in each other's arms at last.

"And then gradually, imperceptibly, a change came. The same tide which had brought me to her feet began to draw me away again, and sudden terror seized me that I was going to lose her. I clung convulsively to her, but my arms were no longer round her. We were apart, stretching out our hands to each other. Her figure was growing dimmer and dimmer in a golden mist. In an agony I cried to her. 'Where shall I find you ? Tell me how to reach you ? ' And she laughed, and her voice came

serene and reassuring. 'We shall meet. You are on your way to me. You will find me on the high road.' "

And we were parted from each other, and I came slowly back over immense distances and moving waveless tides of space ; back to this room, and the dawn coming up behind the tower of Westminster.

"You awoke in fact," I said.

"No. I had not been asleep. I returned. And an immense peace enveloped me. But gradually that too, ebbed away as I began to realise that I had not seen her face. She was in the world, she was waiting for me. Thank God that was no delusion. But which of all the thousands of women in the crowd was she ? How was I to know her ? 'You are on your way to me, you will find me on the high road.' That was what she had said, and it flashed through my mind that she might be Mildred. 'You are on your way to me.' I was to motor Mildred to Burnham Beeches that very afternoon. I had arranged to take her there before I had received the letter about my sister. Chipps, I dare say you will think me heartless, perhaps you often have, but I simply dared not start off to Yorkshire that morning, even if my sister was dangerously ill. I had a feeling that my whole future was at stake, that I must see Mildred again, that nothing must come between her and me. I went

with her to Burnham Beeches. We spent the afternoon together."

"I have not forgotten that fact," I said.

"And I found I was mistaken," he said. "She knew nothing. The same evening I went to Yorkshire, but I did not find my sister. She had died suddenly that afternoon."

"You would have been in time to see her if you had let Mildred alone," I said brutally.

He did not answer for a long time.

"For ten years I looked for her, now in one person now in another, but I could not find her. I tried to go to her again in that waking dream, but I could not find the way. I could not discover any clue to her. For ten years she made no sign. At last I supposed she was dead, and I gave her up.

"That was last autumn. Gout had been increasing on me, and I had been up to Strathpeffer to take the waters there. And my other sister Anna, now a widow, pressed me to stay a few days with her at the little house on the moors where my younger sister had lived, and which I allowed Anna to use as her home as she was extremely poor. The air was bracing and I needed bracing, so I went, dropping down from Strathpeffer by easy stages in my motor. I was glad I went. The heat was great, but on those uplands there was always a fresh air stirring. Anna, who had hardly seen me for years, made

much of me, and though she had no doubt become rather eccentric since her husband's death, that did not matter much on a Yorkshire moor. I spent some happy days with her, and it turned out to be fortunate that I had come, for on the third afternoon of my visit, she had found out—she found out everything—that an old servant of mine, the son of my foster mother, had got into difficulties, and was being sold up next day at a distant farm. She urged me to motor over very early in the morning and stop the sale and put him on his legs again. I rather liked the idea of a thirty mile drive across the moors before the sun was up, and I agreed to go. I had no objection to acting Providence and pleasing Anna at the same time.

"I shall never forget that afternoon. We had tea together in the verandah, overlooking the great expanse of the heathered, purple moors. And the thunder which had hung round us all day rolled nearer and nearer. The moors looked bruised and dark under the heavy sky. The long white road grew whiter and whiter. My sister left me to shut all the windows, and I lay in my long deck chair and looked at the road.

"And as I looked the words came back to my mind. 'You will find me on the high road.' Lies! Lies! Ten years I had been seeking her. I should never find her. And far, far away on

the empty highway I saw a woman coming. My heart beat suddenly, but I remembered that I had been deceived a hundred times, and this was no doubt but one more deception. I watched her draw nearer and nearer. She came lightly along towards the house under the livid sky with the heather on each side of her. She had a little knapsack on her shoulder. And as she drew near the breathless stillness before the storm was broken by a sheet of lightning and a clap of thunder. My sister rushed up and dragged the chairs farther back. Then her eye caught sight of the tall grey figure now close below us on the road. A few great drops fell.

"Anna ran down to the gate and called to the woman to take shelter. She walked swiftly towards us, and then ran with my sister up the steps, just as the storm broke.

" ' Magnificent,' she said, easing her shoulder of the strap of her knapsack while her eyes followed the driving rain cloud. "How kind of you to call me in. There is not another house within miles.

"She was a very beautiful woman of about thirty, with a small head and a clear-cut grave face. Her dark, parted hair had a little grey in it on the temples. She smoothed it with slender, capable, tanned hands. She had tea with us, my sister welcoming her as if she were her dearest friend. That was Anna all over.

The thunderstorm passed, but not the rain. It descended in sheets.

"The stranger looked at it now and then, and at last rose and put out her hand for her knapsack.

" 'I must be going,' she said.

"But Anna would not hear of it. There was not another house within miles. She insisted on her stopping the night. A room was got ready, and presently we all three sat down to a nondescript meal which poor Anna believed to be dinner.

"I was attracted by our guest, but not more than I had often been before by other women. She had great beauty, but I had seen many beautiful women during the last twenty years. She was gay, and I like gaiety. And she had the look of alertness and perfect health which often accompanies a happy temperament. She and Anna talked incessantly, at least, Anna did. I did not join in much. My cure had left me languid. When we had finished our meal we found the rain had ceased, and the moon shone high in heaven over a world of mist. The moors were gone. The billows of mist drifted slowly past us like noiseless waves upon a great sea. The house and terraced garden rose above it like a solitary island. The night was hot and airless, and we sat out on the verandah, and talked of many things.

"Of course, Anna is eccentric. There is no

doubt about it. But the worst of her is that her form of eccentricity is infectious. She is extremely impulsive and confidential, and others follow suit if they are with her. I have known her once (at a luncheon party of eight people whom she had never met before) say, as a matter of course, that she remembered a previous existence, and sleeping seven in a bed in an underground cellar. I was horrified, but no one else was. And a grave man beside her, a minister, told her that when first he went to Madeira he remembered living there in a little Portuguese cottage with a row of sugar canes in front of it. He said he recognised the cottage the moment he saw it, and said to himself, 'At any rate, I am happier now than I was then.' A sort of barrier seemed always to go down in Anna's presence. People momentarily lost their fear of each other, and said things which I have no doubt they regretted afterwards.

"I need hardly say that as Anna looked at the moonlight and the mist she became recklessly indiscreet. I could not stop her. I did not try. I shut my eyes, and pretended to be asleep. And she actually told this entire stranger all about her first meeting with her late husband, which it seemed had taken place on an expedition to Nepal. Anna was always wandering over the globe with Lamas, or sailing on inflated pigskins with wild Indians, or things of that kind.

I had only known the bare fact of her marriage with a distinguished but impecunious soldier who had died some years later, and I was amazed what a dramatic story she made of her first encounter with him on the mountains of Nepal, and how his coolies had all run away, and she let him join on to her party. And how they walked together for three days through a land of rose-coloured rhododendrons ; without even knowing each other's name, and how she cooked their meals at the doors of the little mud rest-houses. There was something very lovable after all in the way Anna told it. I realised for the first time that she, too, had lived, that she had been touched by the sacred flame, and that it was natural to her to speak of her great happiness, the memory of which dwelt continually with her.

"I saw through my half-closed eyes the strange woman's hand laid for a moment on Anna's hand.

" 'You were very fortunate,' she said gently.

" 'Was I ? ' said Anna. 'I suppose everyone else is the same. We all see that light once in our lives, don't we ? I am sure you have too.'

" 'I am unmarried,' said the stranger, 'and thirty years of age, and nothing of that kind has ever happened to me. I was once engaged to be married for a short time. But I had to break it off. It was no good. I suppose,' she said, with a low laugh, 'that the reason we are both

talking so frankly is because we are entire strangers to each other.'

" 'I do believe the world would go all right, and that we should all be happy if only we did not know each other,' said Anna earnestly.

"I felt sure the stranger would think her mad, but she answered tranquilly :

" 'There are two ways of living absolutely happily with our fellow creatures, I think. When you know nothing about them and have no tie to them, and when you know them through and through. But on the long road between where all the half-way houses are, there seems to be a lot of trouble and misunderstanding and disappointment."

" 'We can never know anyone through and through until we love them,' said Anna.

" 'No,' said the stranger, 'Love alone can teach that. Even I know that, I who have never seen love except once—in a dream.'

" 'Tell me about it,' said Anna.

" 'I have never spoken of it,' she said with the same tranquillity ; her face as I took one glance at it serene and happy in the moonlight, 'except to my sister. And it is curious that I should speak of it here ; for it was in this house it happened to me.'

" 'You have been here before ? ' said Anna.

" 'Yes. Ten years ago. That was why I went out of my way on my walking tour to-day

just to look at the little place again. I stayed a month here, and I helped a friend of mine who is now dead, a trained nurse, to nurse a Miss Sinclair who was dying here.'

" 'We are her brother and sister,' said Anna.

" 'I thought it possible when I saw you on the verandah. You are both like her in a way. My friend, who was in charge, was over-taxed, and I came down to help her. Two nurses were necessary, but she did not like to complain, and the family seemed rather inaccessible. Miss Sinclair liked me, and I did the night work till she died. I left directly she was gone.'

" 'My brother was too late,' said Anna.

" 'Yes,' she said. 'I was grieved for him. I added a postscript unknown to her, to her last letter to him which I wrote at her dictation. My postscript would have alarmed him and brought him at once. But the letter must have been delayed in the post. The last night before the end I was sitting here on the verandah. I had just been relieved, and I ought to have gone to bed, but I came and sat here instead and watched the dawn come up, 'like thunder,' behind the moors. And as I sat I became very still, as if I were waiting in a great peace. And gradually I became conscious as at an immense distance of someone in trouble. I was not asleep, and I was not fully awake. And from a long, long way off a man came swiftly to me, and threw himself on

his knees at my feet, and hid his face in my gown. He was greatly agitated, but I was not. And I wasn't surprised either. I raised him in my arms, and held him to my breast, and said, "Do not be distressed, for I love you, and all is well." It was quite true. I did love him absolutely, boundlessly, as I love him still. And gradually his agitation died away, and he rested in my arms, and ecstasy such as I had never thought possible enfolded us both. We both cried for sheer joy, and for having found each other. It was beyond anything I had ever dreamed. It was as beautiful as the dawn.'

" 'It *was* the dawn,' said Anna.

" 'If it was the dawn, the day it spoke of never came,' said the stranger quietly, 'and presently we were parted from each other, and he began to be frightened again. And he called to me, 'Tell me how to find you,' and I laughed, for I saw he could not miss me. I saw the way open between him and me. Such a short little way, and so clear. I said, 'You are on your way to me now. You will find me on the high road.' It was such a plain road, that even a blind man could not miss it. And we were parted from each other and I came back to the other dawn, the outer dawn. For days and weeks I walked like one in a dream. I felt so sure of him, I would have staked my life upon his coming—that is ten years ago—but he never came.'

"Chipps, I thought the two women must have heard the mad hammering of my heart. She was there before me in the moonlight, found at last—my beautiful, inaccessible mate. And she was free, and we loved each other as no one had loved since the world began. I could neither speak nor move. Though it was joy, it was the sharpest pain I had ever known. I did not know how to bear it.

" 'My dear, he will come still,' said Anna.

" 'Will he ? ' said the stranger, and she shook her head. She rose and stood in the moonlight, a tall, noble figure. And for the first time there was a shade of sadness on her serene, happy face.

" 'I saw the road so clear,' she said, 'but I am afraid he has somehow missed it. I have an intuition that he will not come now, that he is lost.'

"Sitting far back in the shadow, I looked long at her, at my wonderful dream came true ; and I swore that I would never lose sight of her again once found. I would take no risks ; I would bind her to me with hooks of steel.

"And then, in a few minutes, it was bedtime, and Anna aroused me, and she and her guest went off together hand in hand. I dragged myself to my room, too. I was shaking from head to foot, and Brown, my valet, said 'You aren't fit, sir, to start at six in the morning.'

"I had clean forgotten that I had arranged to

drive early across the moors to stop the sale of my foster brother's farm. It was impossible to go now. I might come back in the afternoon and find my lady flown. There was no telegraph office within miles ; I must think of some other plan. It was too late to countermand the motor, which put up several miles away. So I told Brown to send it back when it arrived at six, and to tell the chauffeur to bring it round again at eleven. Then, perhaps, my lady would deign to drive with me, and I might have speech with her.

" 'On the high road '—that was where she had said we should meet. Yes, when we were on the high road alone together, I would prove to her that I was her lover. I would boldly claim her. She would never repulse me, for she needed me as I needed her.

"I did not sleep that night. It seemed so impossible, so amazing, that we had met at last. I felt transformed, younger than I had ever been. Waves of joy passed over me, and yet I was frightened, too. There was a sort of warning voice at the back of my mind telling me that I should lose her yet. But that was nonsense. My nerves were shaken. I could not lose her again. I would see to that.

"Very early, long before six, I heard Anna stirring. I remembered with compunction that she had only one servant, and that she had said

she would get up and cook my breakfast for me herself before I started. Anna was an excellent cook. I heard her rattling the kitchen grate and singing as she laid the breakfast and presently there were two voices, Anna's and another. I knew it was the voice of my lady. I felt unable to lie still any longer, and when the motor came round at six I was already half dressed. There was a momentary turmoil, and an opening and shutting of doors, and then the motor went away again. I finished dressing and went into the garden into the soft September sunshine. There was no one about. I went back to the house and found the servant clearing away a meal and relaying the table for me. I asked her where her mistress was, and she said she had gone in the motor with the other lady and had left a note for me. Sure enough, there was a scrawl stuck up on the mantelpiece.

"'So sorry you are not well enough to start, but don't worry your kind heart about it. I have gone in your place and will arrange everything. Take care of yourself, and don't wait luncheon.'

"I got through the morning as best I could. I was abominably tired after my sleepless night and getting up so early, and a horrible anxiety grew and grew in me as the hours passed and Anna did not return. I had luncheon alone, and still no Anna. Could there have been an accident

I thought of my careful chauffeur and my new Daimler. Nothing ever happened to Anna, but I could not tolerate the idea of any risk to my lady. At last I heard the motor, and Anna came rushing in.

" 'It's all right,' she cried joyfully. 'Brian's farm is saved, and he and his old mother can't thank you enough. I told them both it was all your doing, and you had sent me as you were not well enough to go yourself. Brown told me how poorly you were. And it was only a hundred and fifty pounds, after all. I gave my cheque for it, as I didn't like to wake you for a blank one. They were almost paralysed with surprise. They could hardly thank me—I mean you—at first. Old Nancy cried, poor old darling, and called down blessings on you.'

" 'Did your guest enjoy the drive ? ' I said at last.

" 'She did,' said Anna. 'And, oh ! how I wished you had been well enough to be driving with her instead of me. The world was all sky. Such a pageant I had never seen—such vistas and fastnesses and citadels of light. She said she should remember it always.'

" 'She is not tired, I hope ? ' I said.

" 'Tired ! She said she was never tired. She said she would have walked the whole way if there had been time ; but of course she was delayed by last night's storm. So she was glad of

the lift, and I dropped her at the cross roads above Riffle station. That was a splendid woman, Gerald.'

"I turned cold.

" 'Do you mean to say she's gone ? '

" 'Yes. She sails for South America on Tuesday. I forget why she said she was going.

"And what was her name ? '

" 'I haven't an idea.'

" 'Anna, you don't mean to say you let her go without finding out her name and address ? '

" 'I never thought of such a thing. She never asked any questions about me, and I didn't ask any about her. Why should I ? What does her name matter ? ' "

Sinclair groaned.

"I lost her absolutely just when I thought I was sure of her," he said. "She walked into my life and she walked out of it again, leaving no trace. I haven't had the ghost of a chance."

"Perhaps you will meet her again," I said at last, somewhat lamely. "She may turn up suddenly, just when you least expect her."

He shook his head.

"I shall never find her," he said. "She's gone for ever, I know it. She knew it. Lost ! Lost ! Lost ! "

And the shadowed room echoed the word "Lost ! "

I told the whole story to Mildred next day. I dare say I ought not to have done, but I did.

"Poor Mr. Sinclair," she said softly when I had finished.

"Do you think he's off his head?" I said. "It sounds perfectly ridiculous, a sort of cracked hallucination."

"Oh, no. It's all true," said Mildred, in the same matter-of-fact tone as if she had said the fire was out. Women are curious creatures. The story evidently did not strike her as at all peculiar.

"What a pity he did not stick to the high road," she said.

"What high road, in Heaven's name?" I asked.

"Why, his duty, of course. Don't you see, it was there she was sitting waiting for him. It led him straight to her. She saw that, and that he couldn't miss her. He had only got to take the train to his sister when she was dying and he would have found his lady there. That was what she meant when she said the road was open between them. But he went down a side track to flirt with me and lost his chance. And the second time, if he had only stuck to going to the rescue of his foster brother, he could have given her a lift in his motor as Anna did, and have made himself known to her."

"What a preposterously goody-goody idea!

I don't believe it for a moment. Here have I been doing my duty for the last ten years, toiling and moiling and snarling at everybody, and it never led me to you that I can see."

"It might have done," said Mildred, "if you hadn't been entirely compacted of pride and uncharitableness. I made a mistake ten years ago, and was horribly sorry for it, but you never gave me a chance of setting it right till last Tuesday."

"I never thought I had the ghost of a chance till last Tuesday," I said. "Upon my honour I didn't. The first moment I saw it I simply pounced on it."

"Pounced on it, did you ? " said Mildred scornfully. "And poor me, with hardly a rag of self-respect left from laying it in your way over and over again for you to pounce on. Men are all alike ; all as blind as bats. I'm sure I don't know why we trouble our heads about them with their silly ghosts and chances and pouncings."

The Goldfish

A Favourite has no Friends.

It was my first professional visit to the Robinsons. I had been called in to prescribe for Arthur Robinson, a nervous, emaciated young man, whom I found extended on a black satin sofa, in a purple silk dressing gown embroidered with life-sized hydrangeas. The sofa and the dressing gown shrieked aloud his artistic temperament.

He had a bronchial cold, and my visit was, as he said, purely precautionary. He kept me a long time recounting his symptoms, and assuring me that he was absolutely fearless, and then dragged himself to his feet and led me into the magnificent studio his mother had built for him, where his sketches were arranged on easels, and where we found his wife, a pale, dark-eyed young creature cleaning his brushes.

He appeared—like most egotistic people—to be greatly in need of a listener, and he poured forth his views on art, and the form his own message to the world would probably take. I am unfortunately quite inartistic, but I gave him my attention. I was in no hurry, for at that time

the one perpetual anxiety that dogged my waking hours was that I had not enough patients.

At last I remembered that I ought not to appear to have time to spare, and his wife took me downstairs to the drawing-room, where his mother was awaiting us, a large, fair woman, with a kindly foolish face.

I saw at once that I was in for another interview as long as the first.

Mrs. Robinson did not wait for me to give an opinion on her son's condition. She pressed me to be perfectly frank, and, before I could open my mouth to reply, poured forth a stream of information on what was evidently her only theme—Arthur's health.

"I said the day before yesterday—didn't I Blanche. 'Arthur, you have got a cold.' And *he* said, so like him—'No Mother, I haven't.' That is Arthur all over. Isn't it, Blanche?"

Blanche made no response. She sat motionless, gazing at her mother-in-law with half absent eyes, as if she were trying—and failing—to give her whole attention to the matter in hand.

"Then I said in my joking way, 'Arthur, I can't have you starting a cold, and giving it to me and Blanche.' We don't want any presents of that kind. Do we Blanche?"

Blanche made no reply. Perhaps experience had taught her that it was a waste of energy.

"So I said, 'with your tendency to bronchitis

I shall send for Doctor Giles, and it will be a good opportunity to make his acquaintance now that our dear Doctor Whittington has retired.' "

It went on a long time, Mrs. Robinson beaming indiscriminately on me and her daughter-in-law.

At last, when she was deeply involved in Arthur's teething, I murmured a few words and stood up to go.

"You will promise faithfully, won't you, to look in again to-morrow."

I said that a telephone message would summon me at any moment. As I held out my hand I heard a loud splash.

"Now, Dr. Giles, you are wondering what *that* is," said Mrs. Robinson gleefully.

