



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### **Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### **About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



23530.44.130

**Harvard College  
Library**

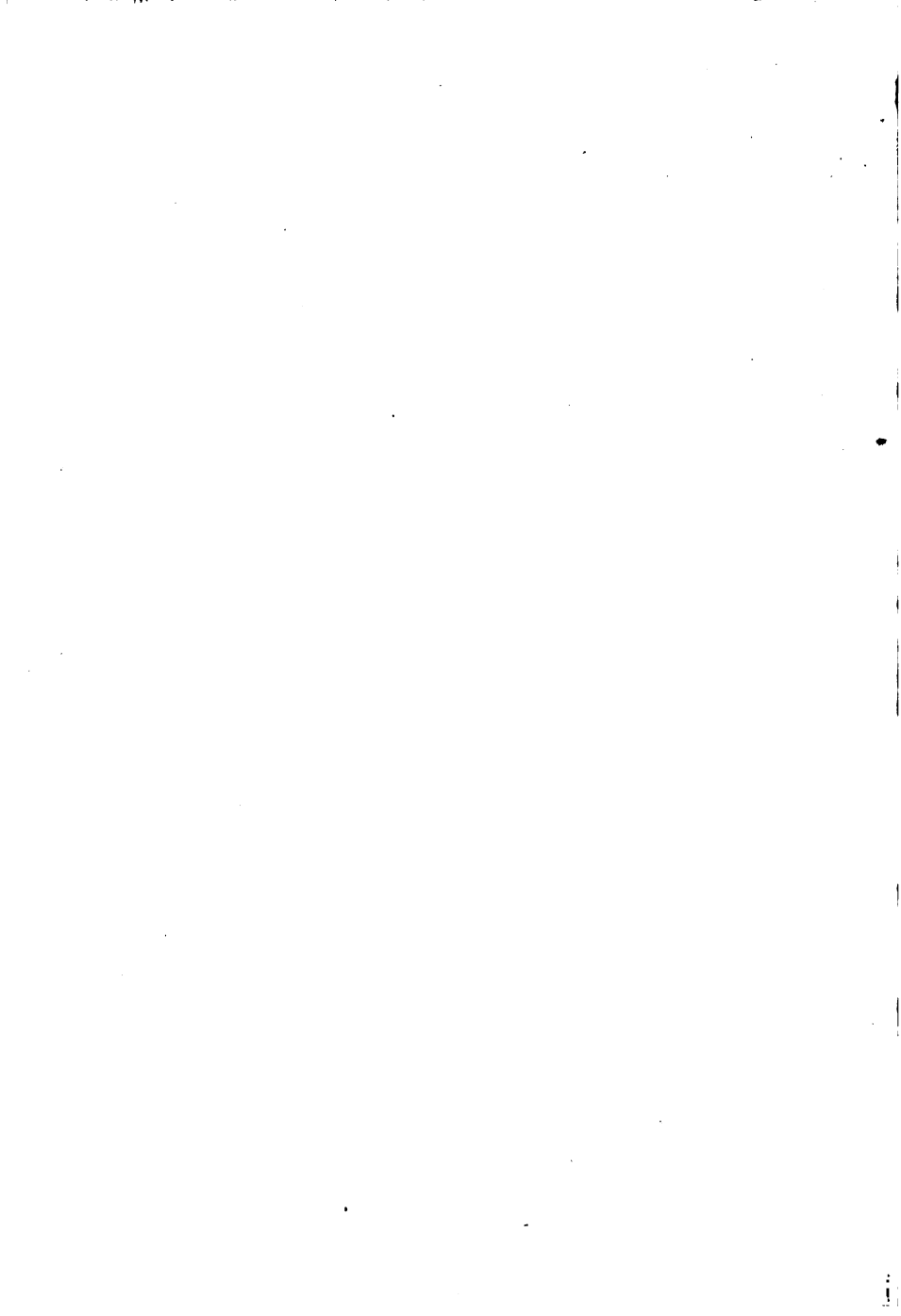


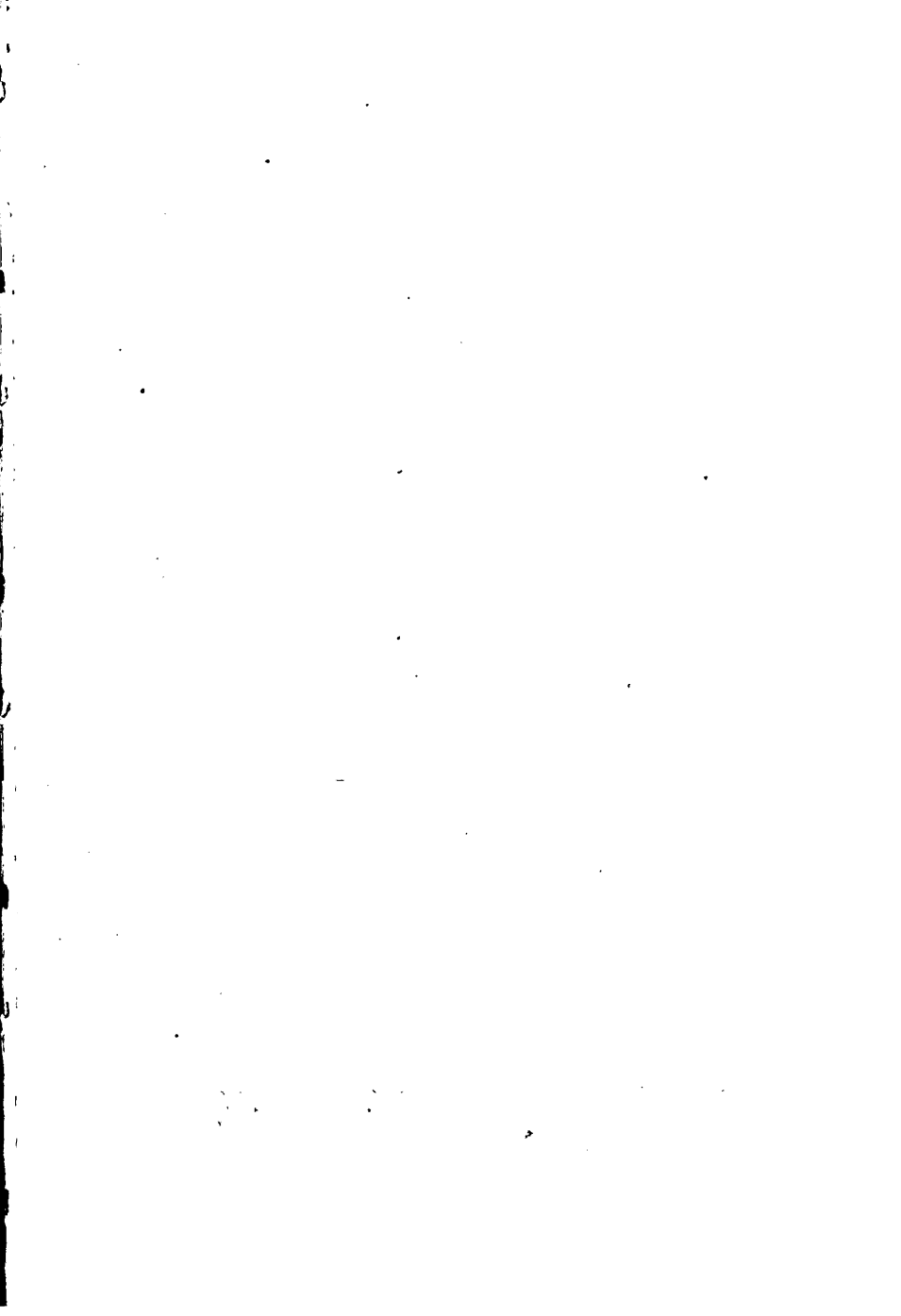
**By Exchange**

11  
1:12



WINNIE O'WYNN AND  
THE WOLVES









"I always make a sacrifice to the god of good luck, too," he said. FRONTISPIECE. See *page 251*.

0

# WINNIE O'WYNN AND THE WOLVES

BY  
BERTRAM ATKEY

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
LESLIE F. BENSON



BOSTON  
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY  
1922

AL 82572-50

2.3530.44.130

✓  
HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY  
BY EXCHANGE ^

JUN 12 1925

*Copyright, 1922,*  
BY LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY.

*All rights reserved*

Published January, 1922

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

# CONTENTS

| CHAPTER   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| I In which Miss Winnie O'Wynn Picks Peas in the garden, gracefully gathers in a sweet little Posy of Pinmoney, remembers the advice of her Papa and goes all alone to the Great Big Town where Wolves Prowl . . . . .     | 1    |
| II In which Winnie is fain for Millinery, is invited out to Tea by a Grandfatherly Gentleman, and meets with a Young and Innocent Wolf who is permitted to provide Her with a Pretty Hat . . . . .                        | 11   |
| III In which Winnie makes the Acquaintance of Mr. George H. Jay, accepts a Position which is guaranteed to be Honourable and arranges to equip Herself for the same . . . . .   | 16   |
| IV Wherein It would appear that Winnie somewhat exceeded the Estimate of Mr. Jay, who introduces Her to Mr. Canis Lupus Carter and begs for Information regarding the Old Ivy-clad Rectory which is in His Mind . . . . . | 28   |
| V In which a Youthful Gentleman basks in the Smiles of Winnie, and Winnie suns Herself in the Golden Beams of Lady Fasterton . . . . .  | 38   |
| VI Wherein Winnie tries very hard and rather expensively to do exactly as Mr. Jay wishes, and Lady Fasterton is by no means divorced . . . . .  | 48   |

| CHAPTER   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| VII In which Winnie is interested in the Quickness of the Quick Mr. Jay and again ventures recklessly within range of His Carnivorous Activities . . . . .  | 57   |
| VIII Wherein Winnie is introduced by Mr. "Wolf" Jay to Mr. "Rattlesnake" Slite, is offered a Situation and having adopted a Little Lonely Money, accepts the same   | 64   |
| IX Wherein Winnie is tried in the Balance, is not found wanting, makes a Friend and hears of the Rust-Red Blonde called "Tiger-Cat" . . . . .   | 74   |
| X In which Winnie is positively forced to accept a Matter of a Couple of Thousand Pounds . . . . .  | 91   |
| XI In which the Silent Player makes His Move, and a Great Fortune passes so close to Winnie that she hears the rustle of its Pinions as it soars out of Her Reach . . . . .   | 104  |
| XII In which Winnie pauses on Her Primrose Path in order to notify Lord Fasterton that She will be Nineteen To-morrow .   | 117  |
| XIII In which Winnie introduces a Bookmaker to the Higher Mathematics, instructs Him in the Art of Generosity, and accepts an Invitation to meet a Lady . . . . .   | 126  |
| XIV In which Winnie finds Her Way to the Heart of a Lady with <i>je ne sais quoi</i> , takes Coffee with Lady Fasterton and the Hon. Gerald Peel, and first hears of Rex the Remarkable . . . . .   | 132  |
| XV In which Winnie leaves it, by permission, to Lady Fasterton, is pounced upon by Rex the Remarkable, is tempted by the Steed called Amaranth, learns of the Three Little Maids, Daisy, Lucille and Sara, and calls upon Mr. George H. Jay | 141  |

# CONTENTS

vii

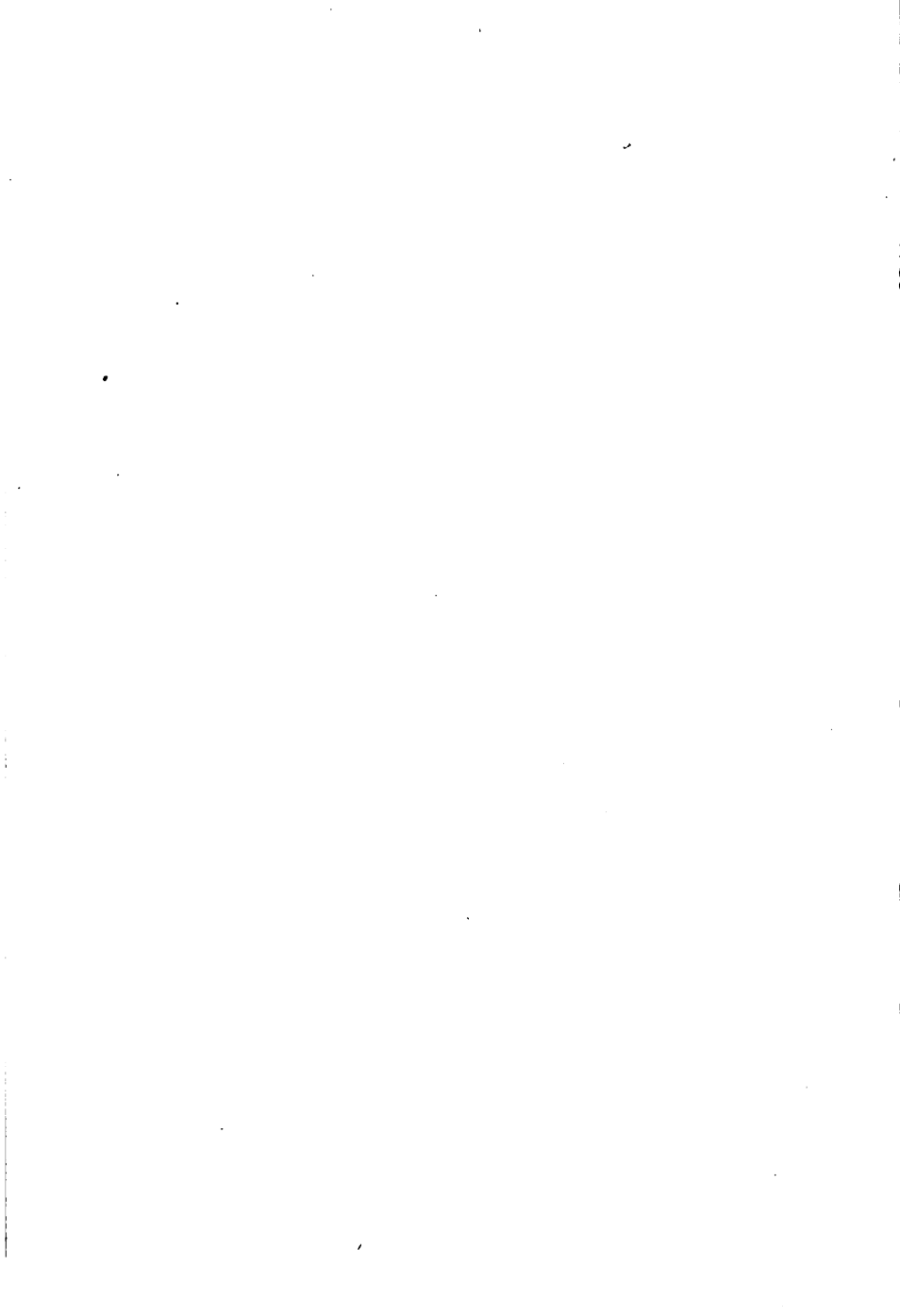
| CHAPTER  | PAGE |
|--|------|
| XVI In which Winnie, supported by Her Guardian, faces a Painful Task, performs an Act of Renunciation, gives to Mr. Jay a succession of Shocks and to Bookmaker Ripon Severe Palpitation in his Bank Balance . . . . . | 162  |
| XVII In which Winnie holds a Little Séance in Lullabyland with Sir Cyril Fitzmedley and becomes the Owner of a Pet with Possibilities . . . . .  | 178  |
| XVIII In which Winnie goes riding on Newmarket Heath in the Dawn, meets a Tiger-Man, firmly refuses to accept the Handsomest Horse on the Turf and disposes of an Option . . . . .                                     | 191  |
| XIX In which Winnie makes Her Debut as Darling of the Maison Mountarden . .  | 206  |
| XX In which Winnie takes Tea at the Astoritz, suffers the Babblings of Sir Cyril, re-adjusts His Outlook and reflects upon the Habits of the Decoy Duck in Its Natural Haunts . . . . .                                | 214  |
| XXI In which Winnie again calls upon the Reliable Mr. Jay, prattles prettily to <i>Felis Tigris</i> Mountarden concerning the Queer Side of Things, and wafts Herself gently home . . . . .                            | 223  |
| XXII Wherein Winnie takes Luncheon with the Hon. Gerald Peel, reminds Mr. Benson Boldre of Queen Anne Boleyn and goes to the Aid of the Ultra-Superba Film Company . . . . .   | 238  |
| XXIII In which Winnie introduces Mr. Boldre to the Ancient Custom of sacrificing to the Gods of Good Luck, and rings up Mr. George H. Jay . . . . .  | 248  |
| XXIV In which Winnie inadvertently intrudes upon a Lady indulging in "a Good   |      |

| CHAPTER |  | PAGE |
|---------|--|------|
|         | Cry", dries those Tears, and sweetly<br>depresses Mr. Sus Porcus Archer's Fi-<br>nancial Temperature to Five Hundred<br>Below Zero . . . . .                             | 255  |
| XXV     | Wherein Winnie, having dined with a Lady<br>who would fain become a Wise Woman,<br>dons a New Pink Silk "Thinking"<br>Kimono . . . . .                                   | 273  |
| XXVI    | In which Winnie is asked in Marriage,<br>postpones Her Answer, permits Mr.<br>Boldre to purchase a Jewel Case, and<br>grieves Mr. George Careful Jay . . . .             | 281  |
| XXVII   | Wherein Winnie, in Self-defence, surprises<br>Sus Porcus Archer, saddens Mr. Boldre,<br>amazes Lady Fasterton, gratifies Miss<br>Allen and shocks and amuses Mr. Jay . . | 292  |
| XXVIII  | Wherein Winnie gives her Celebrated Imit-<br>ation of the King in His Counting<br>House and takes a Rest . . . . .   | 305  |

## ILLUSTRATIONS

|  | PAGE |
|--|------|
| “I always make a sacrifice to the god of good<br>luck, too,” he said . . . . <i>Frontispiece</i> |      |
| She turned. It was the beautifully dressed<br>lounger in navy blue . . . .                       | 13   |
| “Look down, Major,” she advised kindly.<br>“People will notice your eyes” . . .                  | 231  |
| It took the form of a heavy bruise on the<br>shapely arm of Miss Beryl Allen . . .               | 273  |





# WINNIE O'WYNN AND THE WOLVES

## CHAPTER I

*In which Miss Winnie O'Wynn Picks Peas in the garden, gracefully gathers in a sweet little Posy of Pinmoney, remembers the advice of her Papa and goes all alone to the Great Big Town where Wolves Prowl.*

WINNIE was picking peas in the garden just beyond the strawberry bed and she looked so sweet and dainty in the old sun-hat that even the blackbirds would have faltered in the havoc which they were industriously working among the late berries had they not had other things to think about.

The doctor came absent-mindedly down the garden path, lost no doubt in grave reflection upon the best method of prolonging Lord Alquoholl's highly remunerative gout, and saw Winnie there. For a moment he watched her pretty hands flit pinkly among the pods, then he glanced, by no means absently, at the house.

The glance was necessary, for his wife was in the morning room counting up her "accounts rendered."

The doctor stepped into the pea-tangled green corridor and smiled at Winnie.

"You look charming, Miss O'Wynn — positively delicious. Let me help you pick the peas."

His method of helping her pick peas was quaint. It began, apparently, by the quick passing of his arm around Winnie's waist, the bending of his brown, handsome face to hers, and a smiling whisper:

"I love you, Winnie. Be mine, sweet maid, and let who will be clever."

"Sir!" said Winnie, and pushed him. He lost his balance and fell among the peas. But he regained his feet without difficulty, and he still smiled.

"How unkind you are to me, Winnie. Have you forgotten how well I cured your influenza?" he reproached her. "I can't help loving you, child."

But Winnie was not responsive.

"Your wife is looking out of the window of the morning room," she said. "Why do you insult me when I come into the garden? I shall leave." Her glance did not waver; she looked

like a flower that had inadvertently grown among the peas instead of the pansies, fair and cool as a slender pink-tinted blossom. "Your wife is looking out of the window, Dr. Fennel, and if you do not lend me twenty pounds I shall tell her of this insult."

The jaw of the frolicsome young doctor fell and his eyes rolled a little.

"I—I beg your pardon, Miss Winnie—what was that?"

"Twenty pounds. A loan. If you do not lend it to me I will go to Mrs. Fennel and tell her that I am compelled to leave her because the garden is not safe—on account of your unwelcome but persistent advances."

The doctor gasped.

"But it's blackmail, child—you can't do this sort of thing. It was a joke."

"I have eighty pounds," said Winnie, "and of course I want to make it into a hundred. Wouldn't you want to if you had eighty pounds?"

Her blue eyes were like forget-me-nots, thought Fennel, sadly realizing that he would forget them not for a long time to come, and her face was as tranquil and innocent-looking as that of a small child.

"It's ridiculous — impossible, Winnie," he protested.

Winnie's clear, silvery voice rose from among the pea-sticks.

"Mrs. Fennel!"

"No — shut up, child — for God's sake," hissed the doctor.

"—— Dr. Fennel says that ——"

"Be quiet, you little fool — I'll let you have the money ——"

"—— that the peas are small and few in the pod. Shall I go on picking?"

Mrs. Fennel glanced up from her "accounts rendered."

"Try to find enough for lunch," she called pleasantly, then, perceiving the proximity of her husband to Winnie — her nineteen-year-old lady-help-guest-maid-kept-companion — added, less pleasantly, "Jack! I want you."

"Jack" moved out of the pea patch and went slowly up the garden path, fighting a losing battle against some deep strong instinct which seemed to tell him that twenty pounds would shortly pass into his pass book — debit side.

Winnie O'Wynn went on picking peas.

She smiled softly as she picked, and presently she began to sing, an airy trifle of Swin-

burne's all about some butterflies somewhere —

“Fly, butterflies, out to sea . . .  
Frail, pale wings for the winds to try . . .  
Fly, butterflies, fly.”

It came sweetly in through the window of the morning room, and both Fennel and his wife listened.

“Pretty, happy little thing,” said Mrs. Fennel, with a sigh. “She sings prettily. ‘Fly, butterflies, frail, pale wings.’ Don’t you see them, Jack, flying out to sea?” (Mrs. Fennel was literary and very artistic.)

“Eh — oh, yes — I see them, certainly,” said Jack Fennel. But they were no butterflies which he saw — flying out to sea. They were Treasury notes — a perfect flock of them — and, frail and pale though they might be, they were strong enough to fly for ever out of his reach into that of Miss Winnie O’Wynn.

Jack Fennel was very much deceived in Winnie, but he really matters very little, for Miss O’Wynn, having satisfactorily achieved the hundred pounds which she had long been aiming for, left the village a few days later and settled down in that Mecca of her dreams, — London.

For some months past Winnie had worked steadily towards that glittering destination.

For she was possessed of an instinct that London was really the only place where one can get on quickly, and in addition to her instinct she possessed also a very clear memory of the advice which her late father had left her — almost the only thing he had left her — when, apparently utterly discouraged by the very worst flat-racing season he had ever experienced, and with the valves of his heart gone almost completely out of action, he turned his face to the wall and left the flat-racing to other gay plungers. He had been a younger son, cut off on his marriage to the nursery governess of whom Winnie was an exquisite replica, and though he disliked the thought of leaving Winnie to look after herself, nevertheless that pang of regret was blunted by the knowledge that few girls were better capable of taking care of themselves. He had treated her very much as a “pal” since the death of her mother and during the few years preceding his own, and though he suffered from a strange and fatal incapacity to pick winners, he was a shrewd, experienced and broad-minded man of the world.

“Remember, Win, old man,” he had said during their last talk, “if ever you find yourself really seriously up against it, go to my people — the Quennings. They’re not much of

a crowd, but they have plenty of money and they can't do less than see you through. We've had a pretty good time, Win, during the last few years, but it's cost money and I don't think there's much left. Everything is more or less mortgaged, so take what you want while you can. The money-lenders will be down on the place like wolves any day — and the creditors will make a fuss for they will have a nasty shock. Your mother's jewellery is intact. Take that and — anything else you can get. I've no anxiety about your future. You're shrewd and you're extraordinarily pretty — your mother over again. Never lose your head, and remember that to a pretty woman wine is the most treacherous friend in the world. Remember that, Win. I've taught you that: never forget it. I'm leaving you to face a social system that isn't worth a fraction of what it used up in the making. You'll find that most people have hearts but are afraid to use 'em — which means that they might as well be without. Be careful of all men. They're wolfish — some because they can't help it, more because they don't want to help it. Be on your guard, therefore, against all men. Trust no woman. You will, of course. You're bound to. But she'll probably let you down. You will be able to



stand that, however — if you have not trusted any man. . . .”

He had paused, reflecting.

“ Yes, I think you’ll be all right, child. Don’t forget what I’ve said. Ca’ canny with wine, men and women. Trust nobody but yourself — until you have proved them. But be sure you have proved them. You will be pursued — with that face — but I think you know how to handle pursuers. Be ruthless with them — they would be ruthless with you. And remember that my people, the Quennings, hate publicity above all things. *That’s* your last weapon, Win, but you will probably never need it. If you do, use it for all it’s worth. Be as merciless to them as they were to your mother.”

Then keen pains had racked him and he had turned wearily.

“ Now, kiss me, little woman — and I’ll join your mother.”

He spoke as though the mother were in the next room, and an hour later he had joined her.

Winnie had never forgotten his advice.

Pelham O’Wynn had left even less behind him than he thought. And the money-lenders had been so quick and capable that Winnie had barely time to get everything really valuable out of their reach before they pounced. Had

it not been for a neighbouring young farmer who was a very willing slave to her, she might have lost practically everything. But his horses were strong and instantly available, and there was room in his barns for much.

So that when presently Winnie, with her hundred pounds in cash, and her five hundred or so in jewels, found a cosy unfurnished flat in the neighbourhood of Russell Square it needed only a line to the agriculturalist aforesaid to bring her furniture to her.

He proposed to her, of course, was kindly refused, patted on the head and sent home to his mother.

And Winnie was alone in London.

She had worked busily all that day and was tired. So she cooked herself a small grey mullet, made tea, cut bread and butter, opened a tin of peaches and dined in her kimono. Then she took a cigarette to the couch and, lying comfortably, reviewed her situation.

She considered it from all angles and was satisfied with it.

She was going to get on. How was not instantly apparent. She had the usual accomplishments but no special training. She was qualified for no particular work. She had a gift for dressing, and she was very pretty. But

there are thousands of girls who have those advantages, — which by many are considered highly risky advantages.

But Winnie O'Wynn had two other assets which modified the risk. One was a clear-cut, cool, quiet courage that rendered her impervious to any kind of fear; the other was the possession of plenty of brains and few scruples.

That, she decided, was what it all amounted to, — her beauty and her brains versus The World.

She dropped her cigarette end into an ash tray and, smiling, loosened a strand of her heavy, reddish-gold hair.

“ Winnie O'Wynn versus The Earth! ” she said. “ Why, it's what poor daddy used to call a ‘ one-horse snip! ’ ”

Then she spent half an hour over her hair, and having looked with a leisured, lingering delight at the beautiful little nightdress — a scrap of a thing in pale turquoise georgette — oh, yes, very attractive — with the purchase of which she had celebrated her arrival in town, she slipped it on, and so to bed, to sleep instantly.

She looked like a child as she slept her dreamless sleep.

## CHAPTER II

*In which Winnie is fain for Millinery, is invited out to Tea by a Grandfatherly Gentleman, and meets with a Young and Innocent Wolf who is permitted to provide Her with a Pretty Hat.*

ONE of the first things Winnie did was to see what London had to offer her in the way of millinery.

She needed a hat—several hats—quite a lot of hats, she felt, but she also felt that she she did not care to deplete her store of money by paying for hats. And that being so, it naturally follows that she saw a very charming hat at the first milliner's before whose display she lingered, a dream in an odd, new, dark green. Very simple—the price four and a half simple guineas.

She studied it.

Once she interrupted herself in order to drive away a well-dressed man who stopped at her side, peered at her face and suggested that it would be an act of grace on her part if she

would deign to bestow upon him the boon of her company at tea.

She looked at him, her eyes wide with wonder.

“ No, thank you,” she said, smiling. “ You are very kind, but you are so old and you look so jaded and worn. I am so sorry for you, and I think you ought to be resting quietly at home. I am going to dinner with my grandpapa — you are so like him, you know, that it would be rather tiring to take two meals with grandpapas. Besides — do forgive me, but I don't like the way you are dressed nor the scent you use, nor the pointed toes of your boots and the shape of your hat. I am very sorry — and I hope you will find a nice old lady to be your companion for tea.”

He appeared slightly disconcerted, stared at the flower-like face under the trim little hat, frowned, hesitated, and went away. She was a novelty to him, but not the kind of novelty he wished to cultivate.

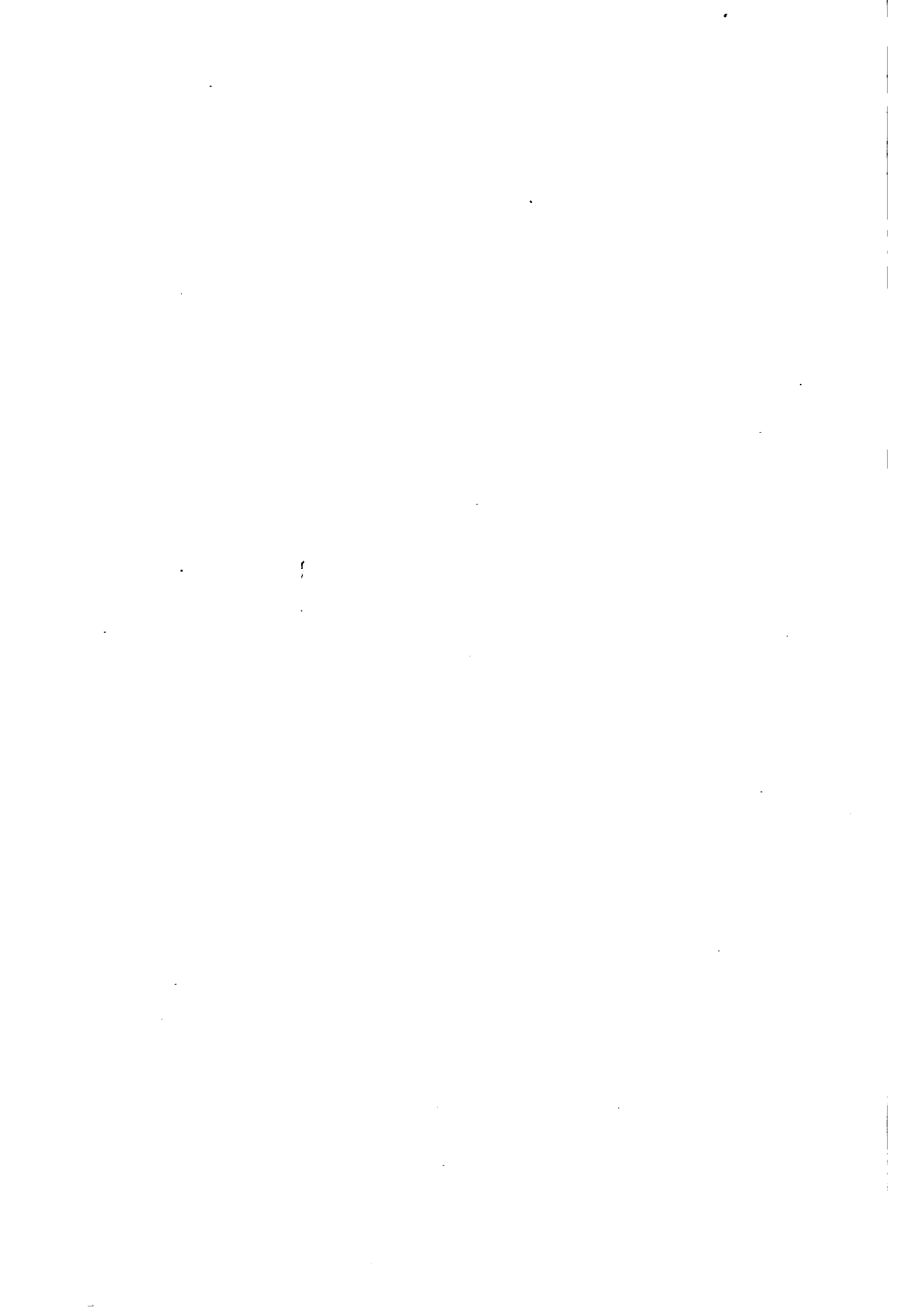
Another man went past, with a peculiar side-long look, — a younger, very well-groomed loungeur, with bold eyes, and clothed in beautifully cut navy blue. His pace slackened suddenly.

Winnie's face hardened ever so little.

“ Daddy was right,” she said. “ What



**She turned. It was the beautifully dressed loungee  
in navy blue. *Page 13.***



wolves they are. One has to defend oneself incessantly."

She stopped a crawling taxi.

"I engage you," she said, with a look and smile and a gentle caressing touch of the arm that melted the black-a-vized tough at the wheel into a surprised grin. "You will wait here, won't you? I shall send out a parcel by the assistant to be put into your car, and I want you to take it at once to Miss O'Wynn, 28, Ady Street. You need not wait for me. Here are five shillings. If she is out leave it with the caretaker, Mrs. Bean."

"Right, miss," replied the petrol pirate.

She turned, resuming her study of the hat.

"Such a sweet thing, isn't it?" came a trickle of honey over her shoulder.

"Oh, perfect — but so expensive," she said absently.

"How kind it would be of you to accept it from me as a little souvenir," continued the even, persuasive voice.

She turned. It was the beautifully dressed loungee in navy blue.

"A little souvenir," she said, smiling. "Very well. But it is you who are kind — to give me so nice a present."



His eyes gleamed as they went into the shop, tried on and bought the hat.

"Will you put it into my taxi, please," said Winnie to the assistant who brought it to her, packed.

"Certainly, moddam."

The assistant disappeared while the benevolent gentleman handed over the necessary notes to pay.

When they left the shop the taxi had gone. Winnie glanced around swiftly, frowned for a second like one who makes a swift mental effort, then smiled full upon a big man who stood halfway across the street upon a traffic island, — a big man, in City clothes, with a red, gloomy face.

He received her smile with a look of sheer amazement.

"Go — go!" whispered Winnie, urgently to the hat buyer. "My husband — he would misunderstand and make a violent scene."

"But where — where can I see you?"

"I will telephone — quick — what is your number?"

"Ninety-nine Leeward — ask for Captain Dunnwell — *dear!*"

He moved away, raising his hat as the big man came up. But Winnie was smiling across

the street at some one behind the big man. He perceived it, and a look of extraordinary sheepishness appeared upon his face. But he persevered feebly.

“ Did you want me, madame — you — er — smiled —— ”

“ Sir! ” said Winnie.

The red-faced man wilted like a dying dahlia. He was too far West to feel confident. Throgmorton Avenue was his favourite environment.

Winnie gave a faint shrug, and called a taxi.

“ What wolves men are, ” she said, and had herself driven away with speed from such a highly objectionable place.

“ One must fight them with their own weapons, ” she said, as she opened her cigarette case. And the sweetness of the hat drove the telephone number out of the pretty head quite satisfactorily.

### CHAPTER III

*In which Winnie makes the Acquaintance of Mr. George H. Jay, accepts a Position which is guaranteed to be Honourable and arranges to equip Herself for the same.*

FROM all of which may be gleaned a tolerably clear idea of the lines along which Miss O'Wynn proposed to succeed in life. She was quick-witted. If the big, red-visaged man had not been in evidence she would have thought of something else. She used the big man because he was obviously usable. She used the navy-blue clad man about town because he had insulted her. She retaliated his insult by fining him a four and a half guinea hat. And, as she told herself, smiling angelically at the mirror, he was a wolf, ready and willing to eat her up with one bite. It served him right.

“How cruel and merciless men are,” she said to herself, as she turned to survey the hat from another angle. “They pounce on one like great, fierce hawks. Daddy was right. A lonely little girl like me has to be so careful — like

a mouse hiding among the cornstalks away from the owls. . . . Ye-es, it goes well with my hair! Awfully well."

That evening she gave up to a long and careful consideration of her plans. Her original idea, when planning her future while "lady-helping" Mrs. Fennel, had been to seek a position as typist in an office or pianist in a cinema cellar and so settle down to save money. This idea, since the wolf-like conduct of Doctor Fennel, had been gracefully but swiftly receding into the never-never.

Winnie did not care for work for work's sake, and she felt that pounding the keys of either a typewriter or a piano was not a swift method of increasing her hundred to a thousand, which gentle project was looming large in the exceedingly active mind that worked under her great pile of beautiful hair.

Nevertheless she glanced through the *Evening View* advertisements rather idly, as she sipped a cup of chocolate, in case any demented millionaire wanted a typist or secretary at about a thousand a year, and so came upon the following advertisement:

"Wanted, young lady for confidential work requiring no special training. Must be fair-haired, blue-eyed, not over five feet four inches,

good complexion. High salary. Call 11 A.M. George H. Jay, 9, Finch Court, Southampton Row, W.C."

Winnie smiled. She fitted that advertisement so well that it might have been written round her. She decided to accept the position. It did not appear to occur to her that she might not get it offered to her, — for Winnie was no pessimist.

At eleven o'clock next morning Finch Court was practically full of petite, fair-haired ladies with good or pretty good complexions. They were from six feet to four feet tall; evidently some were as poor judges of height as they were good applicants for high salaries. Their hair ranged from grey to orange, — fair, that is.

Winnie, strolling up at about eleven-twenty, turned into Finch Court and stopped abruptly. She perceived at a glance that this business was going to be a scramble, and as she did not care for scrambles she smiled and turned abruptly — into the arms of a fat man in a racy silk hat and grey frock-coat suit. He had a good-humoured, jolly sort of face, though his eyes were hard and glassy.

He started a little as Winnie collided with him.

“ I beg pardon — ” he began in tones of surprise, then checked himself.

“ Are you calling in reply to the advertisement? ”

“ Oh, yes, ” smiled Winnie. “ But it is so crowded, and as I really don't mind whether I have the position or not, I was coming away. ”

“ Don't do that, miss. It's yours. You've got it. You're engaged. I'm a quick man. I'm Jay. George Jay. If I interviewed a thousand ladies I should never find any one more suitable than you. ”

He took out a handkerchief, removed his hat, mopped his forehead and laughed very loudly indeed.

“ I knew I should be lucky. Saw a black cat last week. Ran over it, in fact, ” he bellowed. “ Come into the office. ”

He made his way up the court and called loudly to the fair-haired bevy.

“ Sorry, ladies. The position is filled. ”

They began to pour out of the court instantly, and the fat man turned into an office, the windows of which were inscribed “ Geo. H. Jay. Agent. ” No information was supplied concerning the person or persons, thing or things, for whom or which Mr. Jay acted as agent.

“ This way, my de — miss. ”

Winnie entered a comfortably furnished office on the first floor and took the chair which George H. Jay offered her. She wondered whether he, too, was a wolf. She fancied he was not; but with jolly-faced fat men one never knew.

He looked at her closely and a great satisfaction dawned in his eyes. He beamed.

“Do you mind if I ask you what is the salary, please?” inquired Winnie, her innocent, lovely eyes very wide and anxious.

“Oh, very good — very good indeed, Miss — Miss — ”

“I am Winnie — Winnie O'Wynn, you know.”

“Dear me, that's a very pretty name, Miss O'Wynn. The salary is — er — ten pounds and all expenses.”

“Are there any duties, please?” asked Winnie naïvely.

George H. Jay blinked slightly.

