Part 4

After a day or so she thought more steadily. She found herself in a phase of violent reaction against the suffrage movement, a phase greatly promoted by one of those unreasonable objections people of Ann Veronica's temperament take at times—to the girl in the next cell to her own. She was a large, resilient girl, with a foolish smile, a still more foolish expression of earnestness, and a throaty contralto voice. She was noisy and hilarious and enthusiastic, and her hair was always abominably done. In the chapel she sang with an open-lunged gusto that silenced Ann Veronica altogether, and in the exercising-yard slouched round with carelessly dispersed feet. Ann Veronica decided that "hoydenish ragger" was the only phrase to express her. She was always breaking rules, whispering asides, intimating signals. She became at times an embodiment for Ann Veronica of all that made the suffrage movement defective and unsatisfying.

She was always initiating petty breaches of discipline. Her greatest exploit was the howling before the mid-day meal. This was an imitation of the noises made by the carnivora at the Zoological Gardens at feeding-time; the idea was taken up by prisoner after prisoner until the whole place was alive with barkings, yappings, roarings, pelican chatterings, and feline yowlings, interspersed with shrieks of hysterical laughter. To many in that crowded solitude it came as an extraordinary relief. It was better even than the hymn-singing. But it annoyed Ann Veronica.

"Idiots!" she said, when she heard this pandemonium, and with particular reference to this young lady with the throaty contralto next door. "Intolerable idiots!..."

It took some days for this phase to pass, and it left some scars and something like a decision. "Violence won't do it," said Ann Veronica. "Begin violence, and the woman goes under....

"But all the rest of our case is right.... Yes."

As the long, solitary days wore on, Ann Veronica found a number of definite attitudes and conclusions in her mind.

One of these was a classification of women into women who are and women who are not hostile to men. "The real reason why I am out of place here," she said, "is because I like men. I can talk with them. I've never found them hostile. I've got no feminine class feeling. I don't want any laws or freedoms to protect me from a man like Mr. Capes. I know that in my heart I would take whatever he gave....

“A woman wants a proper alliance with a man, a man who is better stuff than herself. She wants that and needs it more than anything else in the world. It may not be just, it may not be fair, but things are so. It isn’t law, nor custom, nor masculine violence settled that. It is just how things happen to be. She wants to be free—she wants to be legally and economically free, so as not to be subject to the wrong man; but only God, who made the world, can alter things to prevent her being slave to the right one.

“And if she can’t have the right one?

“We’ve developed such a quality of preference!”

She rubbed her knuckles into her forehead. “Oh, but life is difficult!” she groaned. “When you loosen the tangle in one place you tie a knot in another.... Before there is any change, any real change, I shall be dead—dead—dead and finished—two hundred years!...”

Part 5

One afternoon, while everything was still, the wardress heard her cry out suddenly and alarmingly, and with great and unmistakable passion, “Why in the name of goodness did I burn that twenty pounds?”

Part 6

She sat regarding her dinner. The meat was coarse and disagreeably served.

“I suppose some one makes a bit on the food,” she said....

“One has such ridiculous ideas of the wicked common people and the beautiful machinery of order that ropes them in. And here are these places, full of contagion!

“Of course, this is the real texture of life, this is what we refined secure people forget. We think the whole thing is straight and noble at bottom, and it isn’t. We think if we just defy the friends we have and go out into the world everything will become easy and splendid. One doesn’t realize that even the sort of civilization one has at Morningside Park is held together with difficulty. By policemen one mustn’t shock.

“This isn’t a world for an innocent girl to walk about in. It’s a world of dirt and skin diseases and parasites. It’s a world in which the law can be a stupid pig and the police-stations dirty dens. One wants helpers and protectors—and clean water.

“Am I becoming reasonable or am I being tamed?

“I’m simply discovering that life is many-sided and complex and puzzling. I thought one had only to take it by the throat.

“It hasn’t GOT a throat!”

Part 7

One day the idea of self-sacrifice came into her head, and she made, she thought, some important moral discoveries.

It came with an extreme effect of re-discovery, a remarkable novelty. “What have I been all this time?” she asked herself, and answered, “Just stark egotism, crude assertion of Ann Veronica, without a modest rag of religion or discipline or respect for authority to cover me!”

It seemed to her as though she had at last found the touchstone of conduct. She perceived she had never really thought of any one but herself in all her acts and plans. Even Capes had been for her merely an excitant to passionate love—a mere idol at whose feet one could enjoy imaginative wallowings. She had set out to get a beautiful life, a free, untrammelled life, self-development, without counting the cost either for herself or others.

“I have hurt my father,” she said; “I have hurt my aunt. I have hurt and snubbed poor Teddy. I’ve made no one happy. I deserve pretty much what I’ve got....

“If only because of the way one hurts others if one kicks loose and free, one has to submit....

“Broken-in people! I suppose the world is just all egotistical children and broken-in people.

“Your little flag of pride must flutter down with the rest of them, Ann Veronica....

“Compromise—and kindness.

“Compromise and kindness.

“Who are YOU that the world should lie down at your feet?

“You’ve got to be a decent citizen, Ann Veronica. Take your half loaf with the others. You mustn’t go clawing after a man that doesn’t belong to you—that isn’t even interested in you. That’s one thing clear.

“You’ve got to take the decent reasonable way. You’ve got to adjust yourself to the people God has set about you. Every one else does.”

She thought more and more along that line. There was no reason why she shouldn’t be Capes’ friend. He did like her, anyhow; he was always pleased to be with her. There was no reason why she shouldn’t be his restrained and dignified friend. After all, that was life. Nothing was given away, and no one came so rich to the stall as to command all that it had to offer. Every one has to make a deal with the world.

It would be very good to be Capes’ friend.

She might be able to go on with biology, possibly even work upon the same questions that he dealt with....

Perhaps her granddaughter might marry his grandson....

It grew clear to her that throughout all her wild raid for independence she had done nothing for anybody, and many people had done things for her. She thought of her aunt and that purse that was dropped on the table, and of many troublesome and ill-requited kindnesses; she thought of the help of the Widgetts, of Teddy’s admiration; she thought, with a new-born charity, of her father, of Manning’s conscientious unselfishness, of Miss Miniver’s devotion.