I looked round and saw at the further end of the immense be-mirrored double drawing-room a grove of begonias, and heard a faint trickle of water.

"It's an aquarium," said Mrs. Robinson triumphantly, and she looked archly at me. "Shall we tell Dr. Giles about it, Blanche ? "

"It has a goldfish in it," said Blanche, opening her lips for the first time.

"That was the splash you heard," continued Mrs. Robinson, as if she were imparting a secret. "That splash was made by the goldfish."

I gave up any thought I may have had of paying other professional calls that morning, and allowed Mrs. Robinson to lead me to the aquarium.

As aquariums in back drawing-rooms go it was a very superior aquarium, designed especially for the house, so Mrs. Robinson informed me, by a very superior young man at Maple's——quite a gentleman.

The aquarium had gravel upon its shallow bottom, and large pointed shells strewed upon the gravel. The water trickled in through a narrow grating on one side, and trickled out through another on the other side. An array of flowering begonias arranged round the irregularly shaped basin, gave the whole what Maple's young man had pronounced to be "a natural aspect," and effectually hid the two gratings while affording an unimpeded view of the shells, and the inmate.

In the shallow water, motionless, save for his opening and shutting gills, and a faint movement of his tail, was poised a large obese goldfish.

I looked at him through the gilt wire-netting stretched across the basin a few inches above the surface of the water, and it seemed as if he looked at me.

I wondered with vague repugnance how anyone could regard him as a pet. To me he was wholly repulsive, swollen, unhealthy looking.

"He knows me," said Mrs. Robinson, with a vain attempt at modesty. "He has taken a fancy to me. Cupboard love I'm afraid, Dr. Giles. You see I feed him every day. He just

swims about or stays still if I am near, like I am now, and he can see me. But if I am some way off and he can't see me he tries to jump out to get to me. He never tries to jump when I am near him. I call him Goldy, Dr. Giles, and I'm just as fond of him as he is of me. Isn't it touching that a dumb creature should have such affection? If it were a dog or a cat of course I could understand it, and I once heard of a wolf that was loving, but I have always supposed till now that fishes were cold by nature. I daresay, dear Dr. Whittington told you about him? No! Well I am surprised, for he took such an interest in Goldy. It was Dr. Whittington who made me put the wire-netting over the aquarium. He said 'Some day that poor fellow will jump out in your absence to try and get to you, and you will find him dead on the carpet.' So we put the wire-netting across."

"He jumps," said the young girl gazing intently at the goldfish. "When we sit playing cards in the evening he jumps again and again. But the wire always throws him back."

I looked for the first time at Mrs. Robinson's daughter-in-law; her colourless young face bent over the aquarium with an expression of horror. And as I looked the luncheon bell rang, and with it arose a clamour of invitation from Mrs. Robinson that I should stay for the meal. Pot luck! Quite informal! etc., etc., but I wrenched myself away.

A few days later I called on my predecessor, Dr. Whittington, and found him sitting in his garden at East Sheen. He was, as always, communicative and genial, but it was evident that his interest in his late patients had migrated to his roses.

Mrs. Robinson is an egregious goose, my dear Giles, as you must have already perceived, but she is a goose that lays golden eggs. You simply can't go too often to please them. I went nearly every day, and they constantly asked me to dinner. They have an excellent cook."

"They adored you," I said.

"They did ; and some great writer has said somewhere that we must pay the penalty for our deepest affections. I—ahem ! exacted the penalty ; you see part of the results in my Malmaisons, and I advise you to follow in my footsteps. They are made of money."

"They look it."

"And they are, if I may say so, a private preserve. They know nobody. I always thought that everybody knew somebody, at any rate every one who is wealthy, but they don't seem to know a soul. If you dine there you'll meet a High Church parson whom they sit under, or the family solicitor, or a servile female imbecile who was Arthur's governess, and laughs at everything he says—no one else."

"Didn't he go to school ? "

"Never. His mother said it would break his spirit. I've attended him from his birth. A very costly affair *that* was to Mrs. Robinson, for I had to live in the house for weeks, in order to help to usher in young Robinson, and at the same time usher out old Robinson, noisily dying of locomotor ataxia, and drink on the ground floor. I've since come to the conclusion that she never was legally his wife, and that is why they know no one, and don't seem to make any effort socially. She had all the money, there's no doubt of that, and she wasn't by any means in her first youth. I rather think he must have been a bigamist or something large hearted of that kind. Perhaps like Henry the Eighth he suffered from a want of concentration of the domestic affections."

"And what is the son like, a malade imaginaire? I've never seen anything like his dressing gowns except in futurist pictures."

"A malade imaginaire! Good Lord! no. Where are your professional eyes? Arthur is his father's son, that is what is the matter with him. Abnormal irritability and inertia, and a tendency to dessimated sclerosis. He may have talent, I'm no judge of that; but he'll never do anything. No sticking power. He's doomed. If ever any one was born under an unlucky star that poor lad was. He began to cause a good deal of anxiety when he was about twenty, made

a determined attempt to go to the devil: women, drink, drugs. In short, it looked at one moment as if he would be his father over again without his father's vitality. His mother was in despair. I said to her, 'My good woman find him a wife; a pretty young wife who will exert a good influence over him and keep him straight.'"

"Apparently she followed your advice."

"She did. It was the only chance for him, and not a chance worth betting on even then. I've often wondered how she found the girl. She makes no end of a pet of her. She's a warm-hearted old thing. She ought to have had a dozen children, and a score of grandchildren. Introduce your wife and family to her, Giles. She'll take to them at once. She's fond of all young people. She's wrapped up in her son and daughter-in-law and—"

"Her goldfish?" I suggested.

"Her goldfish," assented Dr. Whittington, with a grin. "What an ass she is. She actually believes the brute tries to jump out of the aquarium to get to her."

"You encouraged her in that belief."

"My dear Giles," said my predecessor drily, "I have indicated to you the path your feet should assiduously tread as regards the Robinsons. Now come and look at my Blush Ramblers."

Dr. Whittington was right. The Robinson family was a gold mine, It is not for me to say

whether I resorted to a pick and shovel as he had done, or whether, resisting temptation, I held the balance even between my duty, and the natural cupidity of a man with an imperceptible income, and three small children. At any rate I saw a great deal of the Robinsons.

Arthur was a most interesting case, to which I brought a deep professional interest. Perhaps also I was touched by his youth and good looks, and felt compassion for the heavy handicap which life had laid upon him. I strained every nerve to help him. Dr. Whittington had been an old-fashioned somewhat narrow-minded practitioner close on seventy. I was a young man, fresh from walking the hospitals. I used modern methods, and they were at first attended with marked success. Mrs. Robinson was at my feet. She regarded me, as did Arthur, as a heaven-born genius. She openly blessed the day that had seen the retirement of Dr. Whittington. She transferred her adoration from him to me as easily as a book is transferred from one table to another. She called on my wife, and instantly enfolded her and the children in her capacious affections, and showered on us cream-cheeses, perambulators, rocking-chairs, special brands of marmalade, "The Souls' Awakening" in a plush and gilt frame, chocolate horses and dogs, eider-down quilts and her favourite selection from the works of Marie Corelli and Ella Wheeler-Wilcox.

I began to think that Dr. Whittington had not put such an exorbitant price on the practise as I had at first surmised.

I fought with all my strength for Arthur, and it was many months before I allowed myself to realise that I was waging a losing battle. I had unlimited funds at my disposal, the Robinson purse had apparently no bottom to it. My word was law. What I ordered Mrs. Robinson obsequiously carried out. Nevertheless, at last I had to own to myself that I was vanquished. Arthur was doomed, as Dr. Whittington had said, and certain sinister symptoms were making themselves more and more apparent. His temper always moody and irritable, was becoming morose, vindictive, with sudden outbursts of foolish mirth. The outposts were being driven in one after another. I saw with profound discouragement that in time—perhaps not for a long time if I could fend it off—his malady would reach the brain.

I encouraged him to be much in the open air. I planned expeditions by motor to Epping Forest, to Virginia Water, on which his young wife accompanied him. She was constantly with him, walked with him, drove with him, played patience with him, painted with him, or rather watched him paint until the trembling of his hand obliged him to lay down his brush. I hardly exchanged a word with her from one

week's end to another. She seemed a dutiful, docile, lifeless sort of person, without any of the spontaneity and gaiety of youth. Mrs. Robinson owned to me that fond as she was of her daughter-in-law, her companionship had not done all she hoped for her son.

"So absent-minded, Dr. Giles, so silent, never keeps the ball rolling at meals ; the very reverse of chatty, I do assure you. I don't know what's coming to young people now-a-days. In my youth," etc., etc.

Gradually I conceived a slight dislike to Blanche. She seemed colourless, lethargic, one of those people who without vitality themselves, sap that of others, and expect to be dragged through life by the energy of those with whom they live. It was perfectly obvious that fat and foolish Mrs. Robinson was the only person in the house with any energy whatever.

Presently the whole family had influenza. Then for the first time I saw Blanche alone. She was laid up with the malady at the same time as her husband and mother-in-law. I went to her room, to see how she did, and found her in bed.

She looked very small and young and wan, in an immense gilt four poster with a magnificent satin quilt.

I reassured her as to her husband's condition, and then asked her a few questions about herself, and told her that she would soon be well again.

She gave polite answers, but again I had that first impression of her that she was making an effort to keep her attention from wandering, that she felt no interest in what I was saying.

"Have you an amusing book to pass the time?" I asked.

She looked at a pile on the table near her.

"Perhaps your eyes are too tired to read?"

"No," she said, "I had forgotten they were there. I don't care for reading."

Her eyes left the books and travelled back to the other end of the large ornate room, overfilled with richly gilt Empire furniture.

I turned and followed her rapt gaze.

There were half-a-dozen yellow chrysanthemums in a dull green jar on a Buhl chiffonier. The slanting November sunshine fell on them, and threw against the white wall a shadow of them. It was a shadow transfigured, intricate yet vague, mysterious, beautiful exceedingly.

I should never have noticed it if she had not looked at it with such intentness. For a moment I saw it with her eyes. I was touched; I hardly knew why. All the apathy was gone from her face. There was passion in it. She looked entirely exhausted, and yet it was the first time I had seen her really alive.

The sunshine went out suddenly, and she sighed.

"You may get up to-morrow, and go

downstairs," I said. "It is dull for you alone up here."

"I like being here," she said.

Was she, like so many women, " contrairy ? " Always opposing the suggestions of others, never willing to fall in with family arrangements.

"Don't you want to see the goldfish ? I hazarded, speaking as if to a child. "He must be lonely now Mrs. Robinson is laid up. And who will give him his crumbs."

"No, I don't want to see him," she said passionately. "I never look at him if I can help it. Oh Dr. Giles, every one seems to shut their eyes who comes into this house—everyone—but don't you see how dreadful it is to be a prisoner."

She looked at me with timid despairing eyes, which yet had a flicker of hope in them. I patted her hand gently, and found she still had a little fever.

"But he gets plenty of crumbs," I said soothingly, " and it is a nice aquarium with fresh water running through all the time. I think he is a very lucky goldfish."

She looked fixedly at me, and the faint colour in her cheeks faded, the imploring look vanished from her eyes.

She leaned back among her lace pillows.

"That is what Mrs. Robinson says," she said with a quivering lip, and I perceived that I was

relegated to the same category in her mind as her mother-in-law.

She withdrew her thin hand and retreated once more behind the frail bastion of silence from which she had looked out at me for all these months; from which she had for one moment emerged, only to creep back to its forlorn shelter.

A few days later Mrs. Robinson was convalescent, sitting up in bed in a garish cap festooned with cherry-coloured ribbons, and a silk wadded jacket to match. I questioned her about her daughter-in-law, in whom for the first time I felt interested. It needed no acumen on my part to draw forth the whole of Blanche's short history. One slight question was all that was necessary to turn on the cock of Mrs. Robinson's confidences. The stream gushed forth at once, it overflowed, it could hardly be turned off again. I was drenched.

"How long has Blanche been married? Two years, Dr. Giles. She's just nineteen. That's her age—nineteen. Seventeen and three days when she married. Such a romance. *She* was seventeen and Arthur was twenty-two. Five years difference. Just right, and you never saw two young people so much in love with each other. And such a beautiful couple. It was a love match. Made in heaven. Just like his father and me over again. That is what I said

to them. I said on their wedding day : 'Well, I hope you will be as happy as your father and I were.' "

There was not much information to be retrieved from Mrs. Robinson's gushings, but in the course of the next few days I hooked up out of a flood of extraneous matter a few facts which had apparently escaped her notice.

Blanche it seemed was the niece of a former Senior Curate of St. Botolph's. "A splendid preacher, Dr. Giles, and a real churchman, high mass and confession, and incense, just the priest for St. Botolph's, a dedicated celibate and vegetarian—such a saintly example to us all."

It appeared obvious to me, though not to Mrs. Robinson, that the vegetarian celebate had been embarrassed as to what to do with his niece, when at the age of seventeen she had been suddenly left on his hands owing to the inconvenient death of her widowed mother. Evidently Blanche had not had a farthing.

"But he was such a wide-minded man. Of course he wanted dear Blanche to lead the highest life, and to dedicate herself as he had done, and to go into a sisterhood. But she cried all the time when he explained it to her, and said she could not paint in a sisterhood. And she didn't seem to fancy illuminating missals, or church embroidery, just what he had thought she would like. He was always thinking what

would make her happy. And then it turned out there was some question of expense as well which he had not foreseen, so he gave up the idea. And just at that time I had a lot of trouble with Arthur—with drink—between you and me. It was such a hot summer. I am convinced it was the heat that started it ; too much whiskey in the soda water—and other things as well. Arthur was got hold of and led away. And Dr. Whittington advised me to find a nice young wife for him. And I told Mr. Copton—that was the priest's name, all about it—I always told him everything, and he was *most* kind, and interested, and so understanding, and he agreed a good wife was just what Arthur wanted, and marriage was an honourable estate, those were his very words. And Arthur was fond of painting, and Blanche was fond of painting too, simply devoted to it, and they had lessons together in a private studio and—"

It went on and on for ever.

"And her uncle gave her away. He was quite distressed that he could not afford a trousseau, for he was Rector Designate of Saint Oressa's at Liverpool, but I told him not to trouble about that. I gave her everything just as if she had been my own child. I spent hundreds on her trousseau, and she was married in my Brussels lace veil that I wore at my own wedding. I just took to her as my own child from the first. And

would you believe it before he went away on his honeymoon, Arthur brought me the goldfish to keep me company. In a bowl it was. Such a quaint idea, wasn't it, so like Arthur. They are my two pets, Blanche and Goldy."

I am not an artistic person, but even I was beginning to have doubts about Arthur's talent. It seemed somehow unnatural that he was always having his work enlarged by a third or a fifth, or both. Every picture he had painted, before his hands trembled too much to hold a brush, was faithfully copied and enlarged by his wife. She reproduced his dreary compositions with amazing exactitude, working for hours together in a corner of his studio, while he lay pallid, with half-closed eyes on the black satin sofa, watching her.

I had always taken for granted they were a devoted couple. Mrs. Robinson was always saying so, and it was obvious that Arthur never willingly allowed his wife out of his sight.

However, one morning I came into the studio when there was trouble between them. I saw at once it was one of his worst days.

He was standing before an enlargement of one of his pictures livid with anger.

"How often am I to to tell you that a copy must be exact," he stammered in his disjointed staccato speech. "If you quote a line of poetry do you alter one of the words ? If I trust you to

reproduce a picture surely you know you are not at liberty to change it."

She was as pale as he was. She looked dully at him, and then at her own canvas on the easel.

"I forgot," she said, in a suffocated voice.

I looked at the original and the copy, and even my stolid heart beat a little quicker.

The original represented a young girl—his wife had evidently sat for him—playing on a harp, while a man listened, leaning against a table, with a bowl of chrysanthemums upon it.

The copy was much larger than the original, and its wooden smugness was faithfully reproduced. The faulty drawing of the two figures seemed to have been accentuated by doubling its size. It was an amazingly exact reproduction, except in one particular. In Blanche's copy she had made the shadow of the chrysanthemums fall upon the wall. It was a wonderful, a mysterious shadow, *I had seen it before.*

"I hadn't indicated the slightest shadow," Arthur continued. "There is no sunshine in the room. You have deliberately falsified my composition."

"I did it without thinking," said Blanche shivering. "It is a mistake."

"A mistake," he said sullenly. "Your heart isn't in your work, that is the truth. You don't really care to help me to find my true expression."

And he took the canvas from the easel and tore it in two.

Did he half know, did some voice in the back of his twisted brain cry out to him that his part of the picture was hopelessly mediocre and out of drawing, that the only value it possessed was the shadow of the chrysanthemums? Was there jealousy in his rage? Who shall say!

I butted in at this point, and made a pretext for sending Blanche out of the room.

"Now, my dear fellow," I said confidentially, "don't in future try to associate your wife with your art. It is quite beyond her. Women, sir, have no artistic feeling. The home, dress, amusement that is their department. 'Occupy till I come,' might well have been said of feminine talent. It does occupy—till—ahem! *we* arrive. When a woman is happily married like your wife she doesn't care a fig for anything else. Let her share your lighter moments, your walks and drives, allow her to solace your leisure. The bow, sir, must not be always at full stretch. But promise me you won't allow her to copy any more of your pictures."

"Never again," said Arthur sepulchrally, stretched face downwards on the satin sofa.

I picked up the two pieces of torn canvas. A sudden idea seized me.

"And now," I said, "I shall say a few words of

reprimand to Mrs. Robinson. You need not fear that I shall be too severe with her."

Arthur made no movement, and I left him, and after taking the torn picture to my car I climbed to the top of the house where I suspected I should find Blanche.

Her mother-in-law had reluctantly given her leave to use an attic lumber room, and, amid a litter of old trunks and derelict furniture and cardboard boxes, she had made a little clearing near the window, where she worked feverishly at her painting in her rare leisure.

I had seen the room once when I had helped the nurse to carry down a screen put away there, and suddenly needed in one of Arthur's many illnesses. I had been touched by the evident attempt to make some sort of refuge in that large house, where there were several empty rooms on the lower floors, but—perhaps—no privacy.

I quickly found that Mrs. Robinson tacitly disapproved of Blanche working in the attic. Her kind face became almost hard when she spoke of the hours her daughter-in-law spent there, when her sick husband wanted her downstairs.

I tapped at the door, but there was no answer, and I went in. Blanche was sitting near the window on a leather trunk.

I expected to find her distressed, but her eyes, as they were raised to meet mine, were

untroubled. An uncomprehending calm dwelt in them. I saw that she had already forgotten her husband's anger in her complete absorption in something else.

For the first time it struck me that her mental condition was not quite normal. Had she then no memory; or did she continually revert, as soon as she was left to herself to some world of her own imagination, where her harassed, bewildered soul was refreshed? I remembered the look I had often seen in her face, the piteous expression of one anxiously endeavouring and failing to fix her attention.

She was giving the whole of it now to a picture on a low easel before her. I drew near and looked at it also.

It was a portrait of the goldfish. It was really exactly like him with his eye turned up on the look out for crumbs. He was outlined against a charming assortment of foreign shells, strewn artistically on a zinc floor. The aquarium was encircled by a pretty little grove of cowslips and primroses, which gave the picture a cheerful and pleasing aspect.

"It is lovely," I said.

"He is a lucky goldfish, isn't he?" she said apathetically.

I pondered long that night over Blanche. I reproached myself that I had not perceived earlier that she was overwrought. When I came to

think of it her life was deeply overshadowed by her husband's illness. Was it possible that she was the more talented of the two, and that it was not congenial to her to spend so much of her time docilely copying Arthur's pictures? I had never thought of that before. I knew nothing about art myself, but I could find out. I was becoming much more occupied by this time, and one of my patients was the celebrated artist, M., whose slow death I was trying to make as painless as possible.

A day or two later I laid before him the picture Arthur had torn in two.

I can still see M. sitting in his arm-chair in the ragged dressing gown which he wore day and night, unshaved, wrinkled, sixty.

He threw the larger half of the canvas on the floor, and held the piece containing the chrysanthemums and their shadow in his thin shaking talon of a hand, moving it now nearer now further away from his half blind blood-shot eyes.