“Well, *sure!* That is — they're very light.”

“Are they honourable, please? Do forgive me for asking you that, Mr. Jay — but a lonely and unprotected girl has to be so careful.”

Mr. Jay stared intently at the lovely child-face turned so eagerly towards him and he winced a little.

“ I will tell you the duties and you shall judge for yourself, Miss O'Wynn,” he said, and added quickly, “ If I were a married man and had a daughter, no doubt she would be about your age, and one thinks of these things, of course, of course.”

It did not sound translucently clear, but that wincing, flinching look of discomfort had not escaped those blue, blue eyes. Winnie mentally filed it for future reference.

“ You will be required to occupy a room in an hotel at Brighton on the night after next. That is all. I myself will escort you there and call for you in the morning. You may choose your room, examine it, lock it and keep the key. I will guarantee that you will sleep as safe and sound there as in your own home. Nobody will interfere with you, annoy you, or even attempt to speak to you from the moment you arrive till the moment you leave. That's a guarantee. If it is not kept to the strict letter you are free to call the police or any one you like to care for you. The fee which will be paid to you for this simple service is — come now — ten — no, say twelve pounds — call it guineas.”

“ Oh, but that is awfully easy. Shall I be taken down in a motor? ”

“ Certainly,” said George H. Jay, smiling.



The sweet lips drooped.

"Oh, but I haven't a motor coat, or bonnet, or anything. It will be very expensive."

"That will come under expenses," said Mr. Jay, laughing extremely loudly.

Winnie smiled.

"How pleasant it will be to work for *you*," she said impulsively.

"Well, I'm not mean — no, you won't find us — me — mean."

Her face fell.

"What is it — what's the matter?"

Winnie's eyes were downcast.

"I'm so afraid that you will be ashamed of my dressing-case. It's rather shabby. You see, I am not very well off and I am saving up for a new one, but I haven't got very far yet. Do you think if I were to put a little money towards it the rest could come under expenses, too? You see, it *would* be an expense."

Mr. Jay's good humour and generosity seemed unbounded.

"Dressing-case, dressing-case. Oh, that'll be all right. Can't go with a shabby dressing-case, certainly not," he said in his noisy, open, breezy way.

He pondered, staring at her. His gaze was very keen and penetrating. But it fell off like

a blunted arrow from a shield from the impenetrable innocence of Winnie.

“Certainly have a dressing-case, child. In fact, it's necessary,” he said, “and we won't call upon your pennies for it, either. Look here, go and buy one now — a nice one. Ten pounds, hey? Ought to get a nice one for ten pounds.”

“Before the war my father bought me a beauty for fifteen pounds, but everything is so dear now,” said Winnie.

A certain sadness crept into Mr. Jay's eyes — a kind of weariness.

“Well, well, choose for yourself and bring the bill to me.” He laughed louder than the waves breaking on the shore, but there was not much amusement in his mirth.

“Come and see me to-morrow when you have got suitable things. Anything in reason that is necessary for a lady staying one night at a good hotel you can have. And if you have, or can get, a smart violet evening dress to dine in — why, do so. I will attend to the bill.”

He drew a sharp breath.

“Only be human — I mean, be reasonable — what I mean is, don't spend for the sake of spending.”

Winnie's eyes widened.

“Oh, that would be wicked. I think that is

quite a detestable thing to do. I will be very economical," she promised.

"I'm sure you will, Miss Winnie. That's a good girl." He rose and, excusing himself for a moment, left the room. He closed the door behind him, but the catch failed and it hung slightly ajar.

Winnie rose, widened the gap, and resumed her seat.

In a moment she heard faintly the voice of Mr. Jay speaking upon the telephone. He had subdued his lusty voice, and she only caught a word here and there. But they were useful words —

" — wonderful likeness . . . amazing luck, my lord . . . expense . . . quite so . . . yes, my lord . . . ha, ha . . . *carte blanche* . . . instructions . . . very good . . ."

The voice ceased and Winnie got up, closed the door and sat down again, her eyes fixed thoughtfully on the telephone on Mr. Jay's table. Why did he not use his own telephone instead of going into another room? Filed for reference.

Mr. Jay entered, apologizing for his temporary absence.

"Well, my dear Miss O'Wynn, I think everything is clear. Fit yourself up properly — I

see you're a lady and know how to dress, and so on. Let the few little things you find it necessary to buy be of good quality — suitable for a lady."

He sighed.

"But, as I say, be human about it. Don't spend more than is absolutely necessary. Hard times, you know."

Winnie reassured him, and having promised to return on the following day, she smilingly tripped away.

Mr. Jay resumed his chair and for some moments stared before him, frowning slightly. Once he half rose, then relapsed into his chair again.

"She's as innocent as a child. But I hope she's not as careless. . . . I ought to have fixed a limit. Thirty pounds — something like that. If she's careless — she might easily spend nearer fifty. That's the worst of these pretty little things — either they're carelessly extravagant — or else they're as rapacious as vampires. And I guess I can provide all the rapacity required in this business."

He grinned.

"However, she's too timid to do much damage. But, all the same, I should have mentioned a limit."

He was right; he should have done so.

It would have been unlike Winnie had she failed to realize that in some mysterious way the Wolves were after her once more. The man Jay, acting no doubt for others, needed her badly, so badly that he was evidently prepared to pay for the privilege.

She called in at the nearest Fuller's, ordered a cup of chocolate and thought it out.

The duty required of her was so exceedingly simple and the pay so high that it would have frightened many girls.

Why was Mr. Jay prepared to lay out quite a large sum of money just to get a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl of five feet four to occupy a room for one night only in a Brighton hotel, and why need she wear a violet dress to dine in?

It was apparent to her that there was nothing to fear. She need only take a good novel, a box of chocolates, keep the light burning all night, see to the lock and key, if necessary pay a fee for a detective to stand on duty all night outside or below her open window, and so, safe, spend a few hours reading.

It was very mysterious. But it was also very easy. No doubt Mr. Jay expected to reap some wolfy advantage out of it; Winnie did not mis-

take him for a philanthropist. But what advantage it was difficult to see.

And it did not greatly matter.

Winnie glanced at her watch and smiled quietly. She had a great deal of shopping to do and very little time to do it in. She left the shop and took a taxi.

“Please drive me to Regent Street,” she said in her caressing way.

## CHAPTER IV

*Wherein It would appear that Winnie somewhat exceeded the Estimate of Mr. Jay, who introduces Her to Mr. Canis Lupus Carter and begs for Information regarding the Old Ivy-clad Rectory which is in His Mind.*

MR. GEORGE H. JAY was not alone when she called at his office on the following morning. Sitting by the window was a tall, excessively slender, well-dressed man of middle age.

He rose as Winnie entered. It was an effective entrance, for she was wearing a thirty-guinea grey costume — new; a three and a half guinea pair of grey suéde shoes — also new; grey silk stockings — new, thirty-seven and six; and, of course, the hat which had been so kindly presented to her by the Wolf of yestereve. She carried a grey, gold-mounted soft alligator bag — new; and in the bag were a small bundle of receipted bills and a very much larger bundle of unreceipted bills.

“Let me introduce Mr. Carter, Miss O’Wynn,” said the man Jay.

Mr. Carter bowed, smiling.

Winnie decided that had it not been for a certain semi-boiled appearance of his eyes, the pallid hue of his rather weak face, and his air of being out of condition, he would have been tolerably good-looking. As it was, he was far, very far, therefrom.

“And now, with your permission, to business,” said Mr. Jay, adding, “Mr. Carter is my sleeping partner, my dear Miss O’Wynn, and entirely in my confidence.”

Winnie nodded.

“How nice,” she said, and Mr. Carter smiled pleasantly, nodding his head with a mechanical motion that might have been inspired by a couple at the sideboard for breakfast.

“Have you arranged for the few little things you required?” asked Mr. Jay.

“Oh, yes, quite, thank you. Some I paid for myself — and the others will be sent when you have paid for them. I have brought you the bills.”

“Ah, yes, you are a business-like young lady, I see. What was the total?”

“It seems to be a hundred and seventy-eight pounds,” said Winnie composedly.

Mr. Jay gripped the sides of his chair. His



lips seemed feebly to shape the words "Be human," and he gulped very loudly.

"You see, I didn't buy any jewellery," said Winnie. "It seemed too expensive. Besides, I have some of my own." She was taking the bills from her bag. "Those are the receipted ones — will you please pay me now for those? — sixty-two pounds — as I spent all my own money on them. And those are the unpaid ones for you to pay."

Mechanically Mr. Jay took the bills. His eyes were fixed on Mr. Carter. But Mr. Carter's eyes were on the angelic face of Winnie.

Mr. Jay cleared his throat.

"Do you approve, my — Mr. Carter?" he asked, it seemed nervously.

Mr. Carter nodded.

"Oh, quite, quite. Make out the cheques, Jay."

"Certainly, Mr. Carter. At once."

Mr. Jay excused himself for a moment and went out to instruct a clerk to make out the cheques.

"You know, dear Miss O'Wynn, that your little adventure will be quite free from any complication. It will be exactly as Mr. Jay has explained, I assure you of that. I could not

sanction it were it in the least likely to cause you any inconvenience," said Mr. Carter.

"I am quite sure that you would not, Mr. Carter," replied Winnie admiringly. "I felt very relieved when I saw you. I could see that you were chivalrous ——"

Mr. Carter looked surprised but pleased.

"And noble-minded and with great delicacy, honour and generosity. You don't mind my saying so, do you?"

"Not at all, I assure you."

"Some men are like wolves, I think, don't you?"

"Oh, lamentably—I have frequently noticed it."

"And some are just the opposite. They are like shepherds—protectors of the lambs against the wolves, aren't they? Don't you think so, Mr. Carter? I think you are one of the shepherd kind—you would protect any one, I am sure."

Mr. Carter seemed so surprised that he was almost embarrassed.

"Yes, indeed," he said. "If ever you need a protector come straight to me."

"Thank you, Mr. Carter, I will," said Winnie, so innocently that he fully believed the

*double entente* had sailed harmlessly over her head.

But it had not. Things of that kind never sailed over Winnie's head; they sailed instead into her mental notebook, which automatically entered the man who said it as a very wolfy specimen of *Canis Lupus*.

Her feminine intuition and habit of keen observation through those baby blue eyes had some minutes before summed up Mr. Carter as that "my lord" to whom Mr. Jay had telephoned on the previous day, and who probably was behind the mysterious "duty" for which she was being so well paid.

So she stood up and impulsively offered her hand.

"Shall we be friends, we two?" she cried softly. "Just we two."

"Indeed, yes," said Mr. Carter. "The very best of friends." He seemed quite enthusiastic.

"But, I say, what about that jewellery? You positively must have a trinket or two for the visit. Naturally, what? You must let me arrange that for you. Where do you live, Miss O'Wy —" he broke off as Mr. Jay reëntered, apparently much to Mr. Carter's annoyance.

"Well, Jay, well — what is it, now?" he said irritably.

Jay stared.

"Why, my lo — Mr. Carter — the cheques are being written."

"Yes." Mr. Carter remembered himself. "Naturally, what? Well, I'll be cantering along. Remember, Jay, its *carte blanche*. You will leave your address with Mr. Jay, won't you, Miss O'Wynn, in case we have anything to send — a message, for instance."

He made a rather vague exit, and Mr. Jay settled down to business.

"Tell me, my dear Miss O'Wynn," he inquired, "before we go any further — are you really up from the old, ivy-clad rectory or are you barbed? What I mean is: are you really an *ingénue*, or is this innocence just your special — er — spiel?"

"Daddy wasn't a rector," said Winnie, rather blankly. Mr. Jay, whose sharp eyes had been piercing her, suddenly laughed his loudest, breeziest laugh, the suspicion clearing from his eyes.

"I see you don't follow me, my dear. That's all right. Forgive me. Keep your ingenuousness as long as you can. It's grand currency, anyway. . . . But that hundred and seventy odd! Gee! You got to have a natural nerve to hit it up like that — innocent or not innocent.

I meant about thirty pounds, you know. However, it's all right."

That was quite true. He had meant her to spend about thirty. But he had meant, also, to charge his client, Mr. Carter (for so Lord Fasterton had chosen to call himself that morning), about a hundred, under the heading of "outfit and preliminary expenses." Still, Mr. Jay did not lack nerve himself, and he had no doubt that he could make up his "loss" by some other gentle little charge.

Winnie had guessed all that from the almost careless way in which he had discussed her pay and expenses during the first interview, and like the gardener who decided to learn the toad to be a toad naturally, she had promptly decided to learn Mr. Jay to be a wolf.

"Yes, keep your pretty innocence as long as you can, my dear child," said Mr. Jay innocently. "It's better than nerve. No crook would have had the nerve to hit it up like that. They're human, some of 'em."

"I don't understand, please," said Winnie.

"That's all right. Now to business."

He gave her the cheques and bills, advised her (quite superfluously) to collect the things as quickly as possible, and then plunged into detailed instructions. They were neither long

nor complicated; and within ten minutes everything was arranged and Winnie tripped out.

The clerk who had brought the cheques — a dark-eyed youth, good-looking in the nut or bean style, with be-plastered hair — leaped to open the door for her.

“ Thank you so much,” said Winnie in her most caressing voice. “ You are so kind.” She stabbed him to the heart with her blue eyes — for she had an idea that he might be useful — and departed, leaving him convinced that he had made a conquest. He, too, was much more innocent than he knew.

All went with the silken and dream-like smoothness which usually characterized the operations of the shady though breezy Mr. Jay.

He motored her down to Brighton, arriving there in time for her to change her six-guinea dream in motor bonnets, her motor coat (lightly fur lined), and similar sundries, for a really entrancing evening gown in violet, hastily and expensively fitted by Jaquin — the celebrated imitator of Rakuin — from Laquin's. The hotel was small, but smart — entitled *The Bijouette* — run by a ladylike woman who seemed unnecessarily deferential to Mr. Jay. As Winnie left Mr. Jay to go to her room a telegram

was handed her. It contained a profound apology from Mr. Carter for his failure to provide the "trinkets." Insurmountable difficulties had prevented him, but she would find on her return to town that the omission had been rectified.

She dined with Mr. Jay and in due course retired to her room. She had intended to read through the night, but the motor run seemed to have tired her. So she locked her door, went to bed and slept dreamlessly till nine o'clock on the following morning. She breakfasted with Mr. Jay at leisure and presently drove back to London.

It was about as thrilling as eating mashed potato.

Mr. Jay dropped her at her flat, gave her a ten-pound note, two pound notes and twelve shillings, thanked her, shook her hand warmly, hoped to have the pleasure of putting fresh "business" in her way, and drove off, with a vague appearance of relief.

Winnie took the couch and settled down to think it out. Few people knew better than she that men are not in the habit of spending something like two hundred pounds for nothing.

But it was difficult to see what Mr. Carter and Mr. Jay were getting for their good money.

Winnie made herself a cup of her favourite chocolate and lapsed into reverie, which speedily produced a decision to cultivate the smitten clerk of Mr. Jay.

For, as Winnie told herself rather plaintively: "Those men have taken advantage of me in some way, though I don't quite know how. But I won't be wolfed by any of them — and I must defend myself with the kind of weapons they chose."



## CHAPTER V

*In which a Youthful Gentleman basks in the Smiles of Winnie, and Winnie suns Herself in the Golden Beams of Lady Fasterton.*

ONE brief tea at a tea-shop, resulting from a chance (he thought) encounter near Finch Court did the business of Mr. Gus Golding, the clerk.

Winnie O'Wynn was an almost irresistible siren at her very worst; but at her best, and when in form, she could have charmed the man in the moon to earth and have persuaded him to take out his British naturalization papers.

And as the adoration of Gus Golding was unhampered by any sort of loyalty to the loud-laughing Mr. Jay, whom the youth tersely described as a "man-eating lobster," it took Winnie perhaps ten minutes to acquire all the information Gus had to give, which was very little, but included the interesting fact that at first sight he, Gus, had mistaken Miss O'Wynn for Lady Fasterton.

“ Am I like her, then, Mr. Golding? ” purred Winifred.

“ Ten years ago she might have held a candle to you, Miss O'Wynn — but not now. She's your style, but she's got to make up pretty much to come anywhere near you now.”

Winnie gave him a smile — not for the compliment, which was ordinary — but for the information which, to her quick wits, was extraordinary.

Light began to show dimly at the end of the tunnel of mystery into which she was peering. She gathered that Mr. Golding had very little information to add to the facts that Lady Fasterton (whom he had seen only once) resembled Miss O'Wynn, that Mr. Carter was indeed Lord Fasterton, and that he was wont to employ Mr. Jay upon occasional commissions of the type which would not commend themselves to the family solicitors. Beyond this, Gus knew nothing. So she gently disengaged herself from his conversation and company and sent him back to the office. He had not appeared to possess an inkling of why Mr. Jay or Lord Fasterton had needed the services of Winnie.

But, innocently, he had dropped a scrap of information which, upon consideration, began

to grow in Winnie's mind. It was to the effect that Lord Fasterton had recently purchased The Bijouette Hotel at Brighton (through Mr. Jay), thus causing an increase in the office work, which was the only aspect of the matter which interested Gus.

Winnie filed it away in her mind and spent all the following day in making a few inquiries. During her absence Lord Fasterton called at her flat twice. On the second occasion he left a packet. It contained a very sweet microscopic bracelet watch, in gold, with a diamond or two set about it, together with an affectionate little note.

But, save to mark this further evidence of the wolfishness of Lord Fasterton, Winnie was too busy spurring on a private inquiry agent in whom she had invested a few guineas. Lord Fasterton could wait until she was ready to deal with him.

Her diligence and intelligence brought speedy results, and when, some four days after the Brighton trip, she put on the pink kimono (she always thought best in the pink) and, with a vast supply of cushions, made herself comfortable on the huge old couch which was one of the things the money-lenders by appointment to her father had found "magicked" away,

she had gleaned sufficient information to give her quite one of the jolliest evenings any lonely, unprotected girl has ever had since jigsaw was invented.

So deftly, indeed, did she fit together the particular jigsaw puzzle of Mr. Jay and the Bijouette that when, on the following morning, she slipped on the Fasterton wrist-watch prior to going out, she regarded it with the almost contemptuous look which one might bestow upon a stone presented to one who is fully entitled to ask for a complete bakery.

She took a taxi to Grosvenor Square and asked for Lady Fasterton.

It was nearly twelve and Lady Fasterton had been up for some time, almost half an hour. Having nothing better to do she received Winnie, who thrilled at her first glance at Lord Fasterton's wife. She was fair-haired, blue-eyed, and five feet four,—very pretty, very much like Winnie, but looking a little more the victim of the strenuous life. At the time Fasterton had married her—off the stage—she must have been a veritable twin sister to Miss O'Wynn.

But she lacked the young girl's vivacity. She was as languid as a slowly drifting curl of mist, or a lily lying upon a still pool.

“ Good morning, Miss O’Wynn,” she said, smiling faintly. “ For a moment I fancied I was looking into a mirror, but I see now that you are younger, fresher, and prettier than I am. But I was like you once.” She sighed and leaned back as if exhausted by this long speech.

“ You only say that because you are so kind, Lady Fasterton,” smiled Winnie, and drew a chair close to the settee. “ But I shall try hard to believe it, though I don’t think I shall succeed. . . . No doubt you wonder why I have come to see you. It is because I have discovered a conspiracy against you.”

“ A conspiracy? ” asked Lady Fasterton wearily. “ Oh, let them conspire.”

“ A very serious one,” pressed Winnie. “ I would not distress you with the particulars, only they have tried to make use of me to aid them.”

“ They? Whom? ”

“ Your husband and Mr. Jay.”

Lady Fasterton rose.

“ One moment, dear Miss O’Wynn,” she said, and crossed the apartment and opened a drawer from which she took a small gold box. She moved her hands, her back to Winnie, and the girl heard a little inhalation, a sniff.

The drawer closed and the lady returned.

Her languor had gone, temporarily drug-driven away.

“ Now tell me, my dear,” she said. “ Tell me everything and don't mind my feelings.”

And Winnie told her in detail all that had happened to her.

Lady Fasterton listened to the end. But her temporary keenness had died out long before Winnie finished, and the story conveyed nothing to her.

“ It's all very mysterious. What does it mean — and why do you tell me all this, my dear girl? ” she asked.

“ Do you want me to speak freely, Lady Fasterton? ” asked Winnie. The innocence that characterized her manner with men was not now apparent.

“ Certainly.”

“ Very well; I believe that if the register of the Bijouette Hotel were available to us instead of to Lord Fasterton only, we should find an entry, dated last Monday, which would show that Mr. and Mrs. Jay stayed there on Monday night, and, no doubt, there are several people who would swear to that, and, confronted with you, would swear that you were the lady who stayed there! ”

Winnie paused.

"Go on," said Lady Fasterton.

"Have you witnesses — could you prove — where you were on last Monday night?" asked Winnie.

"Cer——" began Lady Fasterton and stopped sharply. A change passed over her face and an odd look flashed into her eyes.

"Ah — I see. I see," she said, half to herself, and faced Winnie.

"No," she said. "I could not."

She leaned forward suddenly.

"Don't misunderstand me," she said, rather harshly. "Let me explain. The state of my health — my nerves — renders it necessary that I should take certain drugs," she laughed. "Oh, call me a drug-fiend if you like — we're always misunderstood. On Monday I was at a place where drugs are obtainable. I was there practically all night. Fasterton knew — or guessed — if he were sober, which is improbable. He slept at his club. But of all the party that was at the place, the drug place, on Monday, there is not one who would admit it, much less swear it in a law court. You see, it's illegal — and scandalous."

Winnie nodded.

"So that if people swore that they saw you at the Bijouette on Monday last, you could only

deny it; you could not prove that you were elsewhere? ”

Lady Fasterton shrugged her shoulders.

“ I could not. No, my dear; I'm so sure of the people I spoke of that if Fasterton were to start divorce proceedings — which is the sole reason of this plot — it would not be worth my while to defend it.”

Winnie thought.

“ But you, Lady Fasterton; do you want a divorce? ”

“ I? Heavens, child, no. Fasterton is one of the richest men in the country. He and I each go our own way. We dislike each other — but that's nothing. Probably Jay suggested this scheme to him — because Fasterton would like to marry Feline — that's the girl who does the weird leopard dance at the Paliseum. He'll be tired of her in a month.”

She stared at Winnie.

“ But now Fasterton is powerless — as far as this particular scheme is concerned. It's tremendously generous of you to tell me all this, my dear. You see, your evidence would quite ruin their plan. You would give evidence for me, wouldn't you? ”

“ Of course, dear Lady Fasterton. Would it be very expensive? ”



“ Expensive, child! ” A light dawned on the lady’s face. “ Oh, I forgot. You are so lady-like that I quite forgot that you have to earn your living. Do forgive me. But that can be put right.”

She went to a desk and drew out a cheque book.

“ When I married a millionaire I took care of myself, my dear,” she said, reverting for a moment to the old stage-days manner. “ Mind you do the same. Don’t trust any man to love you more than a year or two. Tie him down while he’s mad for you — in black and white.”

She scrawled gigantically across the fair pink face of a cheque.

“ There, my dear. It’s five hundred. And remember you’ve a friend in me. You’ve done me a good turn — I don’t want the trouble of being divorced by Fasterton. I’ve given him no cause, at least, not as much as he’s given me, and it would take me a long time to find another husband as well off. Keep this quiet, my dear, and don’t forget I’m your friend. Apart from my settlements my allowance is five thousand a year, and your being so much like me might be useful — to us both.”

She kissed Winnie.

“ Only you're prettier and sweeter and younger, Winnie,” she said ruefully.

“ Oh, no, dear Lady Fasterton,” said Winnie politely.

e  
d

## CHAPTER VI

*Wherein Winnie tries very hard and rather expensively to do exactly as Mr. Jay wishes, and Lady Fasterton is by no means divorced.*

WINNIE then called on Mr. Jay, for no particular reason, save to ask him if he had any more work for her in immediate view, as, if not, she was going to enjoy a week's holiday at Brighton, staying at the Bijouette Hotel, which she liked very much, she said. She met him on the way to lunch, and joined him.

Innocent — nay, even trifling though the item of news appeared to be — it smote the smile off Mr. Jay's mouth like the blow of an axe. Nothing could be more fatal to the gentle plan of Lord Fasterton and himself than for Winnie to become well known to the staff of the Bijouette.

“ Oh, I shouldn't go to Brighton, my dear Miss O'Wynn — I heard only this morning that they're expecting an outbreak of influenza there. Why not make it — er — Bournemouth? Fine place, Bournemouth.”

“ Yes, isn't it? ” said Winnie. “ But so expensive.”

“ Expensive — eh? Why, so it is.” Mr. Jay appeared to ponder. Then, with a smile on his lips, but with a sob in his eyes (so to speak) he made a very pleasing proposition.

“ I've been thinking during the last day or so, my dear young lady, and, to be truthful, I confess that I paid you too little for that matter you attended to for me. So, if you would prefer Bournemouth — and I advise it — I will foot the bill for you.”

Winnie's blue eyes opened.

“ But it will cost nearly fifty pounds — to have a really nice holiday there. Daddy stayed there once, and he said how dear it was.”

Mr. Jay gasped. He looked as if he wanted to say, “Be human.” But he refrained.

“ Well, well, I dare say that can be managed,” he said, staring at the sweet face before him.

He took out a note-case and counted over five ten-pound notes.

“ There you are, my dear young lady,” he said. “ You needn't mind taking them. You earned them. But it's Bournemouth, not Brighton. That's a promise, eh? ”

Winnie put away the notes in her little alligator bag.

"Of course it is, Mr. Jay. Thank you ever so much. I will persuade the friend who is coming with me that I have decided to go to Bournemouth."

"That's right — that's fine," purred Mr. Jay. "A lady friend?" he inquired.

"An old school friend," said Winnie quietly. "Lady Fasterton. Do you know her? I am going to call and see her this afternoon to renew our old friendship, and to try to persuade her to come with me."

The hair of George H. Jay stood straight up on end.

"Who?" he said, his eyes starting.

"Lady Fasterton, Mr. Jay," repeated Winnie, her eyes wide with wonder. "Is anything the matter?"

"You were going to stay at the Bijouette, Brighton, with Lady Fasterton?" croaked Mr. Jay.

"At Bournemouth, now, if she is willing after I have renewed our schoolgirl friendship," Winnie explained soothingly.

"But — you can't, my dear — you simply can't! It's impossible! There are lots of

reasons why you shouldn't call on Lady Fasterton."

"But why, Mr. Jay?"

"Oh — excuse me a minute. I've got to telephone. I won't be a minute."

He hurried away.

Winnie smiled and turned to deal prettily with an ice which the waiter had just brought. She guessed without difficulty that Mr. Jay was desperately ringing up Lord Fasterton.

"Such wolves!" she murmured. "How they try to pounce upon one."

"Beg pardon, miss?" It was the elderly waiter.

"I only said what wolves men were," smiled Winnie. "I didn't mean you, of course — it was the others I meant."

"Yes, miss, certainly," said the fatherly waiter rather hazily.

Mr. Jay returned, looking worried.

He sat down.

"Very fortunate business, Miss O'Wynn," he said.

"What do you mean, Mr. Jay?"

"It's too long — and too complicated — a story to explain, my dear little lady. But, strangely enough, I have another commission

for you, if you are free. It would be honourable and well paid."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Quite easy. I want some one to go to Cardiff for a month and make a list of all the Evans living there. It's in connexion with a legacy. Could you do that? Only, unfortunately, for certain reasons you would have to give an undertaking not to see or communicate with Lady Fasterton for three months!"

He paused, looking anxiously at Winnie.

"Oh, dear!" A look of pain darkened the blue eyes. "I don't think I would like to promise not to see May Fasterton for so long," demurred Winnie.

"But it's business — *business* — most serious, my dear child. And well paid."

"How much would you pay me, please?"

A look of sheer agony appeared on Mr. Jay's red face.

"A hundred pounds."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Mr. Jay. I really couldn't give up my friendship with May Fasterton for the sake of a hundred pounds. It would seem like selling her."

Mr. Jay groaned audibly.

"No, no, Miss Winnie — not at all. It's Business." He drew a deep breath. After all,

it was Fasterton's money: he was prepared to spend well for the sake of his divorce. The whole plot depended upon it. If Winnie and Lady Fasterton met it was only a question of time before Winnie spoke of her Brighton trip.

"Look here, what will you do it for?" said Mr. Jay anxiously.

"I don't want to do it, please."

"Do it for two hundred."

"Oh, no, no, please not," implored Winnie.

Mr. Jay ground his teeth.

"Four hundred! Think of it—four hundred pounds!"

"Oh, you tempt me so. I don't want to," sighed Winnie.

Beads of perspiration broke out upon Mr. Jay's brow.

"My last word, Miss O'Wynn. I'll give you five hundred not to see or communicate with Lady Fasterton for three months, and to go to Wales for that time."

"I can't—I can't resist five hundred guineas—but I don't want to do it," said Winnie.

"You promise?"

"Yes—if I must. I promise."

Mr. Jay drew out a cheque-book and a fountain pen and wrote the cheque forthwith.



Winnie took it and looked at it with aversion.

"What a lot of money," she said. "Will they pay me that over the counter, please?"

Mr. Jay took the cheque and made it payable to bearer.

"Now they will," he said, with the air of a sorely stricken man.

Winnie began to gather up her things.

"I will go to the bank and get it. Does that seem very greedy, Mr. Jay?"

"Oh, no, not at all," said Mr. Jay with a tortured smile.

He saw her into a taxi.

"Good-bye, and thank you, Mr. Jay," she said. "How complicated everything seems, doesn't it?"

"Yes, very," agreed Mr. Jay shortly.

The following morning Winnie called at Finch Court for instructions about proceeding to Cardiff.

It needed only a glance at Mr. Jay to perceive that Lady Fasterton had acted promptly. He was very subdued.

"Tell me, Miss O'Wynn, did you see Lady Fasterton yesterday?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," smiled Winnie.

"Before you gave your promise, of course?"

“ Oh, yes — before lunch.”

“ Did you tell her about your Brighton adventure? ”

“ Yes — she was very interested. Why? Was I wrong to tell her? I did not understand that it was to be a secret. You said it was quite open and honourable.”

Mr. Jay smiled like a man who has been run over and has just regained consciousness.

“ Yes, my dear,” he said wearily. “ It’s all right. Er — did you cash your cheque yesterday? ”

“ Oh, yes. They paid me without a word.”

“ Hum! Well, you needn’t go to Cardiff after all. That matter is settled now.”

“ And can I see Lady Fasterton, too, please? Is the promise still binding? ”

Mr. Jay hesitated, then with an effort decided to be generous.

“ No. Do as you like! ”

He waved his hands.

“ Everything has fallen through,” he said. “ Nobody has got a penny out of it all but you. It’s too long a story to tell you — but, believe me, your innocence, your pretty prattling ways, have paid you about forty thousand per cent. Keep your innocence as long as you can, my dear — for it looks to me like Good Business.”

She shook her head with a puzzled smile.

"I don't understand," she said, rising; "but I'm very happy. And thank you very much, Mr. Jay, for all your kindness to me."

He came to the door with her. He seemed to be struggling internally with something. It came out with a rush as he shook hands.

"Tell me — honest now," he burst out, his eyes searching her very soul. "Are you *really* Baby Blue-eyes — or are you the cutest little kidder in town?"

But Winnie shook her pretty head.

"Oh, Mr. Jay," she said, most exquisitely confused, "I don't understand," and so was gone.

Mr. Jay watched her trip down the court. Then, shaking his head sadly, he retired into his office, took paper and pencil, and began painfully to figure out what she had cost him, representing Lord Fasterton.

It was a dull way of spending a morning, but it was weighing upon him rather, and he was glad to get it off his mind.

But Winnie O'Wynn smiled all the way home, — very much as little Red Riding Hood smiled when the woodman had axed the wolf.

## CHAPTER VII

*In which Winnie is interested in the Quickness of the Quick Mr. Jay and again ventures recklessly within range of His Carnivorous Activities.*

BREEZY Mr. Jay was a gentleman of resilient temperament, and there were few business men in either of the hemispheres who could bear up more philosophically and courageously under other people's losses. Particularly was this the case when the loser was a person so well able to endure a considerable puncture in his revenues as Lord Fasterton.

If Lord Fasterton had failed to divorce his beautiful and good-natured wife, clearly it was his lordship's melancholy privilege to officiate as chief mourner at the obsequies of his stratagems, sleights and devices.

Certainly Mr. Jay did not attach to himself nor Winnie any blame whatsoever for the very disconcerting miscarriage of a carefully worked-out plan.

Nor, indeed, did Winnie imagine that he

would. Therefore, it was without any amazement that, a few days later, the child opened a letter from him in which he managed to convey that he would be almost painfully grateful if Winnie could call upon him next morning. He was, he added, in need of just such assistance as his — he hoped he might say “ friend ” — Miss O'Wynn could give him. It was quite a simple matter, would be well paid, and he would send a taxi for her at ten o'clock.

Winnie put down the letter with a pensive smile.

“ Dear Mr. Jay — he always makes the mistake of being too anxious. But then he is a quick man — he said so. I think he wants something else from me. It is a pity, from his point of view, to let it be so obvious. But I suppose that it is because he is so quick.”

She laughed — a low musical sound, harmonizing exquisitely with her baby blue eyes — and settled down for a little quiet reflection upon nature and nature study, the wolf department thereof.

For, although she had not been in London a month she had found, as she had expected, that the city was full of those whom it amused her to term “ wolves.” And now that she was a minor capitalist she was aware of an instinct

that it would not be only her slim, wild-flower loveliness which attracted the roving eyes of some of the "wolves." There were, she felt, plenty of them not above closing their teeth upon her capital.

This instinct may have been due to her recollection of certain wise words of that worldly-wise man, her late father.

"Remember, when I am gone, Win, old man," he had once said, "that few men under the age of about fifty can withstand that siren song of which the refrain is 'Something for nothing.' Lots can give the impression that the idea doesn't appeal to them, but you will find them on the telephone next morning, pretty early. That is what they call The Nature of Man. There are others, of course. You can easily sum them up. We'll run through the list. There are:

"1. The men who want something for nothing and usually get it on the reverse gear.

"2. The men who will give something to get a good deal more. (Watch these, Win. Never take your eyes off them.)

"3. The men who are satisfied with what they have. (You won't be troubled much by these, for they are mainly in institutions suitable for them.)

“ 4. The men who throw away what they have never earned, because they don't know the value of it. (It goes to those who do.)

“ 5. The men who have nothing, have had it all their lives, and will always have it.

“ That about covers the main headings, Win. Classify them as you come across them and treat them accordingly! ”

Winnie was doing so diligently.

On the whole she put Mr. Jay in Class 2 — the class that had to be watched — though, strictly, he was also fifteen per cent. Class 1.

And nothing happened on the following morning to justify her taking him out of it.

She found him as breezy and decisive as ever. His laugh was as loud and his way was as candid. There was admiration in his hardish eyes as he shook hands and placed a chair for her.

“ Good morning, my dear little lady,” he called to her across the three feet between them. “ I am glad — very glad — to see that London agrees with you so well. You are like a rose in the city, you really are. It is a pleasure to me to see you looking so bonny. Like a rose” — he let his voice die away — “ as bonny as a rose — a rose. . . . ”

He settled in his chair.

“ Now, I wonder whether you have accepted a permanent post, Miss O'Wynn,” he continued.

“ Oh, no. I am afraid I haven't enough experience, Mr. Jay.”

“ Well, well, never mind. It will come. After all, you did pretty well out of our last little transaction, eh? Haha! Tide you over for a little, eh? Haha! ”

Winnie sighed, her eyes downcast.

“ I hope so, dear Mr. Jay.”

He smiled.

“ Well, well. Now to business. It seems that a great friend of mine is in need of the services of just such a little gentlewoman as yourself. Nothing much — merely to do a little light reading for an invalid. But the lady must be a lady, you understand. Such as yourself. Natural — reliable — charming — young. As I say, such as yourself. He does not want one of those keen, worldly, witty ladies with their future somewhere back in the past, but just a nice, sweet, fresh, innocent little country girl.” Here the telephone spurted a metallic jet of sound at him and he turned. “ Ah, there's my friend Slite — just a moment. I will tell him you are here.”

He did so, briefly, and rang off.



“ He’s coming around, Miss O’Wynn.”

“ Thank you,” said Winnie. She smiled upon Mr. Jay.

“ You are very kind to a lonely little person new to London and a tiny bit afraid of it,” she continued. “ You know, men are so big and clever and quick, and sometimes they seem so — so fierce that they are almost like wolves, aren’t they, Mr. Jay? Don’t you find it so, too? ”

Mr. Jay screwed up his eyes.

“ Wolves — wolves, do you say, my dear little lady? ” he said. “ Believe me, there are men in this city that would make a respectable God-fearin’ wolf lie down and howl. That’s so.” He spoke warmly, so warmly that Winnie silently wondered what particular wolf was gnawing at *his* bank account just then.

“ But never mind — they needn’t worry *you*, my dear. Keep clear of them — have nothing to do with any of them. It’s fierce the wolves there are in this town,” urged Mr. Jay.

“ I have anything to do with them! Oh, Mr. Jay! ” Winnie shivered.

He nodded.

“ I see you haven’t changed. Still the same sweet, unspoiled — er — fresh outlook on life. That’s fine, very fine. It’s nice to meet some-

body who isn't mistrustful — watchful — suspicious of their best friends. You want to keep that way."

There were quick footsteps in the outer office and Mr. Jay arose.

"Here's Mr. Slite, my friend. You will like him — very nice — polished man of the world. Not wolfy, haha! Certainly not. Charming man!"

## CHAPTER VIII

*Wherein Winnie is introduced by Mr. " Wolf " Jay to Mr. " Rattlesnake " Slite, is offered a Situation and having adopted a Little Lonely Money, accepts the same.*

MR. SLITE entered, a dark, thin person, with extremely bright, cold eyes. He was very pale and might have been anything from thirty-five to fifty. Very well preserved, and most neatly clad in a dark grey lounge suit.

Mr. Jay introduced Winnie, and he smiled pleasantly as he surveyed her. But his eyes remained cold as ever, and though his glance seemed no more than to waver, to flicker, Winnie knew that he had seen her and appraised her in that one flicker from the crown of her pretty hat to the tip of her trim shoes.

He was quick, she saw. Whether he was accurate remained to be seen.

But Winnie had never been slow.

Behind the impenetrable innocence of her blue eyes, the dainty ingenuousness of her sweet, childlike face, her matchless wits had

instantly and unerringly switched Mr. Slite into his correct category.

“ Here,” flickered the swift intuition of the girl, “ here is no wolf. Mr. Slite is not a member of the great *Canis Lupus* family. By no means. Put him among the rattlesnakes! It's where he belongs. *Crotalus horridus* — and he's lost his rattle.”

She shook hands and fixed upon Mr. Slite the expectant and slightly admiring gaze which the circumstances seemed to her to call for.

“ Mr. Jay has been telling me of the poor invalid for whom you wish to engage a reader, Mr. Slite,” said she.

Mr. Slite smiled with his lips.

“ And do you think that you would care to accept the position, Miss O'Wynn? ” asked he in his slow, soft voice.

Winnie hesitated.

“ You see, I don't know very much about it yet. I oughtn't to promise until I know, ought I, do you think? ”

“ No, indeed — haha! That wouldn't be very business-like, would it, Slite? ” said breezy Mr. Jay.