“And for me it has been Pride and Pride and Pride!

“I am the prodigal daughter. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him—

“I suppose pride and self-assertion are sin? Sinned against heaven—Yes, I have sinned against heaven and before thee....

“Poor old daddy! I wonder if he’ll spend much on the fatted calf?...

“The wrappered life-discipline! One comes to that at last. I begin to understand Jane Austen and chintz covers and decency and refinement and all the rest of it. One puts gloves on one’s greedy fingers. One learns to sit up...

“And somehow or other,” she added, after a long interval, “I must pay Mr. Ramage back his forty pounds.”

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

ANN VERONICA PUTS THINGS IN ORDER

Part 1

Ann Veronica made a strenuous attempt to carry out her good resolutions. She meditated long and carefully upon her letter to her father before she wrote it, and gravely and deliberately again before she despatched it.

“MY DEAR FATHER,” she wrote,—“I have been thinking hard about everything since I was sent to this prison. All these experiences have taught me a great deal about life and realities. I see that compromise is more necessary to life than I ignorantly supposed it to be, and I have been trying to get Lord Morley’s book on that subject, but it does not appear to be available in the prison library, and the chaplain seems to regard him as an undesirable writer.”

At this point she had perceived that she was drifting from her subject.

“I must read him when I come out. But I see very clearly that as things are a daughter is necessarily dependent on her father and bound while she is in that position to live harmoniously with his ideals.”

“Bit starchy,” said Ann Veronica, and altered the key abruptly. Her concluding paragraph was, on the whole, perhaps, hardly starchy enough.

“Really, daddy, I am sorry for all I have done to put you out. May I come home and try to be a better daughter to you?

“ANN VERONICA.”

Part 2

Her aunt came to meet her outside Canongate, and, being a little confused between what was official and what was merely a rebellious slight upon our national justice, found herself involved in a triumphal procession to the Vindicator Vegetarian Restaurant, and was specifically and personally cheered by a small, shabby crowd outside that rendezvous. They decided quite audibly, “She’s an Old Dear, anyhow. Voting wouldn’t do no ‘arm to ‘er.” She was on the very verge of a vegetarian meal before she recovered her head again. Obeying some fine instinct, she had come to the prison in a dark veil, but she had pushed this up to kiss Ann Veronica and never drawn it down again. Eggs were procured for her, and she sat out the subsequent emotions and eloquence with the dignity becoming an injured lady of good family. The quiet encounter and home-coming Ann Veronica and she had contemplated was entirely disorganized by this misadventure; there were no adequate explanations, and after they had settled things at Ann Veronica’s lodgings, they reached home in the early afternoon estranged and depressed, with headaches and the trumpet voice of the indomitable Kitty Brett still ringing in their ears.

“Dreadful women, my dear!” said Miss Stanley. “And some of them quite pretty and well dressed. No need to do such things. We must never let your father know we went. Why ever did you let me get into that wagonette?”

“I thought we had to,” said Ann Veronica, who had also been a little under the compulsion of the marshals of the occasion. “It was very tiring.”

“We will have some tea in the drawing-room as soon as ever we can—and I will take my things off. I don’t think I shall ever care for this bonnet again. We’ll have some buttered toast. Your poor cheeks are quite sunken and hollow....”

Part 3

When Ann Veronica found herself in her father’s study that evening it seemed to her for a moment as though all the events of the past six months had been a dream. The big gray spaces of London, the shop-lit, greasy, shining streets, had become very remote; the biological laboratory with its work and emotions, the meetings and discussions, the rides in hansoms with Ramage, were like things in a book read and closed. The study seemed absolutely unaltered, there was still the same lamp with a little chip out of the shade, still the same gas fire, still the same bundle of blue and

white papers, it seemed, with the same pink tape about them, at the elbow of the arm-chair, still the same father. He sat in much the same attitude, and she stood just as she had stood when he told her she could not go to the Fadden Dance. Both had dropped the rather elaborate politeness of the dining-room, and in their faces an impartial observer would have discovered little lines of obstinate wilfulness in common; a certain hardness—sharp, indeed, in the father and softly rounded in the daughter—but hardness nevertheless, that made every compromise a bargain and every charity a discount.

“And so you have been thinking?” her father began, quoting her letter and looking over his slanting glasses at her. “Well, my girl, I wish you had thought about all these things before these bothers began.”

Ann Veronica perceived that she must not forget to remain eminently reasonable.

“One has to live and learn,” she remarked, with a passable imitation of her father’s manner.

“So long as you learn,” said Mr. Stanley.

Their conversation hung.

“I suppose, daddy, you’ve no objection to my going on with my work at the Imperial College?” she asked.

“If it will keep you busy,” he said, with a faintly ironical smile.

“The fees are paid to the end of the session.”

He nodded twice, with his eyes on the fire, as though that was a formal statement.

“You may go on with that work,” he said, “so long as you keep in harmony with things at home. I’m convinced that much of Russell’s investigations are on wrong lines, unsound lines. Still—you must learn for yourself. You’re of age—you’re of age.”

“The work’s almost essential for the B.Sc. exam.”

“It’s scandalous, but I suppose it is.”

Their agreement so far seemed remarkable, and yet as a home-coming the thing was a little lacking in warmth. But Ann Veronica had still to get to her chief topic. They were silent for a time. “It’s a period of crude views and crude work,” said Mr. Stanley. “Still, these Mendelian fellows seem likely to give Mr. Russell trouble, a good lot of trouble. Some of their specimens—wonderfully selected, wonderfully got up.”

“Daddy,” said Ann Veronica, “these affairs—being away from home has—cost money.”

“I thought you would find that out.”

“As a matter of fact, I happen to have got a little into debt.”

“NEVER!”

Her heart sank at the change in his expression.

“Well, lodgings and things! And I paid my fees at the College.”

“Yes. But how could you get—Who gave you credit?

“You see,” said Ann Veronica, “my landlady kept on my room while I was in Holloway, and the fees for the College mounted up pretty considerably.” She spoke rather quickly, because she found her father’s question the most awkward she had ever had to answer in her life.

“Molly and you settled about the rooms. She said you HAD some money.”