I began to explain that only the chrysanthemums were by the wife of the painter of the picture, but he brushed me aside.

"She can see," he said at last. "And she's honest. I was honest once. She can't always say all she sees—who can—but she sees *everything*. Bring me something more of hers."

Reader, after immense cogitation I decided to take him two of Arthur's compositions, the

couple which after hours of agitated vacillation he considered to be his best. They were all spread out in his studio, and I had to assist in his decision. He had on several occasions—knowing I attended the great man—hinted to me that he should like M. to see his work and advise him upon it, but I had never taken the hint. Mrs. Robinson was only surprised that he had not pressed to see her son's pictures earlier. She and Arthur evidently thought I had kept them from the famous painter's notice until now, as, indeed, I had.

"And I must take something of yours too," I said kindly to Blanche as she put the two selected works of art into a magnificent portfolio.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Robinson. "Blanche paints sweetly too, but mostly copies. She's a wonderful hand at copying."

"I have nothing," said Blanche, "except the goldfish."

"Then I must take him," I said. This was regarded as a great joke by Arthur and his mother, and they could hardly believe I was in earnest until I sent Blanche for it.

"It's Goldy to the very life," said Mrs. Robinson fondly, "and the shells and everything exact. Such a beautiful home for him."

Arthur looked gloomily at the little picture, and for a moment I thought he would forbid my taking it, but I wrapped it up with decision, put

it in the portfolio with the others, and departed.

I found M. as usual in his armchair in his studio, leaning back livid and breathless, endeavouring so he whispered "to get forward with his dying."

I assured him he was getting forward at a great pace.

"Not quick enough for me, Giles," he said, "and you won't help me out, d—— you."

I put the goldfish on a chair in front of him. He looked at it for some moments without seeing it, and then reared himself slowly in his chair.

He began to speak in his broken husky voice, and for an instant I thought he had gone mad.

"Ha!" he said, leaning forward towards the picture. "You're portrayed, sir. Your unsympathetic personality, your unhealthy spots, your dorsal redness, and your abdominal pallor, your sullen eye turned upwards to your captors and their crumbs, all these are rendered with lynx-eyed fidelity. Privacy is not for you. Like Marie Antoinette, you are always in the full view of your gaolers."

He paused to take breath.

"This is England, a free country where we lock into tiny prisons for our amusement the swiftest of God's creatures, birds, squirrels, rabbits, mice, fishes. You are silhouetted against a background of incongruous foreign shells strewn on a zinc floor: the nightmare of a mad conchologist.

What tenderness, what beauty in the cowslips and primroses which encircle your prison and almost hide the iron grating—but not quite. The rapture of Spring is in them. They bloom, they bloom, every bud is opening. The contrast between their joyous immobility and your enforced immobility is complete. Nothing remains to you, to you once swift, once beautiful, once free, nothing remains to you in your corpulent despair except—the pleasures of the table."

M. leaned back exhausted, trembling a little.

"It is certainly a work of the imagination," I hazarded, "if you can read all that into it."

"Giles, my good fellow, confine yourself to your own sphere, how to keep in life against my will and all laws of humanity my miserable worn out carcase. That is not a work of the imagination. It is the work of close and passionate observation, observation so close, and of such integrity that it fears nothing, evades nothing. It is tremendous."

There was a moment's silence. I was a little hurt. I knew I was ignorant about art, but after all I had brought the picture to M.'s notice.

"How old is she ? "

"Nineteen."

"I've never had a pupil, but if I could live a few months longer I would take her. I suppose she's starving. I nearly starved at her age. I'll give her a hundred for it, and I'll see to its future.

Send her round here to-morrow morning." He scrawled and flung me a cheque for a hundred guineas.

"Now, understand," I said, "I will bring the girl to see you to-morrow on one condition only, that you buy her husband's 'Last Farewell,' and 'The dawn of love' for fifty pounds each. They are in this portfolio—and 'The Goldfish' by his wife for five. Is that a bargain?"

"If you say so it is. You always get your own way. I suppose he's jealous of her."

"He's just beginning to be, and he doesn't do things by halves."

Perhaps the happiest moment of poor Arthur's tawdry inflamed existence was when I told him that the great M. had bought his pictures. The latent suspicion and smouldering animosity died out of his eyes. He became radiant, boyish, for the moment sane. Perhaps he had looked like that before the shadow fell. Blanche, too, was suffused with delight. Mrs. Robinson, hurrying in with an armful of lilac orchids, was overjoyed. She burst forth in loud jubilation, not unlike the screeches of the London "syrens" when they herald the coming in of the New Year. She it seemed had *always* known, *always* seen her boy's genius. He would get into the Academy now, from which jealousy had so long kept him out. He would be hung on the line. He would be recognised. He would be as great

as M. himself, greater, for she and others among her friends had never fancied his pictures. They had not the lofty moral tone of Arthur's.

I produced the cheque.

"One hundred pounds for Arthur," I said, "and five pounds for the goldfish."

Blanche started violently and looked incredulously at me.

Arthur's jaw dropped. Then he said patronizingly, "Well done, Blanche," and leaned back pallid and exhausted on the satin couch.

"I must see him," he said over and over again as his mother laid a warm rug over his knees, and his wife put a cushion behind his head. "He could tell me things, tricks of the trade. Art is all a trick."

"He found no fault with your work," I said, "but—don't be discouraged, Blanche—he did criticise yours. He said you could not put down all you saw."

"What have I always told you, Blanche?" said Arthur solemnly. "You put down what you *don't* see. Look at that shadow where I had not put one."

"He is really too ill to see anyone, but he will speak to Blanche for a few minutes." I turned to her. "You must not mind if he is severe. He is a drastic critic. Would you like to put on your hat and come with me? I am going on to him now."

I had some difficulty in getting her out of the house. Mrs. Robinson wanted to come too. Arthur was determined that she should wait till he was better, and they could go together. But I had long since established my authority in that household. I had my way.

Blanche asked no questions as we drove along. She did not seem the least surprised that the greatest painter of his day had bought her husband's pictures. Was she lacking in intelligence ? Was there some tiny screw loose in her mind ?

M. had not made a toilet as I half expected he would. When we came in he was standing with his back to us, leaning against the mantelpiece, his unshaved chin on his hands. His horrible old dressing gown, stained with paint, and showing numerous large patches of hostile colours, clung to him more tightly than ever. His decrepidness struck me afresh. He looked what, indeed, he was, an old and depraved man, repulsive, formidable—unwashed—a complex wreck, dying indomitably on his feet.

"And so you can do things like that," he said, turning towards Blanche a face contracted with pain, and pointing a lean finger at the goldfish, and the chrysanthemum shadow, propped side by side on the mantel piece.

"Yes."

"Where were you taught ? "

She mentioned the school where she had studied.

"Why did you leave it?"

"Because Mother died, and I had not any money to go on with my education."

"And so you married for a home I suppose," he snarled, showing his black teeth, "for silken gowns and delicate fare and costly furs such as you are wearing now."

She did not answer.

"You had better have gone on the streets and stuck to your painting."

Blanche's dark eyes met the painter's horrible leer without flinching.

"I wish I had," she said.

They had both forgotten me. They were intent upon each other.

And she who never spoke about herself said to this stranger:

"I married because I did not want to go into a sisterhood, and because Arthur said he understood what I felt about painting, and that he felt the same, and that when we were married we would both study under S., and I was grateful to him, and I thought I loved him. But S. would not take him and wanted to take me. And Arthur was dreadfully angry, and would not let me go without him. And the years passed, hundreds and hundreds of years, and Arthur changed to me. And he has to be humoured. And now—

I copy his pictures. I enlarge them. Sometimes I decrease them, but not often. He likes to watch me doing them. He does not care for me to be doing anything else."

There was a long silence.

They stood looking at each other, and it seemed as if the sword that had pierced her soul pierced his also.

"Leave all and follow me," said the painter at last. "That is the voice of art, as well as of Jesus of Nazareth. That is the law. There is no middle course. You have not left all, you have not followed. You have dallied and faltered and betrayed your gift. You have denied your Lord. And your sin has found you out. You are miserable; you deserve to be miserable."

She made no answer.

"But you are at the end of your tether. I know what I know. You can't go on. You are nineteen and your life is unendurable to you. You are touching the fringe of despair. Break away from your life before it breaks you. Shake its dust from off your feet. Forsake all and find peace in following your art."

"You might as well say to the goldfish, jump out," said Blanche, white to the lips, pointing to the picture.

"I do say to him, 'Jump out.' Leap in the dark, and risk dying on a vulgar Axminster

carpet, and being trodden into it, rather than pine in prison on sponge cake."

"Yes," said Blanche fiercely, "but there is the wire netting. It's not in the picture, but *you know it's there*. He jumps and jumps. Haven't I said so in the picture! And it throws him back. You know that. I was like him once. I used to jump, but I always fell back. I don't jump any more now."

And then, without any warning, she burst into a paroxysm of tears.

For a moment I stared at her stupified, and then slipped out of the room to fetch a glass of water.

When I came back M. was sunk down in his armchair, and she was crouching on the ground before him almost beside herself, holding him by the feet.

"Let me live with you," she gasped half distraught. "Arthur hates me, and I'm frightened of him. He's mad, mad, mad, only Dr. Giles pretends he isn't, and Mrs. Robinson pretends; everything in that dreadful house is pretence, nothing real anywhere. Let me live with you. Then he'll divorce me, and you needn't marry me. I don't want to be married. I won't be any trouble to you. No pretty clothes, no amusements, no expense. I don't want anything except a little time to myself, to paint."

"You poor soul," said the painter faintly, and in his harsh voice was an infinite compassion.

"Help me to jump out," she shrieked, clinging to him.

"My child," he said. "I cannot help you. I am dying. I could not live long enough even to blacken your name. I have failed others in the past whom I might have succoured. Now I fail you as I failed them. There is no help in me."

He closed his eyes, but nevertheless two very small tears crept from beneath the wrinkled lids, and stood in the furrows of his cheeks.

She trembled and then rose slowly to her feet, and obediently took the glass of water which I proffered to her. She drank a little, and then placed the glass carefully on the table and drew on her gloves. I saw that she had withdrawn once more after a terrible bid for freedom into her fortress of reserve. She was once more the impassive, colourless creature whom I had seen almost daily for a year without knowing in the least until to-day what she really was.

"I ought to be going back now," she said to me.

"I will take you home," I said.

She went slowly up to M. and stood before him. I had never seen her look so beautiful.

The old man looked at her fixedly.

"I made up my mind," she said, "after I spoke

to Dr. Giles that I would never try to jump out any more, but you see I did."

"Forgive me," he said brokenly, holding out a shaking hand.

"It's not your fault," she said, clasping his hand in both of hers. "You are good, and you understand. You are the only person I have ever met who would help me if you could. But no one can help me. No one."

And very reverently, very tenderly, she kissed his leaden hand and laid it down upon his knee.

As I took Blanche home I said to her :

"And when did you appeal to me, and when did I repulse you ? "

"When I spoke to you about Goldy and you weren't sorry, you did not mind a bit. You only said he was a lucky goldfish."

"And what in Heaven's name had that to do with you ? "

She looked scornfully at me as if she were not going to be entrapped into speaking again.

I saw that she had—so to speak—ruled me out of her life. Perhaps when I first came to that unhappy house nearly a year ago she had looked to me as a possible helper, had weighed me in the balance, and had found me wanting.

I was cut to the heart, for deep down, at the bottom of my mind I saw at last, that I *had* failed her.

She might be, she probably was, slightly deranged, but, nevertheless, she had timidly, obscurely sought my aid, and had found no help in me.

M. died the following evening, after trying to die throughout the whole day. I never left him until, at last, late at night, he laid down his courage, having no further need of it, and reached the end of his ordeal.

Next morning after breakfast I went as usual to the Robinson's house, and, according to custom, was shown into the drawing-room. Now that M. was out of his agony my mind reverted to Blanche. My wife and children were going to the seaside, and my wife had eagerly agreed to take Blanche with her, if she could be spared.

"But they won't let her go," said the little woman.

"They must if I say it's necessary," I said with professional dignity. I wondered as I waited in the immense Robinson drawing-room how best I could introduce the subject. Half involuntarily I approached the aquarium. As I drew near my foot caught on something slippery and stiff. I looked down, and saw it was the dead body of the goldfish on the carpet. I picked it up, and was staring at it when Mrs. Robinson came in. She gave a cry when she saw it, and wrung her hands.

"Put him back in the water," she shrieked. "He may be still alive."

I put him back into his cell, but it had no longer any power over that poor captive. "Goldy" floated grotesque and upside down on the surface of the water. His release had come.

"He must have jumped out to get to me when I was not there," sobbed Mrs. Robinson, the easy tears coursing down her fat cheeks. "My poor faithful loving little pet. But someone has taken the wire off the aquarium. Who could have been so wicked? Downright cruel I call it."

The wire, true enough, had been unhooked, and was laid among the hyacinths on the water's edge.

"Where is Blanche?" I asked. "I want to talk to you about her. I do not think she is well, and I should advise—"

"That was just what I was going to tell you when I came in and saw that poor little darling dead in your hand. I am dreadfully worried about Blanche. She has been out all night. She hasn't come in yet."

"Out all night?" A vague trouble seized me.

"Yes," said Mrs. Robinson, "all night. Would you have thought it possible? But between you and me it's not the first time. Once long ago, just before you came to us, she did just the same. She—actually—ran away: ran away from her husband and me, and her beautiful home, though we had done everything in the world to make her happy. She went to her uncle at Liverpool,

who never liked her. He telegraphed to us at once, and he brought her back next day. He spoke to her most beautifully, and left her with us. She seemed quite dazed at first, but she got round it and became as usual, always very silent and dull. Not the companion for Arthur. No brightness or gaiety. Blanche has been a great disappointment to me, tho' I've never shown it, and I'm not one to bear malice, I've always made a pet of her. But between you and me, Dr. Giles, Arthur is convinced that she is not quite right in her head, and that she ought to be shut up."

"But she is shut up now," I said involuntarily.

She stared at me amazed.

A servant brought in a telegram.

"I telegraphed to her uncle first thing this morning," said Mrs. Robinson, "to ask if she was with him. Now we shall hear what he says."

She opened the envelope and spread out the contents.

"She's *not* with him," she said. "Then Dr. Giles, where *is* she? Where can she be?"

Later in the day we knew that Blanche had taken refuge in the Serpentine.

The two pets had fled together. She had made the way of escape easy for her weaker brother.

It was early in May. There was the usual crush at the Academy. I elbowed my way

through the crowd to look at Serjeant's majestic portait of M. Near it on the line hung the picture of the goldfish.

A long-haired student and a little boy were staring at it.

"Mummy," said the child, running to a beautifully dressed slender woman looking at the Serjeant, "I want a goldfish, too."

"Well, darling, you shall have one," she said, and, turning to the young man who accompanied her, she added, "You never saw a child so fond of animals as Cedric."

The Stars in their Courses

I WAS always somewhat amazed when I came to think of it, but I hardly ever did think of it, that my cousin, Jimmy Cross, should have married Gertrude Bingham. There seemed no reason for such a desperate step on his part. But if one is going to be taken aback by the alliances of one's friends and relations one would journey through life in a continual state of astonishment, and the marriage service especially exhorts the married "not to be afraid with any amazement," which shows that that is the natural emotion evoked by contemplation of the holy estate, and that it is our duty not to give way to it.

I said there seemed no reason for the lethargic Jimmy to take this step, especially as he had been married before, and had enjoyed a serene widowhood for some years. But what I forgot was that he never did take any step at all in either marriage. He just sat still.

The first time his Mother arranged everything, and the result, if dull, was not actually unpleasant.

The second time Gertrude Bingham took all

the necessary steps with precision and determination. Now and then it certainly seemed as if he would take alarm and run away, but he did not. He remained seated.

It is as impossible for a man rooted in inertia to achieve a marriage which implies an effort, as it is for him to evade a marriage, the avoidance of which requires an effort. He remains recumbent both when he ought to pursue and when he ought to fly. He is the prey of energetic kidnappers.

Gertrude was a great astrologer and conversed in astrological terms, which I repeat, but which I don't pretend to understand. She told me (after the wedding) that when she discovered that Jimmy's moon in the house of marriage was semi-sextile to her Venus she had known from the first that their union was inevitable. I think Jimmy felt it so too, and that it was no use struggling. To put it mildly, she placed no obstacles in the way of this inevitable union, and it took place amid a general chorus of rather sarcastic approval from both families.

What a mother Gertrude would make to Joan, Jimmy's rather spoilt girl of twelve, what a wife to Jimmy himself, what an excellent influence in the parish, what an energetic addition to our sleepy neighbourhood. We were told we were going to be stirred up. I never met the second Mrs. Cross till Jimmy brought her down as a

bride to call on me in my cottage near his park gates. She at once inspired me with all the terror which very well-dressed people with exactly the right hair and earrings always arouse in me. She was good-looking, upright, had perfect health and teeth and circulation, did breathing exercises, had always just finished the book of the moment, and was ready with an opinion on it, not a considered opinion—but an opinion. During her first call I discovered that she had, for many years, held strong views about the necessity of school life for only children, and was already on the look-out for a seminary for Joan.

"It is in her horoscope," she said to me, as we walked in my orchard garden, too much engrossed with Joan's future to notice my wonderful yellow lupins. "Her Mercury and ruling planet are in Aquarius, and that means the companionship of her own age. I shall not delay a day in finding the best school that England can produce."

I need hardly say that such an establishment protruded itself on to Mrs. Cross's notice, with the greatest celerity, and thither the long-legged nail-biting, pimply, round-shouldered Joan repaired, and became a reformed character, with a clear complexion and a back almost as flat as her step-mother's.

"Wonderful woman," Jimmy used to say

somewhat ruefully to me, sitting on the low stone wall which divides my little velvet lawn from my bit of woodland. "Gertrude has been the making of Joan."

"And of you, too, my dear Jimmy," I remarked.

He sighed.

It was perfectly true. She had been the making of him, just as she had been the making of the Manor garden, of the boot and shoe club, the boys' carving class, the Confirmation candidates' reading class, the mothers' working parties, the coal club, the Church members' lending library. The only misgiving that remained in one's mind after she had been the making of all these things was that it seemed a pity that they were all so obviously machine-made, turned out to pattern.

Personally, I should have preferred that they should have been treated less conventionally, or let alone. My own course and Jimmy's would, of course, have been to have left them alone. We left everything alone. But Gertrude always had a ready-made scheme for everything and everybody. She even had a scheme of salvation into which the Deity was believed to be compressed. I did not mind much the industrious efforts she expended on Jimmy, who was now an inattentive Magistrate and member of the County Council, and wobbly chairman of his own

Parish Council, writing an entirely illegible hand, which perhaps did not matter much as he never answered letters. But I felt acutely distressed when she reconstructed the rambling old Manor garden entirely. All its former pleasant characteristics were wrenched out of it. It was drawn and quartered, and then put together anew in compartments. It contained everything; a Japanese garden, a rock garden, a herb garden, a sunk garden, a wilderness, a rose garden, a pergola, three pergolas, just as the village now contained, a boot club, a coal club, a—but I think I have said that before.

In the course of time she presented Jimmy with two most remarkable children, at least she said they were remarkable: and from their horoscopes I gathered the boy would probably become a prime minister, and the girl a musical genius. We don't actually know yet what form their greatness will take, for as I write this they are still greedy, healthy children, who come out in plum-pudding rash regularly at Christmas.

I knew her well by the time the garden had been given its *coup de grâce*, and I told her after I had been dragged all over it that she had a constructive mind. (I have never been a particularly truthful person, but my career as a liar dates from Jimmy's marriage with Gertrude.)

My remark pleased her. She smiled graciously

and said, "Ah, I had not got Mars rising in Capricorn for nothing when I was born."

As we became more intimate she insisted on drawing out my horoscope, and after a week of intense mental activity produced a sort of cart wheel on paper at which I looked with respectful misgiving.

"I hope it does not say anything about my living anywhere except here," I said anxiously.

I had long had a fear at the back of my mind that she might need my cottage for some benevolent scheme. Jimmy, who had always been fond of me, had let it to me at a nominal rent in his easygoing widower days, because the mild climate suited my rheumatism, and my society suited him. Round the cottage had gradually sprung up what many, though not Gertrude, considered a beautiful garden.