“ Indeed, no,” agreed *Crotalus*. “ I will explain the position. It is quite simple. A client of mine — a valued client — is now growing old

and suffers increasingly from failing sight. He has been a great reader, and now that he is no longer able to follow the print for himself he is anxious to engage a sympathetic young lady to read to him. The engagement may be only temporary, as my friend — for so I think I may term him — might go abroad shortly. If you will permit me to say so, dear Miss O'Wynn, you are rather young — ”

Winnie's face fell.

“ — but fortunately,” he hastened to add, “ my friend stipulates for a young lady. He lives not far from London, in a quiet way, and he would not demand more than, let me say, an average of three or four hours' reading a day. For the rest you would be free to do as you choose — to play golf, to ride, to motor with his secretary — what you choose. Indeed, it is, in many respects, an enviable post. Have you many relatives? Friends whose advice you could ask? ”

“ I am quite alone in the world,” sighed Winnie.

“ Ah! Then I will take it upon myself to advise you, my dear young lady. Accept the position. It is a good one. The salary will be five pounds a week and — everything found. It is a generous salary.”

Winnie did not appear to hear the last sentence.

“ Please, what is his name? ”

“ Mr. Cairns Bradburn, of Bradburn Manor, near Woking. ”

Winnie saw that both men were watching her closely, as though for any indication that the name was familiar. Not a shadow, not a flicker of change appeared on the fair, flower-like face, and the big blue eyes were as steady and calm as the unclouded sky outside. But Winnie's mind had registered the name. She had watched the financial columns of her newspapers pretty carefully ever since she had decided to become a capitalist herself, and she remembered a paragraph to the effect that Mr. Cairns Bradburn, of the Northern High Speed Tool Steel Company, of the Bradburn Shipbuilding Company (1915), Limited, and many other similar comfortable-sounding concerns, had recently retired from active participation in business on account of failing health.

She looked at Mr. Slite.

“ I would try very hard to please Mr. Bradburn, ” she said. “ But please, I would like to ask if the proposal is quite honourable, open and aboveboard. Don't be angry with me, Mr. Slite, for asking that. You see, I am a novice

in these matters, and I—well, I *have* to ask that, don't I?"

Mr. Slite's thin lips registered his medium smile.

"A very sensible and intelligent question to ask, my dear young lady," he said. "I like frankness. I believe in it. I am a frank man myself, and so, you see, I can appreciate it in others. Well, you may accept the position without trepidation or anxiety. It is an honourable and straightforward business throughout—I guarantee that."

"And I will add My Own Personal Assurance to Mr. Slite's guarantee, haha!" said Mr. Jay, laughing boisterous approval of Winnie's caution.

Winnie smiled her relief.

"I am so glad."

Mr. Slite cleared his throat.

"I am very glad you asked that question, Miss O'Wynn," he said. "Very glad indeed. For I have yet to inform you that there is a curious condition attaching to the post. Nothing that you need mind—but, to my mind, curious."

Winnie waited. She had long ago guessed that there was a string attached to this attrac-

tive position. Mr. Slite was about to produce one end of it.

“ It is really very simple — merely that you agree never, in any circumstances, to discuss with any one at Bradburn Manor your parents or your past life. There, that’s not a difficult or dishonourable condition, is it? ”

She fixed her wide eyes on him.

“ Why, no, of course not. In any case, I should not discuss my parents, and my past life has been so unexciting that I don’t think any one could possibly be interested in it. I agree, naturally.”

Messrs. Slite and Jay did not trouble to conceal their satisfaction.

“ You are a very sensible, level-headed young lady,” declared Mr. Slite.

Mr. Jay smiled like a proud uncle.

“ I told you she was,” he said.

“ And may I have some of my salary in advance, please? ” said Winnie.

Mr. Jay’s smile suddenly vanished. There was, it seemed to him, an odd, familiar sound in that simple little request.

“ Why, surely. I think that could be arranged quite well,” said Mr. Slite. “ How much would you like? ”

He took out his note-case.



“ Please, I would like six months’ salary in advance,” cooed Winnie.

A cold surprise gleamed in the watchful eyes of Mr. Slite.

“ But, my dear little lady, the engagement may not last for six months! ” he explained.

Winnie laughed — the sweetest, naïvest, most innocent laugh in the world. It was like the tinkle of a far-off sheep-bell, wafted musically on a gentle wind across a pasture knee-deep in wild flowers.

“ Why, that is just exactly why I asked for six months’ salary. Just to make the engagement last that long. Don’t you *see*? You see, don’t you, Mr. Jay? ”

“ Oh, yes, I see — haha! Certainly I see, ” said Mr. Jay rather hollowly.

The two gentlemen exchanged glances.

What Mr. Slite read in his friend’s was evident, for he dug reluctant fingers into his note-case.

“ Well, well, I will do it. I feel, after our talk, that you will keep the post for that length of time quite easily. ”

He counted out a hundred and twenty-five pounds, with an air of melancholy, and handed them to the girl.

“ There you are then. Forgive me if I sug-

gest that you take care of all that money. Put it in the bank, my dear Miss O'Wynn. You may not know it, but there are men in this city who would not hesitate to rob you of that if they could!"

"Oh, how wicked!" cried Winnie.

Mr. Slite then arranged to call for her on the following morning, and personally to escort her to Bradburn Manor, and, having thanked both men with a very pretty air of profound and even slightly excited gratitude, Winnie went—bankwards.

"Will you please let them put this money with my other money?" she purred to the cashier in a voice that penetrated through all the layers of horn and thick armour-like callosities which his work had built up round his heart, clear down to his Inmost Being.

He smiled at the lovely face that had blossomed so suddenly before him.

"Why, of course, Miss O'Wynn."

"Thank you so much. You are so kind."

One of the rosebuds she was wearing broke off and fell on the counter.

She pushed it across to him, with a delicious faint flush.

"Would you like it?" she said. "It's for

being kind to a little girl who doesn't understand very well about money matters."

He took it, almost simpering, and slipped it into his buttonhole.

After all, he needn't wear it home, where, if his wife did not notice it, one of his six children certainly would.

Winnie had made another friend for life. . . .

She spent the greater part of the afternoon in her pink kimono, thinking things over.

"Well, it is perfectly clear that Mr. Jay and Mr. Slite need me very badly," she mused gaily. "Or they would never have agreed to pay so well and so heavily in advance. They are such wolves and so clever. I'm sure they mean to take some advantage of me."

She worked over the interview step by step and finally arrived at the conclusion that, as the "wolves" were willing to pay her heavily in excess of the market rate for readers, then they needed her in preference to any one else.

"That is because I am so ingenuous," she said.

But she was to refrain from discussing her past or her parents.

"That is obviously because they do not want Mr. Bradburn to know who I am — which may mean that they want him to believe me some-

body I am not," she told herself rather intricately.

"And they are in a very great hurry," she noted further.

"So, to sum up, here is the position: Two wolves are in very urgent need of a nice, demure, ingenuous girl to read to a very rich business man in failing health. They seem to desire him to believe that she is a certain person. What person? And why?"

She knitted her pretty brows, then relaxed them. She had her problem, but, without further knowledge, it was impossible to solve it.

She decided to wait.

## CHAPTER IX

*Wherein Winnie is tried in the Balance, is not found wanting, makes a Friend and hears of the Rust-Red Blonde called "Tiger-Cat."*

THERE was nothing about the approach to Bradburn Manor which indicated that Mr. Bradburn was other than a very wealthy man indeed.

The wonderful antique, wrought-iron gates, the long avenue of vast oaks, the huge, cattle-dotted park, the lake, the great gardens and finally, the mansion, a perfect specimen of Jacobean architecture, all had their simple, sound, sterling, genuinely hall-marked, milled-edge message for Winnie.

With the cold-eyed Mr. Slite she entered the big house and there was introduced to a thinnish gentleman who, though all his features were good, was absolutely expressionless.

This was Alexander Boyde, confidential secretary to Mr. Bradburn. He and Slite greeted each other quietly, but like old friends, old friends with a mutual understanding, Winnie

fancied, and mentally card-indexed the fancy for future consideration.

Mr. Boyde advanced a welcome, and Winnie, switching on her full voltage of wireless charm, cooed civilities back to him.

A certain faint interest dawned in the lidless-looking gaze of Mr. Boyde.

“ You would like to go to your rooms, I expect,” he said then. “ Your things are already there — and your maid —— ”

Winnie's wide, blue eyes dropped swiftly: “ Your maid! ” (Card-indexed, heavily underlined, and with a great big, black ? next to it.)

“ Thank you. That is so thoughtful — kind,” she murmured, and shook hands with Mr. Slite.

Boyde moved to touch the bell, and Mr. Slite bent towards her.

“ You are going to make a great hit here, child,” he whispered, a quiver of excitement in his low voice. “ Boyde thinks you will suit Mr. Bradburn grandly. Tell me, how are you off for clothes? Have you plenty? Can you be trim and dainty always? You must be, you understand; it's essential.”

“ I have one nice frock and two that I can patch up somehow. I will try, though they are so shabby and out of date,” sighed Winnie.

“ Tchk! Tchk! ” went Mr. Slite softly and crammed a big wad of notes into her hand. “ Here, take this. It’s for expenses. Dress yourself well — well, you understand. Quiet, ladylike, demure, but *well*. Do you see? *Well*, mind.”

“ Very well,” said Winnie submissively.

Boyde turned to the footman who answered his ring with instructions that the housekeeper be required to show Miss O’Wynn to her rooms.

And this was done.

She was a dear old lady, Mrs. Beaton, these many years housekeeper to Mr. Bradburn, and she took Winnie under an ample wing at once.

“ You’re tired, child, my dear,” she said, smiling motherly at the girl. “ You would like your lunch. I will have it sent up to you when I have made you comfortable.”

They went out together.

Mr. Slite, with a tinge of apology in his voice called her back: “ Oh, pardon me, Miss O’Wynn; one moment! ”

He steered her out of ear-shot and whispered:

“ Remember, my dear girl, nothing about your past or your parents, and when you receive a telegram from me: ‘ Return at once,’ act on it instantly. Tell no one, not even Mr.

Bradburn, you are going. That is all provided for. Do you understand? ”

“ Oh, yes, perfectly, Mr. Slite.”

“ That’s fine — fine. Good-bye.”

Winnie spent twenty-four hours at Bradburn Manor before she met her employer, but during that time her wits put in a forty-eight-hour shift. She perceived that Mr. Alexander Boyde appeared to be very much the Grand Vizier of the establishment, and, further, that he evidently desired her to be treated rather more like an honoured and distinguished guest than a nice but unimportant little girl hired to read to Mr. Bradburn.

She rode with Boyde in the morning, and listened carefully to the advice and information he gave her as to Mr. Bradburn’s tastes and fancies. It occurred to her that, like Messieurs Jay and Slite, he was desperately anxious that she should succeed in pleasing the old millionaire. A few naïve questions soon made it clear to her that Mr. Bradburn was not an unreasonably difficult man to please.

She recalled the intuition that had warned her of a possible secret understanding between Boyde and Mr. Slite, and, as she did not for one half-second imagine that either was anxious for



her sake, reached the obvious solution that their anxiety was on their own behalf.

“ And, as daddy would have said if it had occurred to him, one rarely sees men anxious except on account of their children, their health, and their money — most often their money,” she told her reflection in the mirror, before which she presently changed from riding-kit to a demure house frock.

She stood regarding herself, holding a wispy, silk stocking in her hand.

“ It is clearly worth a lot of money to them if I make a good impression on Mr. Bradburn. Why? That is what you have to find out, Winnie mine.”

She was still revolving this simple problem in her mind when, presently, she was presented to Mr. Cairns Bradburn, who was lying upon a couch in his big, comfortable study.

“ The lady I have engaged to read to you, sir — Miss O'Wynn,” said Mr. Boyde.

Winnie found herself looking into a pair of grey eyes, from which increasing years and ill-health as yet had been powerless to delete the keenness. As she took in the worn face she realized that Mr. Bradburn was a handsome old man, and if not one who was prone to over-

leniency, nevertheless a just and reasonable man.

But it was evident that he was ill — even clear that he had fought his last big fight in the world of business and finance.

She felt sorry for him. Winnie admired ability more than anything else, and a child could have seen that here was an able man. With his thick, rather long grey hair, his short, grey beard, his square, competent face, he was rather like an old lion enfeebled—with a ring of hungry jackals closing in upon him.

Perhaps her real sympathy showed in her deep blue eyes, or upon her face; at any rate, the old man's eyes softened as he looked at the trim, quiet, little grey figure standing before him.

He welcomed her, asked a few questions about her comfort, wanted to know if she had had any exercise that morning, and finally indicated a volume lying upon a table near his couch.

“Do you think you are man enough to read through Gibbon's ‘Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire’, Miss O'Wynn?” he asked  
“In my young days my opportunities for reading this monumental work were limited — but now I have time and to spare. I am very in-

terested in what Gibbon has to say about that great ruin. He used very sound arguments. He had a wonderful mind. I look around me and I see other Empires making the same terrible mistakes, heading along the same fatal path, so surely and swiftly that one might almost believe they were deliberately modelling themselves upon ancient Rome. I am very much interested in Gibbon. I have reached the part dealing with the exactions of Constantine! ”

He showed her the place and the girl began :  
“ ‘ With the view of sharing that species of wealth which is derived from art or labour, and which exists in money or in merchandise, the emperors imposed a distinct and personal tribute on the trading part of their subjects. Some exemptions, very strictly confined both in time and place, were allowed to the proprietors who disposed of the produce of their own estates. Some indulgence was granted to the profession of the liberal arts, but every other branch of commercial industry was affected by the severity of the law. The honourable merchant of Alexandria, who imported the gems and spices of India for the use of the western world; the usurer, who derived from the interest of money a silent and ignominious profit;

the ingenious manufacturer; the diligent mechanic; and even the most obscure retailer of a sequestered village were obliged to admit the officers of the revenue into the partnerships of their gain. . . .’ ”

Already the old financier was sorrowfully shaking his head at the only too familiar picture conjured up by the soft, rather slow and distinct voice of the girl, but he did not interrupt. She, too, fell quickly under the spell of the great historian, and read on steadily.

It had its charm, that little scene in the big and luxurious study. A long shaft of sunlight dropping through the deep mullioned window caught her beautiful pile of hair, so that it looked like spun gold; and her sweet face was hardly less serious and perturbed than that of Mr. Cairns Bradburn as, together, they lost themselves in the mazy politics of ancient Rome.

“ ‘ A people elated by pride, or soured by discontent, is seldom qualified to form a just estimate of their actual situation. The subjects of Constantine were incapable of discerning the decline of genius and manly virtue which so far degraded them below the dignity of their ancestors; but they could feel and lament the rage of tyranny, the relaxation of discipline, and the increase of taxes. . . .’ ”

The millionaire moved.

“ ‘ The relaxation of discipline and the increase of taxes —— ’ ” he repeated. “ That will do for to-day, Miss O'Wynn.”

He smiled at the girl's look of surprise.

“ Too little, eh? ” he said. “ We shall read much more usually, but to-day's reading was only a test. I don't want to depress you with a long instalment on the first day.”

“ Do you think you will like my reading, Mr. Bradburn? ” asked Winnie a little anxiously.

“ You read perfectly, child. I look forward to many enjoyable afternoons.”

The old financier looked at her with a great kindness in his eyes.

She flushed a little, delightfully conscious of a sensation of genuine pleasure. Her quick intuition had almost instantly told her that deep down under the armour of chill, hard reserve which the rich man had been driven to assume by the envious, grasping, and rapacious swarms that for years had eddied round his knees, like waves round a lighthouse base, there was a mine of sheer selfless kindness and goodwill, and she had been really anxious to please him. She could see by his eyes that he was lonely with the terrible loneliness of a very

rich but childless man, and she knew that he was ill.

“ I am so glad you like my reading,” she said. “ I will do my very best.”

“ I know; I know! ” He looked out at the sunshine.

“ Now Boyde shall play you a game of golf,” he said. “ There’s a course in the park, and some nice people come to play there. You will meet them.”

He hesitated a little.

“ If you think you would care for a lonely meal with an old man I should like you to dine with me to-night. It will not be very amusing.”

“ I have not come here to be amused, you know,” she said simply. “ You are the master, I am the reader. I would like to dine with you.” She knew that he was lonely in the sense that her father had often been lonely. Lonely for lack of a woman about him whom he liked and trusted. She saw a slow light burn in his eyes.

“ Thank you, thank you, child,” he said quietly. “ Now go and play. Tell me if everything is not as you would like it.”

She went slowly to her rooms, thinking.

And this was the man upon whose trail that pack of wolves — Jay, Slite, and, she suspected,

Alexander Boyde—were running with their muzzles to the ground—mute, dangerous, famished for plunder.

And they had selected her with the intention of using her, in some deeply hidden, subterrene fashion, as the decoy.

She stopped in the big hall she was crossing, staring absently at a fine oil painting.

“ I, too, want money—lots and lots of it,” she told herself. “ But I wouldn't ‘ manipulate ’ it from a man who is so ill and yet so kind as Mr. Bradburn. Only a hyena will linger round a dying lion that has often fed him royally. No. He is the only man who has looked at me quite like that since—since poor daddy . . . ”

She frowned, thinking deeply.

“ What is their scheme? ”

The soft sound of house slippers crossing a space of oak flooring between the great rugs of the hall caught her ear and she turned. It was Mrs. Beaton.

“ So you are studying the paintings, my dear? ” said that comfortable lady, smiling. “ Do you think her beautiful? ”

Winnie looked again. It was a portrait of a lady. She had never seen the portrait nor the lady before.

“ She is wonderful, of course, Mrs. Beaton, with that unusual hair — and so pale — and those almond eyes! ”

She smiled upon Mrs. Beaton.

“ It would be foolish to call her anything but beautiful, only it is a strange and bizarre beauty,” she said.

The old housekeeper nodded.

“ You see her right, my dear,” she told the girl and dropped her voice.

“ She was Mrs. Raymond Cleves — his only child.”

“ *Was?* Do you mean she is dead? ” asked Winnie.

“ She is dead, yes. But she was dead to Mr. Bradburn many years ago. They quarrelled and she left home. She never returned, nor did Winifred, her daughter. Her temper was terrible. It was a tragedy.”

Winnie wondered if that tragedy had anything to do with the curious conditions of her engagement.

“ I shall come to your room for tea presently, if you will have me, dear,” she purred, “and if you like I would love to hear about her.”

Mrs. Beaton was only too willing.

So, that being settled, Winnie dutifully found Mr. Boyde, played him a quick nine holes as



Mr. Bradburn had wished her to, and then strolled into the town, where she headed at once to the nearest telephone call office and called up Mr. Jay's clerk, Mr. Golding, who, she knew, used at least fifty per cent. of his brains for the purpose of producing quite hopeless dreams, exclusively concerned with herself.

"Is that Mr. Golding?" she cooed. "Ah, dear Mr. Golding, I want you to help me with your advice, please. . . . Yes, I knew you would . . . so kind . . . always so kind. . . . You are speaking from the office? . . . I was afraid you would be out to tea. Are you alone in the office? How lucky for me. It's only a little thing I want your advice about — little to *you*, but important to me. Do you know — have you ever heard of a lady named Winifred Cleves? She might be a client of Mr. Jay — or of his friend Mr. Slite." It was quite a shot in the dark — but it found the bull.

Mr. Golding did know of the lady. He said so — at length and with emphasis. And when, a little later, Winnie sweetly rang him off, she had learned several things from the clerk.

Miss Cleves, it seemed, was a friend of Mr. Jay and a client of Mr. Slite. Gus could not conceive why she was friendly with his employer, and he certainly did not understand

how she could permit herself to be a client of Mr. Slite. He spoke with similar definiteness about the lady herself. If Miss O'Wynn would picture a lady exactly different from herself in every respect, she would achieve an admirable idea of Miss Cleves.

"She's tall like a maypole," said Mr. Golding, "and slender like a sword. She's a twenty-four-year-old rust-red blonde, with a French-chalk clown-white complexion and geranium lips. I heard Jay call her hair Titian, but to my mind it's more imatitian. She's got a Chinese side slant to her eye corners, and her brows are about the same angle as Bernard Shaw's, but there's less of them. . . ." Some of the boys called her beautiful. He, Gus Golding, differed. She had a temper that was news to him, and she used it like a Gurkha uses his kukri—handily and frequent. He had heard that even her friends called her Tiger-Cat. She had been on the stage, was a notoriously extravagant spender, and had recently married an owner of racehorses—groggy ones, quoth Gus with feeling—who had none too good a reputation himself. So she was now no longer Miss Cleves, but Mrs. Eustace Tolbar—and he, Gus, wished her joy. In his humble opinion she was a pretty bad lot—like her

husband. It was odd that Winnie should be asking about her, he added, as recently she had been several times to the office. She and Mr. Jay and Mr. Slite had some very important, private business in hand, he fancied; but nothing of it had ever leaked out into the general office.

That was all he could tell her, but it was a great, white light to Winnie.

“A rust-red blonde, with a French-chalk complexion, geranium lips, and almond eyes!” she whispered, smiling at the picturesque description of the gentle Gus. “So Mrs. Eustace Tolbar is the daughter of the lady in the portrait — and granddaughter of Mr. Bradburn.”

Her eyes were thoughtful.

She learned more over tea in Mrs. Beaton's room. With infinite tact and patience she gathered the history of the lady of the oil painting. She was Mr. Bradburn's daughter Winifred, and had possessed all the beauty that the oil painting had reproduced — and more. But she had, too, the temper of a wildcat, and was cursed with a heritage of unconquerable passions that had skipped a generation and passed over her mother, Bradburn's wife. A bitter mania for gambling as wild, reasonless, and reckless as that of the professional gambler is

the reverse; a deliberate and insolent disregard for conventions to which most people are willing, for sake of decency, to subscribe; a disdainful selfishness, so complete and perfected that it set her apart from the average woman in a haughty and defiant isolation, which she, nevertheless, failed to recognize as isolation at all; these, and others, were the defects that, with her elopement with a trusted but treacherous cashier of Mr. Bradburn's works, had estranged her from her father for ever. There had never been any attempts at reconciliation by her, and to those of her father she had responded with a contempt so savage and bitter as to indicate almost a disordered mind.

She had died some years before; even that Mr. Bradburn had learned by sheer chance.

“What became of her daughter?”

“Nobody knows. Nobody here — not even her grandfather — has ever seen her. But I have heard that she has defrauded Mr. Bradburn in some cunning way of very large sums. He will not have her mentioned in this house — and I don't think he can be blamed.” The old lady shook her head sadly. “I am afraid her mother passed on her wild hatred of Mr. Bradburn to the girl. It is very sad — mother and daughter alike hating him — who is at heart the

kindest man. . . . Give me your cup, my dear."

Winnie passed it in silence, too occupied with her thoughts to speak for a moment. For she had now the clue, the very key, to the windings of the labyrinth, in the heart of which, busily spinning her web, sat the spider: Jay, Slite, Mrs. Eustace Tolbar, or,— was it Boyde, the expressionless?

That was what she had to discover.

And she knew how to do so.

## CHAPTER X

*In which Winnie is positively forced to accept a Matter of a Couple of Thousand Pounds.*

It was a great week which followed for Winnie. Quietly though the old financier was living, it was the quietness of a big man, and that is otherwise than the quietness of one who does not matter.

There were dozens of people in and out, coming and going, seen and unseen. Winnie met many of them, made friends with all, among them the doctor, who, after a few days, played a game with her over the nine-hole golf course, confiding presently that Mr. Bradburn's condition of health was such that his faulty heart might miss just one beat too many at almost any moment.

She met, also, the family solicitor — an important man just then — and he, too, came partly under her spell.

But she never got nearer to Boyde. He was ever gentle, quiet, polite, anxious for her com-

fort, but he lived entirely under a mask, consuming his own smoke.

These and others — urgent-eyed men in responsible positions along the Bradburn chain of enterprises — seemed to her to pass before her watching eyes in a procession, but they meant nothing now.

Only Mr. Bradburn mattered to her — he and those silent watchers of whom she alone knew — whom she alone was watching.

It was, she realized, a dangerous game, and one which had long since become devoid of humour. The stakes, she suspected, were gigantic. And she, Winnie O'Wynn, was sitting in that game with a straight flush.

The excitement sent a wild-rose tint to her face that charmed the old financier as she went in to her reading.

They were old friends now, and were perusing, with keen interest, and, on the whole, approval, the ancient severities of Valentinian.

“ You look wonderfully well, child,” said Mr. Bradburn. “ It suits you here.”

She stood by the table looking at him, much as the mouse may have looked at the lion before the nets fell.

“ Oh, yes,” she said. “ But if you could

spare me, please, I want to go to London to-morrow."

He smiled.

" Shopping? "

" Partly that — but something else very important, too."

" The sweetheart, child? "

" There isn't one, Mr. Bradburn."

He shook his head.

" Where are their eyes? . . . Well, well, I mustn't complain. Some blind man's loss is my gain."

That evening she found a hundred-pound note in an envelope addressed to her and left in her sitting room. With it was a line: " For my little reader to spend to-morrow."

She was enormously pleased.

" The nicest money I have ever had," she said half laughing, half sighing.

Eleven o'clock next morning found her facing the breezy Mr. Jay and his cold friend Mr. Slite — *Crotalus horridus*. She was going to test her theories.

" Why, my dear young lady, this is a pleasant surprise, very pleasant," shouted Mr. Jay, in a voice like the thunder of wind in a great sail. " You look bonny — bonny — "

But Winnie was serious this morning.



“ I am not feeling very bonny, Mr. Jay,” she said, “ nor very happy.”

They caught at that very swiftly — even with a touch of alarm.

“ What’s the matter? ” They said it together.

“ You see I have grown to like Mr. Bradburn — ”

“ Yes, yes — ? ”

“ And I feel — do forgive me — I feel that I can’t quite go on as I am at present.”

The blue troubled eyes caught both the real anxiety on the big face of Mr. Jay, and the hint of a snarl on the thin, wide lips of Slite.

“ But — why? ”

“ You see, I feel somehow that I am sailing under false colours. He often asks about my people, and somehow I want to tell him, for he is so kind. I feel I cannot endure the secrecy; oh, I know it is honourable enough, just as you told me before, but I want to be released from my promise not to tell him about my parents. Please do agree with that. It’s only quite a little unimportant matter.”

The two men looked at each other. Both shook their heads.

Mr. Jay came to the girl, dropped one hand

on the back of her chair and spoke very quietly, very persuasively, even paternally.

“ Dear little lady, I am sorry — ever so sorry. But it’s impossible,” he crooned. “ Look here — you know me — Jay — old George Jay. We’ve had business together — and I’ve treated you as well as I could, fair and square, generous, eh? I’m a tender-hearted old fellow, little Miss Winnie, and I would do it for you if it were possible. But ” — his voice changed unconsciously to a harder note — “ it’s impossible. Quite absolutely.”

“ Utterly impossible,” said Slite, in a curious low voice.

Winnie’s eyes dropped sharply like a scolded child’s.

“ Oh! ” She fumbled with her bag.

“ I must pay you back the money, after all,” she said sadly.

“ Why on earth? ” demanded Mr. Jay.

“ Please don’t be angry with me, only I can’t go on — under false colours. I must give up the position.”

There was a singular keen silence in that office for a moment. Then Mr. Slite did an odd thing. He stepped nearer the girl and stared into her eyes as no man had stared before, except perhaps Mr. Jay on the occasion when he

doubted for a fleeting moment whether such innocence as Winnie's was possible.

But that deadly stare was no more effective than the stabbing of a great blue lake with two daggers.

Cleverer men than *Crotalus* Slite were to try to plumb those serene and tranquil blue depths, — and fail. Winnie was more than a match for him, with his friend Mr. Jay thrown in.

“ You really mean it? ” asked the breezy one, very agitated.

“ Oh, I am so sorry, but I must. ”

They looked at each other again and moved to the window where they conversed softly. Winnie could not hear what they were saying, but she knew.

“ Buy her. It's her innocence. It's just her sheer innocence. We've got to pay for that. She's a freak — but you've got to pay a price for it. She'll leave too soon if you don't — just for a qualm. That's how they are, these innocent ones. I'm telling you — *pay!* The whole thing is going up in the air if she leaves too soon! ”

That was what Mr. Jay was saying in effect; and Winnie knew it.

They came at her again.

“ Don't do it, Miss Winnie, ” said Mr. Jay.

“ We understand how you are feeling about it, and we admire your feeling. If only we were free to divulge the affairs of our clients we could explain all the silly mystery of it at once. But we can't do that. You must take our word that it is honourable — more, it is almost noble. That's it. You are unconsciously helping to do a noble act by staying on. . . . Now, we don't want you to worry for nothing, and we are going to offer you a — a — little solatium. Nothing much — ten pounds. Just a little gift — for trying to help us.”

“ Oh, how kind you always are to me, Mr. Jay! ” said Winnie in distress. “ But I cannot do it. No. Really, I cannot. Not even for ten — no, not even a hundred pounds, although I'm not very well off.”

A bead of perspiration started on Mr. Jay's forehead.

“ Come, come, be human, my dear,” he implored. “ You know — you know not what you say when you say not for a hundred pounds, child! ”

“ But I do — indeed I do. I could not go on any longer for hundreds of pounds! It's not the money — no — ” Mr. Jay hesitated a second, then plunged.

“ Listen, Miss O'Wynn,” he said; “ I am

going to speak very seriously. I will give you the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds to continue as you are under the same strict promise, until you get a wire recalling you to London. And I may say that it probably will be within a week. There! ”

Winnie thought. Was this his last word? In her heart she hesitated, then steeled herself.

“ Oh, you tempt me so, Mr. Jay.” She turned wide eyes of alarm on them. “ I—I almost agreed. But I mustn't. No, I must not. I *will* not! ”

Mr. Slite, eyeing her like a coiled snake, spoke with a quiet and crushing decision.

“ The last word. You shall have five hundred pounds.”

The blood was humming to her brain; it burned pinkly in her face; but resolutely she guarded her wits against the siren rustle of the bank-notes fluttering nearer and nearer.

She caught herself up, thinking swiftly. She must be careful. These men were not principals; they were agents—crooked ones, too. How far would they go? How much would their principals stand?

She fluttered like a bird struggling in a child's hand.

“ No, no, no—please not—not for a thou-

sand pounds! I won't give way. You know — it is my self-respect — ”

“ *Is it?* ” sneered Slite, his face pale.

Mr. Jay jumped up at that.

“ It is, man! I tell you, I know her. She is the most ingenuous little girl in town. She feels that way. I know it. I admire her. she shall have a thousand.”

But there was agony in his voice.

Slite threw out his arms, glaring.

Then a new voice broke in from behind, a woman's voice.

“ Let me see her. I will tell you if she is really ingenuous.”

Winnie turned to this far more dangerous attack, and was face to face with that rust-red, French-chalk, geranium blonde, Mrs. Eustace Tolbar, The Tiger-cat.

Winnie sighed with relief as she looked at her. This was indeed the daughter of the painted lady in Bradburn Manor Hall — granddaughter of Cairns Bradburn.

Tall, graceful, superbly gowned, she was beautiful, with exactly the strange and sinister beauty that had been her mother's. And she was looking at the girl with an easy, insolent confidence that would have cowed many girls.

Unerringly, instinctively, Winnie selected her weapon.

"Oh, but I cannot fight against you all," she cried softly, and sat down.

Mrs. Eustace Tolbar shrugged a shoulder.

"Then you'll take the thousand?"

"No, please," said Winnie, in the tone of one who yields.

"Then, my dear child, what in heaven's name do you want?"

She faced them — permitting her lips to quiver, and a hint of tears to dim her eyes.

"Oh, don't you see — don't you *see*, please?" she cried. "If I let you buy my self-respect — my pride — with your terrible money — I — I shall never have it again. I'm sure I shall never be quite as happy as I used to be. I have been taught to work very hard for two things — to keep my self-respect and to earn a dependence. And a dependence is two thousand pounds!"

She stood up.

"I am sorry to seem so unkind — you must think I am hateful — but I am all alone in the world and quite unprotected — and if my self-respect is taken from me I must have a dependence in return."

Mr. Slite writhed a little.

“ Unprotected! *You* don't need any protection, child! ” he snarled.

Mr. Jay moved his hands rather feebly.

“ It's her innocence — her ignorance! ” he said. “ She doesn't know the value of money! ”

“ Let me understand,” said Mr. Slite. “ You want two thousand pounds down for remaining with Mr. Bradburn and answering no questions about your parents until such time as your engagement is terminated by telegram from me. Is that it? ”

“ Yes, please,” said Winnie, quite simply.

Mr. Jay raised his hands to his jaws like one suffering from toothache, and the almond eyes of Mrs. Eustace Tolbar glowed greenly.

“ There is nothing else you require? ” demanded Slite.

“ Only your strict word of honour that there is nothing wrong or dishonourable in the matter, please,” said Winnie.

“ Oh, I give you that.”

“ Yes, my dear. We All Assure you of That,” echoed Mr. Jay.

Winnie gave a long, rather sad sigh.

“ Very well then, and thank you very much,” she said. “ Please may I have the money in one of those cheques that they give you the money for immediately? ”



“ She means a ‘ bearer ’ cheque.”

With an air of bitter sorrow and extreme reluctance, Mr. Slite wrote it, blotted it, and handed it to her, — with an appearance of hoping it would burn her hand off.

She took it like one catching hold of an eel and read it.

“ Well, is it all right, Miss O'Wynn? ” he asked, endeavouring to make his voice sound jovial.

Winnie nodded and put it in her little bag.

“ I am sure it is, thank you. But I am not very happy, I assure you.”

“ And you're going straight back to Bradburn Manor, my dear? ” enquired Mr. Jay.

“ Oh, yes.”

She rose.

“ Good-bye, and thank you. I hope you will succeed in doing the kind action for your client,” she said, and slowly passed out of the door which Mr. Jay held open for her. She almost smiled at the smitten look upon his big face.

“ Well, next time you employ a girl for me, Jay,” snarled Mr. Slite, “ just engage one with some sense. I admire innocence like any other man, but there's a limit. My God, a girl like that doesn't understand money any more than

a doll. Nothing over a few pounds has any meaning for her! I don't believe she's so dashed innocent — ”

Mrs. Eustace intervened.

“ She's just a baby,” said the rust-red one. “ You can't have it both ways, you know. She's innocent — as a baby is innocent.”

Which, coming from one who was certainly a judge, clinched it.

“ After all,” Mr. Jay reminded them, “ what is two thousand when we're closing in on *mil-lions!* Boyde says the old man is crazy about her. You want to keep a sense of proportion, Slite.”

“ I want to keep my money — that's what I want to keep,” growled Slite, not altogether unreasonably.

## CHAPTER XI

*In which the Silent Player makes His Move, and a Great Fortune passes so close to Winnie that she hears the rustle of its Pinions as it soars out of Her Reach.*

WINNIE took the fastest looking taxi to Mr. Slite's bank, cashed the cheque, and promptly paid the resultant notes into her own account.

Then she hurried back to Bradburn Manor. She knew better than any that the complex scheme in which she had become involved and which she had solved with her own nimble wits was nearing its end. Things were speeding up. Every instinct told her that. The Slite gang were on the brink of making their coup. It was not for nothing that they had permitted themselves to be detached from two thousand solid pounds instead of a reluctant ten — that "little solatium."

But her smiles faded as the train rushed her into the station.

The huge saloon Rolls-Royce, which usually Mr. Bradburn reserved for his own use on the

rare occasions when he was well enough to go out, had been sent to meet her. It was characteristic of her that she caught the serious expression on the face of Neury, the French chauffeur, immediately she saw him.

“What is the matter, Neury?” she asked. “How is Mr. Bradburn?” She knew, even before he spoke.

The old financier was in the throes of another heart attack, — a ‘serious one.

She caught her breath. There was a player in that great game who held even a stronger hand than a straight flush, a silent player who always wins in the end. She had forgotten him.

“Listen, Neury,” she said. “I must see Mr. Bradburn at the earliest possible moment. Get me there quickly. You have driven racing cars, haven’t you? Well, get me to the Manor as quickly as you can. It is imperative. You cannot drive too fast to please me and to render a great service to Mr. Bradburn.”

She got in and the Frenchman swung her across the four miles from the railway station to the house like a stone from a sling.

Mrs. Beaton, in tears, met her in the hall.

“The master is very ill!” she whimpered.

Straight to the sunny study went Winnie. She paused on the threshold for a moment.

The big table was drawn up close to the couch on which the steel-master lay, his face grey, strangely thinner, heavily lined with pain. But his fierce, indomitable old eyes were still bright, and grew brighter still as they fell on Winnie.

Around him were his own doctor and a famous specialist, Carden, his solicitor, Carden's managing clerk, and Alexander Boyde.

It was Boyde who wheeled softly from the group, and taking a telegram from the table came swiftly to Winnie, ripping open the envelope as he came.

"Your engagement is terminated, Miss O'Wynn," he whispered in such urgent haste that it had a touch of fury. She glanced at the telegram:

*"Engagement terminated. Return at once.—SLITE."*

"You see. It is all in order. Mr. Bradburn is *in extremis*. The least disturbance. . . . I'm sorry to seem curt—but please leave the room!"

His hand stretched to the door.

"No!" said Winnie quietly, but very distinctly.

Boyde's fingers flexed with a gripping

movement, and a savage and murderous change of expression flashed to his face.

“ Ah — Miss O'Wynn! It is Miss Winnie, Mr. Bradburn!” The voice of Carden, the solicitor, broke the sudden, half-second tension between the secretary and the girl. Carden rose from the parchments with which he was occupied, came over to Winnie, and led her to the steel-master's couch.

“ Your granddaughter has returned, Mr. Bradburn,” he said. “ Miss Winnie, you know, of course, that Mr. Bradburn is your grandfather. Mr. Boyde has just told us your great secret — and, if an old friend of the family may say so, every one will be pleased at the reconciliation! ”

Winnie dropped on her knees by the couch, and it seemed that the eyes of the dying man poured upon her in that long last look all the love and tenderness which Fate had debarred him throughout almost his whole life from lavishing upon his child or his child's child.

And alone among all there — for Boyde had quietly left the room — Winnie O'Wynn knew that it was not she, but Mrs. Eustace Tolbar who was the millionaire's granddaughter.

“ All — all to her! ” came the dry whisper of the steel-master.

“ Fill in her name — Winifred May Cleves — everything to Winifred May Cleves, quickly — quickly! ” whispered Carden to his clerk, hovering over the hastily drawn fresh will of the millionaire.

“ *No!* My name is Winifred Constance O'Wynn! ” said the girl. “ I am not his granddaughter! Her name was Winifred May Cleves — now she is Mrs. Eustace Tolbar. ”

“ Then, in God's name, who are you? ” cried the astonished lawyer.

“ Just Winifred Constance O'Wynn. I am not related to Mr. Bradburn. There has been a great plot to secure this inheritance to Mrs. Eustace Tolbar — ”

“ To her — to Winnie O'Wynn — all — all — everything — ” whispered Bradburn, in a fading voice.

The clerk scribbled furiously, fluttered his paper, and crossed out in many places.

The grip of the dying man's hand tightened feebly on that of the girl, then relaxed. The brightness of his eyes dimmed swiftly and the lids fell heavily.

“ He will never sign — it is too late. Mr. Bradburn is dead! ” said the specialist slowly. His clear, quiet, cultured voice beat upon the shocked silence like the blows of a hammer.

Winnie leaned over the still face, blind with tears. She had come within an ace of inheriting five millions — and had missed them by a space of seconds. But for a moment there was no thought of money in her mind at all, not one thought.