“I borrowed it,” said Ann Veronica in a casual tone, with white despair in her heart.

“But who could have lent you money?”

“I pawned my pearl necklace. I got three pounds, and there’s three on my watch.”

“Six pounds. H’m. Got the tickets? Yes, but then—you said you borrowed?”

“I did, too,” said Ann Veronica.

“Who from?”

She met his eye for a second and her heart failed her. The truth was impossible, indecent. If she mentioned Ramage he might have a fit—anything might happen. She lied. “The Widgetts,” she said.

“Tut, tut!” he said. “Really, Vee, you seem to have advertised our relations pretty generally!”

“They—they knew, of course. Because of the Dance.”

“How much do you owe them?”

She knew forty pounds was a quite impossible sum for their neighbors. She knew, too, she must not hesitate. “Eight pounds,” she plunged, and added foolishly, “fifteen pounds will see me clear of everything.” She muttered some unlady-like comment upon herself under her breath and engaged in secret additions.

Mr. Stanley determined to improve the occasion. He seemed to deliberate. “Well,” he said at last slowly, “I’ll pay it. I’ll pay it. But I do hope, Vee, I do hope—this is the end of these adventures. I hope you have learned your lesson now and come to see—come to realize—how things are. People, nobody, can do as they like in this world. Everywhere there are limitations.”

“I know,” said Ann Veronica (fifteen pounds!). “I have learned that. I mean—I mean to do what I can.” (Fifteen pounds. Fifteen from forty is twenty-five.)

He hesitated. She could think of nothing more to say.

“Well,” she achieved at last. “Here goes for the new life!”

“Here goes for the new life,” he echoed and stood up. Father and daughter regarded each other warily, each more than a little insecure with the other. He made a movement toward her, and then recalled the circumstances of their last conversation in that study. She saw his purpose and his doubt hesitated also, and then went to him, took his coat lapels, and kissed him on the cheek.

“Ah, Vee,” he said, “that’s better! and kissed her back rather clumsily.

“We’re going to be sensible.”

She disengaged herself from him and went out of the room with a grave, preoccupied expression. (Fifteen pounds! And she wanted forty!)

Part 4

It was, perhaps, the natural consequence of a long and tiring and exciting day that Ann Veronica should pass a broken and distressful night, a night in which the noble and self-subduing resolutions of Canongate displayed themselves for the first time in an atmosphere of almost lurid dismay. Her father’s peculiar stiffness of soul presented itself now as something altogether left out of the calculations upon which her plans were based, and, in particular, she had not anticipated the difficulty she would find in borrowing the forty pounds she needed for Ramage. That had taken her by surprise, and her tired wits had failed her. She was to have fifteen pounds, and no more. She knew that to expect more now was like anticipating a gold-mine in the garden. The chance had gone. It became suddenly glaringly apparent to her that it was impossible

to return fifteen pounds or any sum less than twenty pounds to Ramage—absolutely impossible. She realized that with a pang of disgust and horror.

Already she had sent him twenty pounds, and never written to explain to him why it was she had not sent it back sharply directly he returned it. She ought to have written at once and told him exactly what had happened. Now if she sent fifteen pounds the suggestion that she had spent a five-pound note in the meanwhile would be irresistible. No! That was impossible. She would have just to keep the fifteen pounds until she could make it twenty. That might happen on her birthday—in August.

She turned about, and was persecuted by visions, half memories, half dreams, of Ramage. He became ugly and monstrous, dunning her, threatening her, assailing her.

“Confound sex from first to last!” said Ann Veronica. “Why can’t we propagate by sexless spores, as the ferns do? We restrict each other, we badger each other, friendship is poisoned and buried under it!... I MUST pay off that forty pounds. I MUST.”

For a time there seemed no comfort for her even in Capes. She was to see Capes to-morrow, but now, in this state of misery she had achieved, she felt assured he would turn his back upon her, take no notice of her at all. And if he didn’t, what was the good of seeing him?

“I wish he was a woman,” she said, “then I could make him my friend. I want him as my friend. I want to talk to him and go about with him. Just go about with him.”

She was silent for a time, with her nose on the pillow, and that brought her to: “What’s the good of pretending?

“I love him,” she said aloud to the dim forms of her room, and repeated it, and went on to imagine herself doing acts of tragically dog-like devotion to the biologist, who, for the purposes of the drama, remained entirely unconscious of and indifferent to her proceedings.

At last some anodyne formed itself from these exercises, and, with eyelashes wet with such feeble tears as only three-o’clock-in-the-morning pathos can distil, she fell asleep.

Part 5

Pursuant to some altogether private calculations she did not go up to the Imperial College until after mid-day, and she found the laboratory deserted, even as she desired. She went to the table under the end window at which she had been accustomed to work, and found it swept and garnished with full bottles of re-agents. Everything was very neat; it had evidently been straightened up and kept for her. She put down the sketch-books and apparatus she had brought with her, pulled out her stool, and sat down. As she did so the preparation-room door opened behind her. She heard it open, but as she felt unable to look round in a careless manner she pretended not to hear it. Then Capes' footsteps approached. She turned with an effort.

"I expected you this morning," he said. "I saw—they knocked off your fetters yesterday."

"I think it is very good of me to come this afternoon."

"I began to be afraid you might not come at all."

"Afraid!"

"Yes. I'm glad you're back for all sorts of reasons." He spoke a little nervously. "Among other things, you know, I didn't understand quite—I didn't understand that you were so keenly interested in this suffrage question. I have it on my conscience that I offended you—"

"Offended me when?"

"I've been haunted by the memory of you. I was rude and stupid. We were talking about the suffrage—and I rather scoffed."

"You weren't rude," she said.

"I didn't know you were so keen on this suffrage business."

"Nor I. You haven't had it on your mind all this time?"

"I have rather. I felt somehow I'd hurt you."

"You didn't. I—I hurt myself."

"I mean—"

"I behaved like an idiot, that's all. My nerves were in rags. I was worried. We're the hysterical animal, Mr. Capes. I got myself locked up to cool off. By a sort of instinct. As a dog eats grass. I'm right again now."