"No travelling at all," she said, "no movement of any kind. And I am afraid, Anne, I can't hold out the slightest hope of a marriage for you."

"Since I turned forty I had begun to fear I might remain unwedded," I remarked.

"No sign of marriage," she said, exploring the cart wheel, "and there must have been considerable lethargy in the past when openings of this kind did occur. Your Venus seems for many years to have been in square to Neptune, and that would tend to make these chances slip away from you."

"I endeavoured to pounce on them," I said humbly. "My dear mother's advice to me as to matrimony was 'clutch while you can'—I assure you I left no stone unturned."

"In that case you probably turned the wrong ones," she said judicially. "And I am sorry to tell you that I don't see any good fortune coming to you either, and rather bad health. In short, you will have a severe illness next spring. March especially will be a bad month for you. Your Moon will be going through Virgo, the sign of sickness.

It generally was. I don't mean my moon, but March. I rarely got through the winter without an attack of rheumatism at the end of it.

All in a moment, as it seemed to me, after a few springs and autumns and attacks of rheumatism, Gertrude's two children were leaving the nursery, and Joan was returning home from school to be introduced into society. Gertrude began to look round for a governess who would also be a companion for Joan. I helped her to find one. It was a case of nepotism. I recommended my own niece, Dulcibella, who had just returned from the completion of her education at Dresden. Dulcibella's impecunious parents had, of course, both died and left her to battle with life—and me, alone, her only heritage being a wild rose prettiness and dark eyes like an Alderney calf's.

She was well educated. I had been able to achieve that owing to the cheap rate at which I lived, thanks to Jimmy. But I had thoroughly made up my mind that I was not going to have her twirling her thumbs under my roof. She was close on eighteen, and must now earn her own living.

She was staying with me on a visit when Gertrude told me of her requirements. Gertrude's two stout children were at that moment sitting on the lawn blowing soap bubbles with Dulcibella. Jimmy had been engaged in the same pursuit as his offspring five minutes earlier, but had departed. Gertrude looked at the group critically.

"Your niece does not look strong," she said dubiously.

"She isn't."

"Or energetic."

"She's not."

"Is she really firm with children?"

"I should not think so, but you are a better judge of character than I am."

Conscience pricked as I said the words, but I had become inured to its prickings.

"I have, of course, studied human nature," she said slowly, still looking at the pretty group on the lawn.

I have not yet met a fellow creature who does not think he has studied human nature. Yet

how few turn the pages of that open book. And out of that few the greatest number scan it upside down.

"I could make a truer estimate," she continued, "if I drew out her horoscope. I go by that more than by my own fallible judgment. I may err, but I have never known astrology to fail."

Dulcie was duly engaged as governess on approval for three months, on the strength of her horoscope. Before she went to the Manor House I made a few remarks to her to which she listened decorously, her eyes reverently fixed on my face.

"You will leave with me that remarkably pretty lilac muslin you appeared in yesterday—and the sun-bonnet. You will make yourself look as like a district visitor as possible, thick where you ought to be thin, and thin where you ought to be thick. Don't cry, Dulcie. I am endeavouring to help you. Be thankful you have an aunt like me. Who educated you ? "

"You did." Sob. Sob.

"Well, now I am finishing your education. You want to earn your living, I suppose. You know that I only have a small annuity, that I have not a farthing to leave you."

"Yes, yes, Aunt Anne."

"Well, then, don't look prettier than that square Joan, and don't let the wave in your hair show."

The Alderney calf eyes brimmed anew with tears. Dulcie drooped her pin of a head. Like that defunct noodle, her mother, she lived solely for clothes and poetry and the admiration of the uncorseted sex. She had come into the world a little late. She conformed to the best Victorian ideals, but there are men still lurking in secluded rural districts if one could but find them, to whom her cheap appeal might be irresistible. I had hopes she might secure a husband if she took a country engagement. I proceeded with my discourse. It spread over Jimmy as well. I did not bid her pure eyes look into depths of depravity but I did make her understand that Mrs. Cross was becoming rather stout and middle-aged, and that if Mr. Cross blew soap bubbles in the schoolroom too frequently, she, Dulcie, might find that her French accent was not good enough for her young charges.

Dulcie has not the faintest gleam of humour, but she is docility itself.

She appeared next day staid, flat-figured, almost unpretty, her wonderful hair smoothed closely over her small ears.

I blessed her, and said as a parting word:

"Take an interest in astrology."

And then the gardener wheeled her luggage on the barrow to the Manor, and Dulcie crept timidly behind it to her first situation.

In order that this tragic story, for it is a

tragedy, should not expand into a novel, I will say at once that she was a complete success. That was because she did exactly as I told her. As a rule, very silly people never will do what they are told. But in that one point Dulcie was no fool.

She was lamentably weak with the children. She had no art of teaching. She did not encourage Joan to preserve a burnished mind, but she took to astrology like a duck to water. From the first she was deeply interested in it, and believed in it with flawless credulity.

"Dulcie," said Gertrude with approval, "has a very alert mind for one so young. Joan has, never taken the faintest interest in astrology, but Dulcie shows an intelligent grasp of the subject. She studies it while the children are preparing their syntax. You, yourself, Anne, have never in all these years mastered even the elements of the science. I don't believe you know what *an aspect* means."

"I don't pretend to a powerful mind."

"Your difficulty is the inertia that belongs to a low vitality," said Gertrude, "and I rather think that is what is the matter with Joan. She hardly opens a book. She has not an idea beyond her chickens. She spends hours among her coops."

"Dulcie's horoscope," continued Gertrude after a pause, "shows a marked expansion in her

immediate future. The wider life which she has entered upon under our roof is no doubt the beginning of it. I feel it my duty to help her in every way I can."

"Dear Gertrude," I said. "*Thank you.* My poor motherless child, for whom I can do but little has found a powerful friend in you."

Conscience jabbed me as with a knitting needle, but I paid no more attention to it than the Spartan boy to his fox.

"There is certainly a love affair in her near future," continued Gertrude affably. "*She* says that astrologically she can't see any such thing for several years to come, but I know better. I found him under Uranus, transiting her Venus. She is an extremely intelligent pupil, but she is certainly obstinate. She *won't* see it. But she can see Joan's engagement and marriage quite clearly. We both see that. But I am convinced Dulcie has an opportunity of marrying as well as Joan. Her moon will shortly be going through the fifth house, the house of lovers which speaks for itself. I wondered whether it might possibly be Mr. Wilson. Most respectable—you know—Mr. Benson's pupil. He's always coming over on one pretext or another, to play tennis or see Joan's chickens. I saw him walking back through the park with Dulcie and the children the other day."

I pretended to be horrified.

"I will speak to her," I mumbled, "most reprehensible."

"I beg you will do nothing of the kind," said Gertrude with asperity. "The world moves on, my dear Anne, while you sit dreaming in your cottage ; and if you can't raise a finger to help your own niece then don't try to nullify the benevolent activities of those who can."

"Of course, Gertrude, if you look at it in that way. But a governess ! "

"I do look at it in that way ; and allow me to tell you, Anne, that you dress her abominably, and I have advised her to revolt. And her hair ! I spoke to her about it yesterday, and she said you liked her to plaster it down like that. The child has beautiful hair, very like mine at her age. It needs releasing. It is not necessary that she should imitate your severe coiffure."

"Oh ! Gertrude, I always brush my own hair back, and surely it is not too much to ask of my brother's only child who owes everything to me to—" I became tearful.

"It *is* too much to ask. You are an egoist, Anne. The poor child looked quite frightened when I spoke to her yesterday. You mean well, but you have repressed her. I intend, on the contrary, to draw her out, to widen her narrowed, pinched existence." Gertrude had said the same of Jimmy when she married him. Everyone had a pinched existence till she dawned on them,

though it would have been difficult to say who had dared to pinch Jimmy.

Next day Dulcie came down half frightened, wholly delighted, to confer with me.

"My dear," I said. "Do exactly what kind Mrs. Cross wishes about your hair and dress and general deportment. I can't explain, it would take too long, and when I had explained you would not understand. You may now take back with you the lilac gown and the sun-bonnet. And, by the way, what is this Mr. Wilson like who is always coming over ? "

"Very, *very* nice"—with fervour.

"And handsome ? "

"Very, *very* handsome."

"H'm ! Now, Dulcie, no nonsense such as you ladled out to me about Herr Müller, the music master at Dresden. You needn't cry. That is all past and forgotten. But I want a plain answer. Does this very handsome man care about chickens ? "

"Yes, yes, Aunt Anne. He has taken several prizes ? "

"Does he come to see you, or Joan ? "

Dulcie cogitated.

"At first it was Joan," she said.

Light broke in on me. *That serpent Gertrude* ! She did not think the poultry fancier good enough for the stolid Joan, but quite good enough for my exquisite Dulcibella.

"I must go back now," said Dulcie. "I'm dining down because Mr. Cross likes a game of patience in the evening. It keeps him from falling asleep. Mr. Wilson is staying to dinner. I'm going to wear my amber muslin, and Mr. Vavasour is coming to stay. We've seen a good deal of him lately. Mrs. Cross says he has had a very overshadowed life with his old mother, and she wants to help him to a wider sphere."

I pricked up my ears.

"Is he Vavasour, of Harlington?"

"Yes, that's his home, near Lee on the Solent."

"But surely he is quite an infant."

"I don't know what you mean by an infant, Aunt Anne. He is two years older than me, and he simply *loves* poetry."

"And is he as nice as Mr. Wilson?"

"Very, *very* nice."

Further lights were bursting in. The illumination momentarily staggered me.

"H'm. Dulcie, you will now attend to what I tell you."

"Yes, yes, Aunt Anne. I always do."

"Now, mind you don't make eyes at Mr. Wilson, who is Joan's friend. That is what horrid little cats of girls do, not what I expect of *you*. Chickens draw people together in a way, ahem! you don't understand, but—you will later on."

"Like poetry does?" Dulcie hazarded.

"Just like poetry. And one thing more. Don't speak to Mr. Vavasour unless he speaks to you."

"No, no, Aunt Anne. I never do."

Once again I must compress. As the summer advanced, Gertrude, nose down in full cry on the track, unfolded to me a project which only needed my co-operation.

I reminded her that I never co-operated, but she paid no attention, and said she wished to send the children with Joan and Dulcie to the seaside for a month, while she watched over Jimmy during his annual visit to Harrogate. The children required a change.

I agreed.

She had thought of Lee on the Solent. (You will remember, reader, that Mr. Vavasour's place was near Lee.)

"Why Lee?" I said, pretending surprise. "Expensive and only ten miles away. No real change of climate. Send them to Felixstowe or Scarborough."

But Gertrude's mind was made up. She poured forth batches of adequate reasons. It must be Lee. Would I accompany the party as their guest? Joan and Dulcie were rather too young to go into lodgings alone.

I saw at once that, under the circumstances, Lee was no place for me. I might get into hot water. I, so free now, might become entangled in the affairs of others, and might be blamed later

on. I might find myself acting with duplicity or, to be more exact, I might be found out to be doing so.

I declined with regretful gratitude. If it had been Felixstowe or Scarborough I would have taken charge with pleasure, but I always had rheumatism at Lee. Rheumatism was a very capricious ailment.

"It is, indeed," said Gertrude coldly.

"Send your old governess," I suggested, "the ancient Miss Jones who lives at Banff. You have her here every summer for a month. Kill two birds with one stone. Let her have her annual outing at Lee instead of here."

Gertrude was undeniably struck by my suggestion, though she found fault with it. As she began to come round to it I then raised objections to it. I reminded her that Miss Jones was as blind as a bat : that when she accompanied them to Scotland the year before she had mistaken the footman bathing for a salmon leaping. But Gertrude was of the opinion that Miss Jones's shortsightedness was no real drawback.

The expedition started, and I actually produced five pounds for Dulcie to spend on seaside attire. I considered it a good investment.

Before Gertrude departed with Jimmy for Harrogate she volunteered with a meaning smile that she understood Mr. Wilson bicycled over frequently to Lee.

"Ten miles is nothing," I said, "to a high principled poultry fancier."

"Now you know," she said archly, "why I did not wish to remove Dulcie to a great distance at this critical moment in her young life. I hear from Miss Jones, who writes daily, that there are shrimping expeditions and picnics with the children, strolls by moonlight without them."

Reader, I did not oblige that serpent to disgorge the fact that moonlight strolls are not taken by two women and one man. I knew as well as possible that Miss Jones had received a hint to give these two young men every opportunity. I thanked Providence that I had not got into that *galère*. I had been saved by the fixed principle of a life time to avoid action of any kind.

I had hardly begun to enjoy the month of solitude when it was over, and Gertrude and Jimmy returned from Harrogate, he very limp and depressed, as always after his cure, and sure that it had done him more harm than good.

The two girls came back from the Solent looking the picture of health ; even Joan was almost pretty, beaming under her tan. Dulcibella, who did not tan, was ravishing. The children were a rich brown pink apparently all over, and the ancient Miss Jones was a jet-beaded mass of bridling gratitude and self-importance.

Then, of course, the storm burst.

You and I, reader, know exactly what had happened. Dulcie had got engaged to Mr. Vavasour, and Joan to Mr. Wilson.

Dulcie came skimming down in the dusk the first evening to announce the event to me, her soft cheek pressed to mine. She said she wanted me to be the first to know.

And Gertrude had said I could do nothing for her!

She told me that at that very moment the blissful Joan was announcing her own betrothal to her parents.

Next morning Jimmy came down to see me. He generally gravitated to me if anything went wrong.

"We are in a hat up at the house," he said. "Joan has actually engaged herself to that oaf, Wilson. Infernal cheek on his part, I call it."

"You have had him hanging about for months," I said, "I expect he and Joan thought you approved."

"They did. They do. But that doesn't make it any better. Of course I said I would not allow it, and Joan was amazed and cried all night, and Gertrude is in a state of such nervous tension you can't go near her, and poor old Jones, who came back preening herself, is bathed in tears—and Gertrude says I have got to speak to Wilson at once. She always says things have got to be done at once."

He groaned, and sat down heavily on my low wall, crushing a branch of verbena.

"It's not as if I hadn't warned Gertrude," he went on. "I said to her several times 'I'm always catching my foot against Wilson,' and yet she would have him about the place. She as good as told me she thought he and Dulcie might make a match of it. But it's my opinion Dulcie never so much as looked at him. I told Gertrude so, but she only smiled, and said I was to leave it to her, and that it was in those confounded stars that Dulcie would marry almost at once. This is what her beastly stars have brought us to."

"She did tell me there was an early marriage for Joan, too, in her horoscope," I hazarded.

"Well, we had had thoughts, I mean Gertrude had, that young Vavasour came over oftener than he need. He's rather a bent lily, but of course he's an uncommonly good match. I should not have thought there was anything in it, myself, but Gertrude kept rubbing it in. That is why they went to Lee."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, I do say so. But look how it has turned out."

"I think I ought to tell you—I'm so astonished that even now I don't know how to believe it—I only heard of it last night,—that Dulcie has accepted Mr. Vavasour."

For a moment Jimmy stared at me, and then he burst into shouts of laughter.

"Well done, Anne!" he said, rolling on my poor verbena. "Well done, Dulcie. That little slyboots. Thirty thousand a year. What a score. Who would have thought it, Anne! You look so remote and unworldly in your grey hair, stitching away at your woolwork picture. But you've outwitted Gertrude. Well, I don't care what she says. I'm glad of any luck happening to Dulcie. She is not fit to struggle for herself in this hard world. But Gertrude will never forgive *you*, Anne. You may make up your mind to that."

"But what have I done?" I bleated. "Nothing. I'm as innocent as an unlaid egg."

"You may be, but she will never forgive you all the same," said Jimmy slowly rising, and brushing traces of verbena from his person. "Stupid people never forgive, and they always avenge themselves by brute force."

Old Miss Jones, bewildered and tearful, toddled down to see me, boring me to death with plans for leaving Banff and settling in Bournemouth with a married niece. Joan rushed down, boisterously happy, and confident that her father would give in; Jimmy, weakening daily, came down. Mr. Wilson called, modest and hopeful; Dulcie, and the children came down,

Mr. Vavasour, a stooping youth, with starling eyes, and an intense manner, motored over.

But Gertrude never came.

I consoled myself with Mr. Vavasour. There was no doubt he was in love with Dulcie, and I surmised that in the future, if she could not dominate him, his aunt by marriage might be able to do so. I can't say whether Dulcie cared much about him, but I told her firmly that she was very much in love, and she said, "Yes, yes, Aunt Anne."

That was what was so endearing about Dulcie.

She was so obliging; always ready to run upstairs for my spectacles, or to marry anybody.

One evening, when she was dining with me, she proceeded to draw out her Ronald's horoscope.

She was evidently extraordinarily well up in the subject.

"I will ask, Mrs. Cross," she said at last, after much knitting of white brows, "but I should say Ronald was certainly not going to marry at all at this moment with Mercury and Jupiter in opposition. But then I said the same about myself, and about your going on a long journey. I should have thought some great change was inevitable with your sun now sesquiquadrate to Uranus in Cancer. But Mrs. Cross said I was absolutely mistaken about both. She was very emphatic."

"You don't mean to say you believe a single word of it," I said, amazed.

"Oh, yes, Aunt Anne, of course I do. Why, don't you remember you yourself advised me to study it. I'm *sure* it's all true, only it's difficult to disentangle."

Jimmy came down next day, and a more crestfallen man I have never seen. I was dividing my white pinks, and he collapsed on a bench, and looked at me.

"You've given in about Mr. Wilson," I said drily.

"I have. Gertrude came round to it quite suddenly last night."

"Bear up," I said "They will probably be very happy."

"I don't find I mind much now it's decided on. And between ourselves Gertrude and Joan did not hit it off too well. I used to get a bit rattled between the two of them. It will be more peaceful when Joan is married."

"Then I don't see why you look so woe-begone."

Jimmy shifted on his bench.

"Anne," he said solemnly, "you made the great mistake of your life when you refused me."

"You could not expect me to leave a brand new kitchen boiler for you. I told you that at the time."

"We should have suited each other," went on Jimmy, drearily, ignoring manlike, my reasons

for celibacy. "We are both," he paused and then added with dignity, "contemplatives by nature. We should have sat down in two arm-chairs for life. I should never have been a magistrate, and a chairman of a cursed Parish Council. I should just have been happy."

"I *have* been happy," I said, "I *am* happy."

"You have had a beautiful life : one long siesta. That is so like you. *You* have fetched it off and I've missed it. Just as Gertrude has missed this match for Joan, and you have fetched it off for Dulcie. If I had married you you would never have wanted me to exert myself. That was why my higher nature turned to you like a sunflower to the sun. You ought to have taken me. After all, you are the only woman I have ever proposed to," said the twice married man.

"I thought as much," I said, pulling my white pinks apart.

"You might have known," he said darkly, and a glint of malice momentarily shone in his kindly eyes, "that trouble would some day overtake you for your wicked selfishness in refusing me."

I did not notice what he was saying so much as that alien expression in my old friend's face. I stared at him.

"I'm putty in Gertrude's hands," he continued solemnly, "as I should have been in yours. It's no kind of use saying I ought not to be putty.

I know I ought not, but putty I am. You don't know what marriage is like. No peace unless you give in entirely—no terms—no half-way house, no nothing except unconditional surrender."

I had never heard Jimmy speak like this before. I put in a layer of pinks, and then looked at him again.

There were tears in his eyes.

"My dear old soul," he burst out, "I can't help it, I *cannot* help it. She insisted on my coming down and telling you myself. She said it must come from me, as my own idea, and I'm not to mention her at all. The truth is—she has decided—and nothing will move her—that it will be best if Joan and Bobby Wilson lived quite near us for a time as they are both so young—in fact—" his voice became hoarse—"in this cottage."

"*My* cottage!" I said. "*Here!*"

He nodded.

For a moment I could neither see nor hear. My brain reeled. I clutched at something which turned out to be Jimmy's hand.

"My own little house," I gasped. "My garden, made with my own hands. The only place my rheumatism—" I choked.