It was as though she had found another father and he had been taken from her at the very moment when she realized it. He had loved her for her own sake. And she — ?

She bent low, pressing her lips softly to the forehead of the dead millionaire.

“ Good-bye,” she whispered. “ It was not for the money I loved you. It was only — just — because you were so kind — a good man and not a wolf! ”

She stood up, went to the window and stared out, unseeing, till she had recovered her self-possession. She knew that the others — save only the specialist who was already going — were waiting for some explanation, too late to be of any use though it was.

In a few moments she turned to them.

Carden, poring unhappily over the unsigned will, looked up over his glasses. He liked Winnie, but he disliked mysteries.

“ I don't understand, Miss O'Wynn. You are aware that had you arrived ten minutes



earlier, you would have inherited the whole of Mr. Bradburn's vast estate? I am sorry, very sorry."

It was the truth and Winnie knew it. But she was her father's daughter, and, like him, she could win without hysteria and lose without despair.

"Listen, please," she said. Swiftly, lucidly, quietly she told them of her engagement as reader to Mr. Bradburn, emphasizing the curious conditions.

"All that was arranged by two men in London acting in concert with Mr. Boyde. I expect Mr. Boyde was the mainspring of the whole scheme. You will find he has disappeared, I think." (And, later, they found it so.)

"What, then, was the scheme?"

"I will tell you now. Winifred Bradburn, whose picture hangs in the hall, never made it up with her father. She married a man named Cleves, and before she died she transmitted her hatred to her daughter, Winifred Cleves. Also she left the daughter a good deal of money. Winifred Cleves — now Mrs. Eustace Tolbar — was Mr. Bradburn's granddaughter. But he never saw her in all his life. Yet he knew of her; just as I think you must have known of her, did you not?"

The lawyer nodded.

“ Yes.”

“ She had done something which utterly estranged her grandfather from her, had she not? ”

Again the lawyer nodded.

“ She had forged his name repeatedly to very heavy cheques which he acknowledged to avoid a scandal,” he said. “ He protected himself finally from her rapacity by a secret device relating to his signature and an understanding with the bank.”

“ I did not know exactly what she had done, but I knew she had utterly ruined her chances of reconciliation. That was before the war when Mr. Bradburn was not really rich. But with his sudden tremendous leap into the circle of extremely wealthy men a year or two ago, Winifred Cleves realized that she had thrown away, for a comparative trifle, dishonestly secured, a gigantic fortune. When Mr. Bradburn's health failed she contrived to meet and captivate Boyde, and, with his assistance, they planned to secure the inheritance by means of a reconciliation — in spite of the forgeries. But she is a woman of peculiar temperament and disposition. Her temper is deadly, so deadly that it is not a weakness but an affliction, a

curse. Even her friends call her 'The Tiger-cat.' She hated her grandfather with an inherited and an acquired hatred. And she could not trust herself to ingratiate herself with him even under an assumed name."

The lawyer's lips tightened.

"He would not have forgiven her readily," he said.

"No. . . . So she and her coterie hit upon the idea of engaging a substitute who would win Mr. Bradburn's liking — even his affection. When this was achieved and when Mr. Bradburn's health was such that his death was obviously near at hand, the girl was to disappear and Boyde was to inform Mr. Bradburn that the girl was his granddaughter, representing that she had been the unwilling tool of her husband in the matter of the forgeries. They hoped that with Boyde's help Mr. Bradburn would have become so fond of the girl as to make a will in her favour. It was ingenious — and very likely to succeed, for Mr. Bradburn was a lonely man, with few relatives. So they found a girl, a substitute granddaughter, and Boyde arranged for her to become reader to Mr. Bradburn."

"That girl was you?"

Winnie nodded.

“ Yes.”

“ Did they explain the scheme to you? ”

“ No. I was engaged simply as reader to a gentleman. But they made some mistakes.”

“ Ha! What were they, Miss Winnie? ”

“ First they overpaid me ” — she was ticking off the points on her fingers — “ second, they were in too much of a hurry and showed their impatience. Third, they made a serious condition that I should never discuss *my* parents with any one here. Fourth, Boyde and Slite (one of the gang) were careless enough to let me suspect that there was some secret collusion between them. Fifth, Boyde made it completely clear that he had set his heart desperately upon Mr. Bradburn's liking me. I think any one would have wondered a little at that. So I set to work to puzzle it all out. I learned (from Mrs. Beaton) of the tragic quarrel of Mrs. Cleves with her father, and that there was a daughter. It seemed so odd that the granddaughter should remain unknown to so generous and rich and powerful a man as Mr. Bradburn, and I made some enquiries. I was fortunate. I found out who she was — The Tiger-cat — and after that it was easy to guess what was happening. They were all sitting around like birds of prey, waiting for me

unconsciously to win Mr. Bradburn's affection. Then when I had disappeared, and Boyde had disclosed my *wrong* identity, as his granddaughter, and the innocent artifice by which we had become reconciled, they hoped that Mr. Bradburn would make his will in favour of his granddaughter, Winifred May Cleves, believing her to be myself. . . ."

The men were staring at her, open-mouthed, making no effort to conceal their admiration.

"Why — that — that is exactly what happened — was happening when you arrived," said Carden. "But why did you go away to-day of all days? Had you been here you would have inherited, after all."

"I know," said Winnie calmly. "But I was not able to foresee that poor Mr. Bradburn would have a fatal heart-attack to-day. I went to London to test my belief."

"You met that gang — alone?"

"Oh, yes. I told them I wished to be released from my promise not to say who my parents were. They would not agree. So I felt sure I was right. But I wanted to be quite sure, and so I told them I would give up my post — and leave. They were really startled at that and — offered me money to remain. A little solatium they called it. Ten pounds. I would not

agree to do it for that. I wanted to see just how serious they were. I forced them higher."

" Ah! That was courageous. Did you force them very high? "

" They paid me two thousand pounds," said Winnie.

" You took it? "

" Indeed I did."

" You actually have it? "

" It is in the bank. Then I hurried back with the intention of telling Mr. Bradburn the whole story of this last big fraud. I was just in time to prevent his being swindled on his very death-bed by a heartless woman and a most dangerous trio of men! "

The lawyer sat down.

" You are an extraordinarily brave and clever girl, Miss Winnie," he said. " It is a great misfortune that you were too late."

" Pardon me, I was in time," said Winnie. " I prevented the fraud."

" I meant, my dear, that you were too late to benefit as you deserved and Mr. Bradburn intended. His whole fortune goes to found a great college of Metallurgy and Engineering! "

" Kismet! " said Winnie very quietly.

They stared, each man of them conscious that he could not have taken it so steadily. They

seemed almost shocked, and she saw that. Her blue eyes filled suddenly.

“ Oh, don't misunderstand,” she cried. “ I am not really *hard*, you know. Only I wanted to do something for Mr. Bradburn just in return for his kindness to me, kindness that was really kindness because it required nothing in return, because he was a good man and — and not a wolf! *Of course*, I would have liked all that money. But he tried to give it to me; it was not his fault that he failed. It was just fated to be so.”

She moved to the couch and rested her hand gently upon that of the dead millionaire.

“ And the flowers that I shall place upon his grave will not be less white or beautiful because I pay for them with money that I have had to earn instead of money that he has given me,” she said softly, like one speaking to herself.

None of them had any answer to that.

Her eyes fell upon the open volume of “The Decline and Fall ” balanced precariously upon a small table at the head of the couch. She caught her breath, recovered herself and reached for the book. Quietly she put the silk marker in its place, closed the volume and, woman-like, placed it tidily with its fellows on the shelf.

## CHAPTER XII

*In which Winnie pauses on Her Primrose Path in order to notify Lord Fasterton that She will be Nineteen To-morrow.*

It was characteristic of Winnie that she dropped from her mind forthwith any regrets for that vast sum which she had so nearly inherited. The money was gone as completely as if she, like her daddy before her, had put fifty pounds on a horse which cantered in twenty lengths clear of the other winners, but at the incorrect end of the procession. The money was gone, lost, and as lost money bears no interest the matter was at an end. Any discussion or consideration given to it would be discussion and consideration squandered. And Winnie was no squanderer of her own property.

It was odd how little she grieved over the loss.

She had gone to Bradburn Manor with the fixed intention of culling a very handsome bouquet of banknotes, and, indeed, she had not done badly. She was very well aware that if she



had not been swayed by her genuine affection for Mr. Bradburn she might perhaps have played her hand vastly better—but Winnie was feminine, and, like all women, she was prone to regard money as a matter secondary in importance to her own affections. This is not a weakness; on the contrary, it is a natural compensation, a balance weight in the intricate psychology of women. It keeps them sweet. It may be wrong that a woman will manipulate thousands from a man she does not like and throw them away quite recklessly on a man she does like. But it is very feminine—and a little careful thought upon the matter is apt to bring one to some rather curious conclusions.

Being essentially feminine Winnie took a keen pride in the discovery that the wreath with her quiet little card attached was quite easily the handsomest farewell offering of the many which softened the sombreness of the old millionaire's funeral.

That satisfied her, and it was without brooding upon her financial loss that she was able to settle again in her cosy flat for a few days' rest prior to issuing forth to continue the expansion of the already quite respectable little fortune she had accumulated.

Perhaps a week after her return to London,

she woke to the discovery that there was a late-summer, early-morning chill in the air. She looked across at the mirror, misty-eyed from sleep, and smiled at the charming little lady reflected therein.

"You have some nice kimonos, my dear," she said, "and a heavy dressing gown. But the winter will be here in a few months, and I think you ought to have a nice, warm, pretty dressing jacket with lots of silk and fur about it. . . ."

The idea remained with her.

Later, over an attractive little breakfast of fruit, chocolate, toast, fried sole and marmalade, she gave the matter of the dressing jacket her further consideration.

"Something like that little dream thing they were showing in Paulette's yesterday," she mused. "But Paulette is so ruinous. One could quite easily spend one's whole income in half an hour at Paulette's."

She ate some sole.

"I do think banks are stingy," she soliloquized. "I have over three thousand pounds in the bank, and they only pay five per cent. per annum for the use of it. *My* money, too. I wonder if it would be of any use to interview the chief director and persuade him to increase

my interest. He oughtn't to refuse to pay more for the use of that money — when he knows how hard I had to work to earn it."

She laughed.

"But he would. Men are such wolves — especially directors."

She finished breakfast and gave a reassuring nod mirrorwards.

"You shall have your dressing gown, my Own," she promised. "Without disturbing your Capital — or destroying your Income."

She picked up the only letter of the morning's mail which had really interested her — the one letter which ninety-nine per cent. of the struggling population of a hard, hard world would have thrown contemptuously into the wastepaper basket — being a request for payment of an alleged debt which Winnie had never contracted, and for which she could not by any stretch of the imagination or contortion of the law be held responsible.

It was a request, not unplaintively constructed, from one of the bookmakers by appointment to the late Captain Pelham O'Wynn, that Winnie should "see her way" to "extinguishing" the amount owed by her father at the time of his decease. The figure was in the neighbourhood of a hundred and twenty pounds,

which amount had accrued (on paper) to the bookmaker as a result of the failure of that notable steed Speedwell the Second to win the Derby of the previous year.

What struck Winnie about the letter was the naïveté, the simpleness of Mr. Stewart MacKenzie, the bookmaker in question. The man actually appeared to expect some result from the application. He seemed really to believe that it was worth while wasting a perfectly good sheet of paper, a sound envelope, a certain amount of labour and typewriter wear, and a pretty twopenny stamp upon the chance of getting something back.

“ I think Mr. MacKenzie must be a super-optimist,” smiled Winnie sweetly. “ I will go and see him. Poor daddy used to say he was one of the biggest bookmakers in London — immensely rich — though how such an extraordinarily advanced optimist ever grew rich is a puzzle. I should like to see him if only out of curiosity. . . .”

She decided to call upon Mr. MacKenzie during her morning walk.

On her way thither she had an amusing adventure, — at least, that is how she described it later to the faithful little friend in the mirror

at home with whom she chatted so confidentially.

She had decided also to take in Paulette's place of pretty things in Bond Street during her walk, just to see whether that delightful, heady little creation in quilted silk and fur, which she felt would suit her so well as a breakfast-in-bed wrap, was still unsold.

Only a few yards from the shop she came face to face with Lord Fasterton. That wealthy wolf-about-town was charmed to see her.

"Dear Miss O'Wynn, you look like a — er — blue-bell in Bond Street. Touch of the countryside — wind whistlin' through the harebells and the jonquils and things, you know. Herbs sort of thing. Wild thyme. Oh, charming!"

They talked a little, and ingenuously she revealed the object of her stroll.

"Little breakfast jacket in Paulette's!" he said. "That's a very sound notion, Miss Winnie — cold mornin's coming. Health to consider — most important. Treacherous climate. Where is it? Must have warm clothin'. What?"

Together they inspected the article of "warm clothing." It wanted Winnie. Lord Fasterton said so with a touch of whimsy. It was meant

for her; the person who built it must have seen Winnie and designed it for her.

"Oh, but look!" said Winnie sadly, indicating a tiny but highly artistic price ticket. "Twenty-five guineas, and I can get a splendid Jaeger dressing gown for seven guineas!"

"Jaeger dress — Oh, but that's too homely, dear Miss Winnie; you're too *chic* for Mr. Jaeger's works of art, what?"

"Oh, but they are awfully warm dressing gowns, Lord Fasterton — and it would be wicked to spend so much money on even a pretty thing like that."

Fasterton frowned slightly. He was thinking hard, and it made his head ache.

"Besides, I think I am too young to wear so smart a thing as that, Lord Fasterton," sighed Winnie. "After all, I am not nineteen until to-morrow!" . . . She shook her pretty head and offered her hand.

"I must go now, please," she cooed. "Good-bye, Lord Fasterton."

He shook hands reluctantly, staring rather hard at her. He was not aware that his eyes expressed anything but that vacuity considered the correct thing by his kind, and he would have been excessively surprised had he been

able to read the thoughts deep down below those blue eyes.

“ He looks exactly as the leopards at the Zoo look when they stare through the bars just before feeding time,” she said to herself, smiled, turned and tripped away. He gazed at the dressing jacket that wanted Winnie, then turned to look at the girl.

“ Birthday to-morrow, by Jove! ” he murmured, and disappeared into the shop. . . . The jacket was gone when Winnie chanced to pass the shop a little later on her way home.

“ Oh-h! Somebody has bought it! ” she said. Then she smiled very sweetly and passed on.

“ I will never show mercy to a wolf — particularly a titled one,” she said as she went. Nor did she. Lord Fasterton called at her flat at tea-time. He bore a cardboard box inscribed “ Paulette.” He had ventured to bring a tiny birthday offering to the little daughter of his old friend Pelling O'Wynn, he said. He had the name wrong, but Winnie did not correct him. He had just time to accept a cup of tea from her charming hands, and then he must run away, he said, putting his hat and stick on the floor with a most unhurried air.

Winnie thanked him with ingenuous enthusi-

asm, gave him a cup of tea and called forth from her bedroom a large and acidulated looking lady whom she introduced as her old nurse and companion, Mrs. Darnell, who had come to stay with her. Lord Fasterton expressed himself charmed to meet Mrs. Darnell, heroically drank his cup of tea and proved himself to be a truth-teller by leaving within a space of ten minutes. His mouth was oddly twisted. "There are some people so d — d innocent," he said, as he sulkily entered his car, "that they haven't any common sense." Which, quaintly enough, was exactly what Winnie, in a gentler and more polite way, was saying to Mrs. Darnell, the lady in reduced circumstances, whom recently Winnie had engaged to come in daily and housekeep for her. But the affair of the dressing jacket was no more than a passing coup. Winnie had gathered in the dressing jacket on the way to greater things, just as one on the way to the strawberry bed plucks a casual raspberry, *en passant*.



## CHAPTER XIII

*In which Winnie introduces a Bookmaker to the Higher Mathematics, instructs Him in the Art of Generosity, and accepts an Invitation to meet a Lady.*

THE greater things she envisioned on the horizon had been conjured up by her interview with that optimistic bookmaker, Mr. Stewart MacKenzie, who had proved to be a quiet individual, about as much like the popular idea of a check-suited, brazen-lunged, puce-faced bookmaker as the modern money-lender is like the late Mr. Shylock.

He was a lean, heavy-headed, thick-jowled man of middle age, with a few wrinkles too many, and many hairs too few. His eyes were silent; ungenerous eyes, in that they told nothing and gave nothing away. He sat in a quiet, comfortable office, well furnished with furniture that looked as if it had been paid for, knew it, and was quietly proud of it.

It was more like a visit to a lawyer than a bookmaker. He greeted Winnie kindly, even

paternally, and placed a chair for her, permitting a faint surprise to soften his eyes as he took in her childlike loveliness. She was wearing a very trim, very quiet suit of dark grey, with furs to match, and a little, round hat of sheeny-greeny-blue natural cock's feathers, and she looked good enough to eat. Men have committed poetry for less.

Mr. MacKenzie inquired, indulgently, what he could do for her, and she produced her letter.

"I am very troubled, Mr. MacKenzie, please," she said, pinning him with her wide, wonderful eyes. "Somebody keeps sending me letters signed by your name asking me for some money, you know. They say it is due from my father's estate; here is the last letter. I know you will be so kind as to read it."

She passed him his own letter and he stared at it.

"They say — and they sign your name to it, Mr. MacKenzie; I think you ought to be informed of *that* — that my father's estate owes you a hundred and twenty pounds over a horse called Speedwell the Second! But that's impossible, you know. You see, there isn't any such thing as my father's estate! So how can it owe anything?"

Mr. MacKenzie frowned a little. Certainly it sounded odd — put in that way.

“ You see, don't you, Mr. MacKenzie? ” cooed Winifred, in a voice softer than the immemorial murmur of Tennyson's turtle-bird. “ Nothing is nothing — it can receive nothing, owe nothing, and pay nothing. ”

“ Nothing, ” echoed Mr. MacKenzie rather blankly.

Winnie smiled with the enchanting *naïveté* of a child.

“ The lawyer who explained about poor daddy's debts to people who wanted them paid said that I was the only estate daddy left — a penniless little girl, who has to work for her living — ”

“ I see, ” said Mr. MacKenzie, smiling. “ And he left no insurance? ” It was a foolish question; he knew it as it left his lips. Men who were soundly insured rarely backed the Speedwells or Swiftsures of the turf. They usually backed those steady old reliables, Endowment or Whole-Life, with their good money.

The bookmaker stared intently at Winnie for a moment, then slowly tore the letter to bits, which he contributed to the waste basket. The surprise in his hard eyes became more apparent. He had seen many ladies sitting in that

chair talking about horse-racing from the wrong side of the ledger, but they were chiefly ladies who knew things and knew they knew them. They had been tolerably transparent, but never in his life had he seen any one quite so transparent as Winnie. Why, the child was crystalline, absolutely limpid.

Winnie saw a fugitive gleam of the wolf-look flash to his eyes for a half-second. He leaned forward.

"I see, Miss O'Wynn; I understand. There are no assets. Very well. Give me a kiss and I will write the whole debt off."

Winnie stared at him — secretly amazed, for the wolf-look was gone.

"I don't suppose there would be any harm in my giving you a kiss to clear this debt off daddy's memory," she said slowly. "Only — please — don't you think — I am only a child and I don't understand these things very well — but it seems to me that it would spoil such a generous act to make me kiss you for it — like giving a bunch of flowers with one dead one in it — spoiling them all."

Mr. MacKenzie nodded.

"You are a sensible, good girl," he said. "I was only testing you. Now — the debt's off — paid — wiped out."

He spoke spacioſly, as though he had really done a generous thing, but Winnie let that paſs.

“ I knew you were kind, Mr. MacKenzie, the moment I ſaw you,” ſhe ſaid.

He waved the compliment away, looking pleaſed. After all, a compliment is a compliment even from one who is manifeſtly an *ingénue*, and few of the people who called to ſee Mr. MacKenzie produced any compliments.

“ So you are Captain O'Wynn's daughter — and pennileſs,” he ſaid briſkly. “ Allow a man as old as your poor father to ſay that you are a very charming little daughter to have. Are you working for your living — or are you with friends? ”

“ I live with Mrs. Darnell, a friend,” ſaid Winnie; “ but I am hoping to get a poſition.”

She threw this ſmall fly inſtinctively. That tranſient hint of the wolf had not eſcaped her. She was not ſurprized at its coming, but its ſwift, almoſt inſtant paſſing had puzzled her.

He roſe to it like an underfed trout.

“ Would you accept a poſition as companion to a lady — my wife? ” he aſked, adding quickly and with a certain eagereſs before ſhe could answer, “ But that is rather an abrupt way of putting it. How could you decide until you have ſeen my home and met my wife? ”

He laughed. His laugh sounded as though it were not often used.

“It would be a very easy and, I think you will find, a pleasant position.”

Winnie smiled.

“I am sure it would be, Mr. MacKenzie. Please, what is the salary? Does that sound very greedy? I *have* to ask it, don't I? In order to find out.”

“Oh, good—very good indeed. We can settle that later; but my wife likes to pay a very good salary. And I am sure you and she would get on famously.”

He reflected.

“Now, as it happens, my wife is dining in town with me to-night. Perhaps you could join us, Miss O'Wynn. We can all dine just quietly together and chat it over. Don't you think that's a good idea?”

“Yes, very,” said Winnie. “I would like to do that, and it's very, very kind of you to propose it.”

“Good. And, by the way, my name is Ripon: MacKenzie is the name of the firm.”

## CHAPTER XIV

*In which Winnie finds Her Way to the Heart of a Lady with je ne sais quoi, takes Coffee with Lady Fasterton and the Hon. Gerald Peel, and first hears of Rex the Remarkable.*

BUT the peculiar eagerness to secure Winnie as companion to his wife, which Mr. Ripon had evinced, faded into a mere shadowy wisp against the grim determination shown by Mrs. Ripon within five minutes of meeting the girl that evening.

The lady was a large, ill-preserved blonde, carrying more style and more signs of her lowly origin than her husband. Her eyes were large, prominent and hard, her lips thin, and her mouth bad-tempered. Her complexion did not fit her very well. Her diamonds were excessive and her furs bore eloquent witness to the fact that poor Pelham O'Wynn had not been the only client of her husband afflicted with a great and ingrowing gift for selecting the more wooden wonders of the turf.

But nevertheless, after one long, searching,

steady stare at Winnie, she metaphorically clamped a pair of large, pinkish, slightly muscular arms around the girl and hugged her to her bosom.

“ They want me,” breathed Winnie to herself. “ They want me badly.” Her blue, baby eyes absorbed the lady like blue blotting-paper absorbing pink ink.

“ She’s hard — I think she is the hardest woman I have ever seen,” reflected the girl. “ It’s not for my sake that they want me — it’s for their own. They have a reason. They want to use me. Oh, why won’t people stop trying to take these advantages of me; they just force me to fight them with their own weapons.”

“ And so you think you would like to come to Fonthill Tower as my companion, Miss O’Wynn,” said Mrs. Ripon. She signed rather peremptorily to her silent husband.

“ You are dying to get away to the American bar, Henry. Come back in half an hour,” she commanded. Obediently Henry went, and the lady came abruptly to the point.

“ I usually pay a hundred a year for a companion, Miss O’Wynn,” she went on, staring with her hard, glassy eyes at the girl. “ But we’ve taken a fancy to each other and I would



make it another twenty to you. What do you think? ”

Her lips smiled.

“ I think you are very kind and generous,” said Winnie.

“ That’s settled then.”

She ran a quick, bold eye over Winnie’s frock. The girl had put on a little black thing, nice, but very plain. This had been purely an instinct — a valuable one.

The wealthy lady frowned a little.

“ We mix with very good people down at Lynstead,” she said. “ In fact, I don’t mind telling you, Miss O’Wynn, that in a way I am looked upon as a sort of leader in local society. Mr. Ripon, as you may have heard, is a very wealthy man, very wealthy indeed, and people expect a good tone from us. We’ve got to be smart — and I don’t mind saying that I like to be smart, and I like smart people about me. How are you off for clothes? ”

Her hard eyes bored into the girl.

“ Of course, I don’t expect you to have much — in the circumstances.”

“ No,” said Winnie, softly, “ it would be absurd for a girl in my position to pretend to have any very nice things, wouldn’t it? ” She leaned forward, wide-eyed.

“ You know, Mrs. Ripon, that is exactly what I have been afraid of ever since I saw what a wonderful gown you are wearing — and your jewels — and — well, you. There’s a certain air — a distinction — I don’t quite know how to put it; but I knew from the beginning that I could never hope to catch enough of your — your — *je ne sais quoi* — to do you justice as your companion. I am afraid I am very dowdy,” she finished wistfully, with her big eyes fixed admiringly upon the diamond-sparkling lady.

Mrs. Ripon gasped with gratification. She liked to believe that she had an air of distinction, but there were times when she strongly suspected that she had not. But it was evident that this ingenuous and ladylike girl saw it — the air — the distinction — the *je ne sais quoi*. She was especially glad that Winnie had seen at once the *je ne sais quoi*. It made Mrs. Ripon feel very kindly towards — Mrs. Ripon.

“ Yes, Miss O’Wynn. I see what you mean. I always say that a lady must have *je ne sais quoi*. But I’ll help you about clothes. I particularly want you to be bright, and, in reason, I don’t mind what it costs. You’ll want two nice evening frocks, some little dresses for tennis and the garden, and some sports things —

nice shoes — silk stockings — some ninon — ”

Here she broke off abruptly as the silent Mr. Ripon, his face pale and his eyes glittering, came up.

“ Did you tell Rex we were dining here, Rose? ” he asked curtly.

“ Yes, why? ”

“ He's just rung up from some roulette-hell for money — there's — ” he checked himself, eyeing Winnie. “ There's been some misunderstanding — the boy's not to blame, ” he added without conviction. “ I'll see you into the car and then I must run round and see what the trouble is. Rex and I will come on in his runabout later. You've arranged with Miss O'Wynn? I'll put her in a taxi and she can call and make final arrangements at the office to-morrow. ”

He was jerky with impatience. Rex, Winnie knew, was their only son, and clearly he was on the prodigal path this evening.

They rose.

As they did so, a voice addressed Winnie.

She turned to see that Lady Fasterton, whom, in her simple, innocent way she had once befriended was about to settle down at an adjoining table.

The Ripons stared. Lady Fasterton, though

passionately well got up, was really amazingly like Winnie, plus eight years.

“Your sister, Miss O'Wynn?” whispered Mrs. Ripon.

“Oh, no — an old school friend —” began Winnie.

“It's Lady Fasterton, Rose,” said Henry Ripon. A new respect came into the eyes of Mrs. Ripon.

“She wants me to go over to her,” said Winnie. “Please don't let me keep you. I shall be quite all right. She will let one of her friends see about a taxi for me.”

“Yes, yes — that's a good idea,” agreed Ripon, evidently anxious to get away to the rescue of the rouletted Rex.

“I shall see you then at eleven to-morrow at the office, Miss O'Wynn. Good night.”

“And you will be able to come to Fonthill Tower in two days' time, dear?” added Mrs. Ripon, her eyes avidly on Lady Fasterton. “That will give you time to get the frocks. Don't disappoint me. Good night.”

They went, and Winnie joined Lady Fasterton and her friend — the Honourable Gerald Peel, a well-known steeplechase rider and a cousin of Lord Fasterton.

“What on earth are you doing with those

people, child? ” asked Lady Fasterton, with the maternal air which she adopted towards Winnie.

“ I have been very fortunate, Lady Fasterton,” smiled Winnie. “ I have just secured a post as companion to Mrs. Ripon.”

“ How bizarre! Why have you done that? How much is she paying you, little one? ”

“ A hundred and twenty pounds a year, I think. And she is paying for some frocks.”

Lady Fasterton stared at the sweet face turned to her and smiled.

“ What a lovely little thing you are! ” she said, going off at an impulsive tangent. “ And to think that once I was just like you! Do you think so, Gerry? ”

“ Gerry,” gazing with interest at them both, agreed, and added that they still were like sisters.

Lady Fasterton harked back.

“ But she’s paying you more than the usual money for a companion, you know, child. She’s after something — don’t you think so, Gerry? ”

Gerald was understood to observe that, personally speakin’, he had never known Ripon, the commission agent, to part with money that wasn’t comin’ back, and probably his wife was like him.

But Winnie only smiled and said that she thought she would be quite comfortable and happy. The Ripons had been very kind to her, she explained.

“ I don't think they can want anything from such an unimportant little girl as I am, dear Lady Fasterton. You see, I have nothing much they can want.”

But Lady Fasterton did not look quite sure about that.

“ Well, child, come to me whenever you are in any difficulty. Winnie once did me a very great favour,” she added to the lean, impassive Gerald.

They dropped the Ripons then.

But when, presently, the worthy Gerald put Winnie into her taxi, he breathed a word of advice — rather with an air of one who gives a tip for a cast-steel certainty for the three-thirty sprint.

“ No affair of mine, Miss Winnie, but take care of the Ripons. Ripon's a merciless sort of chap when he's got the whip hand of any one, his wife's said to be even harder, and there's an unlicked cub of a son knockin' about somewhere. Promisin' youth — Rex Ripon — been spoiled all his life. Look out for him —

promisin' young blackguard. Just a tip, Miss Winnie. Wish you luck."

"Thank you so much," said Winnie, one tiny gloved hand pressing lightly on his sleeve. "I knew you were kind and courtly and chivalrous the moment I saw you. Good night."

She smiled bewilderingly, caressed him for an instant with those blue, blue eyes, sank back into the gloom of the taxi, and was gone.

The Honourable Gerald Peel stared after the ramshackle 15 h.p. clank, conscious of a warm glow all over.

"Chivalrous! Discernin' little beauty! Winnie — Winnie — Winnie O'Wynn. Poor Pelham O'Wynn named her well. If ever I saw a winner in my life she's it. Never even knew he had a daughter. . . . Courtly. And only nineteen to-morrow. Don't like her goin' to people like the Ripons — don't like it. . . . What eyes! Chivalrous . . . !" — and went back to Lady Fasterton.

## CHAPTER XV

*In which Winnie leaves it, by permission, to Lady Fasterton, is pounced upon by Rex the Remarkable, is tempted by the Steed called Amaranth, learns of the Three Little Maids, Daisy, Lucile and Sara, and calls upon Mr. George H. Jay.*

WITHIN thirty seconds of calling upon Henry Ripon next morning Winnie was aware of the fact that his anxiety to secure her as companion to his wife had redoubled.

He was cordial and his cheque book was ready. He had a list on his desk, — a list written in the large and lazy hand of his wife.

“ Mrs. Ripon mentioned that she wanted you to get some things, I think, Miss O’Wynn.”

“ Yes,” said Winnie, her eyes falling. “ I am sorry she should be put to such an expense — but I am not so well equipped as — as — I — as Mrs. Ripon would like me to be.”

He nodded.

“ No. She explained.” He passed the list.  
“ Mrs. Ripon thinks you might get the things



she has written down for about fifty pounds. Can you? ”

Winnie studied the list. It called for some keen buying if fifty pounds was going to cover it, and Winnie was not in the mood for keen buying.

“ I suppose so, Mr. Ripon. I don't quite know. You see, Mrs. Ripon is such good style, and unless one gets good things it is impossible to try to be even a modest reflection of her. Do you mind my saying so, frankly? I don't pretend to know a great deal about the really smart things. I was going to get Lady Fasterton to come with me and choose the things. She has perfect taste.”

Evidently Ripon had instructions to be broad-minded in the matter, for he nodded.

“ A very good idea, Miss O'Wynn. And that reminds me — my wife wished you to give her compliments to Lady Fasterton if you see her.”

Winnie promised.

“ Lady Fasterton will be pleased. She was admiring Mrs. Ripon's diamonds last night.”

Ripon looked remotely pleased.

“ Ah, but it's her emeralds we're proud of,” he said naïvely.

“ Don't you think it would be a good plan,

please, to just let Lady Fasterton choose me the dresses and things from the list and leave it to her to choose the quality which would do justice to Mrs. Ripon when I am with her?" suggested Winnie timidly.

If a man — a man connected with racing or finance — had screwed up cold-blooded courage enough to ask him for an open cheque of that description Ripon, honestly, would have wondered in what part of the head the horse had kicked that man and advised a specialist. But it did not seem to strike him as odd, coming from Baby Blue-Eyes, evidently a *protégée* of Lady Fasterton, whose husband was a member of the almighty Jockey Club, and who admired his wife's style — or was it her diamonds — or both?

On the contrary it seemed a very natural, indeed rather flattering suggestion. He smiled and passed the list.

"Very well, let Lady Fasterton choose for you — and bring the bills to me, Miss O'Wynn. Have anything — er — in reason, you know. Give Lady Fasterton my compliments."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Ripon." Winnie rose. "I will leave everything to her. She knows Mrs. Ripon is buying me some frocks.

I will tell her to be as economical as ever she can."

The commission agent winced a little.

"Well, well, you needn't say that to her. Let her do it in about Mrs. Ripon's style, you know."

"Very well, I will do as you say, Mr. Ripon," smiled Winnie shyly, and departed.

Mr. Ripon stared fixedly at his pad for a few minutes after she had gone. He frowned three times, grinned once, looked uneasy, made a movement as though to get up in a hurry, restrained himself, and finally sighed.

"Pshaw! — she's only a kid, anyway. But, when you come to think of it, I've given her an unlimited credit! *Me*. What would Rose say to that! Still — Lady Fasterton. . . . That'll please her. After all, you can't swim with the goldfish unless you've got the scales."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Anyhow — she'll be worth it for Rex's sake," he told himself.

But his jaw fell that afternoon when Winnie's friend, Lady Fasterton, languidly handed him bills for about three hundred and fifty pounds.

"I have done the best I could for this child, Mr. Ripon," she said. "Nothing extravagant, of course, but just nice, don't you know? One

or two of the things are rather sweet. . . . Mrs. Ripon won't be ashamed of her when they go out and about. And I think you and Mrs. Ripon are treating her quite charmingly. Do you want Winnie any more to-day? Because I am taking her to tea with me. She is coming to you to-morrow, isn't she? I will send her down in my car. Come along, child. Thank you so much, Mr. Ripon."

The commission agent stared at the door, silently wishing that he had gone to the Turkish baths that afternoon. He always hated a *cold* perspiration, — such as he was now experiencing.

It is not the custom of English ladies to buy an outfit of expensive plumage for the girls whom, occasionally, they engage as companions. Their custom is otherwise, and Winnie O'Wynn knew this rather better than most people.

Sitting in bed that evening, looking like something that ought to be sprinkled with sugar and cream and eaten in one bite, cosily clad in the Fasterton dressing jacket, and toying with a cup of chocolate, under a pink-shaded electric light, she chatted it over with herself.

"I am a little nervous," she said, picking up a charming hand mirror which had arrived that evening from the Hon. Gerald, — a slight offer-

ing on the occasion of her nineteenth birthday. "You are a little nervous, Winnie mine. Nearly nervous, say. The very last woman in the world to buy clothes for anybody but herself is Mrs. Ripon, and her husband is quite the last man to pay for them, unless they know that it is more than worth their while. Why are they doing it, dear?" She smiled into the mirror. "They have spent, perhaps, three hundred and sixty pounds on you. They must want something back for it which is worth thousands."

She finished her chocolate thoughtfully.

"I think it is just as well that you are going down to Fonthill Tower — just to look into things. Poor daddy used to say that the sea of life was full of great, fierce sharks swimming about looking for little girls — and I am sure that the Ripons are sharks. And I don't see how you can possibly escape them, dearest. I think you are in a very dangerous situation, and will have to be careful. Remember that, Winnie."

Then, smiling the angelic, innocent smile of a child, she put down the mirror, slipped off the dressing jacket, and curled up under the eider-down. Presently a white, slender, graceful arm

reached out to the switch at the head of the bed, and the pink glow died out.

“ Very dangerous — sharks — to snap — me — up,” she whispered. “ Fight them — with their — own — weapons — pretty — dressing jacket — lovely — frocks — weapons — sharks — little girls — ” giggle — sigh — and Winifred was fast asleep, while down at Fonthill Tower the said “ sharks ” were entering on the fourth lap of an argument of singular ferocity concerning the cost of the lovely frocks and things, the gossamer, foamy lace and so forth, on which Winnie had floated so serenely into the arms of kind old Father Morpheus.

But of these recriminations no sign was apparent when Winnie arrived next day at Fonthill Tower, sole occupant (except the driver, a grim devil with a face like an idol — Mongolian species) of the colossal car which Lady Fاستerton had lent her for the journey.

The welcome extended by Mrs. Ripon was most cordial. Servants ran about quite busily for a little, dealing with Winnie's trunks, tea made an instant appearance in the “ small ” drawing-room, Mrs. Ripon kissed her most affectionately, and, to crown all, Rex Ripon put in an appearance.

Rex was a plain, fattish youth of twenty-two,

puffy, and palpably short of exercise. He was brightly dressed, and carried quite a number of carats with him where he went: rings, a bracelet watch, brooch, and so forth.

It was swiftly apparent to Winnie that Rex was mother's boy, and she saw almost as swiftly that Rex was coquetting with an idea that she was destined to be Rex's Winnie.

"I expect you ride a great deal, don't you?" Winnie asked him, as she gazed out at the park.

"No, but we have plenty of horses," said Rex. "Would you like to ride to-morrow?"

"Oh, but that is too kind!" said Winnie, with a glance of shy admiration.

"Not 'tall," said Rex. "You fond of ridin', Miss O'Wynn?"

"Oh, very, please," cooed Winifred.

She perceived that Mrs. Ripon was beaming on them, and wondered why.

"Rex is a very fine rider — when he feels well," said Mrs. Ripon. "But his health is not good."

"Oh, what a pity. And you look so strong, too. So supple — with a strange, sheathed strength — graceful — I — I mean like a leopard," said Winnie, with a delicious confusion.

Rex lit up amazingly.

Strong, graceful, leopard, hey? He'd always

suspected it. This was a sensible girl, this Miss O'Wynn. Goin' to get on well together.

He hung about for a little, but there was no more of the leopard stuff forthcoming just then, and so presently he retired rather reluctantly to keep an appointment.

"How do you like Rex?" asked the fond mother as the door closed behind the youth.

"He is very handsome, isn't he?" said Winnie shyly.

"Yes, very."

"I expect he is very clever, isn't he?"

"Extraordinarily clever," agreed Mrs. Ripon.

"I think you and Mr. Ripon must be very proud of him," cooed Winnie.

"Naturally we are; but his father is so very strict and narrow in his ideas! It cramps Rex amazingly."

Winnie nodded gently, gazing with wide eyes at the fond mother.

"I suppose that is because Mr. Ripon wishes to train him to become able to control the business, isn't it?" inquired Winnie.

Mrs. Ripon gave a curious snort.

"No, indeed. Rex will never be a commission agent with my consent. There will be no need for him to earn money. We are very



wealthy people — much more so than many suspect.”

She leaned forward to this sensible, shy little mouse of a girl who was obviously so deeply impressed by everything.

“ My plans for Rex are very different from his father’s,” she said. “ He will marry a nice girl with a little money and go into Parliament.”

“ That would be splendid, wouldn’t it? ” said Winnie.

Then, tiring of the remarkable Rex, she spoke of the vicious hack at the Ripon revenues so deftly administered by Lady Fasterton on her behalf.

“ I feel very guilty about the terrible cost of the clothes Lady Fasterton bought for me, dear Mrs. Ripon. You know it was at Mr. Ripon’s suggestion that Lady Fasterton chose the things — and the prices were dreadful. I was quite frightened.”