“Because your nerves were exposed, that was no excuse for my touching them. I ought to have seen—”

“It doesn’t matter a rap—if you’re not disposed to resent the—the way I behaved.”

“*I* resent!”

“I was only sorry I’d been so stupid.”

“Well, I take it we’re straight again,” said Capes with a note of relief, and assumed an easier position on the edge of her table. “But if you weren’t keen on the suffrage business, why on earth did you go to prison?”

Ann Veronica reflected. “It was a phase,” she said.

He smiled. “It’s a new phase in the life history,” he remarked. “Everybody seems to have it now. Everybody who’s going to develop into a woman.”

“There’s Miss Garvice.”

“She’s coming on,” said Capes. “And, you know, you’re altering us all. I’M shaken. The campaign’s a success.” He met her questioning eye, and repeated, “Oh! it IS a success. A man is so apt to—to take women a little too lightly. Unless they remind him now and then not to.... YOU did.”

“Then I didn’t waste my time in prison altogether?”

“It wasn’t the prison impressed me. But I liked the things you said here. I felt suddenly I understood you—as an intelligent person. If you’ll forgive my saying that, and implying what goes with it. There’s something—puppyish in a man’s usual attitude to women. That is what I’ve had on my conscience.... I don’t think we’re altogether to blame if we don’t take some of your lot seriously. Some of your sex, I mean. But we smirk a little, I’m afraid, habitually when we talk to you. We smirk, and we’re a bit—furtive.”

He paused, with his eyes studying her gravely. “You, anyhow, don’t deserve it,” he said.

Their colloquy was ended abruptly by the apparition of Miss Klegg at the further door. When she saw Ann Veronica she stood for a moment as if entranced, and then advanced with outstretched hands. “Veronique!” she cried with a rising intonation, though never before had she called Ann Veronica anything but Miss Stanley, and seized her and squeezed her and kissed her with profound emotion. “To think that you were going to do it—and never said a word! You are a little thin, but except for that you

look—you look better than ever. Was it VERY horrible? I tried to get into the police-court, but the crowd was ever so much too big, push as I would....

“I mean to go to prison directly the session is over,” said Miss Klegg. “Wild horses—not if they have all the mounted police in London—shan’t keep me out.”

Part 6

Capes lit things wonderfully for Ann Veronica all that afternoon, he was so friendly, so palpably interested in her, and glad to have her back with him. Tea in the laboratory was a sort of suffragette reception. Miss Garvice assumed a quality of neutrality, professed herself almost won over by Ann Veronica’s example, and the Scotchman decided that if women had a distinctive sphere it was, at any rate, an enlarging sphere, and no one who believed in the doctrine of evolution could logically deny the vote to women “ultimately,” however much they might be disposed to doubt the advisability of its immediate concession. It was a refusal of expediency, he said, and not an absolute refusal. The youth with his hair like Russell cleared his throat and said rather irrelevantly that he knew a man who knew Thomas Bayard Simmons, who had rioted in the Strangers’ Gallery, and then Capes, finding them all distinctly pro-Ann Veronica, if not pro-feminist, ventured to be perverse, and started a vein of speculation upon the Scotchman’s idea—that there were still hopes of women evolving into something higher.

He was unusually absurd and ready, and all the time it seemed to Ann Veronica as a delightful possibility, as a thing not indeed to be entertained seriously, but to be half furtively felt, that he was being so agreeable because she had come back again. She returned home through a world that was as roseate as it had been gray overnight.

But as she got out of the train at Morningside Park Station she had a shock. She saw, twenty yards down the platform, the shiny hat and broad back and inimitable swagger of Ramage. She dived at once behind the cover of the lamp-room and affected serious trouble with her shoe-lace until he was out of the station, and then she followed slowly and with extreme discretion until the bifurcation of the Avenue from the field way insured her escape. Ramage went up the Avenue, and she hurried along the path with a beating heart and a disagreeable sense of unsolved problems in her mind.

“That thing’s going on,” she told herself. “Everything goes on, confound it! One doesn’t change anything one has set going by making good resolutions.”

And then ahead of her she saw the radiant and welcoming figure of Manning. He came as an agreeable diversion from an insoluble perplexity. She smiled at the sight of him, and thereat his radiation increased.

“I missed the hour of your release,” he said, “but I was at the Vindicator Restaurant. You did not see me, I know. I was among the common herd in the place below, but I took good care to see you.”

“Of course you’re converted?” she said.

“To the view that all those Splendid Women in the movement ought to have votes. Rather! Who could help it?”

He towered up over her and smiled down at her in his fatherly way.

“To the view that all women ought to have votes whether they like it or not.”

He shook his head, and his eyes and the mouth under the black mustache wrinkled with his smile. And as he walked by her side they began a wrangle that was none the less pleasant to Ann Veronica because it served to banish a disagreeable preoccupation. It seemed to her in her restored geniality that she liked Manning extremely. The brightness Capes had diffused over the world glorified even his rival.

Part 7

The steps by which Ann Veronica determined to engage herself to marry Manning were never very clear to her. A medley of motives warred in her, and it was certainly not one of the least of these that she knew herself to be passionately in love with Capes; at moments she had a giddy intimation that he was beginning to feel keenly interested in her. She realized more and more the quality of the brink upon which she stood—the dreadful readiness with which in certain moods she might plunge, the unmitigated wrongness and recklessness of such a self-abandonment. “He must never know,” she would whisper to herself, “he must never know. Or else—Else it will be impossible that I can be his friend.”

That simple statement of the case was by no means all that went on in Ann Veronica’s mind. But it was the form of her ruling determination; it was the only form that she ever allowed to see daylight. What else was there lurked in shadows and deep places; if in some mood of reverie it came out into the light, it was presently overwhelmed and

hustled back again into hiding. She would never look squarely at these dream forms that mocked the social order in which she lived, never admit she listened to the soft whisperings in her ear. But Manning seemed more and more clearly indicated as a refuge, as security. Certain simple purposes emerged from the disingenuous muddle of her feelings and desires. Seeing Capes from day to day made a bright eventfulness that hampered her in the course she had resolved to follow. She vanished from the laboratory for a week, a week of oddly interesting days....