"Don't take on so, Anne," but it was Jimmy who was crying, not I, "I'll find something else for you. Miss Jones is leaving Banff. You shall have her house rent free. I hate it all just as

much as you. It makes me sick to think of chicken hutches on your lawn ; but, but—you *shouldn't* have outwitted Gertrude."

"She told me there was no movement, no journey of any kind in my horoscope," I groaned.

"She says she made a mistake, and that she sees now there is a long journey. Dulcie told her so some time ago, but she would not hear of it. But now she has worked it out again, and she says Dulcie was right after all. You are plum in the thick of Uranian upheavals."

"And is Dulcie's marriage a mistake, too ? "

"She said nothing about that. But, between ourselves, Anne, though I'm not an astrologer, I should not count on it too much, for I've been making a few enquiries about Vavasour, and I find he has been engaged four times already. It's a sort of habit with him to get engaged, and his mother never opposes him, but she has a sort of habit of gently getting him out of it—every time."

All this took place several years ago. I live in the suburbs of Banff now in Miss Jones's old house. As there is no garden that kind Jimmy has built me a little conservatory sticking like a blister to the unattached wall of my semi-detached villa. He sends me a hamper of vegetables every week, and Joan presents me

with a couple of chickens now and then, *reared on my lawn.*

They come in handy when Dulcie and her Wilhelm are staying with me. Herr Müller has an appointment in Aberdeen now. They are dreadfully poor, and a little Müller arrives every year, but Dulcie is as happy as she is incompetent and impecunious. She adds to their small muddled away income by giving lessons in astrology. I have learned the rudiments of the science, in order when I stay with her to help her with her pupils. But I never stay long as I have rheumatism as severely in Aberdeen as in Banff.

Her Murderer

"The truth is, I shall have to murder her ! " said Mark gloomily. "I see no way out of it."

"I could not be really happy with a husband whose hands were red with gore," I remarked. "I'm super-sensitive, I know. I can't help it. I was made so. If you murder her, I warn you I shall throw you over. And where would you be then ? "

"Exactly where I am now, as far as marrying you is concerned. You may throw me over as much as you like. I shan't turn a hair."

He had not many hairs left to turn, and perhaps he remembered that fact, and that I held nothing sacred, for he hurried on in an aggrieved tone :

"You never give me credit for any imagination. I'm not going to spill her blood. I'm much too tidy. I've thought it all out. I shall take you and her on a picnic to the New Forest, and trot you both about till you're nearly famished. And then for luncheon I shall produce a tin of potted lobster. I shall choose it very carefully with a bulging tin. Potted lobster is deadly when the tin bulges. And as the luncheon will be at my expense, she will eat more than usual. She will 'partake heartily,' as the newspapers will say

afterwards ; at least, as I hope they will have occasion to say. And then directly the meal is over the lobster will begin to do its duty, and swell inside her, and she'll begin struggling among the picnic things. I shan't be there. I shall have gone for a little stroll. You will support her in her last moments. I don't mind helping with the funeral. I'd do that willingly."

I laughed, but I was near to tears.

"How long have we been engaged ? " asked Mark.

"Twelve years. You know that as well as I do."

"Well, as far as I can see, we shall be still affianced in twenty years' time. Aunt Pussy will see us all out."

"We may toddle to the altar yet," I said hysterically, "when you are about eighty and I am seventy. And I shall give you a bath-chair, and you will present the bridesmaids, who must not be a day younger than myself, with rubber hot-water bottles. Rubber will be cheap again by then."

He came back, and sat down by me.

"It's damnable ! " he said.

"It is," I replied.

"And it isn't as if the little ass couldn't afford it ! " he broke out, after a moment. "She can't have less than thirty thousand a year, and she lives on one. And it will all come to you when she dies. And it's rolling up, and rolling up, and

the years pass and pass. Our case is desperate. Janet, can't you say something to her? Can't you make a great appeal to her? Can't you get hold of someone who has an influence over her, and appeal to them?"

I did not think it necessary to answer. He knew I had tried everything years ago.

It had been thought a wonderful thing for me when Aunt Pussy, my godmother, adopted me when I was fourteen. We were a large family, and I was the only delicate one, not fitted, so my parents thought, to "fend for myself" in this rough world. And I had always liked Aunt Pussy, and she me. And she promised my father, on his impecunious death-bed, that she would take charge of me and educate me. She further gratuitously and solemnly promised that she would leave me all her money. Her all was not much, a few hundreds a year. But that was a great deal to people like ourselves. She was our one rich relation, and it was felt that I was provided for, which eventually caused an estrangement between me and my brothers and sisters, who had to work for their living; while I always had pretty clothes and a little—a very little—pocket-money, and did nothing in the way of work except arrange flowers, and write a few notes, and comb out Aunt Pussy's Flossy, being careful to keep the parting even down the middle of his back.

My sisters became workers, and they also became ardent Suffragists, which would have shocked my father dreadfully if he had been alive, for he was of opinion that woman's proper sphere is the home, though, of course, if you have not got a home or any money it seems rather difficult for women to remain in their sphere.

I, being provided for, remained perfectly womanly, of the type that the Anti-Suffrage League, and the sterner sex especially, admire. I took care of my appearance, I dressed charmingly on the very small allowance which Aunt Pussy doled out to me, I was an adept at all the little details which make a home pleasant, I never wanted to do anything except to marry Mark.

For across the even tenor of our lives, in a little villa in Kensington, as even as the parting down Flossie's back, presently came two great events. Aunt Pussy inherited an enormous fortune, and the following year, I being then twenty, fell in love with Mark and accepted him. I can't tell you whether he, poor dear, was quite disinterested at first. It was, of course, known that I should inherit all my aunt's money. He was rather above me in the social scale. I have sometimes thought that his old painted, gambling Jezebel of a mother prodded him in my direction.

But if he was not disinterested at first, he became so. We were two perfectly ordinary

young people. But we were meant for each other, and we both knew it.

We never for a moment thought there would be any real difficulty in the way of our marriage. Aunt Pussy was, of course, exasperatingly niggardly, but she was now very wealthy, and she approved of Mark, partly because he was not without means. He was an only child with a little of his own, and with expectations from his mother. He had had a sunstroke in Uganda, which had forced him to give up his profession, but he was independent of it. Aunt Pussy, however, though she was most kind and sentimental about us, could not at first be induced to say anything definite about money.

When, after a few months, I began to grow pale and thin, she went so far as to say that she would give me an allowance equal to his income. I fancy even that concession cost her nights of agony. If he could make up five hundred a year she would make up the same.

Was this the moment, I ask you, for his wicked old mother to gamble herself into disgrace and bankruptcy? My poor Mark came, swearing horribly, to her assistance. But when he had done so, and had given her a pittance to live on, there was nothing left for himself.

Even then neither of us thought it mattered much. Aunt Pussy would surely come round. But we had not reckoned on the effect that a large

fortune can make on a miserly temperament. She clutched at the fact that Mark was penniless as a reason to withdraw her previous promise. She would not part with a penny. She did not want to part with me. She put us off with one pretext after another. After several years of irritation and anger and exasperation, we discovered what we ought to have known from the first, that nothing would induce her to give up anything in her life-time, though she was much too religious to break her promise to my father. She intended to leave me everything. But she was not going to part with sixpence as long as she could hold on to it.

We tried to move her, but she was not to be moved. On looking back I see now that she was more eccentric than we realised at the time. In the course of twelve years Mark and I went through all the vicissitudes that two commonplace people deeply in love do go through if they can't marry.

We became desperate. We decided to part. We urged each other to marry someone else. We conjured each other to feel perfectly free. We doubted each other. He swore. I wept. He tried to leave me and he couldn't. I did not try. I knew it was no use. We each had opportunities of marrying advantageously if we could only have disentangled ourselves from each other. I learned what jealousy can be of a woman,

younger and better looking, and sweeter-tempered and with thicker hair than myself.

He asseverated with fury that he was never jealous of me. If that was so, his outrageous behaviour to his own cousin, a rich and blameless widower in search of a wife, was inexplicable. And now, after twelve years, we had reached a point where we could only laugh. There was nothing else to be done. He was growing stout, and I was growing lean. If only middle-aged men could grow thin, and poor middle-aged women a little plump, life would be easier for them. But we reversed it. Aunt Pussy alone seemed untouched by time. Even Mark's optimistic eye could never detect any sign of "breaking up" about her.

And throughout those dreary years we had one supreme consolation, and a very painful consolation it was. We loved each other.

"It's damnable!" said Mark again. "Well, if I'm not to murder her, if you're going to thwart me in every little wish just as if we were married already, I don't see what there is to be done. I've inquired about a post obit."

"Oh, Mark!"

"It's no use saying 'Oh, Mark'! I tell you I've inquired about a post obit, and if you ha.. a grain of affection for me you would have done the same yourself years ago. But it seems you can't raise money on a promise which may be broken,

As I said before, there is no way out of it except by bloodshed. I shall have to murder her, and then you can marry me or not as you like. You will like, safe enough, if I am handy with the remains."

The door opened, and Aunt Pussy hurried in. She was always in a hurry. We did not start away from each other, but remained stolidly seated side by side on the horsehair dining-room sofa with anger in our hearts against her. She had never given me a sitting-room. I always had to interview Mark in the dining-room with a plate of oranges on the sideboard, like a heroine in "The Quiver."

Aunt Pussy was a small, dried-up woman of between fifty and sixty, with a furtive eye and a perpetually moving mouth, who looked as if she had been pinched out of shape by someone with a false sense of humour and no reverence. She was dressed in every shade of old black—rusty black, green black, brown black, spotted black, figured black, plain black. Mark got up slowly, and held out his hand.

"How do you do, Mark ? " she said nervously. "I will own I'm somewhat surprised to see you here," ignoring his hand, and taking some figs out of a string bag, and placing them on an empty plate (the one that ought to have had oranges in it) on the sideboard. "I have brought you some figs, Janet ; you said you liked them.

I thought it was agreed that until Mark had some reasonable prospect of being able to support a wife his visits here had better cease."

"I never agreed," said Mark, "I was always for their continuing. I've been against a long engagement from the first."

"Well, in any case, you must have a cup of tea now you are here," continued Aunt Pussy, taking off her worn gloves, which I had mended for her till the fingers were mere stumps. "Ring the bell, Janet. We will have tea in here as there isn't a fire in the drawing-room."

She put down more parcels on the table, and then her face changed.

"My bag!" she gasped, and collapsed into a chair like one felled by emotion. "My bag!"

We looked everywhere. Mark explored the hall and the umbrella-stand. No handbag was to be seen.

"I knew something would happen if the month began with a Friday!" moaned Aunt Pussy.

"Had it a great deal in it?" I asked.

"Twenty pounds!" said Aunt Pussy, as if it were the savings of a lifetime. "I had drawn twenty pounds to pay the monthly books." And she became the colour of lead.

I flew for her salts, and made tea quickly, and presently she recovered sufficiently to drink it. But her hand shook.

"Twenty pounds!" she repeated, below her breath.

We questioned her as to where she last remembered using the bag, and at length elicited the information that she had no recollection of its society after visiting Brown and Prodgers, the great shop in Baskaville Road, where she recalled eating a meat lozenge, drawn from its recesses. Mark offered to go round there at once, and see if it had been found.

"I've never lost anything before," she said when he had gone, "but I felt this morning that some misfortune was going to happen. There was a black cat on the leads when I looked out. As sure as fate, if I see a black cat something goes wrong. Last time I saw one, two of my handkerchiefs were missing from the wash."

As Aunt Pussy bought her handkerchiefs in the sales for less than sixpence each, I felt that the black cat made himself rather cheap.

Mark returned with the cheering news that a bag had been found at Brown and Prodgers, and one of the principal shopwalkers had taken charge of it. And if Aunt Pussy would call in person to-morrow, and accurately describe its contents, it would be returned to her.

Aunt Pussy was so much relieved that she actually smiled on him, and offered him a second cup of tea. But next morning at breakfast I saw at once that something was gravely amiss.

Had she slept ?

Yes.

Had she seen the black cat ?

No.

"The truth is, Janet," she said, "I have had a most terrible dream. I feel sure it was a warning, and I really don't know whether I ought to call for it or not."

"Call for what ? "

"The bag."

"Was the dream about the bag ? "

"What else could it be about ? I took one of my little bromides last night, for I knew I had not a chance of sleep after the agitation of the day. And I fell asleep at once. And I dreamed that it was morning, and I was in my outdoor things going to Brown and Prodgers for the bag. And the black cat walked all the way before me with its tail up. But it did not come in. And when I got there I told a shopwalker who was standing near the door what I had come about. He was a tall, dark man with a sort of down look. He bowed and said, 'Follow me, madam.' And I followed him. And we went through the—ahem ! the gentlemen's underclothing, which I make a point of never going through, I always go round by the artificial flowers, until we came to a glass door near the lift. And he unlocked the door and I went in, and there on the table lay my bag. I was so delighted I ran to take it.

But he stopped me, and I saw then what an evil-looking man he was. And he said, 'Look well at this bag, madam. Do you recognise it as yours ?' And I looked and I said I did. There was the place where you had mended the handle.

"Then he took it up, and put it in my hand, and said, 'Look well at the contents, madam, and verify that they are all there.'

"So I looked at them, and they were all there, the tradesmen's books and everything. And I counted the money and it came right. The only thing I could not be sure about was the number of the meat lozenges. I thought one might have been stolen.

"Then when I had finished he said, 'Look well at me, madam, for I am your murderer.' And I was so terrified that I dropped the bag and woke with a scream. Now, Janet, don't you think it would be flying in the face of Providence to go there this morning ? Dreams like that are not sent for nothing."

"Well, perhaps it would be better not," I said maliciously, for I knew very well that Aunt Pussy would risk any form of death rather than lose twenty pounds.

"I thought perhaps you would not mind getting it for me. The danger would not be the same for you."

"I should not mind in the least, but they will only give it up to you."

Aunt Pussy's superstition struggled with her miserliness throughout her frugal breakfast. Need I say her miserliness won. Had it ever sustained one defeat in all her life! But she remained agitated and nervous to an extreme degree. I offered to go with her, but she felt that was not protection enough. So I telephoned to Mark, and presently he arrived and Aunt Pussy solemnly recapitulated her dream, and we all three set out together, she walking a little ahead, evidently on the look-out for the black cat.

Mark whispered to me that the portent about the black cat was being verified for us, not her, and that the shopwalker was evidently a very decent fellow, and that if he did his duty by us he should certainly ask him to be best man at our wedding. He had not made up his mind how deep his mourning ought to be for a murdered aunt-in-law, and was, to use his own expression, still poised like a humming-bird between a grey silk tie and a black one with a white spot, when we reached the shop.

It was early, and there were very few customers about. A tall dark man was walking up and down. Aunt Pussy instantly clutched my arm, and whispered, "It's him!"

He saw us looking at him, and came up to us, a melancholy downcast, unprepossessing-looking man. As Aunt Pussy could only stare at him, Mark, who had spoken to him the day before,

told him the lady had come to identify the bag lost on the previous afternoon. The man bowed to Aunt Pussy, and said, "Follow me, madam," and we followed him through several departments.

"Gentlemen's outfitting!" hissed Aunt Pussy suddenly in my ear, pointing with a trembling finger at a line of striped and tasselled pyjamas which she had avoided for many years.

Presently we came to a glass door, and the man took a key from his pocket, opened the door, and ushered us in. And there on a small table lay a bag—*the* bag—Aunt Pussy's bag, with the mended handle. She groaned.

The man fixed his eyes on her and said:

"Look well at this bag, madam. Do you recognise it as yours?"

"I do," said Aunt Pussy, as inaudibly as a bride at the altar.

He then asked her what the contents were, and she described them categorically. He then took up the bag, put it into her hand, and said, "Look well at the contents, madam, and verify that they are all there."

They were all there. As Aunt Pussy was too paralysed to utter another word I said so for her.

There was a long pause. The man looked searchingly from one to the other of us, and sighed. If he expected a tip he was disappointed. After a moment he moved towards Aunt Pussy to open

the door behind her. As he did so she gave a faint scream, and subsided on the floor in a swoon.

When we had resuscitated and conveyed her home, and Mark had gone, she said in a hollow voice :

"Wasn't it enough to make anybody faint ? "

I said cheerfully that I did not see any cause for alarm ; that the man no doubt always used exactly the same formula whenever lost property had to be identified.

"But why should he have said just at the last moment, 'Look well at me, madam, I am your murderer ? ' "

"Dear Aunt Pussy, of course he never said any such thing ! "

"He did ! I heard him ! That was why I fainted."

It was in vain I assured her that she was mistaken. She only became hysterical and said I was deceiving her ; that she saw I had heard it, too. She had been eccentric before, but from this time onwards she became even more so. She would not deal at Brown and Prodgers any more. She would not even pass the shop. She became more penurious than ever.

We could hardly persuade servants to stay with us so rigid was she about the dripping. It was all I could do to obtain the necessary money for our economical housekeeping. As the lease of our house was drawing to a close, she decided

to move into a flat, thinking it might be cheaper. But when it was all arranged and the lease signed, she refused to go in, because the man who met us there with a selection of wallpapers was, she averred, the same man whom she always spoke of as her murderer.

And I believe she was right. I thought I recognised him myself. I asked him if he had not formerly been at Brown and Prodgers, and he replied that he had ; but was now employed by Whisk and Blake. After this encounter nothing would induce Aunt Pussy to enter her new home. She had to pay heavily for her changeableness, but she only wrung her hands and paid up. The poor little woman had a hunted look. She evidently thought she had had a great escape.

Mark, who did not grow more rational with increasing years, said that this was obviously the psychological moment for us to marry, and drew a vivid picture of the group at the altar—the blushing bridegroom and determined bride, and how when Aunt Pussy saw her murderer step forward as the best man, with a gardenia in his buttonhole, she would die of shock on the spot. And after handsomely remunerating our benefactor, he and I should whisk away in a superb motor, with a gross of shilling cigars on an expensive honeymoon.

Six months passed, and there was no talk of

any honeymoons. And then the lease of our house came to an end, and Aunt Pussy, having refused to allow any other house or flat to be taken, she was forced to warehouse her furniture, and we had recourse to the miseries of hotel life. Needless to say, we did not go to a quiet residential hotel, but to one of those monster buildings glued on to a railway station, where the inmates come and go every day.

Strangely enough, the galvanised activity of hotel existence pleased Aunt Pussy. She called it "seeing life." She even made timid advances to other old ladies, knitting and dozing in the airless seclusion of the ladies' drawing-room, for, of course, we had no sitting-room. I saw plainly enough that we should live in those two small adjoining bedrooms under the roof, looking into a tiled air-shaft, for the remainder of Aunt Pussy's life.

Three months we lived there, and then at the cheapest time in the year, when the hotel was half empty and the heat of our rooms appalling, she consented to move for a short time into the two rooms exactly below ours, which looked on the comparatively balmy open of the August thoroughfare, and had a balcony.

I had realised by this time that Aunt Pussy was no longer responsible for her long cruelty to Mark and me, and my old affection for her revived somewhat with her pathetic dependence

on me. She could hardly bear me out of her sight.

A certain Mrs. Curtis, a benevolent old Australian widow, living in rooms next ours on this lower floor, showed us great kindness. She grasped at once what Aunt Pussy was, and she would sit with her by the hour, enabling me to go out in the air. She took me for drives. She soon discovered there was a Mark in the background, and often asked us to dine at her table, and invited him too.

She was said to be enormously wealthy, and she certainly wore a few wonderful jewels, but she was always shabbily dressed. Aunt Pussy became very fond of her, and must have been a great trial to her, running in and out of her rooms at all hours. She gave us tea in her sitting-room next door to us, and this gave Aunt Pussy special satisfaction, as we, having no sitting-room, could not possibly, as she constantly averred, return the civility.

Towards the end of September the hotel began to fill again, and the prices of the lower rooms were raised. So we moved back to our old quarters, and Mrs. Curtis, who had a noisy bedroom, took for herself and her son the two we had vacated. Her son was expected, and I have never forgotten her face of joy when she received a telegram from him during dinner saying he had reached Calais, and should arrive next morning.

We were dining early, for the kind old woman was taking Mark and me to the play. The play was delightful, and he and I, sitting together laughing at it, forgot our troubles, forgot that our youth was irretrievably gone, and that we were no nearer happiness than we had been thirteen years before. Our little friend in her weird black gown, with her thin fingers covered with large diamonds clutching an opera glass, looked at us with pained benevolence.