Mrs. Ripon’s face hardened a little. But when she spoke it was clear that she did not blame Winnie.

“ It was not your fault,” she said. “ Nor dear Lady Fasterton’s. It was Mr. Ripon’s. He has no sense — er — of proportion. I have a special reason for wanting you nicely dressed

— and so has he — but three hundred and fifty pounds was unreasonable.”

“ Yes, indeed, that is what I told May Fasterton; but she laughed at what she called my meagre ideas — ”

“ Never mind, I understand,” said Mrs. Ripon, the steely light dying out of her eyes. “ You are an old friend of Lady Fasterton? I should be very pleased if you would get her to lunch here one day — or perhaps a week-end.”

“ I will ask her when she comes back from the north of England, dear Mrs. Ripon,” purred Winnie. “ She is going to Westmoreland to-morrow.”

Mrs. Ripon was charmed.

So charmed that she had no objection to her husband, who came in just then, being charmed also.

Him Winnie charmed with almost ludicrous ease.

He was inclined to be facetious, probably with some idea of jollying his wife out of her resentment at the three-fifty blunder, being unaware that Winnie had already completely and painlessly performed the jollying operation.

“ Well, young lady, here you are, then? Is Lord Fasterton's Amaranth going to win the big race to-morrow? ”

Winnie looked at him admiringly.

“How wonderful that you should have said that, Mr. Ripon.”

A certain uneasiness darkened the countenance of the commission agent. He had laid a hundred to eight pretty freely against the Fasterton candidate, Amaranth, in a big two-year-old sprint on the following day.

“Lady Fasterton told me it was certain to win. I don't understand racing very well; but I remember Amaranth because Lady Fasterton has a hundred pounds on it. It's a great secret. She has put five pounds on Amaranth for me,” said Winnie with a certain innocent, pretty excitement.

Acute alarm made itself manifest on the visage of the big bookmaker.

“Ah — another of Fasterton's hot-pots, be-god!” he said impolitely and disappeared into his study, where the telephone lived. He had some thousands about Amaranth to lay off and very little time to do it in.

He reappeared in ten minutes, smiling.

“Well done,” he said. “You are a very sensible young lady, Miss O'Wynn, and you are on Amaranth two ponies at ten to one — five hundred to nothing!”

“ I — I am very silly,” said Winnie. “ But I don't understand very well.”

“ If Amaranth wins — as he will — I've arranged that you will win five hundred pounds over him,” explained the bookmaker, failing to add that he, personally, would win a vastly greater sum; indeed, that he would have a “ skinner ” on the race, and would win every bet that he had laid against all other runners, as well as a handsome figure for which he had backed Amaranth.

“ Oh, thank you. How generous!” sighed Winnie, who already had a silent but solid hundred of her own hard-earned pounds on Amaranth at a respectable twelve to one. For among her talents Winifred had one which her daddy had lacked — she knew a red-hot tip when it was given her. And Lady Fasterton had given it to her on the day before.

“ And what have you done for *me*?” inquired Mrs. Ripon rather frostily.

Her husband giggled rather weakly.

“ You are on four ponies at tens, dear,” he lied.

“ Ah, I am glad you thought of me, too,” she replied.

But it was noticeable that Mr. Ripon returned to the telephone at the first opportunity.

To dispose now of a mere passing incident in the affair of Winnie and the Ripons it may be said at once that Amaranth tottered home by about fourteen lengths the next day at the cramped figure of eleven to eight — so drastic an effect upon the market had the activities of the astute Mr. Ripon caused. Not that the short starting price mattered to little Miss O'Wynn, who gently snared no fewer than one thousand seven hundred and sixty pounds over the good and worthy Amaranth's performance.

Yes, the Ripons were charmed with Winnie.

Mrs. Ripon even lent her her maid that night, — an extraordinarily competent but disillusioned Franco-Scottish maiden, who was meditating a move to more genuinely aristocratic circles. Lucile, for so Jean had rechristened herself, was "easy" to Winnie, for, a little exalted at the task of attending so indulgent, gentle, and, after Mrs. Ripon, so ladylike and well-bred a girl, the maid responded to treatment most freely.

She talked. Among others, she spoke of Rex the Remarkable.

Rex, it was apparent, was a youth whose ways were comprehensive and all-embracing; a Don Juan, who cut a wide swathe, painted on a large canvas, and flung a far net. For instance, he

did not disdain a flirtation with a grey-eyed Franco-Scottish coquette. But he should not have disdained such an one after he had *not* disdained her, for these things lead to bitterness.

So that when at long last Winnie curled up in squirrel-like comfort for the night, she felt tolerably confident that she knew why the Ripons had been so lavish and insistent about her.

The gallant Rex, it seemed, was in a thrall to a certain siren of neighbouring woodlands,—namely, the daughter of an adjoining landowner's gamekeeper.

A full-blown, largely beautiful girl, acute with that odd, limited acuteness of the rustic, Miss Daisy Lane, the siren aforesaid, had held the roving Rex in chains of silk for some months past, and the Ripons, *père et mère*, feared that the chains were like to be lasting in spite of all their threats.

So they had hit upon the idea of a counter-attraction to Miss Lane.

And Winnie was It, — the counter-attraction.

“That is the only possible explanation,” she told herself softly. She remembered the sudden disappearance of the wolf-gleam from the

eyes of Ripon, when the idea first occurred to him, and smiled.

“ Let me see now,” she said. “ This spoiled oaf, Rex, has to ‘ marry a nice girl with money and go into Parliament.’ Lucile says that the girl his people want him to marry is the plutocratic daughter of Sir Isidore Campbell-Gordon, who lives close by. But Rex is entangled — willingly — in the nets of Daisy Lane, the pretty daughter of Gamekeeper Lane. So I have been imported, and provided with plumes, in order to allure Rex into forgetfulness of Daisy. When I have done this Mr. Ripon will, no doubt, compensate Daisy or Daisy’s daddy, and promptly get rid of me — leaving Rex to be consoled by Sara Campbell-Gordon. Yes, that is it. How callous and inconsiderate! I knew they wanted to take advantage of me in some way. Nobody cares whether I fall in love with Rex the Remarkable or not. *My* heart might be broken, but they would not care. Such sharks — they would sacrifice me gaily and not care at all,” she concluded drowsily. “ Not — at — all . . . ”

Aided and abetted by Mrs. Ripon, Winnie found it a matter of surpassing ease to bring the somewhat beefy Rex, already bored by the charms of Daisy, to heel.

He fell in love with her like a small boy falling through a gap in the hedge of a lonely orchard of ripe apples.

He was too young, too spoiled, and altogether too raw to use any finesse.

Within a week the episode of the fair Daisy was a thing of the past, and Ripon *père* had compensated her for her wounded feelings on a scale which, although not extravagant, was sufficiently broad to enable the gamekeeper's daughter to face the world with a smile, — and a rather wide one at that.

Ten days after her arrival Winnie was called away unexpectedly. A friend was not well, it appeared, and fain would have Winnie visit her for two or three days.

Graciously Mrs. Ripon agreed.

“ You must come back as soon as you can,” said she. But Winnie caught a note of insincerity in her voice that made her think.

“ I see,” said the girl, as she strolled across the park to the warren where Rex was potting rabbits. “ I have served her turn now. Rex is saved from Daisy, and nothing remains now but to get rid of me — leaving the way clear for Sara Campbell-Gordon. I think I may expect my *congé* from Mrs. Ripon by post.”

She smiled, turned back, and packed all her



pretty things. It was no part of her simple plan to leave anything at Mrs. Ripon's mercy.

Then she found Rex and said "au revoir."

He was grieved but fond.

"No, please," said Winnie, "you may not kiss me until we are married. But you will write to me every night, won't you? Can you write real love letters? If only you knew how I love a romantic letter, Rex darling! And you don't love that ridiculous Sara Campbell-Gordon, do you?"

She tore herself away from the babbling youth, and so, in due course, went back to her flat for a few days.

Rex wrote every day, extremely romantic letters. Winnie loved them. She answered every one, dwelling sweetly upon their plans for the future. She told him of a great stroke of luck which had befallen them, namely, that if they married in the winter Lady Fasterton would probably lend them her villa in the Riviera if Rex cared to spend the honeymoon there. It was lovely there and so convenient for Monte Carlo if Rex cared for roulette. Would he let her know in his next letter if he approved?

He did. He approved by return of post—over four pages of approval. He preferred to marry in the winter, he said, and it should be so.

Winnie put the letters away.

“ Poor child! ” she sighed.

Then came the expected letter from Mrs. Ripon — full of affectionate regret — with a quarter's salary enclosed. She was leaving for Paris, she explained, and owing to unexpected circumstances (over which, she added, she had no control) she was compelled to terminate Winnie's engagement as companion.

Winnie nodded, her blue eyes dancing.

“ She has no further use for me. ”

There was no letter from Rex that day or the next.

Winnie knew what that meant. She waited two days more. But Rex had apparently forgotten the art of caligraphy.

Then Winnie called him up on the telephone.

“ Rex, darling, why don't you write to me any more? ” Her sweet voice quivered. “ Are you tired of me? ” Hoarsely Rex explained that he was helpless. He had spoken to his mother of his forthcoming marriage to Winnie, and his father had come in unexpectedly, so that he had been compelled to explain matters to them both.

“ Ah, ” sighed Winnie, “ that is splendid. I am so glad they know — I did not like having

secrets from them. When do they wish us to be married, Rex, darling? ”

More hoarsely than ever Rex explained that his parents would not hear of his marriage with her. His father, he said in tones of strangely mixed hate, terror and reluctant respect, had been inexorable. He had, confessed the youth, taken him by the coat collar and led him firmly to the door of Fonthill Tower, and there in a voice of cold fury had informed him that he, Rex, was at the moment of decision. If he wished to marry Winnie or anybody but Sara Campbell-Gordon, Mr. Ripon had said gratefully, he was free to do so. He could step through that doorway and go to his marriage. But he need never return nor need he look for any money, food, clothing, cigarettes, nor even matches from his parents. He would have to work or starve. And he had given Rex two minutes to decide.

And Rex, being the sort of youth he was, had decided in one minute four seconds. He had decided for Sara and no work — in preference to Winnie and, presumably, lots of work.

He whined a little, was apologetic, spoke of his great love, moaned once or twice, and finally allowed himself to be cut off.

Winnie made herself a cup of chocolate, en-

joyed a little cigarette, and glanced through the courageless wretch's letters.

Then she telephoned to an old friendly enemy of hers — none other than Mr. George H. Jay — begged an appointment, put on her prettiest things, and took a taxi.

## CHAPTER XVI

*In which Winnie, supported by Her Guardian, faces a Painful Task, performs an Act of Renunciation, gives to Mr. Jay a succession of Shocks and to Bookmaker Ripon Severe Palpitation in His Bank Balance.*

MR. JAY was undeniably pleased to see her. He said so in his spacious and breezy way, laughing loudly and cordially. But there was a certain anxiety in his watchful eye, for Winnie, on the two occasions when she had transacted business with him, had cost him memorable sums.

But her first innocent words, her shining, half-tearful eyes, her quivering lips, reassured him a little.

“ I have come to you for help, please, Mr. Jay,” she said. “ I think my heart is broken.”

Mr. Jay came across and patted her shoulder.

“ Tell me all about it, little one,” he said gently, though his eyes were wary.

And Winnie told him of the cruel way in which the Ripons had used her, and of the heartless cowardice of Rex.

“ The world is full of wolves, Mr. Jay, and they snap up a little thing like me and nobody cares,” she said. “ And Rex promised to marry me — over and over again.”

She produced two of his letters.

Mr. Jay scanned them and an unholy joy lightened his hard eyes.

“ I will stand by you, Miss Winnie,” said he, very earnestly indeed. “ You have done well to come to me, my dear child. I am the man to handle this. It is a shame to treat a sweet, innocent little woman like you this way — a brutal shame. Tell me, is this Ripon the Ripon who runs MacKenzie’s — the big commission agent and money-lender? ”

“ Yes, Mr. Jay,” sighed Winifred.

Mr. Jay drew in his breath.

“ Ah! ” he said. “ *Aa-hh!* You have done well to come to old George Jay, Miss Winnie. Trust me. I will look after this for you. Trust old George! ”

He thought for a moment.

“ I can get you a thousand out of a breach of promise case,” he said. “ If you can face it — ”

But Winnie did not want any coarse publicity.

“ Oh, I couldn’t bear it. I couldn’t endure

that, Mr. Jay. I was hoping that we could call on Mr. Ripon, and try to persuade him to let Rex marry me. Dear Rex is worth more than a thousand pounds to me. . . .”

Mr. Jay nodded enthusiastically. He looked as if he wanted to say “Go on — be innocent some more — more ingenuous than that.” He need not have feared. His part was to be purely subordinate; he was being employed, though he was quite unaware of it.

“If only you will come with me, please, to help me face Mr. Ripon — ” said Winnie.

“Certainly I will — of course — nothing I should like better. Fight for your damages — for you — to the last gasp, dear Miss Winnie. There, there, don't cry, little one. It'll be all right — leave it to me — old George Jay.”

He went to the door and commanded a taxi in the voice of one who means business. . . .

They found Mr. Henry Ripon at his office, inspecting the paying-in-slip relating to the sheaf of cheques received that morning from losers, a little bit of routine which afforded him much innocent gratification.

He feigned pleasure at the sight of Winnie and was extremely civil to Mr. Jay.

“Sit down, Miss Winnie,” he said, indicating a chair. “I was just thinking what a pity

it was my wife had to alter her plans concerning you."

Winnie touched her eyes with a scrap of lace.

"Oh, but it is Rex's change of plan which is breaking my heart, please, Mr. Ripon," she answered. She fixed wide, blue wondering eyes on the bookmaker. "Oh, please won't you let me marry him — *please?*"

Ripon's face hardened.

"But — he's engaged already, my dear child. This — this is very unusual. I never heard of such a thing. A young lady proposing to a young gentleman — such a nice, modest young lady as you are, too, Miss Winnie!"

He smiled like a playful old wolf.

"Oh," said Winnie, with a sob. "Rex wanted to marry me. Indeed he did."

"Ah, I see," he said, his eyes uneasy. "There's been a flirtation — a passing flirtation — between you and Rex. Is that it?"

Winnie said nothing — she looked piteously from Mr. Ripon to Mr. Jay. It was the latter who spoke, gravely, weightily, with dignity.

"I am afraid, my dear sir, that this is altogether a more serious affair than a mere passing — ah — flirtation — to — ah — use your own term. Standing, as I do, in the position of friend and guardian —"



“ Oh, and Lord Fasterton! ” cried Winnie, with a little sob.

Mr. Jay bowed slightly.

“ Yes, child — standing, as Lord Fasterton and I do, in the position of guardians to Miss O'Wynn, it is, I am afraid, my duty — to point out that the term ‘ passing flirtation ’ falls far short of an adequate description of the — ah — facts. ”

Ripon's heavy brows contracted. As a fox may hear from afar the ominous thudding of hoofs, so he heard, deep down under the thick layers of velvet with which Mr. Jay had camouflaged his voice, the steely clink of the coming demand.

“ Your son, Mr. Rex Ripon, ” continued Mr. Jay, his eyes joyous, “ has done my ward the honour to ask her hand in marriage, and she has paid him the compliment of accepting him. . . . ”

Ripon looked pained.

“ Oh, come, ” he protested. “ You take much too serious a view of what appears to have been a mere boy-and-girl flirtation — to pass an idle hour or so. ”

“ Oh! ” gasped Winnie, shocked. “ To pass an idle hour! ” The handkerchief flew to her eyes.

Mr. Jay waved a hand to her.

“You see?” he said seriously to Ripon. “It is by no means a trivial matter to her.”

He hitched his chair nearer to the bookmaker.

“We — Lord Fasterton and I — would not have had this happen for two thousand pounds!” he declared, introducing an extraordinary severity into his voice, and added: “Your son, sir, has broken a butterfly upon the wheel, sir! He has cast a permanent shadow upon the sunshine of the sweetest, most ingenuous, innocent and charming disposition that is to be found among the eight million souls that make up the population of Greater London, sir!”

He drew two letters upon Ripon like a man drawing an automatic.

“Here are two of the many proposals of marriage, and references to their forthcoming married life, made by your son — and my ward has others in her possession. I sympathize with you in the blow to your feelings as a father — but there my sympathy ends.”

“What do you want, Miss O'Wynn?” asked the bookmaker rather desperately, turning to Winnie.

“Please, I want Rex to be allowed to keep his promise to marry me,” she said.

Ripon's face darkened. Sara Campbell-Gordon would be worth a quarter of a million some day. Was Rex to throw that away for a blue-eyed slip of a thing worth nothing? He smiled at the absurdity.

"No," he said flatly. "That's impossible."

"That is your considered decision?" asked Mr. Jay, with awful significance.

"It is. If he likes to marry her against my wishes he can. But he won't. Rex knows his book too well for that," he snapped.

Winnie wiped her eyes and straightened up in her chair. It was time to be dignified.

"You have been very frank, Mr. Ripon," she said with a pretty, childish dignity. "I know that you mean Rex to marry Miss Campbell-Gordon, who will inherit a fortune — and you do not care at all if my heart is broken. You did not mind using me unwillingly to attract Rex from Daisy Lane — and — and — I can't bear it!" She clenched her little gloved hands. But I will. . . ."

"You shall have a present, Miss O'Wynn — a nice present — my wife and I will —"

Mr. Jay arose, his lip curling with honest, manly scorn.

"Enough, Mr. Ripon," he said. "Come, my

dear child. Mr. Rex Ripon will hear from our solicitors."

Ripon started.

"You mean to bring an action for breach of promise?" he demanded.

"Lord Fasterton and I shall be guided entirely by the advice of counsel."

"Why do that? Why make a scandal? What's the good of making everything public? I am willing to compensate Miss O'Wynn. A substantial present in money ——"

"*Money!*" Mr. Jay's lips curled at both ends with contempt.

And Winnie's eyes darkened to violet with scorn.

Mr. Jay half turned on his heel. Then, with a wonderful air of angry and curious amusement, he faced the bookmaker again.

"And, pray, Mr. Ripon, what might your idea of a substantial present of *money*" — he might have been speaking of gas-works refuse — "amount to?"

"Why — something generous — say — well — a hundred pounds. That's a useful little cheque for pin money."

Mr. Jay sat down, as though his knees had weakened.

"You are pleased to jest," he said, with a

bitter smile. "It is an experience to me, I assure you, to hear that for a hundred pounds the heart of the ward of Lord Fasterton and myself may be trodden underfoot."

He glanced at Winnie.

Oh, I forgive Mr. Ripon the insult," she said, faintly with a wan smile. "A hundred pounds — a thousand — five thousand pounds — ten thousand pounds — it is all the same to me!"

Her voice quivered.

"Come, come," said Mr. Jay, to no one in particular, his eyes glittering, "this is all very painful. Let us put aside for the moment the question of the irreparable wound inflicted upon my ward's heart, and come to business. Child — permit me to speak in business terms on your behalf." He cleared his throat and fixed Ripon with a hard and steely eye.

"You speak of a pecuniary consolation, sir," he said. "Will you tell me in one simple figure the amount you have in mind!"

"Two hundred pounds — to keep it out of court," said Ripon.

Mr. Jay smiled, coyly shaking his head.

"Insult upon insult," sighed Winnie.

"Well, what's *your* idea?" snapped Ripon. "In fact, without beating any more about the

bush, what do you want to keep it out of court and call it square? ”

“ I want Rex, please, ” said Winnie.

Ripon scowled.

“ You can't have him. He's booked, ” he said coarsely.

Winnie shrank.

“ Perhaps the judge will say I can, ” said Winnie.

Ripon shrugged.

“ Will two hundred and fifty pounds satisfy you? ” he asked.

“ No, ” said Mr. Jay quickly, “ nor a thousand! ”

Winnie stood up sharply.

“ Nor a thousand — nor two thousand — nor three thousand — nor four thousand — but *five!* Five thousand pounds, Mr. Ripon! ” she cried, in her clear musical voice. “ I despise your money — but for Rex's sake I will let it be settled out of court. ”

“ Girl, you're dreaming! You're mad! Forget it! This is blackmail! ”

Winnie took a bundle of letters from her bag.

“ You have made me angry, ” she said. “ You have made me hard and cruel. I say five thousand one hundred pounds now because

you insult me so — and I have never said one unkind word to you.”

“ But it’s robbery, woman.”

“ Five thousand two hundred pounds.”

Ripon sneered, flushing blackly. “ You can’t hold me up that way, girl.”

“ Five thousand five hundred pounds,” said Winnie, permitting two tears to roll down her cheek.

“ Oh, be damned! ” shouted the bookmaker.

“ Six thousand pounds,” sobbed Winnie.

Mr. Jay was watching her in a fury of admiration.

Something about Winnie — something magic, it must have been an atmosphere, an aura — suddenly cooled the bookmaker.

“ But, child, you don’t understand the value of money the way you talk.”

“ Six thousand five hundred pounds,” said Winnie.

The flame leapt up again.

“ May I be eternally blanked if I pay it,” roared Ripon.

“ Seven thousand pounds.”

Ripon shut his jaws with the snap of a steel trap. Talking, it seemed, was too expensive.

Mr. Jay was trembling inside.

“ He’s right,” he said to himself. “ She

doesn't understand the value of money. She'll never get it. It's her infernal innocence — her ignorance again. She's talking blindly. She'll end in getting nothing."

Ripon spoke again, very coldly, cautiously, politely. He had not made a rich man of himself without learning how to control his temper when things grew serious.

"Just one moment, Miss O'Wynn. If I refuse to pay you this enormous sum of money, your guardians will take it to the Courts where, possibly, if you are lucky, you may be awarded five hundred pounds. And you may lose, and get nothing. You ask for seven thousand pounds. It's laughable. I refuse — and it can go to the Courts."

("I knew it — I knew it," groaned Mr. Jay within himself.)

But Winnie's eyes only widened.

"Oh, please don't let it go to the Courts, Mr. Ripon," begged Winnie. Mr. Jay's heart sank. ("She's weakening," he thought, and opened his mouth to help her. But on second thoughts he closed it again.)

"For Rex's sake, please, please don't let it go to the Courts. Why, you will ruin him — make him unhappy — if you do. When these letters are read out in public and everybody



hears the things he has written about Sara Campbell-Gordon — making such fun of her — she will never, never forgive him. It will make her look so ridiculous — dear Rex is so witty and clever and sarcastic. . . .”

She had him.

A wave of passionate relief flooded the soul of Mr. Jay. “ My God! she’s spread-eagled him! Ready for the shearing! ” he sang silently in his heart.

“ For Rex’s sake — dear, dear Rex — I will submit to the indignity of accepting this — *money!* Seven thousand pounds! ” said Winnie, with a sad little smile.

Ripon said nothing. He sat in absolute silence for three minutes, thinking. He had no illusions about his sweet son, and he knew — none better — that Sara Campbell-Gordon represented probably his only chance of a real heir-ess. If Sara, stung and hurt by his heavy-handed witticisms in the fatal letters, turned her back on Rex, a quarter of a million pounds turned with her.

He ground his teeth, his face like a black frost.

“ Show me one of the funny letters,” he said curtly.

Winnie passed him one, — one that contained

many references to Rex's coming marriage to Winnie, and at least two blunt gibes at Sara's complexion, feet and figure.

Ripon read it, placed it on his desk, and took out his cheque book.

"Very well," he said, his voice reedy. "I don't keep seven thousand pounds in my current private account, you know. . . ."

"Do not," said Mr. Jay blandly, "do not let that bother you. Make out the cheque on your business account and send to the bank for notes. Hundred pound notes will serve, and it will be easy for your messenger to ask for notes that are sufficiently clean for this lady to handle!"

"Ah, I guess she's not particular," sneered Ripon, utterly unable to resist that.

"The price of the letters has risen to eight thousand pounds," said Winnie quietly, almost demurely. But there was a pink flush on her cheeks, and her eyes were as deeply blue as the sea. "Do you desire, Mr. Ripon, to insult me any more?" She was almost whispering. She leaned to him, and her voice was like the cooing of a dove.

"I should welcome an excuse to say ten thousand, Mr. Ripon. Won't you give it to me?"

He was beaten. "I apologize," he said — and

to the end of his days gentle Mr. Jay believed the words saved Ripon two thousand pounds precisely.

He wrote the cheque and sent it to the bank by a messenger. By the time the clerk returned with the notes he and Mr. Jay had agreed upon a form of receipt.

Formally he handed the notes to Winnie, who put them away without emotion, gave him the letters, and signed the receipt with a hand as steady as a flower on a windless day.

"Thank you, Mr. Ripon — say 'Good-bye' to Rex for me."

Ripon, by virtue of his profession, was a good loser — after he had lost.

"I shall have a lot of things to say to Rex, Miss O'Wynn," he replied, with an iron smile. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mr. Ripon," said Winnie, and added kindly, "I bear you no malice."

And so they left.

Outside Winnie bade Mr. Jay call a taxi.

Settled in the gloom of the car she opened her bag and extracted two of the hundred pound notes.

"Your fee, Mr. Jay."

He hesitated a moment. Then took them in the spirit in which they were offered.

“ Thank you, Miss O'Wynn. That is very liberal.”

“ I try to be liberal to those who are kind to me, Mr. Jay. Good-bye, and thank you very much for all the trouble you have taken.”

He hesitated, hovered, hung for a moment, staring at her. His face was wet and red with the strain of it all, but Winnie was cool as cream, and looked it.

“ Good-bye, Miss Winnie,” he said, in a voice that was almost reverent, and the taxi slid away towards Winnie's bank.

George H. Jay stared after it.

“ And that's innocence — sheer, damned Innocence! Why — why, it seems to me that Experience is an also-ran against Innocence.”

He stood there for a moment thinking hard, wondering, rather wildly, if it would not pay him to try to recover some of his own innocence of boyhood's distant days.

Then a hurrying passer-by bumped into him; he woke from his dreams with a violent start and, giving a hard laugh, set out on the return journey to his office.

## CHAPTER XVII

*In which Winnie holds a Little Séance in Lulabyland with Sir Cyril Fitzmedley and becomes the Owner of a Pet with Possibilities.*

It was, very naturally, with a light and blithe-some heart that Winnie proceeded from her bank next morning to lunch with Lady Fasterton, whose affection for the girl seemed to increase with every meeting. Winnie's naïve and uncomplex ways, it seemed, not only amused and refreshed her; they enabled her to bear up against the prospect of the drug cure which, a little later in the winter, she purposed taking. It was a settled affair between them that when the cure was in full swing Winnie should stay with Lady Fasterton, in order to aid and comfort her in the bleaker hours.

“One never knows what silly thing one might do when undergoing a cure. People get into an awful state when they are deprived of a little necessary cocaine,” said Lady Fasterton. “You know, child, if I had never met you I should never have dreamed of taking this cure.

Until you and I stood side by side before the mirror the day we first met, I never realized how swiftly one goes off when one begins to — need reviving regularly. You know, I'm not much older than you, Winnie, and we *are* alike — but there are times when I look ten thousand years older. So, later, you are going to help me through it, aren't you? Next week we're going down to Hawkshover, and you are coming with me, if you will. You can go cub-hunting there if you want to. Fasterton won't be there. He's in Paris — at least, his letters, when he writes, are posted in Paris. Not that it matters."

It was no part of Winnie's plans to become permanently one of the "idle rich" on the footing of a poor relation, or by the generosity of Lady Fasterton, though Winnie fully intended becoming rich. She would decide about the idleness when she was wealthy. But an occasional holiday — especially with some hunting which was one of the expensive tastes her optimistic daddy had taught her to acquire in the days of his comparative affluence — was by no means ruled out of Winnie's Scheme of Progress.

So she went gaily to Hawkshover Hall — one of the Fasterton houses, — a delightful place,

near Newmarket, too large to be called a hunting-box, too small to be a mansion.

Debarred from hunting by perfectly fearsome weather, one day, Winnie drifted into the cosy south drawing-room, found it empty of people, and settled down to amuse herself for a few passing moments at the piano.

It was late afternoon, the men who had gone hunting had not yet returned, the bridge fiends were still rapt in tense and bitter communion in the big drawing-room, Lady Fasterton had retired temporarily into the restful seclusion of her most private holy of holies, and Winnie had been disinclined for bridge, sleep, mild intoxication, or any other of the diversions which usually ameliorated a wet-weather afternoon at Hawashover Hall.

She began to sing (all to herself) a little, soft, plaintive old-fashioned lullaby, with the ghost of exquisite, half-faded melody haunting it. She looked very sweet, very child-like, as she sat on the great carved stool, a little figure, looking upwards, her slender fingers straying over the keys, singing softly in the subdued light like a tiny bird piping sweetly in the dusk.

It was a very pretty picture indeed, — and very definitely arrested the progress of Cyril

Fitzmedley, as, in muddy hunting kit, he passed the half-open door.

Sir Cyril stopped, gazing in, spellbound, at Winnie. And the sweetness of the lullaby lapped about him like the soft waters of Lethe. He listened and was lulled. He had never been quite so excessively nor pleasantly lulled in his short and rather confused life before. At least, that was his impression. It was all so sweet and gentle, and somehow so different that he could not help being lulled. The words were quite simple; there was, he gathered, a naughty wolf that wanted to eat a baby all up, but (sang Winnie) baby needn't be afraid. All baby needed to do was just to go quietly to sleep, and when she was asleep mummy would go and get the naughty, greedy wolf's skin and make a pretty rug of it for baby to roll on. . . . That was all. There appeared to be nothing in it for the wolf.

But the youthful and somewhat spoiled baronet thought he had never known anything quite so charming, — regarded purely as a brief change from the normal.

He waited till the last note had died out, then went in.

“ Dear Miss Winnie,” he said earnestly, “ I want to thank you for the — sweetest few mo-



ments I remember for — er — many a long day. That was charmin', quite."

Winnie was very surprised and pleased, but not excited.

"It was only a little lullaby my nurse used to sing to me, dear Sir Cyril. A little thing. . . . It just came into my head, sitting there."

"Ah — it just went into my heart," said Fitzmedley. He was leaning low to Winnie. "I shall often think of it — often. Will you let me give you some little souvenir of that little moment of pleasure — our tiny secret — what?"

Winnie's wide blue eyes gazed gravely up at him.

"How kind you are to me," she said. "But I don't think there is anything I want. And I am beginning to feel that I ought not to accept presents — oh, don't be angry with me, please —" Impulsively a hand, fair as a flower, rested upon his pink sleeve.

"But why?" said Cyril, leaning nearer. "Do you know, dear Miss Winnie, that I am old enough to be your elder brother — what?"

"I think that must be why!" sighed Winnie. "Is it right for me to accept gifts from you?"

"Oh, quite, quite — especially when it is a souvenir of such a special little secret pleasure

as your charmin' song gave me. I assure you it would be quite all right. I — love to give things to people who give me things."

The frank admiration in Winnie's eyes made him almost desperately eager to mark the occasion. Unconsciously he felt violently wishful to live up to that look.

"I think you have a great nature, Sir Cyril," she lullabied. "You don't mind my saying that, do you? I think that if there happened to be anything I wanted I could accept it from *you* without being misunderstood."

His face fell, as he leaned nearer yet.

"You could, indeed you could."

"I mustn't accept jewellery, Sir Cyril. That would be wrong. I haven't had very much experience of these things — but I know that a girl mustn't accept jewellery from rich, good-looking men — no matter how chivalrous they may be."

"Oh, I don't know about that — Miss Winnie —"

"But perhaps it would not be much harm to accept a little pet —"

His normally rather dull eyes lit up.

"I should love to give you a pet, dear Miss Winnie. What would you like?"

Winnie's eyes fell.

"You will laugh at me, I am afraid," she said.

He caught at her hand—in order to reassure her.

"No, no. How could I laugh at *you* for wanting a pet?" He was thinking how perfectly sweet she would look fondling a tiny Pekinese pup or Persian kitten presented by himself.

"What pet would you like, dear Miss Winnie?"

"A little race-horse, please," cooed Winnie.

"A race-horse!" For an instant the infatuated youth was startled. After all, you can't gallop a race-horse into Lullaby-land without the temporary inhabitants thereof getting a slight shock. But suddenly he got what he conceived to be the right perspective of the thing. When, a few months before, he had inherited his father's three-quarter million estate he had also inherited the big racing stud into which something like another quarter million had been sunk by his turf-loving parent, and he realized that there were few things he could spare better than "a little race-horse," for, counting foals, yearlings, horses of racing age, stud horses and brood mares, he possessed something like a hundred. Dimly it occurred to him that Winnie was paying him a pretty compli-

ment — or so he vaguely interpreted it. The shock passed and he grew enthusiastic.

“ Why — why — that’s a splendid idea, Miss Winnie.”

“ It seemed — so appropriate somehow,” smiled Winnie.

“ Which would you like? ” he asked eagerly. “ You were with the party that I showed over the stables and farm yesterday, weren’t you? Did you see one you liked? ”

“ I liked them all, I think,” said the girl. “ But there was one that I fell quite in love with — a — a — yearling, I think it was called — a lovely little black one with four white — stockings, don’t they say? And a white patch on its forehead like a big star.”

He knitted his brows. Sir Cyril had not inherited his father’s passion for thoroughbreds and, except for the classical event winners, he hardly knew one from the other.

He possessed himself of Winnie’s other hand.

“ Then you shall have that one,” he declared impulsively. “ What was its name? ”

“ I don’t think it had a name. Shall we — just you and I — telephone to the trainer and ask about it? ”

“ Yes, rather, Miss Winnie. Just you and I — on the quiet, eh? Toppin’ idea.”

They crossed the room to the telephone and rang up Cyril's sharp-eyed, rather withered-looking "master of horse," one Mr. Dan Harmon. The "lovely little black one" was, it appeared, an unnamed yearling filly of extremely aristocratic parentage, her mamma being Moonlady, who in her day had won the Oaks, while the filly's papa, the celebrated Volt, had annexed the Derby, the St. Leger, the Two Thousand Guineas, the Eclipse Stakes, and many other similar useful little affairs.

"You have chosen very well, Miss Winnie," said Cyril.

"Have I? How lucky," sighed Winnie. "I chose her because she is so pretty."

Cyril gave the necessary instructions, and made way at the telephone for Winnie.

"Is that Mr. Harmon, please? Good afternoon, Mr. Harmon — this is Miss O'Wynn speaking. . . . Thank you for your congratulations. . . . Yes . . . the little black one with the white stockings . . . the — is it? — the Moonlady filly — how pretty . . . mine, now, yes. . . . Sir Cyril wishes it . . . so kind. . . . I beg your pardon, Mr. Harmon . . . oh, do you think so . . . that would be too good to be true . . . yes, yes . . . with *you*, Mr. Harmon, of *course*. . . . I could not think of allowing her to be trained by

anybody but *you* — may I come for a little talk to-morrow? . . . Thank you, that will be nice. . . . I want her to be named Lullaby . . . (Cyril thrilled) . . . Lullaby. . . . What is she doing now? . . . Yes . . . this very minute . . . in her box . . . how nice . . . yes . . . I shall bring her some sugar to-morrow, tell her. . . . Lullaby . . . thank you, Mr. Harmon . . . take *great* care of her, won't you — she is the only one I have, you know . . . thank you . . . that is kind — kind. Good-bye, Mr. Harmon!"

She turned to Cyril.

"Do you like 'Lullaby' for a name — just in memory of our little secret, Sir Cyril?"

"Ah, Miss Winnie — you know I do ——" he bleated. "You ——"

He broke off sharply as a thinnish, middle-aged lady came in — a pale, well-gowned woman with a manner so icy, remote and faultlessly correct that she was positively awe-inspiring. This was Lady Foxelen, Cyril's future mamma-in-law, for Cyril was firmly betrothed to Vivien Foxelen.

"You are home early, Cyril," she said slowly.

"Yes — I took a short cut and missed the others."

"I hope you are not wet through?" Her eyes played over his pink.

"Perhaps I had better get out of my things," said Cyril, rather piano, and faded away.

"Cyril is so reckless," observed the lady with a chill smile to Winnie.

Winnie agreed.

Lady Foxelen patronized her—this unknown little nobody—for a few moments, not unkindly, and presently moved on to the big lounge hall where the hunting folk were beginning to appear in search of tea or other support to tide them over till dinner-time.

Winnie looked at the telephone, hesitated, then rang up the trainer again.

"This is Miss O'Wynn speaking, Mr. Harmon. . . . Is Lullaby doing any work? . . . Splendid! . . . I think you are *quite right*, Mr. Harmon. . . . I shall come out early to-morrow morning to see her gallop . . . thank you. . . . If Mrs. Harmon would really like it, it would be so nice to breakfast with you . . . yes. . . ."

She hung up—so did Mr. Harmon, whose comment was not without interest.

"She must be that blue-eyed slip of a thing that asked Evans all those questions about the Moonlady filly yesterday," he said to his assistant; "she looked like a child to me."

“ Well, child or not, she’s owner of the likeliest yearling ever bred in the Fitzmedley stud,” said the other, one Skyland. “ I wonder if the boss knows what he’s parted with? ”

The trainer laughed.

“ Knows? Does he know the Moonlady filly from a Hereford heifer? Lord! What can a man know who’ll give away a filly like that — for nothing? ”

Mr. Skyland smiled.

“ Oh, perhaps he got a kiss for it, if he had nerve enough. More likely she let him ‘ old ’er ’and ’ for a minute,” he added inelegantly.

The trainer pondered.

“ Well, she was certainly a lovely little thing — that blue-eyed little lady. But — the finest filly in the South! Given away! It makes me tired! Still, I’d as soon train for a girl with an eye for a horse as a man who knows nothing. And I’ve no doubt I’ll have my own way — that’s one thing,” he added innocently. “ I usually do with owners. . . . Lullaby, eh? I guess she’ll lullabalise some of ’em before all’s finished! ”

Whether he meant the yearling or the yearling’s sweet little owner he did not say.

“ D’ye think she knows anything about horses, or was it a lucky dip? ”



Dan Harmon shook his head.

“ I shouldn't say she knows much — she sounds like a kid — at least, she did the first time she spoke on the 'phone. But, come to think of it, the second time she rang up she sounded — sort of business-like.” He frowned slightly. “ She wanted to know if the yearling was doing any work. And she's coming to see a short pipe-opener to-morrow. Well, now — was that just ignorance? Or did she know that Lullaby will soon be a two-year-old and forward at that? Y'know, Ben, the boss has parted with the winner of next year's Middle Park Plate with a bit of luck. . . . O'Wynn! Kind of familiar name, too. Seem to have heard of it — on the course, too! Funny! However — if I can manage the owners I've got to, and the place and people I'm paid to, I guess I can manage a blue-eyed baby like little Miss O'Wynn.”

He spoke in his ignorance.

## CHAPTER XVIII

*In which Winnie goes riding upon Newmarket Heath in the Dawn, meets a Tiger-Man, firmly refuses to accept the Handsomest Horse on the Turf, and disposes of an Option.*

LONG before six o'clock next morning, Winnie, mounted on a good-looking hack, lent to her during her visit by warm-hearted Lady Fاستerton, who was really fond of the girl, was cantering through the mist towards the Harmon training stables.

She was in high spirits and breathlessly eager to see how her little lady Lullaby promised. She was quite alone, and none of the house-party was aware that she was going to see the Fitzmedley string at work, — not even Cyril. Winnie was leaving for London two days later, and quite the last thing she desired to happen while she was at Hawkshover was for the "secret" she shared with Cyril to leak out.