When she renewed her attendance at the Imperial College the third finger of her left hand was adorned with a very fine old ring with dark blue sapphires that had once belonged to a great-aunt of Manning's.

That ring manifestly occupied her thoughts a great deal. She kept pausing in her work and regarding it, and when Capes came round to her, she first put her hand in her lap and then rather awkwardly in front of him. But men are often blind to rings. He seemed to be.

In the afternoon she had considered certain doubts very carefully, and decided on a more emphatic course of action. "Are these ordinary sapphires?" she said. He bent to her hand, and she slipped off the ring and gave it to him to examine.

"Very good," he said. "Rather darker than most of them. But I'm generously ignorant of gems. Is it an old ring?" he asked, returning it.

"I believe it is. It's an engagement ring...." She slipped it on her finger, and added, in a voice she tried to make matter-of-fact: "It was given to me last week."

"Oh!" he said, in a colorless tone, and with his eyes on her face.

"Yes. Last week."

She glanced at him, and it was suddenly apparent for one instant of illumination that this ring upon her finger was the crowning blunder of her life. It was apparent, and then it faded into the quality of an inevitable necessity.

"Odd!" he remarked, rather surprisingly, after a little interval.

There was a brief pause, a crowded pause, between them.

She sat very still, and his eyes rested on that ornament for a moment, and then travelled slowly to her wrist and the soft lines of her forearm.

"I suppose I ought to congratulate you," he said. Their eyes met, and his expressed perplexity and curiosity. "The fact is—I don't know why—this takes me by surprise.

Somehow I haven't connected the idea with you. You seemed complete—without that."

"Did I?" she said.

"I don't know why. But this is like—like walking round a house that looks square and complete and finding an unexpected long wing running out behind."

She looked up at him, and found he was watching her closely. For some seconds of voluminous thinking they looked at the ring between them, and neither spoke. Then Capes shifted his eyes to her microscope and the little trays of unmounted sections beside it. "How is that carmine working?" he asked, with a forced interest.

"Better," said Ann Veronica, with an unreal alacrity. "But it still misses the nucleolus."

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

THE SAPPHIRE RING

Part 1

For a time that ring set with sapphires seemed to be, after all, the satisfactory solution of Ann Veronica's difficulties. It was like pouring a strong acid over dulled metal. A tarnish of constraint that had recently spread over her intercourse with Capes vanished again. They embarked upon an open and declared friendship. They even talked about friendship. They went to the Zoological Gardens together one Saturday to see for themselves a point of morphological interest about the toucan's bill—that friendly and entertaining bird—and they spent the rest of the afternoon walking about and elaborating in general terms this theme and the superiority of intellectual fellowship to all merely passionate relationships. Upon this topic Capes was heavy and conscientious, but that seemed to her to be just exactly what he ought to be. He was also, had she known it, more than a little insincere. "We are only in the dawn of the Age of Friendship," he said, "when interest, I suppose, will take the place of passions. Either you have had to love people or hate them—which is a sort of love, too, in its way—to get anything out of them. Now, more and more, we're going to be

interested in them, to be curious about them and—quite mildly-experimental with them." He seemed to be elaborating ideas as he talked. They watched the chimpanzees in the new apes' house, and admired the gentle humanity of their eyes—"so much more human than human beings"—and they watched the Agile Gibbon in the next apartment doing wonderful leaps and aerial somersaults.

"I wonder which of us enjoys that most," said Capes—"does he, or do we?"

"He seems to get a zest—"

"He does it and forgets it. We remember it. These joyful bounds just lace into the stuff of my memories and stay there forever. Living's just material."

"It's very good to be alive."

"It's better to know life than be life."

"One may do both," said Ann Veronica.

She was in a very uncritical state that afternoon. When he said, "Let's go and see the wart-hog," she thought no one ever had had so quick a flow of good ideas as he; and when he explained that sugar and not buns was the talisman of popularity among the animals, she marvelled at his practical omniscience.

Finally, at the exit into Regent's Park, they ran against Miss Klegg. It was the expression of Miss Klegg's face that put the idea into Ann Veronica's head of showing Manning at the College one day, an idea which she didn't for some reason or other carry out for a fortnight.

Part 2

When at last she did so, the sapphire ring took on a new quality in the imagination of Capes. It ceased to be the symbol of liberty and a remote and quite abstracted person, and became suddenly and very disagreeably the token of a large and portentous body visible and tangible.

Manning appeared just at the end of the afternoon's work, and the biologist was going through some perplexities the Scotchman had created by a metaphysical treatment of the skulls of Hyrax and a young African elephant. He was clearing up these difficulties

by tracing a partially obliterated suture the Scotchman had overlooked when the door from the passage opened, and Manning came into his universe.

Seen down the length of the laboratory, Manning looked a very handsome and shapely gentleman indeed, and, at the sight of his eager advance to his fiancee, Miss Klegg replaced one long-cherished romance about Ann Veronica by one more normal and simple. He carried a cane and a silk hat with a mourning-band in one gray-gloved hand; his frock-coat and trousers were admirable; his handsome face, his black mustache, his prominent brow conveyed an eager solicitude.

“I want,” he said, with a white hand outstretched, “to take you out to tea.”

“I’ve been clearing up,” said Ann Veronica, brightly.

“All your dreadful scientific things?” he said, with a smile that Miss Klegg thought extraordinarily kindly.

“All my dreadful scientific things,” said Ann Veronica.

He stood back, smiling with an air of proprietorship, and looking about him at the business-like equipment of the room. The low ceiling made him seem abnormally tall. Ann Veronica wiped a scalpel, put a card over a watch-glass containing thin shreds of embryonic guinea-pig swimming in mauve stain, and dismantled her microscope.

“I wish I understood more of biology,” said Manning.

“I’m ready,” said Ann Veronica, closing her microscope-box with a click, and looking for one brief instant up the laboratory. “We have no airs and graces here, and my hat hangs from a peg in the passage.”

She led the way to the door, and Manning passed behind her and round her and opened the door for her. When Capes glanced up at them for a moment, Manning seemed to be holding his arms all about her, and there was nothing but quiet acquiescence in her bearing.