Mark saw us back to the door of our hotel, and after he was gone Mrs. Curtis took my arm as we mounted the steps and said gently :

"You and that nice absurd man must keep your courage up. I waited seventeen years for my husband, and when it was over it was only like a day."

The night porter appeared at the lift door, and we got in. He stood with his back to me, and I did not look at him till he said : "What floor ? " The servants knew us so well that I was surprised at the question, and glanced at him. It was Aunt Pussy's murderer. I recognised him instantly, and I will own my first thought was one of self-congratulation.

"Now we shall leave this horrible place," I thought. "She will never stay another day if he is here."

But my second thought was for her. She might go clean out of her mind if she were

suddenly confronted with him. What would it be best to do?

When he had put down Mrs. Curtis at Floor 7, and we were rumbling towards Floor 8, he volunteered, as we bumped with violence against the roof that he was new to the work. I asked him what hours he came on and went off at. He said, "Heleven p.hem. to hate hay-hem." He did not recognise me—as, indeed, why should he?—but he looked more downcast and villainous than ever. It was evident that life had not gone well with him since he had been foreman at Brown and Prodgers.

"Lady's son from Horsetralia just arrived," he remarked conversationally, jerking his thumb towards the lower landing. "Took 'im up 'arf an hour ago."

I was surprised that Mr. Curtis should have already arrived, but in another moment I forgot all about it, for the first object that met my eyes as I opened my door was Aunt Pussy in a state of great agitation, sitting fully dressed on my bed. It seemed that after we had started for the play she had stood a moment in the hall looking after us, and she had seen her murderer pass, and not only had he passed, but he had exchanged a few words with the hall porter airing himself on the hotel steps.

"We must leave. We must leave to-morrow, Janet," she repeated, in an agony of terror. "I

know he'll get in and kill me. That's why he spoke to the porter. Let's go and live at Margate. No, not Margate; it's too public. But I saw a little house at Southwold once; tumbling down it was, with no road up to it. Such a horrid place! We might go and live *there*. No one would ever think I should go there. Promise me you will take me away from London to-morrow, Janet."

I promised, I realised that we must go at once, and I calculated that if Aunt Pussy, who always breakfasted in her room, only left it at ten o'clock to enter a cab to take her to the station it was impossible she should run across the new night porter, who went off duty several hours earlier. She must never know that he was actually in the house.

I tried to calm her, but dawn was already in the sky, or rather reflected on the tiles of our air-shaft, before she fell asleep, and I could go to my room and try to do the same.

I did it so effectually that it was nearly ten o'clock before I went down to breakfast, leaving Aunt Pussy still slumbering.

While I drank my coffee I looked out the trains for Southwold, and noted down the name of a quiet hotel there, and then went to the manager's office to give up our rooms. When I got there a tired, angry young man, with a little bag, was interviewing the manager, who was eyeing him

doubtfully, while a few paces away the hall porter, all gold braid and hair-oil and turned-out feet, was watching the scene.

"Surely Mrs. Curtis told you she was expecting me, her son," he was saying as I came up.

"Yes, sir," said the manager, civil but suspicious. "No doubt, sir. Mrs. Curtis said as you were expected this morning, but, begging your pardon, you arrived last night, sir. Mr. Gregory Curtis arrived last night just after I retired for the evening."

"Impossible," said the young man, impatiently. "There is some mistake. Take me to Mrs. Curtis's room at once."

The manager hesitated.

"This certainly is Mr. Gregory Curtis," I said, coming forward. "He is exactly like the photograph of her son which stands on Mrs. Curtis's table, and which I have seen scores of times."

The young man looked gratefully at me. And then, in a flash, as it were, we all took alarm.

"Then who *did* you take up to my mother's rooms last night?" said her son. "And who took him up?"

"Not me, sir," said the hall porter promptly. "I was off duty. Clarke, the new night porter, must have took him up."

"Where *is* Clarke?" asked the manager, seizing down a key from a peg on the wall.

"Gone to bed, sir. Not been gone five minutes."

"Bring him to me at once. And take this gentleman and me up in the lift first."

"This lady also," said Gregory, indicating me.

A horrible sense of guilt was stealing over me. Why hadn't I waited to see the fragile little old woman safely into her rooms?

The manager and Gregory did not speak. I dared not look at them. The lift came to a standstill, and in a moment the manager was out of it, and fitting his master key into the lock of No. 10, almost knocking over a can of hot water on the mat. The door opened, and we all went in.

The room was dark, and as the manager went hastily forward to draw the curtain his foot struck against something and he drew back with an exclamation. I, who was nearest the door, turned on the electric light.

Mrs. Curtis was lying with outstretched arms on her face on the floor. Her widow's cap had fallen off, revealing on the crown of the head a dark stain. Her small hands, waxen white, were spread out as if in mild deprecation. There were no rings on them. The despatch box on the dressing table had been broken open, and the jewel cases lay scattered on the floor.

After a moment of stupor, Gregory and I raised the little figure and laid it on the bed. It was obvious that there was nothing to be done.

As we did so the door opened and the day porter dragged in the new lift man, holding him strongly by the arm.

They both looked at the dead woman on the bed. And then the lift man began to shake as with an ague, and his face became as ashen as hers.

"You saw her last alive," said the manager, "and you took up the party to her room last night."

The lift man was speechless. The drops stood on his forehead. He looked the image of guilt.

And as we stood staring at him Aunt Pussy ambled in in her dressing-gown, with her comb in her hand, having probably left something in the room she had only yesterday vacated.

Her eyes fell first on the dead body, and then on the lift man.

I expected her to scream or faint, but she did neither. She seemed frozen. Then she raised a steady comb and pointed it at the lift man.

"He is her murderer," she said solemnly. "He meant to murder me. He told me so a year ago. He has followed me here to do it. But he did not know I had changed my rooms, and he has killed her instead."

I don't know what happened after that, for I was entirely taken up with Aunt Pussy. I put my hand over her mouth, and hustled her back to her rooms.

"He will be hanged now," she said over and over again throughout that awful day. "He is *certain* to be hanged, and when he is really dead I shall feel safe. Then I shall take a house, and you shall have a motor, and anything you like, Janet. He's in prison now, isn't he?"

"Yes, poor creature. He is under arrest. A policeman has taken him away."

"Safe in prison now, and hanged very soon. I shan't be easy otherwise. And then I shall sleep peacefully in my bed."

She was better than she had been for the last year. She ate and slept, and seemed to have taken a new lease of life. She was absolutely callous about Mrs. Curtis's death, and suggested that half-a-guinea was quite enough to give for a wreath.

"If you're thinking of the number of times she gave us tea," she said, "it could not possibly, with tea as cheap as it is now—Harrod's own only one and seven—come to more than eight and six." And she opened her "Daily Mail" and pored over it. She had of late ceased to take in any paper, but now she took in the "Daily Mail" and the "Evening Standard," and read the police news with avidity, looking for the trial of "her murderer."

Mark and I went to the funeral, and he was very low all the way home. He was really distressed about Mrs. Curtis and Gregory, but of

course he would not allow it, and accounted for his depression by saying that he had been attending the *wrong* funeral. He said he did not actually blame Clarke (the lift man), for he had shown good intentions, but the man was evidently a procrastinator and a bungler, who had deceived the confidence he (Mark) had reposed in him, and on whom no one could place reliance. Such men, he averred, were better hanged and out of the way.

When I got back to our rooms I found Aunt Pussy leaning back in her armchair near the window, with the "Evening Standard" spread out on her knee. A large heading caught my eye :

"SENSATIONAL ARREST OF THE MURDERER OF MRS. CURTIS."

" RELEASE OF CLARKE."

It had caught Aunt Pussy's eye too. And her sheer terror had been too much for her. She would never be frightened any more. She had had her last shock. She was dead.

. . . . . .

A month later Mark came to see me in the evening. We did not seem to have much to say to each other, perhaps because we were to be married next day. But I presently discovered that he was suffering from a suppressed communication.

"Out with it," I said. "You've got a wife and five small children at Peckham. There is still time to counter-order the motor and the wedding and the shilling cigars and—me."

He took no notice.

"I've seen Clarke," he said. "Poor devil! They won't have him back at the hotel, think he's unlucky, a sort of Jonah. His face certainly isn't his fortune, is it? And I hope you won't mind, Janet, I—"

"You've asked him to be best man instead of Gregory?"

"Well, no, I haven't. But I was sorry for him, and I gave him fifty pounds. Your money of course. I felt we owed him something for bringing us together. For you know, in a way, he really *has*, though he has been some time about it."

Votes for Men*

Two hundred years hence, possibly less.

EUGENIA, *Prime Minister, is sitting at her writing table in her library. She is a tall, fine looking woman of thirty, rather untidy and worn in appearance.*

EUGENIA [*to herself, taking up a paper*]. There is no doubt that we must carry through this bill or the future of the country will be jeopardized.

HENRY [*outside*]. May I come in ?

EUGENIA. Do come in, dearest.

HENRY [*a tall, athletic man of thirty, faultlessly dressed, a contrast to her dusty untidiness*]. I thought I could see the procession best from here. [*Goes to windows and opens them.*] It is in sight now. They are coming down the wind at a great pace.

EUGENIA [*slightly bored*]. What procession ?

HENRY. Why the Men's Reinfranchisement League, of course. You know, Eugenia, you promised to interview a deputation of them at 5 o'clock, and they determined to have a mass meeting first.

* First Published in 1909.

EUGENIA. So they did. I had forgotten. I wish they would not pester me so. Really, the government has other things to attend to than Male Suffrage at times like this.

[*The procession sails past the windows in planes decked with the orange and white colours of the league. The occupants preserve a dead silence, saluting* EUGENIA *gravely as they pass. From the streets far below rises a confused hubbub of men's voices shouting "Votes for men!"*

HENRY. How stately the clergy look, Eugenia! Why, there are the two Archbishops in their robes heading the whole procession, and look at the bevy of Bishops in their lawn sleeves in the great Pullman air car behind. What splendid men. And here come the clergy in their academic gowns by the hundred, in open trucks.

EUGENIA. I must say it is admirably organised, and no brawling.

HENRY. Why should they brawl? I believe you are disappointed that they don't. They are all saluting you, Eugenia, as they pass. They won't take any notice of me, of course, because it is known I am the President of the Anti-Suffrage League. The doctors are passing now. How magnificent they look in their robes! What numbers of them! It makes me proud I am a man. And now come the lawyers in crowds in their wigs and gowns.

EUGENIA. Every profession seems to be represented, but of course I am well aware that it is not the real wish of the men of England to obtain the vote. The suffragists must do something to convince me that the bulk of England's thoughtful and intelligent men are not opposed to it before I move in the matter.

HENRY. I often wonder what would convince you, Eugenia, or what they could do that they have not done. These must be the authors and artists and journalists, and quite a number of women with them. Do you notice that? Look, that is Hobson the poet, and Bagg the millionaire novelist, each in their own Swallow planes. How they dart along. I should like to have a Swallow, Eugenia. And are all those great lumbering tumbrils of men journalists?

EUGENIA. No doubt.

HENRY. It is very impressive. I wish they did not pass so fast, but the wind is high. Here come all the trades with the Lord Mayor of London in front! What hordes and hordes of them! The procession is at least a mile long. And I suppose those are miners and agricultural labourers, last of all, trying to keep up in those old Wilbur Wrights and Zeppelins. I did not know there were any left except in museums.

[*The procession passes out of sight.* EUGENIA *sighs.*

HENRY. Demonstrations like this make a man think, Eugenia. I really can't see, though you often tell me I do, why men should not have votes. They used to have them. You yourself say that there is no real inequality between the sexes. The more I think of it the more I feel I ought to retire from being President of the Anti-Suffrage League. And all the men on it are old enough to be my father. The young men are nearly all in the opposite camp. I sometimes wish I was there too.

EUGENIA. Henry!

HENRY. Now don't, Eugenia, make any mistake I abhor the "brawling brotherhood" as much as you do. I was quite ashamed for my sex when I saw that bellowing brute riveted to the balcony of your plane the other day, shouting "Votes for men."

EUGENIA [*coldly*]. That sort of conduct puts back the cause of men's reinfranchisement by fifty years. It shows how unsuited the sex is to be trusted with the vote. Imagine that sort of hysterical screaming in the House itself.

HENRY. But ought the cause to be judged by the folly of a few howling dervishes? Sometimes it really seems, Eugenia, as if women were determined to regard the brawling brotherhood as if it represented the men who seek for the vote. And yet the sad part is that these brawlers have done more in two years to advance the cause than their more orderly

brothers have achieved in twenty. For years past I have heard quiet suffragists say that all their efforts have been like knocking in a padded room. They can't make themselves heard. Women smiled and said the moment was not opportune. The press gave garbled accounts of their sayings and doings.

EUGENIA. Your simile is unfortunate. No one wants to emancipate the only persons who are confined in padded rooms.

HENRY. Not if they are unjustly confined?

EUGENIA [*with immense patience*]. Dear Henry, must we really go over this old ground again? Men used to have votes as we all know. In the earliest days of all, of course, both men and women had them. The ancient records prove that beyond question, and that women presented themselves with men at the hustings. Then women were practically disfranchised, and for hundreds of years men ruled alone, though it was not until near the reign of Victoria the First that by the interpolation of the word "male" before "persons" in the Reform Act of 1832 women were legally disfranchised. Men were disfranchised almost as suddenly in the reign of Man-hating Mary the Second of blessed memory.

HENRY. I know, I know, but. . . .

EUGENIA [*whose oratorical instincts are not exhausted by her public life*]. You must remember I would have you all—I mean I would have

you, Henry, remember that men were only disfranchised after the general election of 2009. It was the wish of the country. We must bow to that.

HENRY. You mean it was the wish of the women of the country, who were a million stronger numerically than men.

EUGENIA. It was the wish of the majority, including many thousands of enlightened men, my grandfather among them, who saw the danger to their country involved in continued male suffrage. After all, Henry, it was men who were guilty of the disaster of adult suffrage. Women never asked for it—they were deeply opposed to it. They only demanded the suffrage on the same terms that men had it in Edward the Seventh's time. Adult suffrage was the last important enactment of men, and one which ought to prove to you, considering the incalculable harm it did, that men, in spite of their admirable qualities, are not sufficiently far-sighted to be trusted with a vote. Adult suffrage lost us India. It all but lost us our Colonies, for the corner-men and wastrels and unemployed who momentarily became our rulers saw no use for them. The only good result of adult suffrage was that women, by the happy chance of their numerical majority, and with the help of Mary the Manhater, were able to combine, to outvote the men and so to seize the reins and abolish it.

HENRY. And abolish us too.

EUGENIA. It was an extraordinary *coup d'état*, the one good result of the disaster of adult suffrage. It was a bloodless revolution, but the most amazing in the annals of history. And it saved the country.

HENRY. I do not deny it. But you can't get away from the fact that men did give women the vote originally. And now men have lost it themselves. Why should not women give it back to men—I mean, of course, only to those who have the same qualifications as to property as women voters have? After all it was by reason of our physical force that we were entitled to rule, at least men always said so. Over and over again they said so in the House, and that women can't be soldiers and sailors and special constables as we can. And our physical force remains the greater to this day.

EUGENIA. We do everything to encourage it.

HENRY. Without us, Eugenia, you would have no army, no navy, no miners. We do the work of the world. We guard and police the nation, and yet we are not entitled to a hearing.

EUGENIA. Your ignorance of the force that rules the world is assumed for rhetorical purposes.

HENRY. I suppose you will say brain ought to rule. Well, some of us are just as able as some of you. Look at our great electricians, our shipbuilders, our inventors, our astronomers, our poets, nearly all are men. Shakespeare was a man.

EUGENIA [*sententiously*]. There was a day, and a very short day it was, when it was said that brain ought to rule. Brain did make the attempt, but it could no more rule this planet than brute force could continue to do so. You know, and I know, and every schoolgirl knows, that what rules the birth-rate rules the world.

HENRY [*for whom this sentiment has evidently the horrid familiarity of the senna of his childhood*]. It used not to be so.

EUGENIA. It is so now. It is no use arguing; it is merely hysteria to combat the basic fact that the sex which controls the birth-rate must by nature rule the nation which it creates. This is not a question with which law can deal, for nature has decided it.

[HENRY *preserves a paralysed silence.*

EUGENIA [*with benignant dignity*]. I am all for the equality of the sexes within certain limits, the limits imposed by nature. But the long and the short of it is, to put it bluntly, no man, my dear Henry, can give birth to a child, and until he can he will be ineligible by the laws of nature, not by any woman-made edict, to govern, and the less he talks about it the better. Sensible men and older men know that and hold their tongues, and women respect their silence. Man has his sphere, and a very important and useful sphere in life it is. The defence of the nation is

entrusted to him. Where should we be without our trusty soldiers and sailors, and, as you have just reminded me, our admirable police force? Where physical strength comes in men are paramount. When I think of all the work men are doing in the world I assure you, Henry, my respect and admiration for them knows no bounds. But if they step outside their own sphere of labour, then—

HENRY. But if only you would look into the old records, as I have been doing, you would see that Lord Curzon and Lord James and Lord Cromer, and many others employed these same arguments in order to withhold the suffrage from women.

EUGENIA. I dare say.

HENRY. And there is another thing which does not seem to me to be fair. Men are so ridiculed if they are suffragists. *Punchinella* always draws them as obese disappointed old bachelors, and there are many earnest young married men among the ranks of the suffragists. Look at the procession which has just passed. Our best men were in it. And to look at *Punchinella* or to listen to the speeches in the House you would think that the men who want the vote are mostly repulsive old bachelors stung by the neglect of women. Why only last week the member for Maidenhead, Mrs. Colthorpe it was got up and said that if only this "brawling brotherhood" of single gentlemen, who had missed domestic bliss,

could find wives they would not trouble their heads about reinfranchisement.

EUGENIA. There is no doubt there is an element of sex resentment in the movement, dear Henry. That is why I have always congratulated myself on the fact that, you, as my husband, were opposed to it.

HENRY. Personally I can't imagine now that women have the upper hand why they don't keep up their number numerically. It is their only safeguard against our one day regaining the vote. It was their numerical majority plus adult suffrage which suddenly put them in the position to disfranchise men. And yet women are allowing their number to decline and decline until really for all practical purposes there seems to be about two men to every woman.

EUGENIA. The laws of nature render our position infinitely stronger than that of men ever was. We mounted by the ladder of adult suffrage, but we kicked it down immediately afterwards. It will never be revived. Men had no tremors about the large surplusage of women as long as they were without votes. Why should we have any now about the surplusage of men?

HENRY. Then there is another point. You talk so much about the importance of the physique of the race, and I agree with all my heart. But there are so few women to marry

nowadays, and women show such a marked disinclination towards marriage till their youth is quite over, that half the men I know can't get wives at all. And those who do, have almost no power of selection left to them, and are forced to put up with ill-developed, sickly, peevish, or ugly women past their first bloom rather than remain unmarried and childless.

EUGENIA. The subject is under consideration at this moment, but when the position was reversed in Edward the Seventh's time, and there were not enough men to go round, women were in the same plight, and men said nothing *then* about the deterioration of the race. They did not even make drunkards' marriages a penal offence. Drunkards and drug-takers, and men dried up by nicotine constantly married and had children in those days.

HENRY. I can't think the situation was as difficult for women as it is now for men. I was at Oxford last week, and do you know that during the last forty years only five per cent. of the male Dons and Professors have been able to find mates. Women won't look at them.

EUGENIA. In the nineteenth century, when first women went to Universities and became highly educated, only four per cent. of them afterwards married, and then to school-masters.

HENRY. And I assure you the amount of

hysteria and quarrelling among the older Dons is lamentable.

EUGENIA. I appointed a committee which reported to me on the subject last year, and I gathered that the present Dons are not more hysterical than they were in Victorian days, when they forfeited their fellowships on marriage. You must remember, Henry, that from the earliest times men and women have always hated anything "blue" in the opposite sex. Female blue stockings were seldom attractive to men in bygone days. And nowadays women are naturally inclined to marry young men, and healthy and athletic men, rather than sedentary old male blue stockings. It is most fortunate for the race that is is so.