"If Lady Foxelen should hear that he has given me Lullaby and that I've accepted her, I

am sure that she and Vivien Foxelen would freeze me to death," she said, smiling. "But luckily they know less about Cyril's horses, so far, than poor Cyril does himself, and by the time they know — if ever — it will be ancient history."

She cantered in thoughtful silence for a little. "If Lullaby is what I really think she might be, she shall go for the Ascot New Stakes next June, the Richmond Stakes at Goodwood in July, and if she does well, the Middle Park Plate in October. Some of these big two-year-old sprints will be good for her."

She laughed for the sheer joy of life.

"Oh, if only poor daddy were alive — we would make them lie down and cry as he used to say. . . . I think Cyril Fitzmedley will never be a *very* ferocious wolf. I don't think he will ever snap up a little girl in one bite — unless she is a little silly in her mind! And how could one anyway resist accepting a wolf's skin — a small part of it — when the wolf comes gambolling up and implores one to help oneself? If it had been Lord Fasterton, now. . . ."

She looked more serious, for Fasterton was a wolf of different calibre from Cyril Fitzmedley. She would have been less ready to accept a near-two-year-old from Lord Fasterton,

ready as that nobleman no doubt would have been to give her one, though possibly not one of such promise as Lullaby. Acceptance of such a gift from the experienced Fasterton would have called for somewhat more complicated handling than it did from an innocent young wolfling like Cyril.

Besides, Winnie felt that it was as well to keep the gay Fasterton in reserve; she might be requiring a three-year-old some day, all being well.

But however that may have been, certainly all was well with Lullaby. The veriest beginner could have seen the class of the yearling. Her breeding was stamped on her from hoofs to ear-tips. High-spirited and fidgety as a happy healthy child, with the promise of all the shapeliness, grace and sweet temper of her famous dam, Moonlady, exquisitely merged with the power and look of speed of the great Volt, her sire, Lullaby took her little owner's heart by storm.

"Oh, you darling!" cried Winnie, fondling the yearling. She purposed, all being well, to possess a good many race-horses in the course of time, but she knew at once that never, never would she own any horse that would ever be to

her what this beautiful, fairy-footed creature was going to be.

Mr. Dan Harmon smiled at her enthusiasm as a man may smile at a girl with her first kitten, or a boy with his first pup. They rode out to the great Heath, watched the work of the string, and returned together. Winnie tore herself away from Lullaby and breakfasted at the trainer's house. She was so happy that she was radiant. It was all very jolly indeed, but when presently she rode away, Mr. Harmon seemed faintly puzzled.

“There goes the prettiest little thing in lady-owners I've ever seen,” quoth he. “Why, she's but a child. She talked a good deal, didn't she?”

His wife agreed.

“But I don't call to mind that she said one silly thing about racing — or made one mistake. Her ideas are sound as a bell. Did you notice her rattle 'em off — Ascot New Stakes, Richmond Stakes, and Middle Park Plate, please — like milk gurgling out of a jug! A young, innocent, blue-eyed thing like that! And, you know, Kate, I don't quite know how it happened — but, come to think of it, I'm damned if I don't believe I've agreed to train the filly at a figure

that isn't going to show me more than about a couple of cigars profit a year. Funny!"

His wife laughed.

"Why, you great baby, you're half in love with the child yourself!" she said easily. "Sure, she can tie you in knots round her fingers — the same as I can!" she explained kindly. "Not that she isn't all you say," she added. "You must do well for her with the Moonlady filly. She's only a kiddy, and I fancy she needs it. Can you, Dan, d'you think?" Big Kathleen Harmon was half-Irish, still as generous, easy, and emotional after twenty years of married life as on the first day.

"If only the filly trains on as she promises to," he said solemnly, "Miss O'Wynn has had a fortune given her. I tell you, Kate, Lullaby's a fier. . . . I wonder what he gave her to the girl for?"

"Ah, get along to your horses," said Kate. "What do you want with wonder? Did you never give me a present in the old days — and you half-engaged to that yellow-headed Maud MacGill! Wonder! Sure, it's the men who wonder half the fairy stories in the world!"

"But it's the women that tell them, Katie," said Dan, and escaped.

But Mr. Harmon was not the only person who

believed that Lullaby was a fier. There were others. Winnie met one of them as she rode through the flowing dawn to Hawkshover. This was Major Mountarden, who, with his extremely smart wife, was a popular member of the Fasterton house-party. Winnie had had very little to do with the Mountardens so far, for they were leading lights of the more desperate bridge section, nor did she feel particularly drawn towards either of them, though she believed the Major to be one of the most distinguished-looking men she had ever seen. He was very tall, broad, with a soldierly face, and a rather uncommon golden moustache, which he wore drooping in the old-style cavalryman's fashion. It was tremendously effective.

He greeted Winnie with such a very careful — almost elaborate — sweep of the hat, and with such cordiality, that all her natural instincts of caution jumped on parade at once. The Major, it appeared, was riding out to the Heath. He was not surprised to meet Winnie, he said, for he had guessed that she would be going out.

“ And how do you like the Moonlady filly, dear Miss Winnie? ” he asked, adding casually, “ Cyril told me — in strict confidence — that you had won the yearling from him.”

“ Won Lullaby, Major Mountarden? ”  
echoed Winnie.

“ Over your wager that he could not give you a stroke a hole at golf, wasn't it? ” said the Major.

Winnie thought quickly. She had played a game of golf with Cyril Fitzmedley two days before — Vivien Foxelen having a headache — and she was pleased and rather surprised that Cyril had been bright enough to find so plausible an accounting for his gift and her acceptance of Lullaby.

“ Oh, that — for a moment I did not understand, ” she said, demurely. “ Yes, wasn't it lucky? Do you think it was right for me to accept that yearling, Major? ”

“ Why, certainly, dear Miss Winnie. A wager is a wager. Oh, of course. It's rather a pity that she isn't a two-year-old — or even a three-year-old — though. You see, it will be a long time before she can win a race for you — and the cost of training mounts up. ”

“ But, please, why need it be so long? ” asked Winnie, her lip drooping a little.

“ Why, Lullaby — what a pretty name — is only a yearling. She can't race till she is two years old, and even then you mustn't overwork her. It is nice to have such a handsome little



horse; but a good, useful three-year-old would give you far more fun — and far less expense.”

Winnie's face shadowed with disappointment.

“ I — I never thought of that,” she said. “ I wanted her to race at once — lots of times.”

The Major smiled.

“ Don't take it too much to heart,” he advised. “ There are ways and means. You might sell the filly and invest the proceeds in a useful three-year-old, for instance.”

“ But what can such a baby-horse be worth, please, Major Mountarden? ” faltered Winnie. “ A yearling isn't worth so much money as an experienced three-year-old racer, is it? Any more than a calf is worth as much as a cow! ”

The Major turned his head for a half-second, his lips flickering. But he was quite grave when he answered.

“ Oh, not at all, Miss Winnie. You see, Lul-laby is a little aristocrat. Her breeding makes her worth a fair sum. In fact, you ought to be able to make a quite useful exchange, if you can find a man who is reckless enough to give you a reliable three-year-old for a speculative well-bred yearling! Lots of men love to gamble in yearlings. They are rather foolish men, between you and me — they nearly always lose; but it's a weakness — a foible. I ought to

know " — the Major smiled ruefully — " for, you see, I am one of those silly fellows."

Winnie looked shyly sorry for him.

" Oh, what a pity! " she cried.

" No, no, not at all. We enjoy the gamble. But it's odd, isn't it? As I said, it's a foible. There's no accounting for it. Take myself, now. I happen to own a grand three-year-old — indeed, they say (and I am inclined to agree with them) that he is the handsomest horse on the English turf to-day — a great, slashing, magnificent, red bay, with white stockings and a splendid white blaze. He's called Royal Splendour! You've heard of him, perhaps. His dam was Queen of Beauty, and his sire was Golden Prince. A beautiful horse — beautiful," said the Major absently. Then, rousing from reverie, he went on, " And yet anybody could tempt me to exchange him for a pretty yearling. Silly, isn't it? It's just the charm of the unknown quantity, I suppose."

Winnie said nothing. But she looked very sympathetic, and the Major beamed upon her, greatly pleased with his finesse. He had wanted Lullaby for some weeks. Indeed, nothing but an ingrained dislike to pay a fair price for anything had prevented him from making Cyril Fitzmedley a fair offer for her long before.

Still, he was inclined to congratulate himself already on taking his early ride. Dreamily he saw himself working off that showy cur of a horse, Royal Splendour, in exchange for the most promising yearling, now practically a two-year-old, he had ever known. Nor was he encumbered by any feeling of reluctance to take advantage of this innocent, baby-sweet child, of pity for her lack of experience, of indulgence, generosity, or lenience in consummating the "deal." For he was a hard man, a very hard man, in spite of his straightly-gazing grey eyes and his beautiful golden moustache.

"Royal Splendour!" said Winnie softly.

"It is a ringing name, isn't it?"

"Rather good — but he carries it well."

Winnie dropped her eyes quickly. Few people knew better than she how well Royal Splendour carried his name. Her daddy had often told her of that handsome fraud. His trouble was not how he carried his name, but where he carried it. Usually he carried it in a position which gave his jockey an admirable view of all other runners' heels and tails, — and a disappearing view at that.

"Well, Miss Winnie? Are you going to indulge my weakness and exchange your little

yearling for my big beauty? ” Confidence made the Major a little careless. He was not, usually, a careless man.

“ I don't think I should like to do that, Major,” said Winnie. “ You see, I love my little horse too well ever to give her away for another. And she is so well bred. Perhaps some day she will win the Derby. Nobody can tell, after all. But I do sympathize with you, and I quite understand about your liking yearlings, Major — even though I don't know much about horse-racing. I wish I could help you.”

She thought for a moment.

“ What is an option, Major? Isn't it something that means first choice? ”

“ Something of that sort, Miss Winnie, yes.” He was watching her.

“ If you like — perhaps I am only saying something silly, do forgive me if I am — if it would help you, I could sell you — doesn't that sound mercenary? — the option to buy Lullaby if ever I could bring myself to part with her. I don't think I know enough about racing to exchange for a great, handsome horse like Royal Splendour. But I've heard of options — daddy used to buy them from a man in the City — but they were awfully unlucky ones.”

“ Better sell her outright, Miss Winnie. I

would advise it. No end of bother, racing — for a lady. I could get you a hundred guineas for the yearling — fact, I'd pay you that for her myself."

"What a lot of money for a baby-horse," said Winnie. "I'm sure she isn't worth it — except to me."

"Well, you are the only one that matters, you see," the Major pointed out, rather less confidently.

"It seems unkind, but I wouldn't sell Lul-laby for Five — Hundred — Pounds!" declared the girl softly.

"Pounds!" The Major laughed — almost naturally. Then sighed. "All right, Miss Winnie — it's a deal. I'll pay you five hundred guineas."

"For the option, Major?"

"Lord, no, my dear child! For the filly."

"Why, Major, she isn't for sale — at any price. I couldn't possibly part with her."

The Major scowled — carefully turning away. But he was too wolf-wise to press her.

"Very well, Miss Winnie. I'll buy the option."

Her face lighted up.

"Oh, I'm so glad to be able to do that for you, Major," she cried, her blue eyes shining

on him like stars. "Mr. Harmon had a friend who would have given me a hundred pounds for the option to buy her if ever I wished to sell her—but I would ever so much sooner you had it."

Major Mountarden's smile was rather wry.

"By Jove, it's a stiff price for an option on an unproved yearling," he said. But he added, reluctantly, "Still, we'll make it a bargain, Miss Winnie. I'll give you a cheque after breakfast. . . . Forgive me if I hurry away now. I have to see a trial on the Heath—if I am not too late already."

"Of course, Major."

He rode off, and Winnie watched him as he went. It is possible that he would not have felt quite so debonair as he undoubtedly looked had he seen the expression in the blue eyes of the girl. As was her custom, she drew upon her natural history lore to classify him.

"*Felis tigris*, or Tiger," she said gently. "I shall never regret fining him that hundred and five pounds" (she always thought of a guinea as one pound one shilling. It was instinct, but a useful one, for nothing is more easily thrown away than the odd shilling that tags on to the English guinea).

"Never. He offered me—because he

thought I knew no better — that notorious brute, Royal Splendour, for my little lady Lullaby; and if I had not learned to take care of myself — and remembered my daddy's advice — he would have done it — what a shame! ” For a moment Winnie felt very sorry for the little girl who would have been without a Lullaby if she had not been careful. Then her eyes sparkled and she laughed softly.

“ How absurd! ”

She turned her horse and rode on, happy as the birds that were watching her from the trees.

For himself, *Felis Tigris* Mountarden was somewhat less joyous. He was engaged in wondering precisely what sort of an option it was which he had bought. It seemed to him, thinking it over, that he had agreed to pay a hundred and five healthy sovereigns for an excessively nebulous, ghost-like, and attenuated option indeed.

But it was the best he could do. Only he caught himself wishing that the child had been a little more sophisticated. He felt that he could have made a better “ trade ” with some one a little less obviously just out of the nursery.

“ Damn these flappers! ” he said to his horse. “ They know nothing — and they do

better out of their infernal innocence than women who have spent half their lives and all their beauty in gaining experience! ”

Then suddenly his mood changed, as an idea had occurred to him.

“ The very thing! ” he exclaimed. “ By Jove, that hundred was money well spent, after all! ”

He rode on, smiling.



## CHAPTER XIX

*In which Winnie makes Her Début as Darling of the Maison Mountarden.*

WITHIN a space of hours Winnie became aware that she appeared to have made three new conquests during the week-end, namely, Cyril Fitzmedley — tied to Vivien Foxelen though he was, by steel-strong though silky looking chains — Major *F. Tigris* Mountarden, and his brilliant wife.

Hitherto the Mountardens had not exactly fatigued themselves in their efforts at cordiality to Winnie.

The young, verdant, and slightly sappy Cyril she took rather as a matter of course. He was different from whole battalions of his like only in that he possessed far more money than was good for him. And although Winnie did not precisely shoulder him roughly away, she found him absurdly easy to understand and deal with. His position (with her) was weak, very weak, and she took care to let him see that she knew it.

But with the Mountardens it was different and more difficult. The Major's increased cordiality she could understand.

“ He does not mean to lose sight of me, and he wants to become closer friends because of Lullaby,” said Winnie to herself. “ But why should Mrs. Mountarden be so — gushing? Especially as May Fasterton says that Cyril was prone to worship at her shrine in Vivien's absence until he transferred his spare worship to me.”

She decided that the Major had asked his wife to be “ nice ” to her, no other reason being immediately apparent.

Certainly the Mountardens were charming to her, — so much so that an invitation to stay a little while with them at their place in town was extended to the girl and accepted by her. She agreed to go on to them from Hawkshover, indeed, to leave with them in their big limousine. Winnie was young, but not so young that she disdained to consult her friend, worldly-wise Lady Fasterton, about accepting the invitation.

“ Oh, yes, go, my dear. They are all right — no worse than the rest of us, I think. They'll give you a good time. But don't play there.”

“ Play? ”

“ Cards — roulette — that sort of thing, child. They play very high at Mountarden’s and, level-headed little woman as you are, you might get bitten. I know, Winnie — I cost Fاستerton lots of money there some years ago — when I was more like you than I am now, you sweet little thing. They make a flutter a very pleasant sensation at Mountarden’s. You will enjoy yourself without gambling. I’ll come in there when I get back to town.”

So Winnie went back to London, convinced that the Major was not only after Lullaby, but that he purposed winning her in preference to paying money for her. “ That is quite, quite obvious,” thought Winnie, as, curled up in a luxurious corner of the big comfortable car with the Mountardens, she watched the countryside swing silently past. “ Quite obvious — and yet — and yet ———”

Her brain, her reason, was not satisfied.

*Felis Tigris* is a tolerably catholic feeder — hungry, he will eat almost anything he can bite — he is not particular as to quality, but he is something of a stickler for quantity. He likes bulk — big mouthfuls. And Winnie did not feel mathematically sure that she and Lullaby were quite a tiger-sized mouthful. In her best *ingénue* manner she had learned quite a

good deal about the Mountardens since she had collected the Major's hundred guineas, and it seemed to her that she hardly did either *Felis Tigris* or his wife justice in assuming that they were not capable of devising a rather more adroit way of getting Lullaby than winning her with cards or a roulette wheel.

"They don't know how much I have in reserve," mused Winnie, her lovely eyes absently studying the rather heavy and bulbous jaw-hinges of the Major — a sign, her daddy had once told her, of ruthlessness and possible brutality. "And they can have no reason to think that I could not pay what I lose — if I lose — (she smiled faintly) without parting with my little race-horse. It's — somehow, it's clumsy — ponderous. Yes — it is taking a mountain to crush a molehill."

But it was very pleasant, very restful and lulling to be petted as the Major and his wife — a dark virile beauty in the well-known hidden-fire, passionate or Spanish style — proceeded to pet Winnie. Before she had been a day in their big, elaborately comfortable and expensively fitted house near Eaton Square, the girl realized that if she were their only and idolized daughter they could not have made more fuss of her. And it was delicately and

subtly done. Neither the Major nor his wife made any mistakes. There was a charming, semi-motherly touch in Fay Mountarden's manner to the girl, and the Major was something between old Uncle Henry, Papa, and a courtly old admirer who was much too courtly to say so.

"All for Lullaby?" asked Winnie softly of Faithful-Little-Friend-in-the-Mirror, in her room that evening before dinner. She was nestling on a big settee before the electric fire. She took a little cigarette, and thought diligently. But her reflection led her nowhere, save to a decision to question Cyril Fitzmedley, who was dining at the Mountardens' that evening with two or three other guests, on a few points concerning the Major's position as a racing man. It might give her some hint that would prove useful, she fancied.

"Of course all this attention may be due to their personal liking for me," said she, smiling. "But there was no sign that they were particularly fond of me at Hawkshover until Lullaby was mine. So I don't think it is I that is the attraction. It *must* be Lullaby. They want something from me, I am quite sure of that. Well, we shall see. Meantime——"

It was quite a joyous little evening. A de-

lightful, cosy, well-put-on dinner, a little music — not too much, some bridge, and, later, roulette.

There were eight young people there: five boys of about Cyril's type, three with their wives. The bridge illumined life for the ladies in the drawing-room (they played a tolerably tight game, Winnie observed), while as the evening drew on the men forgathered round the roulette wheel.

Winnie had plenty of opportunities for conversation with Cyril. She gathered all she wished for from the youth, who, if his affection for her was merely his left-hand affection (the right-hand variety presumably being reserved for Vivien Foxelen) was clearly of an intensely affectionate nature.

“ Did Major Mountarden tell you he wanted to buy Lullaby from me, Sir Cyril? ” asked Winnie.

“ Yes, rather, what? But you wouldn't sell her, Miss Winnie? ”

Winnie gazed kindly at him.

“ I don't think I should like to sell your present to me, ” she said softly. “ Besides, I love Lullaby — and Mr. Harmon says that she might easily win a race. ”

Sir Cyril nodded wisely, his face lighting up.

Winnie was an agreeable addition to the Major's plentiful champagne.

"Very wise, dear Miss Winnie. Lullaby is a very good — very promisin' — yearling. Don't you part with her. She might turn out wonderfully well. I always believed in her."

Winnie spared him a few radiations of good-fellowship, listening respectfully, though she would cheerfully have staked a good deal of money against his recognizing Lullaby among a dozen of his yearlings.

"Hasn't the Major any yearlings of his own?" she asked, presently.

"I think so — several very promisin' ones. He doesn't need your pet so badly. He has one beauty, I know. A Projectile colt. Picked him up for a trifle, too. They say that if this colt trains on he will be a sensation. . . . But tell me about yourself, Miss Winnie — are you enjoying yourself here? You have a flat in town, haven't you?"

But here they were interrupted. Bridge had begun in the drawing-room and the boys were going to have some roulette with the Major.

Winnie watched them for a little. She was very interested in their play. She would have disclaimed any intimate knowledge of roulette — for, as she told them shyly, she had never

seen a real game for what she called "real" money before. And that was perfectly true. But though she did not speak of it, there had been a period during her daddy's career when he had been possessed of a devil who led him to believe he had discovered a system which was fated to freeze all other systems out of existence. He and Winnie had spun no more than thirty thousand turns of a small roulette wheel before the perfectly ghastly array of paper losses discouraged the aforesaid devil, cured Captain O'Wynn, and convinced his daughter that, regarded as a means of livelihood, roulette belonged to the stuff that mirages are made of.

So, having watched long enough to realize that the stakes were not low, that the boys were not precisely experts, their methods of playing were perhaps champagne-ly optimistic, and that one or two others were expected to "drop in" presently for some baccarat, though it was midnight, Winnie unobtrusively departed to bed.



## CHAPTER XX

*In which Winnie takes Tea at the Astoritz, suffers the Babblings of Sir Cyril, readjusts His Outlook, and reflects upon the Habits of the Decoy Duck in Its Natural Haunts.*

WHEN, a few days later, Winnie said demurely at lunch that she was permitting Cyril Fitzmedley to take her to tea at the Astoritz that afternoon, nothing but smiles and quiet encouragements greeted her announcement. Everything was quite *couleur de rose* — the Major fired off a playful reminder that he still had an eagle eye on Lullaby and must enlist Cyril's powers of persuasion in his aid, and Mrs. Mountarden had so friendly a word for Cyril that she had evidently forgiven his defection from her.

It was all very jolly — so free, so home-like, so unwoolly.

“Bring Cyril back to dine, darling,” said Mrs. Mountarden. “There will be one or two people in — enough for some bridge.”

Winnie promised. The Mountardens, she had long ago found, were never without dinner

guests who, as the evening wore on, became bridge or roulette or baccarat battlers.

That afternoon, cosily ensconced in an extremely retired corner at the Astoritz with Sir Cyril, the girl discovered that the too-wealthy youth was apparently in the mood to press, right romantically, his left-handed wooing. But for a little she subtly shouldered him away from the subject of hearts that beat as one.

"You know, Cyril," she said, dropping her lids for an instant, "I don't understand games very well, but surely, surely you all play a great deal and for very high stakes at the Mountardens', don't you?" Her tone was gently, even timidly chiding.

Cyril looked very much the man-of-the-world.

"Well, certainly, one can always get a thrill at the Major's," he confessed.

"Ah, but don't you lose a great deal? I—I—don't like to think of your losing so heavily," she sighed.

"That's simply toppin' of you, dear Miss Winnie—oh, toppin'. But don't worry, I can afford to lose what I lose, you know."

Winnie nodded.

"Yes. I know you are awfully rich. Have you lost very much during the last week at the Mountardens'? Men are so bold and reckless."

Cyril hesitated. Then, evidently believing that it would invest him with a species of terrible glory in her blue eyes as it did in his own, he informed her that he had won heavily during the early part of Winnie's stay at the Mountardens' place, but that he had lost far more heavily during the latter end of the week.

"I have dropped six thousand during the week," he said, staring at her. And so little did that lucky son of a rich father realize exactly what the sum really meant that it might have been sixpence. Winnie saw that.

"I shall take it back from Mountarden when the luck turns," he added airily.

Winnie was suitably impressed. When she had recovered she asked another question.

"How reckless you are! Have you played long at the Major's?"

"I used to play there a good deal—but I gave up goin' there a few months ago when I—I got tired of it."

He meant when he first became engaged to Vivien Foxelen.

"I only started dining there again or calling in later, when I knew you were staying there!" he added boldly. "But let's drop the Mountardens and talk of *you*, Winnie."

Winnie said nothing.

Her silence seemed to encourage him, and quite suddenly the spoilt child and the juvenile but developing wolf flamed out in him.

He put it just well enough to allow of Winnie's listening, but no better than that. He made it quite clear that his matrimonial future was unalterably fixed with the comparatively poor, but extremely well-connected and extremely blue-blooded Vivien Foxelen, for whom, in his fashion, he reserved his right-handed love. He hinted, too, that his father's will had something to do with the Foxelen alliance. But, that understood, the left-handed portion of his devotion and income was wholly at Winnie's disposal. He spoke of allowances, he babbled of cosy flats, and he burred of motors; upon the joys of house-boats he held forth, nor did he neglect to touch upon the charms of Monte Carlo; to Paris he referred enthusiastically also, and dwelt too upon millinery, silks, satins, and jewels. But in his discourse — and he was young enough to look slightly sheepish throughout — he made no mention of the simpler and less complicated aids to the social fabric — such as plain golden rings. Diamonds, emeralds, and rubies he spoke of, also sables; but he seemed unaware of the simpler products of the honest goldsmith's art. Deeds of gift upon

parchment, in fair black and white, he did not exclude from his eloquence; but he uttered nothing concerning those plain but wholesome slips of paper called marriage certificates. Finally, he ran down, gulped, and was silent.

Winnie looked at him meditatively, with a quite honest curiosity. He had insulted her pretty badly — about as badly as he could have done — but she bore him no ill-will for that. She was not even angry. She realized that quite a lot of men were like him, though she hoped that some day she might meet one who was not. But she really wondered that he could not see the difference between herself and Vivien Foxelen — not the surface difference, for his proposal implied that probably he did see that — but the intellectual difference.

With his three-quarters of a million and her wits she could have put him anywhere — might even have made him worth while. Vivien, cold, unenthusiastic, correct, but dull, could do nothing for him. Winnie doubted even whether that slip of the aristocracy cared for him at all.

But, in any case, Winnie would not have married him. Her ideas and arrangements about matrimony concerned a different type of man from Cyril Fitzmedley.

A time was to come when he would squirm

a little and feel warm to think that he had ever had the impudence and folly to imagine that Winnie O'Wynn was a suitable candidate for his left-hand love, — and staring with considerable and increasing discomfort into the blue eyes shining before him, he became vaguely and most disconcertingly aware of some strange premonition of this.

Then Winnie smiled.

“I forgive you, Cyril,” she said gently. “Don't blush so. I know you will be ashamed some day. You look as if you are going to cry. But that's vanity, not heartbreak.”

Her voice was like a velvet whip. But it cut like rawhide. “I think we needn't be enemies because of it.” She rose. “You know, I am sure you could be quite nice — nice in your soul, I mean — if you tried. I would think it over if I were you. I am sure it really isn't necessary to be a wolf in order to get most fun out of life. There, now, it's forgotten — finished.”

And it was — except for the penalty. Winnie never forgot the penalty. Wolves — even baby wolves — must expect to pay for the luxury of being wolfy. Naturally.

Besides, she felt that she could afford to be forgiving. She had learned all she needed to know of the real reason why the Mountardens

had been so excessively kind and indulgent to her.

Cyril, a little — but very little — subdued, went back to the *maison* Mountarden with her (the Foxelens were visiting a political marquis, a relative, in Scotland), but he saw nothing of her after dinner. She pleaded a headache and vanished to her own room immediately after leaving the dining room.

She wanted to think over her discovery.

“ I knew I was right when I called the Major a tiger-man,” she told herself presently when, luxuriously relaxed and kimonoed before the big mirror, she began to consider her problems. “ And how clever he is. I wonder I guessed at all. I see how it is: I am too innocent, too trusting. Yes — I am too credulous. And yet — it *was* clever to use Lullaby as a mask, an excuse. I believed it! . . . But really they are using me as a decoy for Cyril Fitzmedley! I felt somehow that the Major and Mrs. Mountarden were pouncing on me with great soft velvety paws — tiger’s paws! They knew Cyril’s feelings towards me the moment he gave me Lullaby. Well, they chose the weapons. They can hardly blame me — an orphan, almost alone and nearly friendless in the world — if I fight them with the sort of weapons they use themselves.”

She smiled and rang for Mrs. Mountarden's maid to brush her beautiful hair.

She rose early next morning, — so early, indeed, that the grey fingers of the dawn had only just begun to pluck back the black veils of night. Silent as a kitten, Winnie embarked on what seemed likely to develop into a little tour of inspection through part of the house.

She went first to the roulette room, from which presently she emerged with happy eyes, and went down to the smaller of the rooms immediately underneath — the Major's "den." She was in the "den" perhaps fifteen minutes, and during almost all that time her attention was fully occupied with the tall gun cabinet, — a massive bit of furniture reaching from floor to ceiling. The Major was notoriously, even ferociously, fastidious about his guns. He cleaned them himself, and kept them in the specially built, wood-fronted cabinet to which, as to the "den" itself, the servants were forbidden access. The cabinet was locked. The key Winnie found in the top drawer of the Major's writing-desk. She appeared to have a desire to study the guns in the cabinet, which was big enough to hold forty, though she found only a pair.

Very sweet and innocent she looked in her



dressing-gown as she stood in the dawn in that tiny room, peering with big blue eyes into the depths of the cabinet.

She was smiling when presently she came out and passed soft as some lovely little ghost up the thickly carpeted stairs to her bedroom.

“ Yes — *Felis Tigris*, ” she said. “ Eater of men — to say nothing of lonely little girls who must fight for themselves with the best weapons they can find! ” . . .

Then she nestled down again in the big soft bed, and in a minute was sound asleep.

## CHAPTER XXI

*In which Winnie again calls upon the Reliable Mr. Jay, prattles prettily to Felis Tigris Mountarden concerning the Queer Side of Things and wafts Herself gently home.*

WINNIE made two calls on the following morning. The first was upon Mr. George H. Jay.

Mr. Jay professed himself charmed to see her, and produced a welcoming laugh nearly as loud as the wind bellowing across the moors. His eyes, though, were the eyes of a careful man. But he need not have put himself so rigidly on guard against Winnie's baffling innocence and *naïveté*, for it appeared that she only required a very small favour from him, — so small that she seemed really shy about bothering him with it.

Looking at her as she sat before him, fair as a flower and much better dressed, the enchanting half-promise of a smile on her perfect lips, a gift (optical) of gold in her sunny hair, of cool ivory, rose-tinted, in her cheeks, and with lullabies in her deep, deep eyes, he warmed

to her as always — as fatal a feminine problem to mere man as ever he had contemplated.

“ I am afraid you will think me very foolish, dear Mr. Jay,” she said. “ But I am nervous. I have been staying with a Major and Mrs. Mountarden and I expect to leave them to-day — this afternoon at about tea-time. I ” — her eyes were downcast — “ I am afraid that the Major will try to force unwelcome attentions on me before I leave; do you understand, please, Mr. Jay? ”

Mr. Jay nodded vigorously — oh, yes, he understood perfectly; it was a shame.

“ And I was hoping that, perhaps, you would not mind very much if I begged you to help me in a certain way.”

Mr. Jay was very willing.

“ Why, of course, dear Miss Winnie; you have come to the right man — old George H. Jay will always be ready to help you against the wolves that infest this big city,” he declared. “ I know them — I know what they are.” Probably he did — he was one of them. “ What would you like me to do, Miss Winnie? ”

Winnie gave him a foolscap envelope sealed with a big blob of red sealing-wax.

“ Would it irritate you, please, Mr. Jay, if

I asked you to stand opposite Major Mountarden's house with this envelope just showing out of your pocket — so that I can see it from the house — from half-past four to half-past five o'clock this afternoon? ”

Mr. Jay looked puzzled but willing.

“ Why — certainly, my dear little lady,” he agreed slowly, staring rather keenly at her. “ That's not very much to do.”

“ Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Jay; you are always so kind. I think you are the kindest man I know,” cried Winnie. “ And I forgot to ask if you would tell a taxi to stop at the house to pick me up at about half-past five? ”

“ Well, that will be easy enough, too,” he said. “ May I inquire why you want me to do this, Miss Winnie? ”

“ Oh, yes, of *course*. I want to be able to point out that my guardian is waiting for me — if necessary.”

His heavy face cleared.

“ Oh, certainly, I see. I regard that as a great compliment, Miss Winnie,” he said.

“ And you won't think I am purse-proud or arrogant, will you, please, if I say I expect to pay you a fee? ” inquired Winnie, anxiously.

“ Oh, no, not at all,” said Mr. Jay, marveling at the extraordinary way in which the child

seemed to retain her fresh, innocent, unspoiled outlook. "Not at all." Winnie rose.

"How fortunate I am to have one good friend," she smiled wistfully, permitted him to shake her hand, and left.

Next she went to her own flat and advised her acidulated and somewhat forbidding housekeeper, Mrs. Darnell, that she would be home that afternoon at five-forty-five precisely.

Then joyously back to the Mountardens to lunch.

It was a big bridge afternoon there, and the card-fiends rallied thither from afar as to the sound of the Last No-Trump.

Practically every one in the Mountarden inner circle that mattered was there; and several of the roulette and baccarat devotees dropped in during the afternoon.

Winnie had informed her housekeeper that she would return to her flat for good at five-forty-five. But at five o'clock there was apparent no sign of her intending departure from the Mountarden establishment. On the contrary, few of the chattering crowd in the big drawing-room, during a brief bridge armistice, looked more reposeful or permanently settled there than Winnie. Exquisite in one of her more careful frocks, she was sitting on a lounge with

Major Mountarden who, having just taken a mahogany-coloured one, had dropped down beside her for a few seconds respite from his not very arduous labours as host.

“ Well, little Miss Winnie, have you decided to let me have Lullaby? ” he said gaily, using his stock opening.

Winnie smiled.

“ I don't think so, Major. You don't really need her, do you? With Royal Splendour and the Projectile colt already yours. ”

The Major's eyes flickered slightly.

“ When did I tell you of the Projectile colt, my dear? ” he asked.

“ It was Cyril Fitzmedley who told me, ” she explained. “ I guessed a little while ago that you didn't really want Lullaby at all. ”

“ But—I paid you a hundred guineas for the option of buying her, ” laughed the Major.

“ Yes; I thought that was so clever. It quite convinced me for a time that you really wanted her. I think you are wonderful, Major. Don't mind my saying that. It made me quite believe that the reason you and dear Mrs. Mountarden invited me here and were—are—so kind—was because you really wanted Lullaby, and meant to persuade me to sell her. ”

The Major seemed a shade puzzled. But he still laughed.

“ Well, my dear, you have discovered my little strategy, haven't you?” he said.

“ Yes,” smiled Winnie, “ I have discovered your little strategy, dear Major. I know now that it wasn't on account of Lullaby at all that you invited me here.”

“ What do you mean, child? ”

A sharpness tinged the Major's voice, and his eyes narrowed slightly.

“ Yes,” purred Winnie softly. “ I know now that why you wanted me here was to act as decoy for Cyril Fitzmedley and his roulette money, which he had given up bringing here.”

She watched those bulbs at his jaw-hinges enlarge as his teeth clinched hard. A vein swelled suddenly on his forehead so that it looked like a cord, and a pale glare blazed in his eyes which thrilled into the girl a certain sense of relief that she had deliberately chosen a crowded drawing-room in which to deal with him. She saw that she had been right in her classification, — this was a tiger-man, dangerous and ferocious at bay.

“ That is not true,” he said, controlling himself.

“ I put it badly, perhaps, Major,” she smiled.

“ You know how I dread hurting any one’s feelings — though people don’t seem to care how they hurt mine. But if I put everything quite clearly — it will be fairer, won’t it? ”

“ Ah, yes, be fair to him, Miss Winnie,” chuckled a youth who, passing the couch, had caught the last words.

She smiled back at him as he moved on, obviously believing he had mildly enlivened a tiny, half-playful flirtation. Not a soul in the room who noticed Winnie and the Major dreamed that they were discussing business, — and business of a razor-keen variety at that.

“ You’ve got hold of some wild idea that I don’t follow,” said the Major in a low, malign voice. But he smiled (albeit a little stiffly) as he spoke. He had to.

“ I will try to explain better, Major. Some months ago Cyril Fitzmedley gave up coming here to gamble. You missed badly the money you won from him. At Hawkshover you found out that he had transferred his — his — left-hand love, *I* always call it, from Mrs. Mountarden to me. So you contrived to get me here — Lullaby helped — and Cyril began again his old custom. Only, this time, I was the lure — the decoy. And I did not realize it until Cyril had lost six thousand pounds. I suppose that



things get very fast and furious in the roulette room after I have gone to bed and the wine has done its work. There, I think that is all I wanted to say." Her blue eyes were fixed squarely on his. "I have to ask you to let me have Cyril's six thousand pounds back — and you must promise never to let him gamble here again, please, Major. There, that is all. I am sure it is all very painful to you, and I don't like it very well, either," she concluded rather plaintively.

He stared at her like a man who does not know quite what is happening. He looked as if he might either laugh at her as at a child who relates an amusing fancy, or try to strangle her.

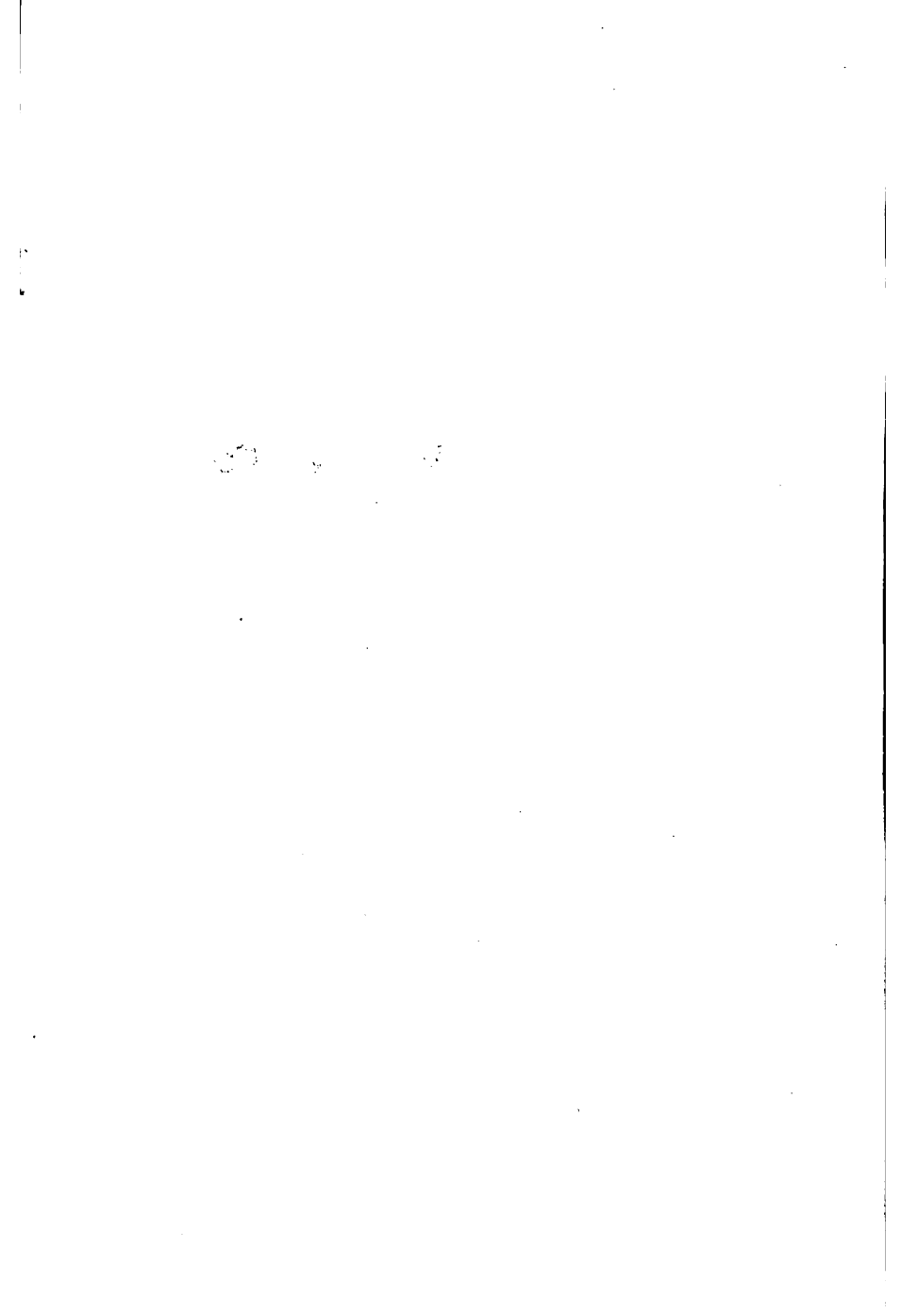
The gossip, laughter, tinkle of teacups and glasses went serenely on around them.