After Capes had finished the Scotchman’s troubles he went back into the preparation-room. He sat down on the sill of the open window, folded his arms, and stared straight before him for a long time over the wilderness of tiles and chimney-pots into a sky that was blue and empty. He was not addicted to monologue, and the only audible comment he permitted himself at first upon a universe that was evidently anything but satisfactory to him that afternoon, was one compact and entirely unassigned “Damn!”

The word must have had some gratifying quality, because he repeated it. Then he stood up and repeated it again. “The fool I have been!” he cried; and now speech was coming to him. He tried this sentence with expletives. “Ass!” he went on, still warming. “Muck-headed moral ass! I ought to have done anything.

“I ought to have done anything!

“What’s a man for?

“Friendship!”

He doubled up his fist, and seemed to contemplate thrusting it through the window. He turned his back on that temptation. Then suddenly he seized a new preparation bottle that stood upon his table and contained the better part of a week’s work—a displayed dissection of a snail, beautifully done—and hurled it across the room, to smash resoundingly upon the cemented floor under the bookcase; then, without either haste or pause, he swept his arm along a shelf of re-agents and sent them to mingle with the debris on the floor. They fell in a diapason of smashes. “H’m!” he said, regarding the wreckage with a calmer visage. “Silly!” he remarked after a pause. “One hardly knows—all the time.”

He put his hands in his pockets, his mouth puckered to a whistle, and he went to the door of the outer preparation-room and stood there, looking, save for the faintest intensification of his natural ruddiness, the embodiment of blond serenity.

“Gellett,” he called, “just come and clear up a mess, will you? I’ve smashed some things.”

Part 3

There was one serious flaw in Ann Veronica’s arrangements for self-rehabilitation, and that was Ramage. He hung over her—he and his loan to her and his connection with her and that terrible evening—a vague, disconcerting possibility of annoyance and exposure. She could not see any relief from this anxiety except repayment, and repayment seemed impossible. The raising of twenty-five pounds was a task altogether beyond her powers. Her birthday was four months away, and that, at its extremist point, might give her another five pounds.

The thing rankled in her mind night and day. She would wake in the night to repeat her bitter cry: “Oh, why did I burn those notes?”

It added greatly to the annoyance of the situation that she had twice seen Ramage in the Avenue since her return to the shelter of her father’s roof. He had saluted her with elaborate civility, his eyes distended with indecipherable meanings.

She felt she was bound in honor to tell the whole affair to Manning sooner or later. Indeed, it seemed inevitable that she must clear it up with his assistance, or not at all. And when Manning was not about the thing seemed simple enough. She would compose extremely lucid and honorable explanations. But when it came to broaching them, it proved to be much more difficult than she had supposed.

They went down the great staircase of the building, and, while she sought in her mind for a beginning, he broke into appreciation of her simple dress and self-congratulations upon their engagement.

“It makes me feel,” he said, “that nothing is impossible—to have you here beside me. I said, that day at Surbiton, ‘There’s many good things in life, but there’s only one best, and that’s the wild-haired girl who’s pulling away at that oar. I will make her my Grail, and some day, perhaps, if God wills, she shall become my wife!’”

He looked very hard before him as he said this, and his voice was full of deep feeling.

“Grail!” said Ann Veronica, and then: “Oh, yes—of course! Anything but a holy one, I’m afraid.”

“Altogether holy, Ann Veronica. Ah! but you can’t imagine what you are to me and what you mean to me! I suppose there is something mystical and wonderful about all women.”

“There is something mystical and wonderful about all human beings. I don’t see that men need bank it with the women.”

“A man does,” said Manning—“a true man, anyhow. And for me there is only one treasure-house. By Jove! When I think of it I want to leap and shout!”

“It would astonish that man with the barrow.”

“It astonishes me that I don’t,” said Manning, in a tone of intense self-enjoyment.

“I think,” began Ann Veronica, “that you don’t realize—”

He disregarded her entirely. He waved an arm and spoke with a peculiar resonance. “I feel like a giant! I believe now I shall do great things. Gods! what it must be to pour out

strong, splendid verse—mighty lines! mighty lines! If I do, Ann Veronica, it will be you. It will be altogether you. I will dedicate my books to you. I will lay them all at your feet."

He beamed upon her.

"I don't think you realize," Ann Veronica began again, "that I am rather a defective human being."

"I don't want to," said Manning. "They say there are spots on the sun. Not for me. It warms me, and lights me, and fills my world with flowers. Why should I peep at it through smoked glass to see things that don't affect me?" He smiled his delight at his companion.

"I've got bad faults."

He shook his head slowly, smiling mysteriously.

"But perhaps I want to confess them."

"I grant you absolution."

"I don't want absolution. I want to make myself visible to you."

"I wish I could make you visible to yourself. I don't believe in the faults. They're just a joyous softening of the outline—more beautiful than perfection. Like the flaws of an old marble. If you talk of your faults, I shall talk of your splendors."

"I do want to tell you things, nevertheless."

"We'll have, thank God! ten myriad days to tell each other things. When I think of it—"

"But these are things I want to tell you now!"

"I made a little song of it. Let me say it to you. I've no name for it yet. Epithalamy might do.

"Like him who stood on Darien

I view uncharted sea

Ten thousand days, ten thousand nights

Before my Queen and me.

"And that only brings me up to about sixty-five!

"A glittering wilderness of time

That to the sunset reaches

No keel as yet its waves has ploughed

Or gritted on its beaches.

"And we will sail that splendor wide,

From day to day together,

From isle to isle of happiness

Through year's of God's own weather."

"Yes," said his prospective fellow-sailor, "that's very pretty." She stopped short, full of things un-said. Pretty! Ten thousand days, ten thousand nights!

"You shall tell me your faults," said Manning. "If they matter to you, they matter."

"It isn't precisely faults," said Ann Veronica. "It's something that bothers me." Ten thousand! Put that way it seemed so different.

"Then assuredly!" said Manning.

She found a little difficulty in beginning. She was glad when he went on: "I want to be your city of refuge from every sort of bother. I want to stand between you and all the force and vileness of the world. I want to make you feel that here is a place where the crowd does not clamor nor ill-winds blow."

"That is all very well," said Ann Veronica, unheeded.