HENRY [*with a sigh*]. Well, all the "blue" women can marry nowadays.

EUGENIA. Yes, thank heaven, *all* women can marry nowadays. What women must have endured in the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth century makes me shudder. For if they did not marry they were never spared the ridicule or the contemptuous compassion of men. It seems incredible, looking back, to realise that large families of daughters were kept idle and unhappy at home, after their youth was over, not allowed to take up any profession, only to be turned callously adrift in their middle age at their father's death, with a pittance on which they could

barely live. And yet these things were done by educated and kindly men who professed to care for the interests of women, and were personally fond of their daughters. Over and over again in the biographies of notable women of the Victorian and Edward the Seventh's time one comes across instances of the way in which men of the country-squire type kept their daughters at home uneducated till they were beyond the age when they could take up a profession, and then left them to poverty. They did not even insure their lives for each child as we do now. Surely, Henry, it is obvious that women have done one thing admirably. The large reduction which they have effected in their own numbers has almost eliminated the superfluous, incompetent, unhappy women who found it so difficult to obtain a livelihood a hundred years ago, and has replaced them by an extra million competent, educated, fairly contented men who are all necessary to the State, who are encouraged, almost forced into various professions.

HENRY. Not contented, Eugenia.

EUGENIA. More contented, because actively employed, than if they were wandering aimlessly in the country lanes of their father's estates as thousands of intelligent uneducated women were doing a hundred years ago, kept ferociously at home by the will of the parent who held the purse-strings.

HENRY. I rather wish I had lived in those good

old times, when the lanes were full of pretty women.

EUGENIA. But you, at any rate, Henry, had a large choice. I was much afraid at one time that you would never ask me.

HENRY. Ah! But then I was a great heir, and all heirs have a wide choice. Not that I had any choice at all. I had the good luck to be accepted by the only woman I ever cared a pin about, and the only one I was sure was disinterested.

EUGENIA. Dearest!

HENRY [*tentatively*]. And yet our marriage falls short of an ideal one, my Eugenia.

EUGENIA [*apologetically*]. Dear Henry, I know it does, but as soon as I cease to be Prime Minister I will do my duty to the country, and, what I think much more of, by you. What is a home without children? Besides, I must set an example. When you came in I was framing a bill to meet the alarming decline of the birth-rate. Unless something is done the nation will become extinct. The results of this tendency among women to marry later and later are disastrous.

HENRY. And what is your bill, Eugenia?

EUGENIA. That every healthy married woman or female celibate over twenty-five and under forty, members of the government excepted, must do her duty to the State by bringing into the world—

HENRY. Celibate! Bringing into the world! Eugenia! and I thought the sanctity of marriage and home life were among your deepest convictions. Just think how you have upheld them to—*men*.

EUGENIA. Patriotism must come first. By bringing into the world three children, a girl and two boys. If her income is insufficient to rear them, the State will take charge of them. One extra boy is needed to supply the wastage of accidents in practical work, and in case of war. I shall stand or fall by this bill, for unless the women of England can be aroused to do their duty—unless there is general conscription to motherhood, as in Germany, England will certainly become a second-class power.

HENRY. Perhaps when there are two men to every woman we shall be strong enough to force women to do justice to us.

EUGENIA. Men never did justice to us when they had the upper hand.

HENRY. They did not. And I think the truth lies there. Those who have the upper hand cannot be just to those who are in their power. They don't intend to be unfair, but they seem unable to give their attention to the rights of those who cannot enforce them. Men were unintentionally unjust to women for hundreds of years. They kept them down. Now women are unjust to us. Yes, Eugenia, you are. You keep us down. It seems to be an

inevitable part of the *rôle* of "top dog," and perhaps it is no use discussing it. If you don't want your plane, would you mind if I borrow it? I promised to meet Carlyon at four above the Florence Nightingale column in Anne Hyde's park, and it is nearly four now.

EUGENIA. Good-bye, Henry. Do take my plane. And I trust there will be no more doubt in your dear head as to your Presidency of the Anti-Suffrage League.

HENRY. None. I realise these wrigglings of the under dog are unseemly, and only disturb the equanimity and good-will of the "top dog." Good-bye, Eugenia.

The End of the Dream

THE first time I saw Essie was a few weeks before her marriage with my brother Ted. I knew beforehand that she would certainly be very pretty for the simple reason that Ted would never have been attracted by a plain woman. For him plain women did not exist, except as cooks, governesses, caretakers and charwomen.

Ted is the best fellow in the world, and when he brought her to see me I instantly realised why he had chosen her ; but I found myself wondering why she had chosen him—she was charming, lovely, shy, very young and diffident, and with the serenest temperament I have ever seen. She was evidently fond of him, and grateful to him. Later on I learned—from her, never from him—the distress and anxiety from which he had released her and her mother. There was a disreputable brother, and other entanglements, and complicated money difficulties.

Ted simply swooped down, and rescued her, and ordered her to marry him, which she did.

"She is a cut above me, Essie is," he used to say rubbing his hands, and looking at her with joyful

pride. It was true. Essie looked among us like a race horse among cart horses. She belonged, not by birth, but by breeding to a higher social plane than that on which we Hopkinses had our boisterous being. I was resentfully on the alert to detect the least sign of arrogance on her part. I expected it. But gradually the sleepless suspicion of the great middle class to which Ted and I belonged was lulled to rest. I had to own to myself that Essie was a simple, humble, and rather timid creature.

I went to stay with them a few months after their marriage in their new home in Kensington. Ted was outrageously happy, and she seemed well content, amused by him, rather in the same way that a child is amused by a large dog.

He had actually suggested before he met Essie that I should keep house for him, but I told him I preferred to call my soul my own. Essie apparently did not want to call anything her own. She let him have his way in everything, and it was a benevolent and sensible way, but it had evidently never struck him that she might have tastes and wishes even if she did not put them forward. He was absolutely autocratic, and without imagination.

Before they had been married a month he had prevailed on her to wear woollen stockings instead of silk ones, because he always wore woollen socks himself.

He chose the wallpapers of the house without any reference to her, though of course she accompanied him everywhere. He chose the chintzes for the drawing-room, and the curtains, and very good useful materials they were, not ugly, but of a garish cheerfulness. Indeed, he furnished the whole house without a qualm, and made it absolutely conventional. It is strange how very conventional people press towards the mark, how they struggle to be conventional, when it is only necessary to drift to become so.

Ted exerted himself, and Essie laughed, and said she liked what he liked. If she had not been so very pretty her self-effacement would have seemed rather insipid, but somehow she was not insipid. She liked to see him happy in his own prosaic efficient inartistic way, and I don't think she had it in her power to oppose him if she had wanted to, or indeed anyone. She was by nature yielding, a quality which men like Ted always find adorable.

I remember an American once watching Ted disporting himself on the balcony, pushing aside all Essie's tubs of flowering tulips to make room for a dreadful striped hammock.

"The thing I can't understand about you English women," said the visitor to Essie, "is why you treat your men as if they were household pets."

"What an excellent description of an English husband," said Essie. "That is just what he is."

"What's that? What's that?" said Ted, rushing in from the balcony, but as he never waited for an answer Essie seldom troubled to give him one.

Perhaps I should never have known Essie if I had not fallen ill in her house. Ted and she were kindness itself, but as I slowly climbed the hill of convalescence I saw less of him and more of her. He was constantly away, transacting business in various places, and I must own a blessed calm fell upon the house when the front door slammed, and he was creating a lucrative turmoil elsewhere. The weather was hot, and we sat out evening after evening in the square garden. Gradually, very gradually, a suspicion had arisen in my mind that there was another Essie whose existence Ted and I had so far never guessed. I saw that she did—perhaps by instinct—what wise women sometimes do of set purpose. She gave to others what they wanted from her, not necessarily the best she had to give. Ted had received from her exactly what he hoped and desired, and—he was happy.

The evening came when I made a sudden demand on her sympathy. In the quiet darkness of the square garden I told her of a certain agonising experience of my own which in one year had pushed me from youth into middle age, and had turned me not to stone, but into a rolling stone.

"I imagined it was something of that kind that

was the matter with you," she said in her gentle rather toneless voice.

"You guessed it," I said amazed. I had thought I was a closed book to the whole world. "You never spoke of your idea to Ted ? "

"Never. Why should I ? "

There was a long silence.

The noise of Kensington High Street reached us like the growl of some tired animal. An owl came across from Holland Park and alighted in a tree near us.

"You should have married him," said Essie at last.

"Married him ! " I exclaimed, "but you don't understand." And I went over the whole dreadful story again—at full length. Love affairs are never condensed. If they are told at all they are recounted in full.

"I don't see that any of those things matter," she said when I had finished, or rather when I paused.

"Where is he now ? "

"In Turkistan, I believe."

"Why not go to Turkistan ? " She spoke as if it were just round the corner.

"Turkistan ! "

"Well, it's somewhere on the map, I suppose. What does it matter where it is."

"And perhaps when I got there I might find he had set up a harem of Turkistan women."

"You might."

"Or that he had long since left for America."

"Just so."

"Or that he did not want me."

"All these things are possible."

The owl began to call through the dusk, and, not far away, somewhere in the square a gentle lady owl's voice answered him.

"There are things," said Essie, "which one can measure, and it is easy to know how to act about them, and whether it is worth while to act at all. Most things one can measure, but there are in life just a few things, a very few, which one cannot measure, or put a value on, or pay a certain price for, and no more, because they are on a plane where foot-rules and weighing machines and money do not exist. Love is one of these things. When we begin to weigh how much we will give to love, what we are willing to sacrifice for it, we are trying to drag it down to a mercantile basis and to lay it on the table of the money changers on which things are bought and sold, and bartered and equivalent value given."

"You think I don't love him," I said, cut to the quick.

"I am sure," said Essie, "that you don't love him yet, but I think you are on the road. Who was it who said

> "The ways of love are harder
> Than thoroughfares of stones."

Whoever it was, he knew what he was talking about. You have found the thoroughfare stony, and you rebel and are angry, very angry, and desert your fellow traveller. He, poor man, did not make the road. I expect he is just as angry and foot-sore as you are."

"He was a year ago. I don't know what he is now. It is a year since he wrote."

Essie knitted in silence.

At last I said desperately:

"I have told you everything. Do you think it's possible he still cares for me?"

Essie waited a long minute before answering.

"I don't know," she said, and then added, "but I think you will presently go to Turkistan and find out."

Reader, I went to Turkistan, and was married there, and lived there and in Anatolia for many happy years. But that is another story. I did not start on that voyage of discovery till several months after that conversation. I had battered myself to pieces against the prison bars of my misery, and health ruthlessly driven away was slow to return.

As I lived with Ted and Essie I became aware that he was becoming enormously successful in money matters. There were mysterious expeditions, buyings and sellings of properties, which necessitated sudden journeys. Immense transactions passed through his competent hands, and

presently the possibility of a country house was spoken of. He talked mysteriously of a wonderful old manor house in Essex, which he had come upon entirely by chance, which would presently come into the market, and which might be acquired much below its value, so anxious was the owner—a foreign bigwig—to part with it at once.

Ted prosed away about this house from teatime till bedtime. Essie listened dutifully, but it was I who asked all the questions.

Ted hurried away next morning, not to return for several days, one of which he hoped to spend in Essex.

"You don't seem much interested about the country house," I said at tea time. I was slightly irritated by the indifference which seemed to enwrap Essie's whole existence.

"Don't you care about it? It must be beautiful from Ted's account."

"If he likes it I shall like it."

"What a model wife you are. Have you no wishes of your own, no tastes of your own, Essie?"

She looked at me with tranquil eyes.

"I think Ted is happy," she said, "and I am so glad the children are both exactly like him."

"Yes, but—"

"There is no *but* in my case. Ted rescued me from an evil entanglement and eased my mother's life. And he set his kind heart on marrying me I told him I could not give him much, but he did

not mind. I don't think men like Ted understand that there is anything more that—that might be given ; which makes a very wonderful happiness when it *is* given. Our marriage was on the buying and selling plane. We each put out our wares. I saw very well that he would be impossible—for me at least—to live with unless I gave way to him entirely. Dear Ted is a benevolent tyrant. He would become a bully if he were opposed, and bullies are generally miserable. I don't oppose him. I think he is content with his bargain, and as fond of me as a man can be of a lay figure. My impression is that he regards me as a model wife."

"He does, he does. He is absolutely, blissfully happy."

"He would be just as happy with another woman," said Essie, "if she were almost inanimate. It was a comfort to me to remember that when I nearly died three years ago."

"Yes, Ted is all right," I said, "but how about you ? I used to think you were absolutely characterless, and humdrum, but I know better now. Don't you—miss anything ? "

"No," said Essie, "nothing. You see," she added tranquilly with the faintest spice of malice, "I lead a double life."

I gasped, staring at her open-mouthed, horror-stricken. She ignored my crass imbecility, and went on quietly :

"I don't know when it began, but I suppose when I was about five years old. I found my way to the enchanted forest, and I went there in my dreams every night."

"In your dreams!" I stuttered, enormously reassured, and idiotically hoping that she had not noticed my hideous lapse.

"In my dreams. I had an unhappy childhood, but I never was unhappy any more after I learned the way through the forest. Directly I fell asleep I saw the track among the tree trunks, and then after a few minutes I reached the wonderful glade and the lake, and the little islands. One of the islands had a temple on it. I fed the swans upon the lake. I twined garlands of flowers. I climbed the trees, and looked into the nests. I swung from tree to tree, and I swam from island to island. I made a little pipe out of a reed from the lake, and blew music out of it. And the rabbits peeped out of their holes to listen, and the squirrels came hand by hand along the boughs, and the great kites with their golden eyes came whirling down. Even the little moles came up out of the ground to listen.

I gazed at her, astonished.

"I did not wear any clothes," said Essie, "and I used to lie on the moss in the sun. It is delicious to lie on moss, warm moss in the sun. Once when I was a small child I asked my governess when those happy days would come

back when we should wear no clothes, and she told me I was very naughty. I never spoke to her of the dream forest again. She did not understand any more than you did the first moment. I think the natural instinct of the British mind if it does not understand is to look about for a lurking impropriety. I saw other children sometimes, but never close at hand. They went to the temple singing, garlanded and gay, but when I tried to join them I passed through them. They never took any notice of me."

"Were you a ghost ? "

"I think not. I imagine I am an old old soul who has often been in this world before, and by some strange accident I have torn a corner of the veil that hides our past lives from us, and in my dreams I became once more a child as I had really been once, hundreds and hundreds of years ago, perhaps in Greece or Italy."

"And do you still have that dream every night ? "

"Not for many years past. I lost my way to the forest for several years, until I was again in great trouble. That was when—then one night when I had cried myself to sleep I saw the same track through the thicket, and I found the forest again. Oh ! how I rejoiced ! And in the middle of the forest was a garden and a wonderful old house, standing on a terrace. And there was no

lake any more. It was a different place altogether, in England no doubt. And the house door was open. It was a low arched door with a coat of arms carved in stone over it. And I went in. And as I entered all care left me, and I was happy again, as I was among the islands in the lake. I can't tell you why I was so happy. I have sometimes asked myself, but it is a question I can't answer. It seemed my real home. I have gone back there every night since I was seventeen, and I know the house by heart. There is only one room I shrink from, though it is one of the most beautiful in the house. It is a small octagonal panelled room leading out of the banqueting hall where the minstrels gallery is. It looks on to the bowling green, and one large picture hangs in it, over the carved mantelpiece. A Vandyck I think it must be. It is a portrait of a cavalier with long curls holding his plumed hat in his hand."

"Did you meet people in the house?"

"No, not at first, not for several years, but I did not miss them. I did not want companionship; I felt that I was with friends, and that was enough. I wanted the repose, and the beauty and the peace which I always found there. I steeped myself in peace, and brought it back with me to help me through the day. The night was never long enough for me. And I always came back, rested, and refreshed, and content, oh! so

deeply content. I am a very lucky person, Beatrice."

"It explains you at last," I said. "You have always been to me an enigma, during the five years I have known you."

"The explanation was too simple for you."

"Do you call it simple? I don't. I should hardly be able to believe it if it were not you who had told me. And the house was always empty? You never saw anyone there?"

"It was never empty, but I could not see the people who lived in it. I could see nothing clearly, and I had no desire to pry or search. I was often conscious of someone near me, who loved me and whom I loved. And I could hear music sometimes, and sweet voices singing, but I could never find the room where the music was. But then I did not try to find it. Sometimes when I looked out of the windows I could see a dim figure walking up and down the terrace, but not often."

"Was it a man or a woman?"

"A man."

"And you never went out to the bowling green and spoke to him?"

"I never thought of such a thing. I never even saw his face till—till that Christmas I was so ill with pneumonia. Then I fled to the house, and for the first time I could find no rest in it. And I went into the octagonal room, and sat down near the window and leaned my forehead

against the glass. My head was burning hot, and the glass was hot too. Everything was hot. And there was a great dreadful noise of music. And suddenly it seemed as if I went deeper into the life of the house, where the light was clearer. It was as if a thin veil were withdrawn from everything. And the heat and the pain were withdrawn with the veil. And I was light and cool, and at ease once more. And the music was like a rippling brook. And *he* came into the room. I saw him quite clearly at last. And oh! Beatrice, he was the cavalier of the picture, dressed in blue satin with a sword. And he stood before me with his plumed hat in his hand.

And as I looked at him a gentle current infinitely strong seemed to take me. I floated like a leaf upon it. I think, Beatrice, it was the current of death. I felt it was bearing me nearer and nearer to him and to my real life, and leaving further and further behind my absurd little huddled life here in Kensington, which always *has* seemed rather like a station waitingroom.

We neither of us spoke, but we understood each other, and we loved each other. We had long loved each other. I saw that. And presently he knelt down at my feet and kissed my hands. Doesn't that sound commonplace, like a cheap novelette? but it wasn't. It wasn't . . . and then as we looked at each other the gentle sustaining current seemed to fail beneath me. I

struggled, but it was no use. It ebbed slowly away from me, leaving me stranded on an aching shore alone, in the dark, where I could not breathe or move. And I heard our doctor say, "she is going." But I wasn't going. I had nearly, nearly gone, and I was coming back. And then there was a great turmoil round me, and I came back in agony into my own room and my own bed, and found the doctor and nurse beside me giving me oxygen, and poor Ted as white as a sheet standing at the foot of the bed. . . . They forced me to—to stay. I had to take up life again."

And for the first time in all the years I had known her Essie was shaken with sudden weeping.

"That was three years ago," she said brokenly.

For a time we sat in silence hand in hand.

"And do you still go back there?"

"Every night."

"And you meet him?"

"Yes and no. I am sometimes aware of his presence, but I never see him clearly as I did that once. I think at that moment I was able to see him because I was so near death that I was very close to those on the other side of death. My spirit had almost freed itself from the body, so I became visible to him and he to me. I have studied the pictures of Charles the First's time, and his dress was exactly of that date, almost the same as that well-known picture—I think it is

Charles the First—of a man with his hand on his hip, standing beside a white horse. Do you think it is wrong of me to have a ghostly lover, who must have lived nearly three hundred years ago?"

"Not wrong, but strange. It is a little like "The Brushwood Boy," and "Peter Ibbetson," and Stella Benson's "This is the end." I suppose we have all been on this earth before, but the cup of Lethe is well mixed for most of us, and we have no memory of previous lives. But you have not drunk the cup to the dregs, and somehow you have made a hole in the curtain of oblivion in two places. Through one of those holes you saw one of your many childhoods, probably in Greece, a couple of thousand years ago. Through the other hole you saw, in comparatively modern times your early womanhood. Perhaps you married your beautiful cavalier with the curls."

"No," said Essie with decision, "I have never been married to him, or lived in his house. It is my home, but I have never lived there. I know nothing about him except that we love each other, and that some day we shall really meet, not in a dream."

"In the Elysian fields?"

"Yes, in the Elysian fields."

At this moment the front door slammed, and Ted banged up the stairs, and rushed in. If I had not known him I should have said he was drunk.

He was wildly excited, he was crimson. He

careered round the room waving his arms, and then plumped on to the sofa, and stretched out his short legs in front of him.

"I've bought it. I've got it," he shouted. "Do you hear ? I've bought it dirt cheap. The young ass is in such a hurry, and he's apparently so wealthy he doesn't care. And two hundred acres of timber with it. Such timber. Such walnut, and chestnut and oak. The timber alone is worth the money, I've got it. It's mine."