Finally the Major smiled, — a tight, unmirthful smile.

"You funny, romantic, imaginative child," he said. "That sort of thing is not done nowadays — at least, not deliberately. But it's rather quaint how well the fairy tale you have made up seems to fit things. Only it's an accidental fit, my dear. Whether you are just a little duffer, or an adventuress, I don't know — but — in any case, child, it is rather bad taste



**“Look down, Major,” she advised kindly. “People will notice your eyes.”** *Page 231.*



to raise the thing. It is perfectly true that I have won a few thousands from Fitzmedley this week — but that, in a circle of sporting gentlemen, is an almost daily occurrence. It may be quite the other way round next week.”

Winnie sighed.

“ Well, at least, I tried not to hurt your feelings, Major, didn't I? ” she said. “ But you make me do it. ” She leaned nearer, sinking her voice to a whisper. “ Listen, Major, and take care, for I am afraid I am going to give you a surprise. Do all sporting gentlemen who keep a roulette wheel keep it on a special table with heavy, carved legs, and a big electro-magnetic machine in an almost terrifying tangle of wires and things in a gun-cabinet in the room underneath, all connected up with the roulette table in some way? And do sporting gentlemen have a set of switch keys hidden under a silent panel under the banker's end of the roulette table —— ”

She felt the tremor of the big settee as he went rigid.

“ Look down, Major, ” she advised kindly. “ People will notice your eyes. They will think you are going to spring at me! ”

He was not yet beaten, and she guessed that. So, precisely as the tiger-tamer with the whip

lashes the impulse to spring out of his striped pupil's mind, so the girl lashed the impulse of violence out of her tiger.

“Control yourself, Major,” she said. “It would take, perhaps, one minute to guide all these people to see the surprise of their lives. Every one is interested in electric puzzles — especially when they are fixed under roulette wheels. I expect that device has kept you in luxury for a long time — but now you are discovered, do you prefer to pay me back Cyril's six thousand or will you be exposed?”

He relaxed a little, and she knew that he had given in.

“I will wait here while you get Cyril's money, please, Major,” she said. “In notes.”

“I haven't six thousand pounds in notes in the house,” he said.

“Oh, do smile, Major, please. People will think you are annoyed about something. If you have only five thousand nine hundred and ninety it will do. But you must play fair — there is a detective waiting for me outside. You can see him from the windows. He does not know why he is waiting — but if I do not appear with my trunk at the front door by half-past five he has orders to open a sealed packet of instructions.

Come and see for yourself. Quickly, for it is twenty minutes past five already."

Like a man in a dream, with a fixed and painful smile on his lips, the Major crossed the room with Winnie.

As she had said, a man was loitering on the far side of the road. From his side pocket protruded slightly the top of a foolscap envelope, — the red blob of sealing-wax plainly visible. He looked like a private detective to the Major.

Even as they gazed out upon him he stopped a taxi and waved it over to the front door of the Mountarden house.

The Major was satisfied.

That fixed smile still upon his face, he turned away and went out.

A minute or two later Winnie followed him. But she remained quite near the drawing-room door until he returned with a thick packet in his hand. He thrust it at her, white and trembling with fury, and drew breath for the whispered maledictions with which he was charged. But Winnie, slender and dainty as a child in a pretty party frock, cool as a white rose, stopped him.

"Oh, don't spoil everything by being uselessly angry, Major," she said. "There is no time to swear at me now."

She was running through the thick wad of hundred-pound notes.

“Thirty-six — eight — you tried to make use of me, you know — forty — you pounced upon *me* like a tiger — forty-two — four — six — eight — fifty — to be your decoy — fifty-two — and even a little, lonely, unprotected girl has her feelings — fifty-six — fifty-eight and two fifties is fifty-nine — why, I make it a hundred pounds short, Major.”

She smiled angelically.

“Oh, never mind that! It will set off the money for the option on Lullaby. And, of course, you must stop the electric roulette, you know, Major.”

She moved past him. He lifted his hand with a low bitter sound in his throat.

“Ah, no!” she said. “I have only three minutes left. I don’t think you could kill me in three minutes! The detective will open the envelope before you can do it.”

His hands fell. She was so openly unafraid of him that it made him uncertain. Then she ran up the stairs.

The servants were already bringing down her trunks. The Major hung restlessly about the hall till she appeared again, — as charming as ever in a furry-collared coat and a little French

hat with a tassel. But it was at the dispatch-case in her hand that he stared, half-fascinated.

Then the door opened, revealing the waiting taxi — and Mr. Jay — closed again, and Winnie was gone.

“ Thank you so much, Mr. Jay,” she said, leaning out of the taxi. “ It was exactly as I feared — in there. But I knew I could rely upon you to be ready.”

She beamed upon him and passed him a folded note. It was one of the fifties, — good pay, but Winnie was never mean.

Mr. Jay smiled as he raised his hat. He was not surprised that Major Mountarden desired to “ pay his attentions ” to Winnie, — though he was not thinking of the kind of attentions that Winnie had meant.

He looked after her cab for a moment, then suddenly remembered the envelope of sealed instructions which he had forgotten to return. He looked at it and hesitated. “ Oh, well, it’s addressed to me, any way,” he said. “ After all, one can’t help being interested in her — pretty, innocent little thing.”

He ripped open the envelope and took out a sheet of notepaper.

It was quite blank. Winnie liked George H. Jay (in the sense that she did not *dislike* him),



but she saw no reason to admit him more than about a sixteenth of an inch into her secrets. And it was the glimpse of the envelope and the red sealing-wax which she had trusted to clinch the doubts of Major Mountarden. Mr. Jay slowly tore up the blank sheet and sprinkled the pieces in the gutter.

“Queer,” he mused. “Queer, that.” He shrugged his shoulders. “Impulsive as a bird — probably tore a sheet in two and put the wrong half in the envelope. Yes, impulsive as a kitten — and prettier.” He scowled at the *maison* Mountarden.

“A pretty girl gets a thin time of it in this burg,” he muttered as he turned away. “Pestered and pursued all the time!”

Another thought struck him, an odd, rather surprising one. “I had an idea once that I could employ her — in my business,” he said to himself with a slight frown. “But — but ——” he fingered the fifty — “I’m damned if it doesn’t begin to look to me as if she’s employing *me!* Yes, sir! In *her* business!”

But however it may have been with Mr. Jay, Winnie was not harassed with any doubts as to who employed who, nor did she look “pestered.” Indeed, she had rarely looked more tranquil.

“ And that more than provides for Lullaby,” she smiled, nursing the note-crammed dispatch-case, “ until she begins to earn her own living. If Cyril had not insulted me so, I would have given him back this money, perhaps. But he tried to be a wolf and pounce on me, the Major tried to be a tiger and pounce on him *and* me. And the only way I could possibly defend myself, of course, was to pounce on them both.”

She smiled sweetly at the strip of looking-glass, and leaning back began her favourite method of resting her mind, namely, counting a flock of imaginary bank notes passing one by one over a bank counter into her own account. It made her feel like a countess.

A tiny clock chimed as presently she entered her flat. It was five-forty-five to the tick. Mrs. Darnell was ready with tea, as previously instructed.

“ Dear Mrs. Darnell,” purred Winnie, and proceeded to put in a telephone call to Newmarket. She was not exactly anxious about Lullaby, but she liked to know how the filly was bearing up without her. After all, Winnie was a woman, even if she could tame tigers and had a way with wolves.

## CHAPTER XXII

*Wherein Winnie takes Luncheon with The Hon. Gerald Peel, reminds Mr. Benson Boldre of Queen Anne Boleyn and goes to the Aid of the Ultra-Superba Film Company.*

MR. DAN HARMON had no news of Lullaby other than good to report, and he delighted the yearling's little mistress with the information that very soon the filly would become a two-year-old.

Winnie was thrilled.

“That is lovely — thank you so much, Mr. Harmon. I shall be staying at Hawkshover Hall with Lady Fasterton for part of the winter and it will be so nice to come and see Lullaby on her birthday . . . she shall have one or two little oats extra that day. How splendid that she likes her work so . . . ‘like a little lion’ . . . it is because you understand so well how to handle them. . . . I think you are a past master, Mr. Harmon, and although perhaps I oughtn't to tell you this I will — so does Mr. Peel . . . yes, the Honourable Gerald . . . he

said the other day that you were the best trainer in England . . . oh, no, not flattery, Mr. Harmon . . . he knows . . . thank you, yes, of course . . . when I am down at Hawks-hover I shall come to breakfast with you and dear Mrs. Harmon every time I come out to see Lullaby gallop . . . good-bye . . . so kind. . . . I beg your pardon . . . does Mr. Peel happen to know of a steady old steeplechaser that would suit a lady for light work with the hounds? . . . I will ask him to-morrow . . . as it happens I am lunching with him . . . no, of course not, Mr. Harmon. . . . I won't allow him to think of anything but an honest bargain . . . although I don't think any one could deceive *you* about a horse, Mr. Harmon. . . . Good-bye."

And Winnie rang off, took tea and rested.

Lunch with the Honourable Gerald Peel was not an event which quickened Winnie's pulse, for Gerald was not one of the type which she classified as *Canis Lupus*. He was a cool, quiet youth, lean, clean-shaven, looking older and harder than he really was, and the only beauty which he regarded as being worth serious attention was equine beauty. For instance, he would cheerfully have turned away from contemplation of the celebrated ankles of that

world-famous dancer M'selle Insidia Fée in order to study the pasterns of any groggy old steeplechaser that happened along, and it is certain that had he been given his choice between matrimonial possession of Winnie and the ownership of Winnie's beautiful little race-horse, he would have chosen Lullaby. Winnie never levelled the twin radiances of her blue eyes at him without realizing that no matter how raptly he might gaze upon her face, probably he would have gazed even more raptly into the mouth of Lullaby. He was a nice boy, and his name should have been John Hippo Peel.

Which was probably the reason why Winnie regarded him as one of the few friends she felt she could really trust. It was indeed chiefly to talk over the possibilities of Winnie's little equine aristocrat that the lunch had been arranged. But it led Winnie rather abruptly to other possibilities, for it was while they were gossiping over coffee that the gentleman she came to know later as Mr. Benson Boldre made his appearance. He was an acquaintance rather than a friend of the Honourable Gerald, but because he speedily made it clear that he came bearing, if not gifts, at least great opportunities for Winnie, the Honourable Gerald tolerated his advent.

He was an extremely well-dressed man of middle age, with a somewhat worn face, thin but rather full-lipped, with grey, slightly dulled eyes.

The first impression of him Winnie registered was that he had seen hard times in the past, had softened them considerably, and was now becoming a trifle flaccid with luxury.

He expanded quickly under the friendly, open, ingenuous gaze of the girl and presently confessed that he had been watching her for the past hour from a table in a far corner of the room.

Winnie's eyes widened with wonder at that.

"Watching *me*, Mr. Boldre!"

She seemed to shrink a little, obviously astonished that any one should find her worthy of more than, say, a passing glance of mild approval.

Mr. Boldre perceived that she was a sensitive plant. She noticed him perceiving it.

"Yes, indeed, Miss O'Wynn," he said heartily.

He laughed a little.

"You remind me of some one I never knew! Come now, that's a puzzle, you think?"

"But, please, it's too difficult, Mr. Boldre. How could I ——"

“ It was Queen Anne Boleyn,” affirmed Mr. Boldre, smiling. “ I am looking for a lady like Queen Anne Boleyn! ”

Winnie’s eyes were misty-blue with perplexity.

The Honourable Gerald was staring at Mr. Boldre much as he might have stared at a man who had said that he preferred to ride a good tricycle rather than a good horse.

“ I’ve puzzled you both, I see,” said Boldre, with an indulgent smile. “ I mean, of course, that I am looking for a lady who comes up to my conception of Queen Anne Boleyn, in order to try to persuade her to accept the star part in a big, new film about to be produced by a firm in which I am interested! I have hunted London for her.” His voice dropped impressively.

“ And I believe I have found her! ”

The Honourable Gerald stirred.

“ You mean Miss O’Wynn, Boldre? ”

“ I mean that Miss O’Wynn is exactly my idea of the Anne Boleyn I am seeking.”

Winnie’s slim, graceful hands clasped impulsively over her heart.

“ But Anne Boleyn was Queen of England! ” she said in a hushed voice. “ How *can* you imagine that a little girl like me could possibly act the part of a Queen, Mr. Boldre? I—I

don't think I have ever had such a compliment as that — but it is impossible.”

She had never looked more exquisite in her life than she did then. Her lips were slightly parted, as she leaned forward; her cheeks had taken on a deeper sea-shell flush; her eyes had darkened almost to sapphire.

Something like a gleam came into those of Mr. Boldre as he watched her: a gleam she knew of old. She had stared into the eyes of a good many men in her short life — and she knew about eyes. And gleams. And men. Also wolves.

Then she sighed.

“ Ah, but you only say that because it is your nature to be kind, I think, Mr. Boldre,” she said.

But that Mr. Boldre made haste to deny.

“ Before Henry the Eighth came along and made her father Viscount Rochford, dear Miss O'Wynn, what was Anne? Just a charming, blue-eyed little bit of a slip of a fairy-thing, playing about in the old-world garden of roses and honeysuckle down in the country, as innocent and sweet as — as — ”

“ A yearling,” suggested the Honourable Gerald seriously, rather carried away by Mr. Boldre's eloquence.



“ Well, say a kitten,” amended the star seeker.

Winnie nodded.

“ Yes, she was. She loved the garden in her old-world home at Hever Castle. I’ve read of it,” said Winnie.

“ When Bluff King Hal proposed to make that charming little country maid his Queen,” resumed Mr. Boldre, “ I expect she felt that it was an impossible position for her to fill. Yet she filled it — temporarily, at any rate.”

He smiled.

“ The lady I have been seeking is one who can play that child in the old home garden naturally before the camera, Miss Winnie. The other parts — the Queen reels — are a matter of brocades and ermine and jewellery and that sort of thing. Comparatively easy. But for the first and last reels I want *naturalness*, and I believe that you, Miss O’Wynn, could take the part to perfection — if it were only possible to persuade you to do it! ”

Evidently Mr. Boldre believed Winnie to be some one or other of the Honorable Gerald’s aristocratic and wealthy relatives or friends, but the child speedily undeceived him.

“ It seems quite wonderful that *I* should be anything at all like your idea of Anne Boleyn,”

she said. "But if it really is so, Mr. Boldre, of course you could easily persuade me — how nice you were to put it like that — to try to act the part. I have acted in amateur theatricals at home. The Vicar wrote a splendid play. . . . Do you mean, please, that you would pay me — like the famous stars — to play Anne Boleyn for you?"

"Why, certainly — I should be very glad indeed. I should regard it as a stroke of luck for me —" began Mr. Boldre.

"Pay you a toppin' salary, Miss Winnie — a movie star gets a bewilderin' figure nowadays," said Gerald. "Make more out of actin' a tragedy than she'd make if she picked up the Eclipse Stakes!"

"Well, hardly that, hardly that," said Mr. Boldre, blandly, "But certainly she would do extremely well. One would pay a handsome, even a very handsome, figure to Miss O'Wynn, all being well. *That*, I can promise."

Like most quiet men, the Honourable Gerald was prone to do the right thing at the right time. He perceived that there seemed to be no urgent reason for his continued presence there. He was well aware that Winnie had a living to earn like himself — he, too, being poor if blue-blooded, and horses being hearty feeders in

these days of expensive oats — and he desired to put no difficulties in the way of her earning it.

He rose.

“ Well, I'll be canterin', Miss Winnie. I know you will like to talk business. You will drive Miss O'Wynn to Lady Fasterton's place after, eh, Boldre? You're going on to my fascinatin' cousin's, aren't you, Miss Winnie? ”

Mr. Boldre, thus tactfully apprised that Winnie had influential friends, even if she did accept movie contracts from comparative strangers, hastily, even anxiously, assured them that he and his car were wholly at Winnie's disposal, and Gerald shook hands.

“ Take care of him, Miss Winnie,” he said playfully, but with serious eyes. “ Business is business, and dear old Boldre is a fine business man. Charge him about half he's got — if you can't get more! You ought to screw thousands out of him with luck.”

He laughed.

“ Get his best offer, double it, multiply by two, take away the number you first thought of, put it in black an' white, and consult an expert before signin' it — don't mind me, old chap, everybody knows that I am simply a

walkin' fatuity when I get more than five yards from a horse."

It was his way of warning Winnie. She needed no warning, but she appreciated the intention.

The Honourable Gerald then "cantered."

## CHAPTER XXIII

*In which Winnie introduces Mr. Boldre to the Ancient Custom of sacrificing to the Gods of Good Luck, and rings up Mr. George H. Jay.*

“ I SHALL have to work very hard to make it a success, I expect,” said Winnie.

But Mr. Boldre hastened to reassure her.

“ No, dear Miss O’Wynn, I don’t think so. Just be your own sweet, natural self all the time. It will come much more easily to you than to a trained actress.”

Winnie smiled into his dull but avid eyes.

“ Does it sound *very* greedy if I ask how much you would pay me, please? ” she cooed. “ It seems so — so mercenary to bring money into such a beautiful story, and I would much rather not. Only one *has* to — in a way, hasn’t one? ”

Mr. Boldre leaned towards her.

“ Of course, my dear Miss Winnie. You needn’t feel ashamed to mention money. Well, now — it’s difficult to say off-hand exactly how much I shall be able to guarantee you over this

film, but you may rest assured, it won't be less than two hundred pounds, possibly more."

Winnie's blue eyes widened.

"Oh, what a lot of money!" she cried softly.  
"For me?"

A pronounced satisfaction softened the features of Mr. Boldre.

"Yes, for you! It may be more." He passed his hand across his chin in the manner of one who reflects. Winnie noted anew that he was wearing a very fine ring — a big, marvelously-coloured emerald set in an unusually red gold.

"Yes, it may be more — almost certainly it will be. I must talk it over with the manager, Archer. If you are agreeable, Miss Winnie, we will have a conference to-morrow!"

"The costumes!" cried Winnie suddenly.  
"I had forgotten those. Will they swallow up all my salary, please?"

Mr. Boldre smiled.

"We shall provide those," he said spaci-  
ously.

"Oh, how lucky I am," sighed Winnie.

"Oh, no — not at all. I am the lucky one,"  
insisted Mr. Boldre.

With a quick, impulsive movement Winnie took off the little ring which she was wearing

on the middle finger of her right hand. It was a pretty, rather than a valuable, thing — a fragment of opal matrix, oddly brilliant, with a great preponderance of lapis-lazuli blue in it. The ring was not rigid, but a bit of gold chain, the opal being bored and held loosely by a gold wire.

“ That is for you, please,” she said with a delicious flush.

Boldre stared. “ For me, child? ”

“ Whenever a great stroke of luck happens to me I always give away a valued possession. You see, it's unlucky to be lucky without making some sacrifice. Every one does it nowadays.”

Mr. Boldre hesitated.

“ But you mustn't give me your pretty little ring, child! ” he said.

The lovely eyes darkened and grew misty.

“ Oh, please, please let me do it — you must have my ring, it will be so unlucky not to. I *always* sacrifice to good luck! ”

Mr. Boldre yielded.

“ But I've been lucky, too,” he said. “ I must make a sacrifice, too, in that case.”

His hands wandered rather vaguely about his vest pockets, but came empty away. After all, he couldn't offer her a gold toothpick or any bric-à-brac of that description. And to go out

and buy a bit of jewellery was hardly equivalent to sacrificing a "valued possession."

It was most awkward in that the only valued possession he happened to have on him was the emerald ring, which was worth several hundred times as much as the chain ring. A certain sadness made itself manifest in his dull grey eyes; but his heart was in the nets, and a good deal of his intelligence, too, and — well, she was worth it. And he knew — or fondly fancied that he knew — the value of first impressions.

He slipped off the great green stone.

"I always make a sacrifice to the god of good luck, too," he said, staring steadily at her. "And I regard my meeting with you as one of the biggest strokes of luck that I have had for a long time. So you must indulge me as I have indulged you, dear little lady!"

He passed the emerald.

Winnie looked frightened.

"Oh, but please!" she begged. "You must not — indeed you must not, give me that. Why, it must be immensely valuable. . . ."

But Boldre suffocated a sigh and took his medicine.

"No more valuable to me, dear little lady, than your pretty little ring to you. You must, you really must, let me play the game."



“ Ah, yes, — I forgot that. It would not be fair to you to spoil your sacrifice.” She took the ring, sighing. “ I have been very silly — very impulsive — I shall not forgive myself. I ought to have waited and given my ring away later. I see that now — too late! ”

She gazed almost with distaste at the greenly glinting jewel and dropped it into her bag with a sigh.

“ I have been foolish,” she said.

“ Not at all,” declared Mr. Boldre. Then he drew forth a card (rather with the air of a man who wishes to forget the past), which he gave her. It was not his own card, but that of one Mr. Adalbert Archer, managing director of the Ultra-Superba Film Company, London.

“ That is the firm I am backing,” he said, and proceeded to speak well of it, better of its manager, and best of its colossal future.

But Winnie, listening — with wide wondering eyes and parted lips — gathered an impression that his conversation contained only about fourteen per cent. sincerity.

His words about the Ultra-Superba Film Company were the words of an admirer, but they rang cracked, like bad money.

She agreed readily to meet Archer at the offices of the company next morning at eleven in

order to discuss preliminaries. Mr. Boldre had a busy morning in the City before him and could not go with her, but he promised to put everything in order with Archer over the telephone.

Then he told her some things about himself. She listened carefully, so that, when presently he drove her on to Lady Fasterton's, she was aware that he was really rich with wealth largely derived from South African lands, that he made his home mainly in South Africa — “a house like a palace, dear Miss O'Wynn, though I say it myself, and a park the size of a province,” — and that he really only came to England in order to invest surplus wealth. She gathered that there was no Mrs. Boldre.

Winnie went to the telephone in the library before greeting Lady Fasterton, and put in a call to her business friend, gentle Mr. George H. Jay.

“Is that Mr. Jay's office, please? . . . thank you so much . . . please, yes . . . if he is not too busy . . . yes, Miss O'Wynn. . . . Ah, thank you. . . . Good afternoon, Mr. Jay. . . . Yes, Miss O'Wynn. . . . How do you do? . . . Oh, yes, thank you, Mr. Jay . . . perfectly well, but I — I am a little frightened — nervous. . . . Oh, no, nothing painful of *that* nature, only I

have been offered a large sum of money to act for a film and I don't quite know whether I ought to take it. . . . Oh, yes, you could come round at once, if you liked, you are always so kind to me, Mr. Jay. . . . Oh, no, I have not agreed anything at all. . . . The firm is called the Ultra-Superba Film Company, and I really wondered if they were good, honourable people with a proper reputation. . . . Yes, that would be better . . . if you could inquire a little . . . and, yes, I would call and see you to-morrow morning . . . whatever you advise me. . . . Thank you again and again . . . so kind, so kind always. . . . Good-bye!"

Winnie hung up, and surveyed the instrument with a pensive, blue-eyed smile for a moment.

"Daddy used to say 'set a poacher to catch a poacher,'" she said softly. "And that is the same as setting a wolf to catch a wolf. I know that there is something wolfy about Mr. Boldre, no matter how much he may smile or how nicely he may sacrifice to Good Luck."

She took the big, green emerald from her bag and looked at it.

"I always loved emeralds," she said, and slipped it on. "And it will go so well with my hand — when I have had it made smaller.

## CHAPTER XXIV

*In which Winnie inadvertently intrudes upon a Lady indulging in " a Good Cry," dries those Tears, and sweetly depresses Mr. Sus Porcus Archer's Financial Temperature to Five Hundred Below Zero.*

It was ten o'clock precisely on the following morning when Winnie, exquisite in a new, very simple walking costume, arrived at the office of George H. Jay.

The " agent " greeted her very cordially, and though there was caution in his eyes there was also enough admiration to obscure the caution fairly well.

He was as breezy as ever, but his breeziness was balmy with a certain deference.

Winnie shook hands.

" I am ashamed to bother you so, Mr. Jay," she said. " But you *do* understand, don't you? I have so *few* friends — sometimes I think I seem almost fated to be always lonely — all alone — in this great city — fighting for myself. Do you remember those terrible Ripons? How

good you were to me over that matter! I shall never forget it. Were you lucky enough to find out if the Ultra-Superba Film Company is a firm that a little novice could venture to accept work from, please, Mr. Jay? ”

Mr. Jay looked serious.

“ I’ve made a lot of inquiries since you rang up, Miss Winnie — a lot of inquiries. I don’t mind admitting that I didn’t get to bed till half-past three this morning. I was out with friends in the cinema business.”

Winnie’s eyes widened.

“ Oh, Mr. Jay! How tired you must be. All for me! ”

Mr. Jay laughed his reverberant and jolly laugh.

“ That comes in the way of business — all in the day’s work, haha! . . . Besides, it was worth it. I found out all we need to know about the firm.”

“ So soon, Mr. Jay,” marvelled Winnie.

“ I’m a quick man, you know, Miss Winnie — quick and sure, haha! ”

Then he became more serious.

“ I’m puzzled about them,” he went on. “ You see, they’re no good. They haven’t any money. And Archer, their manager, may not be a crook. That’s how people put it to me

when I asked them about him. They all began like that. 'Archer? Well, Jay, of course he *may* not be a crook.' . . . So I pushed my inquiries rather far. In fact, as luck would have it, I got in touch with the man who ran all the office side of their business until Archer discharged him recently. He told me everything."

Mr. Jay lowered his voice.

"My dear Miss Winnie, the Ultra-Superba Film Company is stone dead and Archer is liable to bolt any day. Their studio at Willesden Green is next door to derelict, the bailiffs are practically in at Archer's flat, and the only staff he keeps now is the lady, Miss Allen, who spends most of her time at Archer's flat as housekeeper, and occasionally lends him a hand at his office as his secretary. The firm is no good, and I beg you to ignore them and any offers they may make. I am glad — grateful — that you rang me up. I want to see you make a great success in London, Miss Winnie, and, if you can only remain as you are now, so fresh, so unspoilt, so natural and ingenuous, it will all come in time. Old George H. Jay is working for you, believe *him*. It won't be long before he has a position to offer you — if you are still open to one. And if you have a gift for acting

— well, we'll see. I didn't know you could act! ”

“ Well, some years ago the Vicar wrote a splendid play and I acted in that, you see, Mr. Jay,” said Winnie shyly.

Mr. Jay's mouth went pursy, as if he had bitten upon a lemon-sweet orange in the dark, and he laughed rather hollowly.

“ I see, dear Miss Winnie, I see. Well, I shall look out for some nice opening as *ingénue*. But do keep clear of that Ultra-Superba man. He has no money whatever. Quite dangerous, in fact.”

Winnie rose.

“ Thank you very much, dear Mr. Jay. I know it seems mercenary to act like that, but they drive one to be mercenary in self-defence, don't they? ”

“ Yes, indeed, they do — haha — certainly! ” agreed Mr. Jay.

But in spite of the agent's alarming advice Winnie went straight on to the offices of the Ultra-Superba Company, for it was obvious that the breezy George had not heard of Mr. Boldre — and, at present, the girl did not feel particularly moved to allow him in on the same floor as that shortly to be occupied by the Boldre money. She was as innocent as that. . . .

The Ultra-Superba offices were not very superb, but they were rather ultra—ultra-shabby.

Winnie climbed a flight of stairs to get to them. She found the outer office empty, with the opaque glass door to the inner office half open. She had entered without noise, and it was while she paused a moment, a little disappointed at the dusty shabbiness of the place, that she heard a woman crying in the inner office.

She went quietly through the door, to discover a much better-looking office with a big desk by the window. There was a reasonable carpet and a number of flamboyant posters.

At the big desk sat a woman. She had been crying, but she heard the movement at the door and lifted her head, hastily drying her eyes. She was a tall, slim brunette, not without a haggard, darkling beauty.

“ Oh, I—I am so sorry,” said Winnie. “ You see, there was nobody in the outer office.” She came up to the tall woman, offering both her hands impulsively.

“ Never mind that,” she said. “ You— are you in trouble? Won't you let me try to help you, please? I, too, have had troubles— and we women ought to help each other! ”



The dark one looked at her rather helplessly, made an effort, recovered herself, and flashed a glance at a clock on the desk. It was a quarter to eleven. Winnie was early.

Then the dark eyes suddenly concentrated on Winnie's face in as searching a stare as the girl had ever known, clung, wavered, and melted.

" Ah, you are good — sincere. You *meant* that about helping me. There aren't many who say it that mean it, you know. But it's nothing " — the dark eyes went darker yet — " just a silly woman who has made every mistake in the book, having a good cry. Nothing. A fool. Take no notice. Only, thank you again, my dear. You are as sweet as you are lovely. Now let's forget it. I know who you are, I think. Miss O'Wynn, isn't it? Mr. Archer didn't expect you till eleven. He's just popped out. I am his secretary — Miss Allen. Won't you sit down, Miss O'Wynn? "

She had a charming voice, with a faint, familiar accent that puzzled Winnie for a moment. She made a mental effort and caught what she wanted. Mr. Boldre had a similar faint accent. Odd. (Filed for consideration.)

She smiled to Miss Allen — a slow, delicious, friendly smile that was irresistible.

" But there is a quarter of an hour to wait, "

she said. "And that will give us time for a cup of chocolate. Do come with me. It's so cold and foggy this morning, and you could easily put up a piece of paper on the office door: 'Coming back soon.' I will take all the blame. *Do come!*"

Whether it was curiosity, or just sheer yielding to the sweet, warm friendliness that Winnie radiated, Miss Allen never really quite knew. She may not have cared whether Mr. Archer would be annoyed or not, or she may have known that the girl had made such a hit with Boldre of the finances that what Winnie said was extremely likely to "go" with Archer. However that may have been, she yielded and went. Women who work for their living in a big city are prone to snatch at any proffer of what they recognize as real and genuine friendship. And Miss Allen, as her rather ravaged beauty and her tears had already told Winnie, was sorely in need of a friend.

It was at twenty minutes past eleven that Winnie and Miss Allen returned to the office of the Ultra-Superba Film Company. The secretary was extremely nervous about that twenty minutes, but Winnie gently reassured her.

"I will explain to Mr. Archer that I thought

you needed a cup of chocolate, and it will be quite all right," said she, naïvely.

But it was not quite so naïve as it sounded. When, at the age of three or thereabouts, she had been a wee, wonderful, fairy thing, she had learned that a girl who is wanted can do with the people who want her precisely and exactly as she chooses. And ever since that innocent age she had been studying this interesting fact.

Mr. Adalbert Archer, she knew, wanted her services badly. So she was not disposed to fret herself because she had caused Mr. Archer's office to be closed for half an hour. He wanted her much too badly to annoy her with absurd grumblings at such minor inconveniences. If he fancied he could grumble at her, he would have to be put in his place.

He was standing at the door of the office with a black scowl on his brow, and he shot a word of sharp anger at Miss Allen as she led the way up the stairs. He bit his lip as he saw Winnie following his secretary, dispersed his scowl, and became excessively civil.

Miss Allen introduced Winnie, and, making polite noises, he ushered her into his office.

"I expect you feel that an apology is due from me for putting you into the unfortunate position of having to shout at your secretary

and me, Mr. Archer?" said Winnie, very sweetly. That expletive he had sent down the stairs had grazed her temper.

"My dear Miss O'Wynn, certainly — certainly — *certainly* not!" he cried. "It is I who must apologize for my stupid temper. I have been very worried, I — er — of course, it was not at you that I shouted. Impossible!"

He grinned ingratiatingly at her, and Winnie smiled more sweetly than ever. She wondered whether it was worth while making him apologize to Miss Allen, but decided that apologies were cheap that day. Probably the brunette lady would prefer what Winnie proposed to get for her.

So she nodded. Already she had perceived that Mr. Adalbert Archer was a very ordinary sort of blackguard. A rough, harsh, limited, bullying type of person, with no real talent, or gifts, or training, or power of application behind him. And he smelt of cloves and eau-de-cologne, and his under-lip was very red and moist. She saw that probably he often "popped" out of the office, returning with a renewed flavour of cloves. And she understood why the Ultra-Superba Film Company was in need of a backer. Archer had once been a good-looking man, but he had long ago overdrawn his

looks account. He was easy to classify. *Sus porcus*, meaning plain hog, reflected Winnie, secretly amazed that a man of Boldre's ability should be willing to risk money backing such a clear case as Archer.

He began to speak enthusiastically of the Anne Boleyn film. He ran his eyes calculatingly over Winnie and said that he could see that this was going to be the biggest thing in historical films he had yet touched. He had feared that it would be impossible to find a young lady with just that degree of ingenuous charm which, in his view, had rendered Anne irresistible to Henry VIII. But he no longer feared. He was satisfied. His mind was at rest. Mr. Benson Boldre had told him yesterday afternoon that in Miss O'Wynn he had discovered the ideal actress for the part, and he agreed. It was very fortunate — for the Ultra-Superba Company, and, he ventured to say, for Miss O'Wynn. The film would give her a world-triumph; yes, indeed; etc., etc.

“ And do I have to sign my name to a — a contract, I think you call it, please, Mr. Archer? ” inquired Winnie presently.

“ Oh, yes — for your own protection, Miss O'Wynn. Merely formal — nothing more. It

is ready. Just one or two things to fill in. Shall I read it? ”

“ That would be so *kind* of you, please, Mr. Archer,” said Winnie.

He read it.

There was a gap at the place where the contract called for mention of Winnie’s salary. Winnie called for mention of the same, also.

“ Yes, of course, Mr. Boldre discussed that with me, too. We decided that we would wish to make it for as large an amount as the film can stand, namely: two hundred pounds, Miss O’Wynn.”

He looked at her a little anxiously.

“ Oh, what a lot of money! ” cried Winnie softly. “ Surely it is too much! Why, when I acted in the Vicar’s play they only gave us tea at the Vicarage — with cress sandwiches.”

*Sus porcus* Archer looked at her with an expression that was a blend of pity and relief.

“ I will fill in the amount at two hundred pounds, then, Miss O’Wynn? ”

“ Oh, not for a moment, if it is not troubling you too much, please. I would be so grateful if I could use your telephone for a moment. I promised to consult a friend. I assure you, Mr. Archer, that I had no such figure as two hundred pounds in my mind.”

He gladly got her through to the Honourable Gerald Peel at the New Turf Club. He was feeling sorry, not for her, but because he had not suggested a hundred. He had not dreamed that she would be so easy.

He handed her the telephone, and she thanked him with dancing eyes.

"Is that Gerald? This is Winnie O'Wynn. . . . I guessed you would be there. . . . Please for your advice, Gerald. . . . Mr. Archer, of the Ultra-Superba Company, has offered me *two hundred pounds* to act in the film about poor Queen Anne Boleyn. Isn't that a lot of money, Gerald? . . . I think I ought to sign the contract quickly before they alter their minds, don't — Oh! *Gerald!* . . . are you serious?"

Mr. Archer's smile vanished suddenly like the flame of a blown-out candle.

" . . . I don't understand . . . not enough . . . yes, I hear, Gerald. . . . Oh! but I couldn't, really. . . . I haven't the courage. . . it seems so mercenary."

Mr. Archer's jaw began to sag. His ears seemed actually to stand out from his craning head at a wider angle as he listened.

" . . . I am to say — tell me again, Gerald . . . yes, yes, yes . . . of course I will do as you tell me. . . . I am to say two hundred be hanged

for a tale. . . . How rude it sounds. . . . A thousand or nothing and they can take it or leave it alone — good gracious!”

Mr. Archer breathed through his nose heavily.

Winnie turned, putting her hand on the mouthpiece.

“ I — I — my friend says he will never speak to me again,” she said, her eyes misty, “ unless I say ‘ two hundred be hanged for a tale ’ — I don’t mean that *unkindly*, of course — ‘ it must be a thousand pounds, you to take it or — well — leave it alone.’ That is not meant impolitely — it’s Gerald’s way, Mr. Archer. He is so gay and so careless.”

“ Careless!” groaned Archer. “ My dear young lady, it’s impossible. I could get almost anybody for that sum! The film won’t stand it.”

Winnie nodded sympathetically.

“ I know — its dreadful!” she murmured.

“ Mr. Archer could get almost anybody for a thousand pounds, Gerald, he says, and the film won’t stand it. . . . What am I to say, Gerald? . . . What do you advise? . . . Oh, but I couldn’t say *that* to Mr. Archer — he is so kind. . . . I must? . . . Very well, but it makes me unhappy to be so cruel and curt. . . . Tell



me again. . . . I must say that if they can get almost anybody for the money, then in Heaven's name let them go and get them. . . . How rude business men are! . . . And if the film won't stand it, let the film do the other thing. Very well."

She turned, looking sadly at Mr. Archer, who emerged from a species of petrified calm to say sullenly, "Very well, I agree."

Winnie announced through the telephone that Mr. Archer kindly agreed, and rang off.

She watched him thoughtfully as he filled in the amount. There was reason for thought, and Winnie was well aware of it. Quite apart from certain impressions she had gently gleaned from Miss Allen, her wits had long ago warned her that this was not a normal engagement. She did not believe that either Benson Boldre or *Sus porcus* Archer wanted her even at two hundred for her screen-acting talent. Certainly not at a thousand. Yet Archer agreed. She was aware that it was Boldre's money he agreed to pay her, but it was very evident that it could not have caused him keener anguish if it had been his own money.

Among the hints she had received from Miss Allen was the friendly suggestion that she might be wise not to take too seriously the

hope of ever seeing herself in the Anne Boleyn film. Pressed gently and tactfully, the secretary had told her that she had no real reason to believe that the slightest move had yet been made towards preparing the film. More than that Miss Allen would not say.

So that (mused Winnie) if the secretary were right and had no intention at all of producing such a film, then they were paying her a thousand — for what?

Perhaps they did not intend paying her, either. She smiled a little. How funny! How ingenuous men were. Sometimes they were like little children playing in a nursery: trying hard to be pirates or brigands or wolves.

Archer offered her a pen.

She took it.

“ You sign there, Miss O'Wynn,” he said, still sulkily.

“ I see,” she smiled, put down the pen, opened her handbag, and waited. Mr. Archer waited, too. Several seconds went tiptoeing past. Something had to give way. It was Mr. Archer.

“ Won't you sign, Miss O'Wynn? ” he asked, with a painful smile.

“ Of course I will. But — it's awfully awk-

ward; but, do you know, Mr. Archer, you have forgotten the advance! ”

“ Advance, Miss O'Wynn? ” muttered Archer.

“ The fifty per cent. of the fee to be paid me when I sign, you know. ”

“ Fifty per cent.! My dear girl, who said anything about fifty per cent. advance? ” he cried, glaring.

“ Why, Gerald. ”

“ What's Gerald got to do with it, anyway? ”

“ He is my friend, of course. Don't you *see*, Mr. Archer? ”

He made a semi-strangled sound.

“ You mean that unless I pay you five hundred down you won't sign this contract? ” he said at last.

Winnie openly gave a sigh of relief.