"That is my dream of you," said Manning, warming. "I want my life to be beaten gold just in order to make it a fitting setting for yours. There you will be, in an inner temple. I want to enrich it with hangings and gladden it with verses. I want to fill it with fine and precious things. And by degrees, perhaps, that maiden distrust of yours that makes you shrink from my kisses, will vanish.... Forgive me if a certain warmth creeps into my words! The Park is green and gray to-day, but I am glowing pink and gold.... It is difficult to express these things."

Part 4

They sat with tea and strawberries and cream before them at a little table in front of the pavilion in Regent's Park. Her confession was still unmade. Manning leaned forward on the table, talking discursively on the probable brilliance of their married life. Ann Veronica sat back in an attitude of inattention, her eyes on a distant game of cricket, her mind perplexed and busy. She was recalling the circumstances under which she had engaged herself to Manning, and trying to understand a curious development of the quality of this relationship.

The particulars of her engagement were very clear in her memory. She had taken care he should have this momentous talk with her on a garden-seat commanded by the windows of the house. They had been playing tennis, with his manifest intention looming over her.

"Let us sit down for a moment," he had said. He made his speech a little elaborately. She plucked at the knots of her racket and heard him to the end, then spoke in a restrained undertone.

"You ask me to be engaged to you, Mr. Manning," she began.

"I want to lay all my life at your feet."

"Mr. Manning, I do not think I love you.... I want to be very plain with you. I have nothing, nothing that can possibly be passion for you. I am sure. Nothing at all."

He was silent for some moments.

"Perhaps that is only sleeping," he said. "How can you know?"

"I think—perhaps I am rather a cold-blooded person."

She stopped. He remained listening attentively.

"You have been very kind to me," she said.

"I would give my life for you."

Her heart had warmed toward him. It had seemed to her that life might be very good indeed with his kindliness and sacrifice about her. She thought of him as always courteous and helpful, as realizing, indeed, his ideal of protection and service, as chivalrously leaving her free to live her own life, rejoicing with an infinite generosity in every detail of her irresponsive being. She twanged the catgut under her fingers.

"It seems so unfair," she said, "to take all you offer me and give so little in return."

"It is all the world to me. And we are not traders looking at equivalents."

“You know, Mr. Manning, I do not really want to marry.”

“No.”

“It seems so—so unworthy”—she picked among her phrases “of the noble love you give—”

She stopped, through the difficulty she found in expressing herself.

“But I am judge of that,” said Manning.

“Would you wait for me?”

Manning was silent for a space. “As my lady wills.”

“Would you let me go on studying for a time?”

“If you order patience.”

“I think, Mr. Manning… I do not know. It is so difficult. When I think of the love you give me—One ought to give you back love.”

“You like me?”

“Yes. And I am grateful to you….”

Manning tapped with his racket on the turf through some moments of silence. “You are the most perfect, the most glorious of created things—tender, frank intellectual, brave, beautiful. I am your servitor. I am ready to wait for you, to wait your pleasure, to give all my life to winning it. Let me only wear your livery. Give me but leave to try. You want to think for a time, to be free for a time. That is so like you, Diana—Pallas Athene! (Pallas Athene is better.) You are all the slender goddesses. I understand. Let me engage myself. That is all I ask.”

She looked at him; his face, downcast and in profile, was handsome and strong. Her gratitude swelled within her.

“You are too good for me,” she said in a low voice.

“Then you—you will?”

A long pause.

“It isn’t fair….”

“But will you?”

“YES.”

For some seconds he had remained quite still.

“If I sit here,” he said, standing up before her abruptly, “I shall have to shout. Let us walk about. Tum, tum, tirray, tum, tum, tum, te-tum—that thing of Mendelssohn’s! If making one human being absolutely happy is any satisfaction to you—”

He held out his hands, and she also stood up.

He drew her close up to him with a strong, steady pull. Then suddenly, in front of all those windows, he folded her in his arms and pressed her to him, and kissed her unresisting face.

“Don’t!” cried Ann Veronica, struggling faintly, and he released her.

“Forgive me,” he said. “But I am at singing-pitch.”

She had a moment of sheer panic at the thing she had done. “Mr. Manning,” she said, “for a time—Will you tell no one? Will you keep this—our secret? I’m doubtful—Will you please not even tell my aunt?”

“As you will,” he said. “But if my manner tells! I cannot help it if that shows. You only mean a secret for a little time?”

“Just for a little time,” she said; “yes….”

But the ring, and her aunt’s triumphant eye, and a note of approval in her father’s manner, and a novel disposition in him to praise Manning in a just, impartial voice had soon placed very definite qualifications upon that covenanted secrecy.

Part 5

At first the quality of her relationship to Manning seemed moving and beautiful to Ann Veronica. She admired and rather pitied him, and she was unfeignedly grateful to him. She even thought that perhaps she might come to love him, in spite of that faint indefinable flavor of absurdity that pervaded his courtly bearing. She would never love him as she loved Capes, of course, but there are grades and qualities of love. For Manning it would be a more temperate love altogether. Much more temperate; the discreet and joyless love of a virtuous, reluctant, condescending wife. She had been quite convinced that an engagement with him and at last a marriage had exactly that quality of compromise which distinguishes the ways of the wise. It would be the

wrappered world almost at its best. She saw herself building up a life upon that—a life restrained, kindly, beautiful, a little pathetic and altogether dignified; a life of great disciplines and suppressions and extensive reserves...

But the Ramage affair needed clearing up, of course; it was a flaw upon that project. She had to explain about and pay off that forty pounds....

Then, quite insensibly, her queenliness had declined. She was never able to trace the changes her attitude had undergone, from the time when she believed herself to be the pampered Queen of Fortune, the crown of a good man's love (and secretly, but nobly, worshipping some one else), to the time when she realized she was in fact just a mannequin for her lover's imagination, and that he cared no more for the realities of her being, for the things she felt and desired, for the passions and dreams that might move her, than a child cares for the sawdust in its doll. She was the actress his whim had chosen to play a passive part....

It was one of the most educational disillusionments in Ann Veronica's career.

But did many women get anything better?