"The house in Essex ?"

"Kenstone Manor, in Essex. It's a nailer. It's a—a—an old world residence. It has no central heating, no bathrooms, no electric light, obsolete drainage and the floors are giving way. I shall have to put in everything, but I shall do it without spending a penny. I shall do it by the timber, and it's nine miles from a station, that's partly why no one wanted it. But the railroad is coming. No one knows that yet except a few of us, but it will be there in five years, with a station on the property. Then I shall sell all the land within easy reach of the station in small building lots for villas. I shall make a pile."

Ted's round eyes became solemn. He was gazing into the future, leaning forward, a stout hand on each stout knee.

"Teddy shall go to Eton," he said, "and I shall put him in the Guards."

A week later Ted took us down by motor to see Kenstone. It was too far for us to return the same day, so he engaged rooms for us in the village inn. His "buyer" was to meet him, and advise him as to what part of the contents of the house he should offer to take over by private treaty before the sale.

On a gleaming day in late September we sped along the lovely Essex lanes, between the pale harvested fields.

"There's the forest," shouted Ted, leaning back from his seat in front, and pointing to a long ridge of trees which seemed to stretch to the low horizon beyond the open fields.

"When we're over the bridge we're on the—the property," yelled Ted.

We lurched over the bridge, and presently the forest came along the water's edge to meet us, and we turned sharply through an open gateway into a private road.

Such trees I had never seen. They stood in stately groups of birch and oak and pine with broad glades of grass and yellowing bracken between them.

"Ancient deer park once," shouted Ted. "Shall be again."

Essie paid little attention to him. We had made a very early start, and she was tired. She leaned back in the car with half closed eyes.

The trees retreated on each side of the road, and the wonderful old house came suddenly into sight, standing above its long terrace with its stone balustrade.

Ted gave a sort of yelp.

"Oh Essie!" I cried. "Look—look! It's perfect."

She gazed languidly for a moment, and then she sat up suddenly, and her face changed. She stared wildly at the house, and put out her hands as if to ward it off.

The car sped up to the arched doorway, with its coat of arms cut in grey stone, and Ted leaped out and rushed up the low steps to the bell.

"Not here! Not here!" gasped Essie, clinging to the car. "I can't live here." She was trembling violently.

"Dear Essie," I said amazed, "we can't remain in the car. Pull yourself together, and even if you don't like the place don't hurt Ted's feelings by showing it."

She looked at me like one dazed, and inured to obedience got out, and we followed Ted into the house. We found ourselves in a large square hall. She groaned and leaned against the wall.

"I can't bear it," she whispered to me. "It's no use, I can't bear it."

"A glass of water, quick," I said to Ted, who turned beaming to us expecting a chorus of admiration. "Essie is overtired."

"What is the matter?" I said to her as he hurried away. "What's wrong with this exquisite place?"

"It's the house I come to at night," she said brokenly. "The dream house. I knew it directly I saw it. Look! There's the minstrels' gallery."

I could only stare at her amazed.

Kind Ted hurried back, splashing an overfull tumbler of water as he came, on the polished oak floor.

She sipped a little, but her hands shook so much that I had to hold the glass for her.

"Cheero, old girl," said Ted, patting her cheek, but Essie did not cheero.

"The lady ought to lie down," said the old woman who had opened the door to us. "There's a sofy in the morning-room."

I supported Essie into an octagonal room leading out of the great hall, and laid her on a spacious divan of dim red damask.

"Leave her alone with me for a bit," I said to Ted. "She is overwrought. We made a very early start."

"I seem to have gone blind," she whispered when Ted had departed. "Everything is black."

"You turned faint. You will be all right in a few minutes."

"Shall I? Would you mind telling me, Beatrice, is there—is there a picture over the fireplace?"

"Yes."

"What kind of picture ? "

"It is a life-size portrait of a young cavalier with curls, in blue satin, holding his hat in his hand."

"I knew it," she groaned.

There was a long silence.

"I can't bear it," she said. "You may say that is silly, Beatrice, but all the same I can't. My life will break in two. If Ted lives here—I shall have nowhere to go."

"I don't think it silly, dear, but I don't understand. This is your old home where you lived nearly three hundred years ago, and to which you have so often come back in your dreams. Now you are coming back to it as your home once more. It seems to me a beautiful and romantic thing to have happened, and after the first surprise surely it must seem the same to you. You have always been so happy here."

"I can see a little now," she said. "Where is the glass of water ? "

She sat up and drank a little, and then dabbed some of the water on her forehead.

"I'm all right now," she said, pushing back her wet hair.

"Don't move. Rest a little ; you have had a shock."

She did not seem to hear me. She rose slowly to her feet, and stood in front of the picture.

"Yes," she said to the cavalier. "It's you, only not quite you either. You are not really as handsome as that you know, and you have a firmer mouth and darker brows."

The cavalier smiled at her from the wall : a somewhat insipid supercilious face I thought, but a wonderful portrait.

The old caretaker came back.

"The gentleman said you'd be the better for something to eat," she said, "and that you would take it in the hall."

Through the open door I saw the chauffeur unstrapping the baskets from Fortnum and Mason.

"Whose portrait is that ? " said Essie.

"Henry Vavasour Kenstone," said the old woman in a parrot voice. "Equerry to our martyred King, by Vandyck. You will observe the jewelled sword and the gloves sewed with pearls. The sword and the gloves are preserved in the banqueting 'all in a glass case."

Essie turned away from the picture, and sat down feebly by the window.

The clinking of plates, and Ted's cheerful voice reached us, and the drawing of a cork.

"Our Mr. Rupert, the present owner, favours the picture," said the woman proudly in her natural voice, "and when he come of age three years ago last Christmas there was a grand fancy ball and 'e was dressed exackerly to match the

picture, with a curled wig and all. And 'e wore the actual sword, and the very gloves, at least 'e 'eld 'em in 'is 'and. They was too stiff to put on. 'E did look a picture. And 'is mother being Spanish 'ad a lace shawl on 'er 'ead, a duchess she was in 'er own right, and she might a been a queen to look at her. I watched the dancing from the gallery, me having been nurse in the family, and a beautiful sight it was."

Essie's dark eyes were fixed intently on the garrulous old servant.

"Three years ago last Christmas," she said sharply. "Are you sure of that?"

"And wouldn't I be sure that took 'im from the month ma'am, but 'e don't look so like the picture when 'e ain't dressed to match, and without the yaller wig," and she wandered out of the room, evidently more interested in the luncheon preparations than in us.

Ted hurried in. When was he not in a hurry?

"Luncheon, luncheon," he said. "Don't wait for me, Essie. Rather too long a drive for my little woman. Give her a glass of port, Beatrice. I have to see Rodwell about the roof. Shan't be half a mo. He's got to catch his train. Mr. Kenstone, the Duke, I mean, will be here in ten minutes. If he turns up before I'm back give him a snack. They've sent enough for ten."

We did not go in to luncheon.

Essie sank down on the divan. I sat down by her, and put my arms round her. She leaned her head against my shoulder.

"You heard what that woman said," she whispered. "You see he did not live hundreds of years ago as I thought. The dress deceived me. He's alive now. He's twenty-four."

My heart ached for her, but I could find no word to comfort her in her mysterious trouble.

As we looked out together through the narrow latticed windows the lines came into my mind :

> " casements opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

It seemed to me that poor Essie was indeed a captive in some "faery land forlorn," and that invisible perilous seas were foaming round her casement windows.

She gave a slight shudder, and started up.

A man was walking slowly up and down the bowling green.

"It is he," she said. "I've seen him walk there a hundred times."

She watched the tall dignified figure pace up and down, and then turned her eyes from him to me. They were wide, and the pupils dilated.

"Beatrice," she said solemnly, "I must not meet that man. He must not see me, for his sake, and for mine. All his life long he must go on thinking as he does now, that I am . . . . . a dream."

"The old woman says he starts for Spain to-day."

Ted's roundabout figure was suddenly seen trundling out across the grass towards the distant pacing figure.

"Who is that?" said Essie frowning.

"Who is that? Why, it's Ted of course."

"And who is Ted?"

Who is Ted?" I echoed staring at her. 'What on earth do you mean?"

She seemed to make a great mental effort.

"Yes," she said. "Yes. It is Ted. *My husband.* I forgot. You see I've never seen him *here* before."

"You will soon grow accustomed to seeing him here," I said cheerfully.

She shook her head.

The two men met, and moved together towards the house.

Essie looked round her in sudden panic.

"I can't stay here," she said. "It's a trap. Where can I go?"

Her eyes searched the room. There was no other door in it. She looked at the narrow latticed windows. Her eyes came back to me with sheer terror in them, such as I have seen in a snared wild animal.

"You *must* stay here," I said, "if you don't want to meet him. They will reach the open door into the garden long before you could cross

the hall. Stay quietly where you are, and I will tell Ted you are unwell, and are resting."

The two men were already in the hall. I went out to them, closing the door resolutely behind me.

Rupert Maria Wenceslao di Soto, Duke of Urrutia, was a tall grave young man of few words, with close cropped hair and a lean clean shaven face.

Ted introduced him to me, and then pressed him to have some luncheon. The long table down the banqueting hall shewed an array of which Fortnum and Mason might justly have been proud.

The Duke was all courtesy and thanks, but had already lunched. His car would be here in ten minutes to take him to London. If agreeable to Mr. Hopkins he would say one word on business. He had called to modify his agent's letter about the mantelpieces. He was willing to sell them all as agreed at a valuation, except one.

"Which one ? " asked Ted, instantly changing from the exuberant host into the cautious business man.

"The one in the south parlour," said the Duke, waving his hand towards the door of the room in which was Essie. "I desire to make it clear, as my agent has not done so, that everything in that room I intend to take with me, so that

in my future home in the Pyrenees there may be one chamber exactly the same as my late mother's room in my old home here."

The explanation quite bowled over Ted. The business man gave way to the man of sentiment.

"Most creditable, I'm sure. Filial piety, most creditable. I don't recall the mantlepiece in question, but of course as your Grace wishes to keep it, I agree at once. Between gentlemen, no difficulties, everything open to arrangement, amicable settlement."

The old woman, dissolved in tears, interrupted Ted's eloquence to tell "Mr. Rupert" that his car was at the door.

The Duke led her gently out of the hall, his hand on her shoulder, and then came back.

"I will detain you no longer from your luncheon," he said. "With your permission I will spend a few moments in my mother's chamber. It has many beautiful associations for me. I should like to see it once more before I leave for Spain."

Ted hastened towards the door, but I barred the way.

"Dear Ted," I said, "Essie is very ill. No one must go in."

"No one go in!" said Ted flushing darkly. "I am astonished at you, Beatrice. The Duke wishes to see his mother's room once more, on bidding farewell to his ancestral home, and you take upon yourself to forbid it."

"My sister-in-law is ill," I said, addressing the Duke, "it would distress her if a stranger were to go in suddenly."

"I understand perfectly, Madam," he said coldly, and made as if to take his leave.

"Stop," said Ted, purple in the face. "My wife *is* unwell. She is overtired, but she is the kindest, most tender-hearted woman in the world. It would cut her to the heart if she found out afterwards she had prevented your Grace's seeing this room for the last time. Wait one moment, while I go in and explain it to her, and help her to walk a few steps to the settle here."

And Ted, with a furious glance at me, pushed past me, and went into the room.

"It would be a great kindness to my sister, who is very nervous," I said to the Duke, "if you would wait a moment in the garden."

He instantly went towards the open door into the garden. Then I darted after Ted. Between us we would hurry Essie into one of the many other rooms that opened into the hall.

She was standing by the window frantically endeavouring to break the lattice of the central casement, which was a little larger than the others.

There was blood on her hand.

Ted was speaking, but she cut him short.

"Not in here," she said passionately. "I won't have it. He mustn't come in here."

"He must come in if I say so," said Ted. The colour had left his face. I had seen him angry before now, but never so angry as this.

"No," said Essie, "he must not."

She came and stood before her husband.

"Haven't I been a good wife to you these five years past," she said. "Haven't I done my best to make you happy? Haven't I obeyed you in everything, everything, everything—till now?"

He stared at her open-mouthed. She had never opposed him before.

She fell on her knees before him, and clasped his feet with her bleeding hands.

"If you love me," she said, "send him away. I refuse to see him."

"You are hysterical," said Ted, "or else you're stark staring mad. I've spoilt you and given way to you till you think you can make any kind of fool of me. Get up at once, and cease this play acting, and come into the hall."

"He's in the garden," I broke in. "You can pass through the hall, Essie."

She rose to her feet, and her vehemence dropped from her. Her eyes were rivetted on Ted. She paid no heed to what I said. She had no attention to give to anything but her husband.

"I will not come out," she said, and she sat down again on the divan.

"Then by—he shall come in," said Ted, and

before I could stop him he strode to the door, calling loudly to the Duke to enter.

There was a moment's pause, in which we heard a step cross the hall. Then the Duke came in, and Ted introduced him to Essie. She bowed slightly, but he did not. He stared at her, transfixed, overwhelmed.

At that moment the discreet voice of Mr. Rodwell was heard in the doorway.

"Can I have one last word, Mr. Hopkins? A matter of some importance."

"Yes, yes," said Ted darting to the door, thankful to escape. As he left the room he said to me, "Take Essie at once into the hall. At once, do you hear?"

He might as well have said, "Take her to the moon."

The Duke and Essie gazed at each other with awed intentness. There was sheer amazement on his face, blank despair on hers. They were entirely absorbed in each other. As I stood in the background I felt as if I were a ghost, that no word of mine could reach their world.

At last he spoke, stammering a little.

"Madam, on the night of my coming of age I left the dancers, and came in here, and behold! you were sitting on that divan, all in white."

"Yes," said Essie.

"We saw each other for the first time," he said, trembling exceedingly.

"Yes."

"And I knelt at your feet."

"Yes."

A suffocating compassion overcame me. It was unendurable to pry upon them, oblivious as they were of my presence. I left the room.

"He will go out of her life in five minutes," I said to myself, "never to return. Poor souls. Poor souls. Let them have their say."

I had never seen Romance before, much less such a fantastic romance as this, in a faery land as forlorn as this. My heart ached for them.

Presently I heard Ted's voice in the distance shouting a last message to the departing Rodwell, and I went back to the octagonal room.

He was kneeling at her feet, her pale hands held in his, and his face bowed down upon them.

"You must go," she said faintly.

He shuddered.

"You must go," she repeated. "To me you can only be a picture. To you I am only a dream."

"Yes, it is time to go," I said suddenly in a hoarse voice. I obliged them to look at me, to listen to me.

Slowly he released her hands, and got upon his feet. He was like a man in a trance.

"Go! Go!" I said sharply. Something urgent in my voice seemed to reach his shrouded faculties.

He looked in bewildered despair at Essie.

"Go!" she repeated with agonised entreaty, paler than I had ever seen a living creature.

Still like a man in a trance he walked slowly from the room, passing Ted in the doorway without seeing him. In the silence that followed we heard his motor start and whirl away.

"He's gone," said Essie, and she fainted.

We had considerable difficulty in bringing her round, and, angry as I was with Ted, I could not help being sorry for him when for some long moments it seemed as if Essie had closed her eyes on this world for good.

But Ted, who always knew what to do in an emergency, tore her back by sheer force from the refuge to which she had fled, and presently her mournful eyes opened and recognised us once more. We took her back in the motor to the village inn, and I put her to bed.

Rest, warmth, silence, nourishment, these were all I could give her. Instinctively I felt that the presence of the remorseful distressed Ted was unendurable to her, and I would not allow him to come into her room, or to sit up with her as he was anxious to do.

I took his place in an armchair at her bedside, having administered to her a sedative which I fortunately had with me, and was profoundly thankful when her even breathing shewed me that she was asleep.

I have known—who has not?—interminable nights, and nights when I dreaded the morning, but I think the worst of them was easier to bear than the night I kept watch beside Essie.

She was stricken. I could see no happiness for her in her future life, and I loved her. And I loved poor blundering Ted also. I grieved for them both. And I was sorry for the Duke too.

When the dawn was creeping ghostlike into the room and the night-light was tottering in its saucer, Essie stirred and woke. She lay a long time looking at me, an unfathomable trouble in her eyes.

"Beatrice," she said at last, "I could not find the way back."

"Where, dearest?"

"To the house. I tried and tried, but it was no use. It is lost, lost, lost. Everything is lost."

I did not answer. I tried to put my trust in Time, and in the thought that she would presently see her children in its rooms and playing in its gardens, and would realise that Kenstone was in a new sense her home, though not in the old one.

I brought her breakfast to her in her room, and then, in spite of my entreaties, she got up and dressed and came downstairs. But when a chastened and humble Ted timidly approached her to ask whether she would like to see the house once more before returning to London in a few hours time, she shook her head and averted her

eyes. It was evident to me that she was determined never to set foot in it again.

He did not insist, and she was obviously relieved when he left the room. He signed to me to follow him and then told me that he had just received a letter from the Duke asking him to accept the Vandyck in the octagonal room as a present, as on second thoughts he felt it belonged to the house and ought to remain there. The Duke had not started after all, as his ship had been delayed one day. He wrote from the house close at hand where he had been staying till his departure.

"It's worth thousands," said Ted. "Thousands. These bigwigs are queer customers. What an awful fool he is to part with it just out of sentiment. But of course I shall never sell it. It shall be an heirloom. I've told him so," and Ted thrust the letter into his pocket and hurried away.

Our rooms were airless, and Essie allowed me to establish her in a wicker armchair under a chestnut tree in the old-fashioned inn garden still brave with Michaelmas daisies and purple asters. The gleaming autumn morning had a touch of frost in it. I wrapped her fur motor cloak round her, and put her little hat on her head. She remained passive in my hands in a kind of stupor. Perhaps that might be the effect of the sedative I told myself. But I knew it was not so.

Essie was drinking her cup of anguish to the

dregs. She did not rebel against it. She accepted her fate with dumb docility. She was not bearing it. She was not capable of an effort of any kind. She underwent it in silence.

I told her to try to sleep again, and she smiled wanly at me and obediently closed her eyes. As I went into the house to snatch an hour's rest and pack I turned and looked back at her motionless figure sunk down in her chair, her little grey face, pinched and thin like a squirrel's against the garish hotel cushion, her nerveless hands lying half open, palm upwards on her knee.

A faint breeze stirred, and from the yellow tree a few large fronded leaves of amber and crimson eddied slowly down, and settled, one on her breast and the others in the grass at her feet. She saw them not. She heeded them not. She heeded nothing. Her two worlds had clashed together, and the impact had broken both. They lay in ruins round her.

And so I looked for the last time on Essie.

Reader, I thought I could write this story to the end, but the pen shakes in my hand. The horror of it rushes back upon me. Ted's surprise at hearing that the Duke had gone to Essie in the garden, and that he had persuaded her to drive with him to London. Then his growing anxiety and continually reiterated conviction that we should find her in London, his uncomprehending

fury when we reached London and—she was not there. And then at last his tardy realisation and desolation.

I did what little I could to blunt the edge of his suffering when the first fever fit of rage was past.

"Dear Ted, she did not like the house. She told me she could not live in it."

"But she would have liked it when I had gutted it. I should have transformed it entirely. Electric light, bathrooms, central heating, radiators, dinner lift, luggage lift," Ted's voice broke down, and struggled on in a strangled whisper. "Inglenooks, cosy corners, speaking tubes, telephone, large French windows to the floor. She would not have known it again."

He hid his face in his hands.

I almost wished the paroxysms of anger back again.

"Oh! Beatrice, to leave me for another man when we were so happy together, because of a house; and an entire stranger, whom she did not want even to speak to, whom she was positively rude to. It could not have been our little tiff, could it? She must have been mad."

"You have hit on the truth," I said. "She was mad, quite mad. And mad people always turn against those whom they—love best."

It is all a long time ago. I married a year later, and a year later still Ted married again, a

sensible good-humoured woman, and was just as happy as he had been with Essie, happier even. In time he forgot her, but I did not. She had sailed away across "perilous seas." She had passed beyond my ken. I could only hold her memory dear. And at last she became to me, what for so many years she had been to her lover —a dream.

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