“ That is splendidly put, Mr. Archer. I couldn't have put it so — so — neatly and concisely for anything. I always feel so nervous and awkward about money. ”

Mr. Archer pulled himself together and took a little walk around the room. He became quiet and more dangerous. Twice he went to the telephone, twice he altered his mind and left it alone.

Finally, he took out his note-case, extracted therefrom a cheque, and handed it to her. It was a bearer cheque for five hundred pounds, signed by Benson Boldre.

Winnie folded it away. It was tolerably evident to her that it had been given to Archer for just this purpose. Probably it was either Archer's or Boldre's idea of a limit for the whole contract, paid in advance for reasons best known to wolfy Mr. Boldre.

But Archer had not meant letting her have it.

"That cheque was not really intended for this purpose, you know, Miss O'Wynn," he said, eyeing her closely. "But it will do. You can get cash over the counter for it."

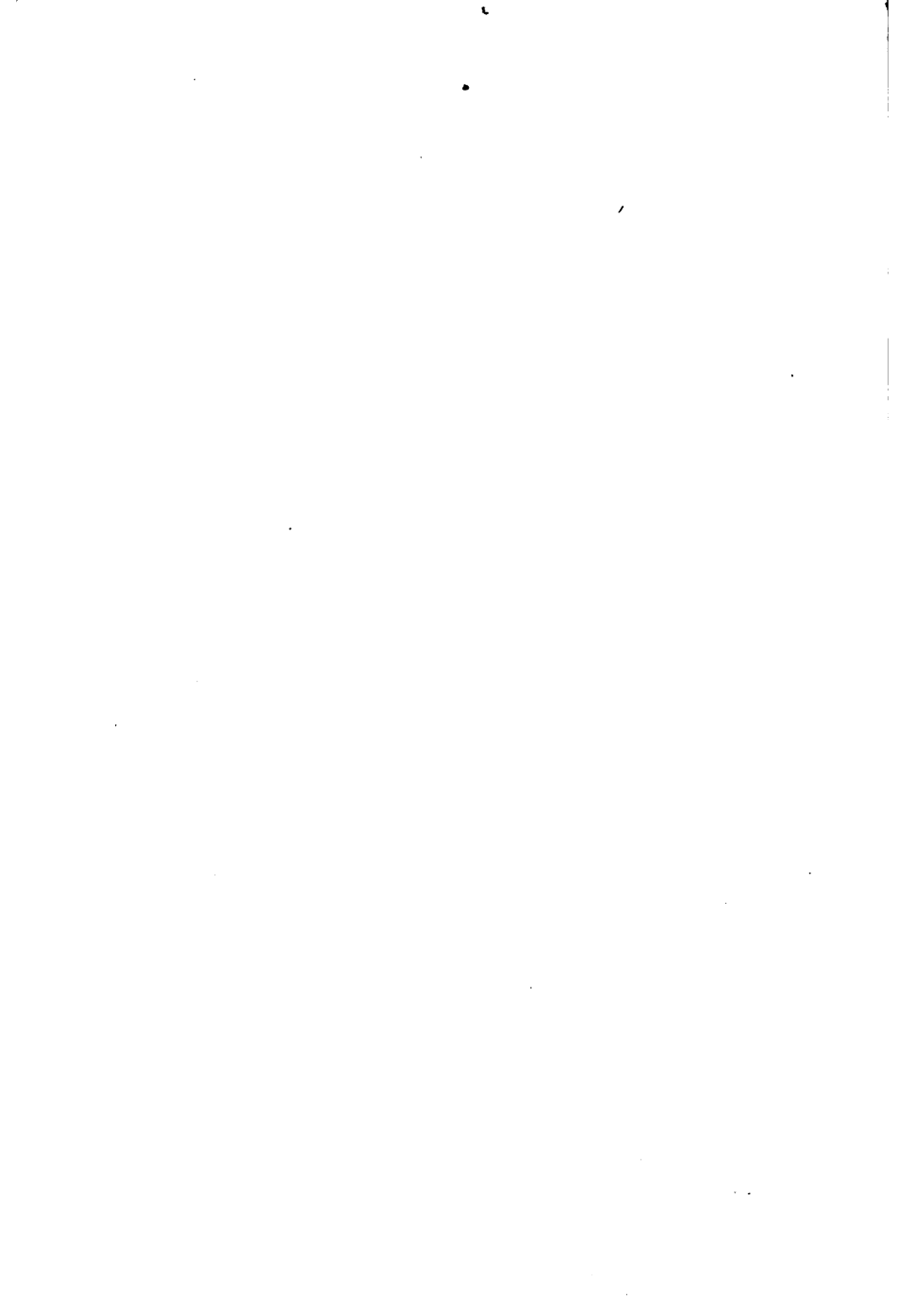
Winnie thanked him, signed the contract and receipt, and, leaving her address, went bankwards—very thoughtfully indeed.

"The wolves are hunting in couples this time," she said to herself, as, presently, she paid in at her own bank. "But I don't think they trust each other very well. I wonder why. This afternoon I will go out to Willesden and see their studios. It might help me to understand better anything that Miss Allen might tell me to-night."

For she had invited the secretary to dine with her that evening. Perhaps that was instinct; but Winnie trusted her instinct, for, so far, it had never proved untrustworthy.



**It took the form of a heavy bruise on the shapely  
arm of Miss Beryl Allen. Page 273.**



## CHAPTER XXV

*Wherein Winnie, having dined with a Lady who would fain become a Wise Woman, dons a New Pink Silk "Thinking" Kimono.*

THE visit to Willesden merely corroborated Miss Allen and George H. Jay.

Winnie discovered that the "studios" of the Ultra-Superba Film Company had degenerated into a couple of glazed and leaky sheds containing a few shabby properties. A novice could have seen that they called for a very heavy outlay to get them in shape even for a trivial film, and they certainly bore no sign of any intention of the firm to prepare a big historic film.

Wisely, Winnie decided not to waste valuable thought on the affair until she had more material to work upon. It saved her an afternoon of profitless concentration upon a puzzle insolvable without the key.

But the key to much of it was forthcoming that evening.

It took the form of a heavy bruise on the



shapely arm of Miss Beryl Allen, and several fresh bruises upon her already somewhat bruised heart. All had been caused by Mr. Archer, who, Winnie learned, appeared to have vented upon his secretary-housekeeper late that afternoon much of the anger which Winnie's not unskilful handling of him had aroused in his soul.

He had been in a deadly temper all day, and it seemed, though naturally Winnie did not comment on this, that the relations between his housekeeper-secretary and himself were of a nature sufficiently complicated to justify him, in his own opinion, in expending his anger on her.

But Miss Allen, looking very much less haggard — thanks, no doubt, to some of those staunch and true little toilet table aids to beauty to which pretty ladies are so deeply indebted — was clearly through with Mr. Archer.

She said so, her fine black eyes glowing, with the arrival of the *hors d'œuvres*, and she had not changed her mind with the departure of the sweets.

“ I have been a fool,” she said tersely, over their coffee. “ For the last ten years I have allowed my heart — my emotions — to run me, and you see where it has landed me. In future, I follow the promptings of my brains. Don't

feel annoyed, Miss O'Wynn, if I advise you to do the same. Trust no men and fewer women. I know, you see; I have been through the mill."

Winnie smiled upon her and reminded her that it had not robbed her of all her beauty or charm. Miss Allen laughed, less tensely.

"Charm!" she said. "Since I have known you I've begun to wonder if I ever had any. *You* are the one with the charm, Miss O'Wynn. You could charm a woman who was jealous of you — and that's a miracle. As for charming men — you couldn't help that."

That was true enough.

They went to Winnie's flat for the remainder of the evening, and then Winnie "charmed" her into telling her story.

And her story contained practically everything that Winnie wanted to know.

After that, Winnie told her a few things, — things that stripped the years, the bitterness, and worry from her like magic, so that she changed wonderfully within a space of hours, almost into another woman.

"If you can do for me half those things, my dear," she cried, "it will be as though you had lifted from a quicksand some poor soul who was all but submerged. Ah, you will see! . . . I

have been a fool. . . . I shall become a Wise Woman! And have some happiness again."

She flushed, and her eyes glowed. And Winnie, watching her — this tall, slender, distinguished woman, still on the edge of the thirties — agreed with her.

Within ten minutes of Beryl Allen's departure, Winnie in a new pink silk thinking kimono, was curled up on the big couch before the fire, fathoms deep in thought.

The secretary-housekeeper's story had emptied practically all the pieces of the jig-saw puzzle on to her mental table. All she had to do was to fit them together.

She mused.

" I knew I was right about Mr. Archer — he really is *sus porcus*. And he is a criminal, too. . . . I can't imagine any woman running away with him, as Beryl Boldre did, even though, ten years ago, he may have been ever so much handsomer and nicer. But Beryl says that Mr. Boldre is as bad, in a different way, as Archer. . . . I don't think I like either of them very well — and I am not going to allow myself to be victimized by either of them. Both are wolves by temperament, and one is a *porcus* — or is it a *sus*? — by disposition. I am going to fight hard to defend myself from them both.

Now, let me see. Ten years ago, Mr. Boldre, in South Africa, had tired of his wife, Beryl, and was cruel to her. He made a trip to England without her, and while he was gone she met, fell in love, and ran away with Archer. After all sorts of ventures—mostly failures—Archer drifted to London and made a failure of his last venture, the Ultra-Superba Film Company, which isn't really a company at all. He has been trying to find somebody to put money into the company, and has always failed until he found out that Mr. Boldre, who has become very wealthy in South Africa, has now a good social position in London. He took advantage of the fact that Mr. Boldre did not know who he was to try to get him interested in his film company, and (Beryl thinks) by hinting that he knows of and can cause all that old scandal about Boldre's cruelty to his wife to come up again, he managed to get Boldre inclined to consider favourably the idea of investing money in the film company. Beryl is always kept out of the way when there is any possibility of her meeting Boldre. Archer is really subtly blackmailing Mr. Boldre, but not unendurably, for it suits Boldre to keep all that past scandal quiet, and it may prove a profitable investment as well, particularly as Archer

has a good film in view. After all, the Anne Boleyn idea is quite a good idea. But nothing happened, and things were getting worse and worse financially with Archer, until Mr. Boldre met me that day with Gerald Peel. He seems to have taken a great liking to me, and sees an opportunity to kill three birds with one stone — how greedy! ”

Winnie smiled, ticking her points off on her fingers.

“ First, he keeps Archer quiet about the past by investing six thousand pounds in his company.

“ Second, if the Anne film is good he might make a great deal of money.

“ Third, he can ingratiate himself with me — as he wants to, for I know he is a wolf, I saw it in his eyes — by insisting that part of the money he is investing is paid to me nominally as salary for acting in the film. It is just a way of softening me towards him with the same money as he is using to quiet Archer. How ingenious! It is just like a wolf. . . . And he might even make a great profit at the end of it all! ”

She laughed gaily, as thus satisfactorily she laid bare the gentle Mr. Boldre's idea of a

really good investment for a few odd thousands. Then she grew serious again.

She looked altogether delightful as she sat there, facing the fire, puzzling out this shady-side jigsaw — like an exquisite child puzzling out her next day's school work.

“ *But* — ” she said, “ — but Mr. Boldre does not know that (if Beryl guesses rightly) Mr. Archer intends to spend not one penny of the money on any film, but quietly to disappear with the money as soon as he gets it — leaving the business — and Mr. Boldre — and Beryl — and me, his “ star ” (her eyes danced), to do the best we can. I am sure that is so from his reluctance this morning to part with the five hundred pounds Mr. Boldre meant for me.”

“ That is the position. But these men wish to take some wolfish advantage of me, and I must fight hard to defend myself — but how? What can a lonely little girl like me do against such merciless, cruel men? And I have to help poor Beryl Allen — I do think Archer might have allowed her to call herself Beryl Archer. He is not a bit chivalrous! It makes me ashamed of men for their own sake. . . . I will go to bed when I have had my chocolate, and think and think and *think* until I think of some

way of defending ourselves!" she concluded indignantly.

Then she rose, smiling affectionately at Best-Beloved-in-the-Mirror, and touched the bell to indicate to her housekeeper that she was ready for her going-to-bed chocolate.

## CHAPTER XXVI

*In which Winnie is asked in Marriage, postpones Her Answer, permits Mr. Boldre to purchase a Jewel Case, and grieves Mr. George Careful Jay.*

BUT the morning brought a development in the form of an invitation to lunch with Mr. Benson Boldre. Winnie accepted it (though not in the spirit in which possibly it was offered), also the motor run which Boldre proposed for the afternoon, and the dinner following the run.

It was, as she expected, the beginning of an extremely assiduous bid for her affections by the gentleman from Africa's sunny clime, so assiduous, indeed, that Winnie swiftly became aware that Boldre was quite amazingly in love with her. Nevertheless, she expected to receive no proposition from him except some perfectly unacceptable wolfy invitation to share as many of his world's goods as he could spare, except his name. That, she was prepared to deal with when it arose.

But she certainly did not expect what ac-



tually happened. Boldre was a tolerably competent judge of people, too, it seemed, for he wasted no time in making impossible proposals, though, doubtless, that had been his intention when he first arranged to "endow" Winnie with the Anne Boleyn money.

Four days later he quietly but firmly asked Winnie to marry him and settle down with him in South Africa; life there to be mitigated by occasional visits home.

Winnie was startled, but, as usual, kept her head.

She looked at him shyly with those bright and childlike eyes of hers.

"Oh — but, please, I have not thought about marriage yet," she fluttered. "You see, I am only nineteen."

He said it all over again. Winnie was too busy thinking to interrupt him. It was evident that either he believed his first wife was dead, or could be easily divorced, or he was so carried away that he was willing to risk it. Beryl Allen had been right when she said he was as bad in his way as Archer, reflected Winnie.

She temporized.

"You must let me think it over, please," she cooed. "It is a — a great honour. You are so

kind. It moves me very much. I can't think what you can see in me — just a little girl like me. Please let me think about it all for a few days, Mr. Boldre. I don't feel that I could cope. . . , You are so rich, aren't you? I should have to learn about money, and how to manage people. It would be so responsible, and I am only nineteen, after all! ”

“ Perhaps that's why, little girl,” he said avidly. But he was satisfied with the way she had received his proposal. His quick, hard mind ranged swiftly forward. After all, even if his wife of ten years before ever appeared again (which was unlikely) he had no doubt that she could be swiftly divorced, or this sweet, simple child, Winnie, be persuaded into shrinking from the publicity of legal action. Besides, he wanted her, and that settled it.

So he smiled one of his less wolfy smiles.

“ Take your time, my dear,” he said. “ I don't want to stampede you — to hurry you. As long as you feel you don't hate me —— ”

“ Oh, Mr. Boldre! Hate you! ” Winnie was shocked.

He laughed and patted her hand, on one of the slender fingers of which glowed a great, green emerald.

“ That's all right, dear little girl. Think it

over; only try not to keep me waiting too long!"

Winnie had no intention of keeping him waiting.

It was Monday. She knew that he had arranged to pay Archer the balance of the money he was investing in the Ultra-Superba Company the following Wednesday, and she decided that she could give him his answer on Thursday.

She glanced at him, dropped her eyes, then, with an access of courage looked him full in the face, with a wonderful expression of half-surrender that shot a thrill through him, *roué* though he was.

"I—I don't think I want to keep you waiting long," she whispered. "I will decide on Thursday."

"Splendid!" he said, a little wildly, quite sure of her.

But he could not leave it at that. He was in a very picturesque mood indeed and instantly proved it.

"And now," he said, "I am going to have my own way about something. You have always refused to accept anything from me, my dear. But I insist on marking this afternoon with a white stone"—she thought of dia-

monds — “ yes, a milestone! ” — she had a better thought — “ I am going to buy you something. ”

She rose.

“ Oh, ought I to accept? ” she said, “ until after Thursday. ”

“ You have got to, my dear, ” he told her with fond firmness.

“ May I telephone to a friend first, please? ” she asked, with a curious sweet air of submission that charmed him.

“ Some girl friend, ” he thought, and agreed.

But it was not to any girl friend she telephoned. It was merely to reliable Mr. George H. Jay, that breezy man.

Briefly, she begged Mr. Jay to wait at his office that evening until she had seen him. She was in difficulties and needed his never-failing succour. Mr. Jay informed her, with enthusiasm, that large herds of wild horses would fail to drag him from his office until she had called. Sweetly she thanked him, spoke of his kind and chivalrous heart, and returned to Mr. Boldre.

Who had been thinking.

He said so.

“ I have thought of a splendid scheme, ” he said. “ This little milestone. I want to know if there is anything — any one thing — which

you want particularly? I first thought of giving you a surprise; but I think it would be better to give you something you have wanted badly."

"There is nothing," said Winnie, looking sorry to disappoint him.

"Nothing, child!"

She was gazing out at the muddy streets.

"Unless you could invent some wonderful invention by which I could go about London without getting my shoes and skirts splashed by mud." She laughed gaily. "A new kind of golosh—or mackintosh dress protector! Isn't that absurd? I am so happy to-day that I want to say absurd things!"

But Mr. Boldre did not appear to think that at all absurd.

"That is soon done!" he said, "and I'll do it."

She looked surprised.

"Please, I was only joking!" she cried.

"I am going to buy you a pair of goloshes and a dress protector," he said, mysteriously.

She smiled affectionately.

"How funny you are, dear Mr. Boldre."

Five minutes later they were sliding across Regent Street in Boldre's big car. They pulled up outside an establishment which had no re-

semblance whatever either to a goloshery or mackintoshery. But it certainly was a very fine motor depot.

“ There,” said Boldre spaciously, “ there is the shoe and dress protector I am going to buy you! ”

He pointed to a perfect little miracle of a 12 h.p. light *coupé* in royal blue.

Winnie knew it. That little “ bus ” was an old friend of hers. It had wanted her from the day they put it in the window. Its graceful little domed mud-guards had always seemed like two chubby arms held appealingly out for her; its electric head-lamps always seemed like two eyes shining with pleasure at her appearance, dulling with disappointment when she left. She had come to see it several times. Once, when she had some shopping to do in that street, she and Boldre had paused to look at it.

But she had not thought he would be quite so quick in the uptake. . . . She had expected a wee trifle more trouble.

“ Oh, no, no, please not; why, it is eight hundred pounds, Mr. Boldre. I couldn't — it would be wrong! ” she protested, horrified. “ I thought you meant just an ordinary present: a

stationery case — something like that; a little jewel case — ”

“ Well, my dear, isn't this a jewel case? ”

“ Oh, how witty and quick you are, ” sighed Winnie, and protested again.

As usual, it was all over when Winnie began to protest, all over except the paying.

Boldre was accustomed to having his own way. He had it on this occasion. In any case he knew that his wife would want such a “ ’bus ” sooner or later; it might just as well be now as a few days later. Winnie could drive, he knew. She had told him days before how her daddy had taught her.

The car was purchased and ordered to be sent forthwith to Lady Fasterton's garage, with a note from Winnie to that lady. She knew that dear May would extend her hospitality to her little friend's car for a while.

But Winnie was going to dine with Boldre that evening, and it was already late afternoon. She decided to allow the mechanic, who was taking the car to Lady Fasterton's, to drop her at her flat.

She thanked Boldre while they were running the *coupé* out. He would have preferred to be thanked in the privacy of his own limousine, but that would have meant denying his jewel

her first ride in the new case. So, as well-trained men do, he put up with it.

But Winnie merely stopped at her flat to pick up her cheque book and to telephone to Miss Beryl Allen at Archer's flat, asking a question. Whatever it was, the answer was satisfactory. Then she sweetly directed the driver of her nice new *coupé* to run along to Finch Court.

Mr. George H. Jay, as promised, was awaiting her.

It was with something remotely resembling paternal or avuncular pride that he welcomed her, and, though present, his natural caution was not markedly apparent. He was beginning to realize that the simple innocence of this exquisite little *ingénue* was not so dangerous to him when she came to his office to make use of him as it was when he invited her there with the intention of making use of her.

“ Oh, thank you, dear Mr. Jay, for bothering to wait for me,” she cried. “ You know I am ashamed to worry you so — only an idea came into my head, and I thought you would help me, please.”

“ Yes, indeed, my dear little lady, that I will,” he offered, resonantly.

“ It is not very important to you, I know, but it is to me. I want to invest — isn't that what



they say, please, 'invest' ? — I want to invest five hundred pounds! ”

A faint anxiety flashed into the eyes of gentle Mr. Jay.

But he need not have worried.

In less than ten minutes she had made it quite clear as to the precise manner in which the five hundred, for which she gave him an open cheque, was to be invested. He warned her seriously that she was going to lose her money.

“ You are getting a worthless thing for the money, dear Miss Winnie, I assure you. I have made inquiries and I really know.”

But Winnie was gently determined and not to be shaken.

She felt sure that she was making a good investment, she said timidly, and even offered to sell Mr. Jay a fifth share of it for one hundred pounds — an offer he declined with some haste and but poorly concealed horror. But he promised at last faithfully to carry out her request, without reservation at all, and she hurried away.

He shook his heavy head as he returned from seeing her out.

“ Just a baby,” he mused. “ A sweet but lucky baby. She's going to burn her fingers — well, it may be a good thing for her. Make her

careful. A lesson. Lord, what a wild-cat buy! Here's London full of rotten things to invest in, and she's managed to pick the rottenest of all to put five hundred in! And she offered me a fifth share for a hundred — *me!* — old George Careful Jay. Well, well, it only shows you that all the people can't have all the luck all the time. Pity, though — she's the prettiest, nicest little thing I've ever seen — like a little bird, bless her! Still, it'll do her good — and she can afford it! ”

Then he looked at the cheque, pondered a little, and made a note or two.

“ I'm to be ‘ very careful, please, ’ ” he chuckled. “ Right. I'll pull it off first thing to-morrow. As she's got to lose her money, I may as well lose it for her as per instructions. ”

That was on Monday evening.

## CHAPTER XXVII

*Wherein Winnie, in Self-defence, surprises Sus Porcus Archer, saddens Mr. Boldre, amazes Lady Fasterton, gratifies Miss Allen and shocks and amuses Mr. Jay.*

ON Wednesday Mr. Benson Boldre was gay, very gay, for Winnie and her friend, Lady Fasterton, lunched at his flat. He would have preferred Winnie alone, but Winnie had thought otherwise.

It had been a very jolly lunch, and they were having a little cigarette at the end of it when a note was brought to Boldre. He nodded slightly when he read it and glanced at Winnie.

“Archer is ready now to start serious work on the film,” he said, smiling. “The scenario is fixed up. He wants to arrange about your costumes and some other things at once.” Boldre laughed and continued: “And naturally he wants the rest of the money I’m investing in it. You must try to get him to pay you another instalment of your salary to-morrow.”

Winnie shook her head.

“ Oh, I couldn't press him unkindly,” she said. “ Are you sending him the money? ”

Boldre nodded.

“ If you ladies will forgive the interruption to our little festivity, I will send it now.”

He went across to his desk — they were having coffee in his big, comfortable library — and scribbled the cheque.

“ There, mademoiselle, that's what your big first (and last) appearance in Filmiland is costing me,” he said playfully, passing the pink slip.

It was an open cheque to the Ultra-Superba Company — as Winnie had judged it would be, for when Archer wanted the money he wanted it quickly — for £5,500.

She gazed at it, almost, it seemed, in terror.

“ What a huge sum! ” she cried. “ I did not dream — look, May dear, it is costing all that money to make the film in which I am acting as Anne Boleyn.”

Lady Fasterton smiled.

“ My dear child; that's quite moderate — extremely moderate for a film nowadays,” she informed the girl, and Boldre nodded.

“ It seems vast to me,” sighed Winnie.

She offered the cheque to Boldre, then drew

it back, her eyes sparkling with the excitement of a sudden idea.

" Oh, Mr. Boldre, let me take Mr. Archer this money. I'm sure it will be an omen of good luck. I am going there this afternoon if he is ready to arrange about my costumes. May will come, won't you? And, perhaps, you will come too, Mr. Boldre! "

She was as excited as a child.

Boldre smiled.

" All right, you baby," he said. " You can be the good fairy who hands Archer the money, if you like. It's very kind of Lady Fasterton to help choose your costumes. And, if you are likely to be more than an hour at Archer's, perhaps I may be permitted to come on there presently. I have to wait here till half-past two. My lawyer is calling — about some settlements," he added significantly.

Lady Fasterton had been acting *in loco parentis* to Winnie, and " marriage " and " settlements " were practically interchangeable terms with " dear May."

Winnie looked shyly away.

" But you *will* come on, please, won't you? We shall wait," she coaxed.

" Just as quickly as I can," he promised.

" Ah, you are so kind," she breathed, her big blue eyes radiant.

So she folded and tucked away the cheque, and with Lady Fasterton went happily off.

" That man is mad for you, child," said May Fasterton, as her car rolled away. " You can tie him round his own little finger. Did you tell Evans where to take us? "

Winnie smiled.

" Yes, dear."

But Evans, on the quarter-deck of the Fasterton car, went not direct to Archer's office. Winnie had told him where to go. He stopped first at Boldre's bank, then at Winnie's.

Finally he arrived at the office of the Ultra-Superba Company.

There was no sign of Beryl Allen; there never was when Boldre was liable to appear.

Even as Mr. Adalbert Archer welcomed them, another car slid up and Boldre entered, in high spirits.

" Here we are then," he said. " I was quicker than I expected. How about those costumes, Archer? "

Archer said something softly.

" The cheque. Yes, certainly. Miss O'Wynn brought it," replied Boldre. He laughed, turning to Winnie.

But Winnie did not laugh. She was looking a little shocked.

“ Oh, but, please, the cheque was not for Mr. Archer,” she said timidly. “ I — surely, Mr. Archer, you don't expect it. It was to be a little surprise for you ” — she smiled to Boldre — “ but surely, surely you aren't surprised, too, Mr. Archer! ”

“ Not surprised! ” choked Archer. He certainly did not look so much surprised as he looked struck by lightning.

“ Why, dear Mr. Archer, it was not intended for you, was it? The cheque was meant for the Ultra-Superba Film Company! ”

Boldre's face grew serious and suspicious. Was this child an adventuress, after all?

Lady Fasterton was frankly amazed.

Winnie went to the door, looked out, smiled, and beckoned, and there entered unto the assembled company gentle Mr. George H. Jay, looking as much like a very old-established, excessively respectable family lawyer as he could.

“ This gentleman is Mr. Jay, who is so kind that he looks after my business affairs for me. You see ” — she smiled witchingly upon them all — “ he understands so well about things, and I don't.”

“ One hardly expects to find old heads on young shoulders,” stated Mr. Jay, bowing to everybody. Archer was glaring at him like a man who sees phantoms.

Winnie continued.

“ Would you please tell Mr. Boldre who is the owner of the Ultra-Superba Film Company, Mr. Jay?”

George H. seemed surprised.

“ Why, naturally, you are the owner. I bought it, lock, stock, and barrel, on your behalf yesterday from Mr. Archer for the sum of £500 cash. I — ah — have the documents here, dated yesterday, and all in order, I believe.”

Archer stood forward, his face white with anger.

“ It was clearly understood that you take possession as from next Monday — any incoming between then and now was due to me as — ”  
He stopped abruptly, as Boldre cut in:

“ Sold the business yesterday! What on earth for, man? Were you mad?”

Archer said nothing.

So Winnie said it for him.

“ Why, Mr. Archer is leaving England on Friday. Didn't you know? He has booked a passage on the *Aquatic* under the name of



Milton." (She had got that from Beryl, who had got it from Archer's desk.)

"Leaving England?" began Boldre, mystified. Then suddenly his face cleared. "Oh, I see, I see! You were bolting with that money, were you, Archer? I see now why you wanted a bearer cheque! Why, you crook!" His eyes hardened, and he stepped towards the telephone.

Archer drew a swift breath, frowned heavily in a violent effort to think, decided not to wait, and sprang for the door. He was through it in a flash. Somebody — a woman — cried out in surprise in the outer office, a door banged, and Archer was gone. He had thrown away a certain five thousand five hundred for an extra five hundred, precisely and exactly as Winnie had expected he would, when she had sent Mr. Jay to offer five hundred for the worthless business. Archer had thought that he would have cashed the big cheque and vanished before Mr. Jay put in an appearance to take possession, and he simply could not resist the opportunity of taking the money Mr. Jay, acting on behalf of a client "who wished to go into the film business," had offered him.

He had landed the small fish, but the big one had bitten on Winnie's little hook.

Gratefully, Boldre turned to the girl.

“ Thank you, my dear girl,” he said. “ You are as wise and sensible as you are good. You shall have a necklace for that. What a good thing you didn't give that villain the cheque.”

“ Yes, isn't it? The money is safely in the bank,” said Winnie.

Boldre laughed joyously.

“ Yes — in the bank. Splendid,” he said.

“ In my bank,” cooed Winnie.

“ Oh! ” Boldre jumped. Mr. Jay turned his head to hide a smile; he knew exactly how Boldre was feeling. He had been there himself.

“ In *your* bank, my dear girl! ” said Boldre. “ But *why*? ”

“ Because, of course, it is my money, you see,” explained the girl kindly.

There was a strained silence.

“ I don't quite understand — ” began Boldre, reasonably enough.

“ It was paid to the Ultra-Superba, and I am the Ultra-Superba, don't you see? ” said Winnie patiently. “ And — *do* forgive me, but apart from that — ” She paused, putting her hand on the door-knob.

“ Yes — apart from that? ” repeated Boldre unpleasantly.

“ Apart from that, how dare you insult me

by trying — by deliberately arranging — to marry me when you are already a married man. You have planned a wicked thing, Mr. Boldre! ” cried Winnie, with a rather effective sob.

“ You will have to prove that,” snapped Boldre.

Winnie opened the door.

“ Come in, please, Beryl,” she said, and turned to Boldre, as the distinguished-looking Beryl entered.

“ Do you know this lady, Mr. Boldre? ” asked Winnie, almost brokenly, and flew to Lady Fasterton’s ready arms.

“ Oh, May, May, take me away. I have never been so badly treated in my life,” she seemed to sob. “ Are *all* men wolves? ”

Mr. Jay understood then, and he put up his hands in a perfect fury of admiration.

“ My God! She wins again! By forty thousand lengths! Horse, foot and guns — and the devil take the hindmost! ” he babbled.

A terrible thought flashed into his mind.

“ Five into fifty-five hundred! Eleven hundred! Good Lord have mercy on us! *Me*, too! Eleven hundred for nothing in twenty-four hours — a fifth share — and I turned it down.”

He looked as if he did not know whether to cry or laugh.

Boldre and Beryl were talking in low tones of repressed anger and recrimination, and oddly, Mr. Jay caught himself thinking that she was one of the most graceful women he had ever seen, as Winnie was the prettiest.

Lady Fasterton spoke in the icy tones of an annoyed aristocrat.

“This is all very tedious — and impossibly sordid,” she said, her arm around Winnie, who seemed on the whole to be bearing up tolerably well — “and I do not see quite why we need suffer it — ”

Boldre brushed past his wife.

“I am very upset,” he said naïvely. “There is an explanation, I assure you, Lady Fasterton — Miss O’Wynn. You will hear from me. I can explain everything. Only not now. I am upset — I am not feeling quite well. I have had a great shock.”

He bowed and departed, no doubt to begin the construction of an explanation, a task which, judging by his subsequent early departure to South Africa, he failed to accomplish.

Winnie observed Mr. Jay’s gaze of open admiration for Beryl, who had made a good use of certain financial aid from Winnie and was looking wonderful.

The girl smiled, whispering to Lady FASTER-  
TON.

“ May, dear, don't bother to wait. Let me dine with you to-night and tell you the whole story.”

“ That's a promise, Winnie, remember. What adventures you have! ”

She suffered Mr. Jay to see her into her car.

Left alone, Winnie and Beryl shook hands, with shining eyes.

“ You were wonderful, my dear! ” They said it simultaneously.

Winnie passed her a cheque. It was for a thousand.

“ Is that agreeable, Beryl? . . . It will last you until ” — she smiled — “ Mr. Boldre has got his divorce and I marry you again.”

Beryl, thrilled by the cheque, laughed.

“ Again, you darling! To whom? ”

“ To whom? ” repeated Winnie.

Even as she spoke, the door opened, and as though in answer to her inquiry, Mr. George H. Jay stepped into the room. It was, or seemed, so apt and obvious a reply to Beryl's question that Winnie smiled involuntarily. She knew that Mr. Jay was at least a genuine bachelor.

He saw the smile.

“ Aha! ” said he innocently. “ No wonder you smile, dear Miss Winnie. You have something to smile about, you know. But ” — he shook his head ruefully, thinking of mere money — “ I am afraid that I haven't. ”

Winnie wondered.

It was true that Beryl had a past. But, unquestionably, so had Mr. Jay. Winnie wondered. Then she glanced at her watch and became hurried.

“ Oh, but it is so late. I must go now. Dear Mr. Jay, will you take care of Mrs. Boldre, please? You are staying for a little while at the Great Southern Hotel, aren't you, Beryl? I am sure Mr. Jay will make some house agents find you a nice flat. Mr. Jay is the kindest man in London. He has been sweet to me — and I know you will be to Beryl, please, won't you, Mr. Jay? ”

“ Indeed, indeed, I will — any mortal thing I can do — trust old George Jay, ” he said reverberantly.

Winnie shook hands.

“ I have promised to spend the early part of the winter with Lady Fasterton at Newmarket, or I would help, too. But Beryl understands, don't you, dear? ”

Yes, Beryl understood.

“ We are going on the day after to-morrow and, perhaps, I shall not see either of you again for a little while ” — she was misty-eyed, a little forlorn, but very sweet — “ but you will be good friends, won't you? And I will write sometimes — and come up to town to see you, perhaps, if you would like me to.”

It appeared that they would.

“ Beryl has had a good deal of unhappiness in her short life, Mr. Jay, and it isn't fair. So you will warn her against the wolves that prowl about, just as you warned me, won't you? ”

Assuredly Mr. Jay would. He was quite emphatic about it.

So Winnie was made happy.

She made Mr. Jay a present of the Ultra-Superba Company, as a going concern, then and there, just to prove it.

Then she said “ Au Revoir,” and permitted Mr. Jay to find her a taxi to take her on to “dear May's.”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

*Wherein Winnie gives her Celebrated Imitation of the King in His Counting House and takes a Rest.*

NINE o'clock on the following morning found Winnie engaged in considering a problem of such importance that she was allowing her cigarette to smoke itself on the silver ash-tray which, with the early morning chocolate things and a few fresh flowers, helped to make the table by her bed quite a pretty picture.

Mrs. Darnell, her housekeeper, had reported plentiful fog, keen cold, and rather more than the average mud outside, and so the curtains were still drawn, the light still burned, and the electric fire still warmed the pinkly cosy inmost nest of the girl as, looking charming in her dressing jacket, she sat up in bed studying the rough pencil notes she had been making upon a sheet of writing paper. The notes were somewhat as follows :



## CASH ACCOUNT.

| <i>I have</i>                   | £       | <i>I owe</i>  | £     |
|---------------------------------|---------|---|-------|
| Money at the bank               | 23,267  | No money owed to anybody except for the electric light account, say ..... |       |
| Deduct electric light money.... | 4       |   |       |
|                                 | <hr/>   |   | <hr/> |
| Balance .....                   | £23,263 |   | 4     |

*And my clothes and furniture and motor and my little race-horse, Lullaby, who is paid for till the end of next month.*

*Five per cent. on £23,260 is  $232 \times 5 = £1,160$ .*

*Add sixty shillings = £1,163.*

*Total income if left alone, £1,163.*

*Query—Leave it alone ?*

From which it will be seen that, like a sensible little girl, Winnie had been counting up her money.

She surveyed her balance sheet thoughtfully for some minutes, soliloquizing.

“ If daddy were alive, I know what he would say,” she murmured. “ He would strongly advise ‘ turning it over.’ But I don’t think I am very clever at turning my own money over. It produces a crop even if you do nothing but sit and watch it. Of course, I could go into the City and learn how to invest it skilfully and

make a fortune — perhaps. I could get a position in a stockbroker's office and work my way up — or down."

She frowned a little, thinking hard.

"But if I did I should find myself just a little, lonely, bewildered girl in the middle of crowds and crowds of great, keen men as fierce and merciless as a pack of wolves!" She smiled. "I should have to compete with them — in their own forests. But if I stay as I am, I don't compete with them at all. And none of them competes with me — so far, they seem to compete for me — in *my* forests. That is ever so much nicer. I think it will be better to leave it alone."

She carefully crossed out the ? opposite her query.

"After all," she mused, "I have only been in London six months, and I have secured twenty-three thousand pounds, a splendid little race-horse, a dear little car, a sweet emerald ring, and lots of frocks and things. That is at the rate of forty-six thousand a year — and four hundred and sixty thousand in ten years. I am only nineteen, and if I live to be sixty that will be another forty-one years!"

She worked out another sum — thus :

$$\begin{array}{r}
 £46,000 \\
 41 \\
 \hline
 46,000 \\
 1,840,000 \\
 \hline
 \underline{\underline{£1,886,000}}
 \end{array}$$

She stared, a little astonished at the figure. Then she smiled.

“ And I’ve forgotten the compound interest,” she said. She began — much in the spirit in which a kitten light-heartedly chases the wisp of fur it uses as a tail — to work out the compound interest on £46,000 a year for forty-one years, realized that she was in the land of day-dreams, and decided that she could leave that particular bit of accountancy for a little.

“ I should hardly need it,” she said. A thought came to her, and she smiled.

“ Why, that’s what daddy used to do,” she murmured. “ Work out what he would have won if the horses he backed had not lost. Dear daddy. If only he were alive now he could have it all — all! ”

She sighed, for she had been passionately fond of the father who had taught her so many

things that, although not part of the strictly conventional education of a girl, were, at any rate, extraordinarily useful.

Then she remembered that she was due that morning to practise driving her new car for an hour with an expert from the makers, and emerging from day-dreamland, adventured a slender little foot out of bed, *en route* to her bath.

She would not have missed that bit of practice for a good deal, as it had been agreed overnight that she was to drive Lady Fasterton and herself down to Hawkshover on the following day, and she did not wish to start with an accident what promised to prove a very enjoyable rest from her warfare with the wolves.

It would certainly be two months before poor May conquered, as she was determined to do, her little weakness for cocaine, and Winnie was able, with a clear conscience, to look forward not only to helping her friend through her cure, but to getting better acquainted with her pearl of price, Lullaby. And there would be fox-hunting. Which reminded her — she would have to “arrange” about mounts.

Ah, well, there were wolves in the country, too. No doubt she would be able to defend her-

self against them to the tune of a couple or so of good hunters.

Then Mrs. Darnell warned her through the bathroom door that in three minutes precisely her breakfast would be ready, and, laughing softly to herself for the sheer joy of life, Winnie slipped into her bath, where, for the time being, she may very gracefully be left.





This book should be returned to the Library on or before the last date stamped below.

A fine of five cents a day is incurred by retaining it beyond the specified time.

Please return promptly.

~~DUE AUG 19 33~~

DUE AUG 28 1925

~~DUE SEP 25 33~~

DUE SEP 20 1925

DUE OCT 1 1925

DUE FEB 2 1929

~~DUE OCT 23 '39~~

MAR 11 1923

~~DUE MAY 11 '44~~

DUE APR 15 1930

DUE OCT 27 1930

APR 25 '45

~~DUE MAY 2 1932~~

~~DUE JUN 10 '33~~



23530.44.130

Winnie O'Wynn and the wolves /

Widener Library

002778297



3 2044 086 873 098