This afternoon, when she was urgent to explain her hampering and tainting complication with Ramage, the realization of this alien quality in her relationship with Manning became acute. Hitherto it had been qualified by her conception of all life as a compromise, by her new effort to be unexacting of life. But she perceived that to tell Manning of her Ramage adventures as they had happened would be like tarring figures upon a water-color. They were in different key, they had a different timbre. How could she tell him what indeed already began to puzzle herself, why she had borrowed that money at all? The plain fact was that she had grabbed a bait. She had grabbed! She became less and less attentive to his meditative, self-complacent fragments of talk as she told herself this. Her secret thoughts made some hasty, half-hearted excursions into the possibility of telling the thing in romantic tones—Ramage was as a black villain, she as a white, fantastically white, maiden.... She doubted if Manning would even listen to that. He would refuse to listen and absolve her unshriven.

Then it came to her with a shock, as an extraordinary oversight, that she could never tell Manning about Ramage—never.

She dismissed the idea of doing so. But that still left the forty pounds!...

Her mind went on generalizing. So it would always be between herself and Manning. She saw her life before her robbed of all generous illusions, the wrappered life

unwrappered forever, vistas of dull responses, crises of make-believe, years of exacting mutual disregard in a misty garden of fine sentiments.

But did any woman get anything better from a man? Perhaps every woman conceals herself from a man perforce!...

She thought of Capes. She could not help thinking of Capes. Surely Capes was different. Capes looked at one and not over one, spoke to one, treated one as a visible concrete fact. Capes saw her, felt for her, cared for her greatly, even if he did not love her. Anyhow, he did not sentimentalize her. And she had been doubting since that walk in the Zoological Gardens whether, indeed, he did simply care for her. Little things, almost impalpable, had happened to justify that doubt; something in his manner had belied his words. Did he not look for her in the morning when she entered—come very quickly to her? She thought of him as she had last seen him looking down the length of the laboratory to see her go. Why had he glanced up—quite in that way?...

The thought of Capes flooded her being like long-veiled sunlight breaking again through clouds. It came to her like a dear thing rediscovered, that she loved Capes. It came to her that to marry any one but Capes was impossible. If she could not marry him, she would not marry any one. She would end this sham with Manning. It ought never to have begun. It was cheating, pitiful cheating. And then if some day Capes wanted her—saw fit to alter his views upon friendship....

Dim possibilities that she would not seem to look at even to herself gesticulated in the twilight background of her mind.

She leaped suddenly at a desperate resolution, and in one moment had made it into a new self. She flung aside every plan she had in life, every discretion. Of course, why not? She would be honest, anyhow!

She turned her eyes to Manning.

He was sitting back from the table now, with one arm over the back of his green chair and the other resting on the little table. He was smiling under his heavy mustache, and his head was a little on one side as he looked at her.

“And what was that dreadful confession you had to make?” he was saying. His quiet, kindly smile implied his serene disbelief in any confessible thing. Ann Veronica pushed aside a tea-cup and the vestiges of her strawberries and cream, and put her elbows before her on the table. “Mr. Manning,” she said, “I HAVE a confession to make.”

“I wish you would use my Christian name,” he said.

She attended to that, and then dismissed it as unimportant.

Something in her voice and manner conveyed an effect of unwonted gravity to him. For the first time he seemed to wonder what it might be that she had to confess. His smile faded.

“I don’t think our engagement can go on,” she plunged, and felt exactly that loss of breath that comes with a dive into icy water.

“But, how,” he said, sitting up astonished beyond measure, “not go on?”

“I have been thinking while you have been talking. You see—I didn’t understand.”

She stared hard at her finger-nails. “It is hard to express one’s self, but I do want to be honest with you. When I promised to marry you I thought I could; I thought it was a possible arrangement. I did think it could be done. I admired your chivalry. I was grateful.”

She paused.

“Go on,” he said.

She moved her elbow nearer to him and spoke in a still lower tone. “I told you I did not love you.”

“I know,” said Manning, nodding gravely. “It was fine and brave of you.”

“But there is something more.”

She paused again.

“I—I am sorry—I didn’t explain. These things are difficult. It wasn’t clear to me that I had to explain.... I love some one else.”

They remained looking at each other for three or four seconds. Then Manning flopped back in his chair and dropped his chin like a man shot. There was a long silence between them.

“My God!” he said at last, with tremendous feeling, and then again, “My God!”

Now that this thing was said her mind was clear and calm. She heard this standard expression of a strong soul wrung with a critical coldness that astonished herself. She realized dimly that there was no personal thing behind his cry, that countless myriads of Mannings had “My God!”-ed with an equal gusto at situations as flatly

apprehended. This mitigated her remorse enormously. He rested his brow on his hand and conveyed magnificent tragedy by his pose.

“But why,” he said in the gasping voice of one subduing an agony, and looked at her from under a pain-wrinkled brow, “why did you not tell me this before?”

“I didn’t know—I thought I might be able to control myself.”

“And you can’t?”

“I don’t think I ought to control myself.”

“And I have been dreaming and thinking—”

“I am frightfully sorry....”

“But—This bolt from the blue! My God! Ann Veronica, you don’t understand. This—this shatters a world!”

She tried to feel sorry, but her sense of his immense egotism was strong and clear.

He went on with intense urgency.

“Why did you ever let me love you? Why did you ever let me peep through the gates of Paradise? Oh! my God! I don’t begin to feel and realize this yet. It seems to me just talk; it seems to me like the fancy of a dream. Tell me I haven’t heard. This is a joke of yours.” He made his voice very low and full, and looked closely into her face.

She twisted her fingers tightly. “It isn’t a joke,” she said. “I feel shabby and disgraced.... I ought never to have thought of it. Of you, I mean....”

He fell back in his chair with an expression of tremendous desolation. “My God!” he said again....

They became aware of the waitress standing over them with book and pencil ready for their bill. “Never mind the bill,” said Manning tragically, standing up and thrusting a four-shilling piece into her hand, and turning a broad back on her astonishment. “Let us walk across the Park at least,” he said to Ann Veronica. “Just at present my mind simply won’t take hold of this at all.... I tell you—never mind the bill. Keep it! Keep it!”

Part 6

They walked a long way that afternoon. They crossed the Park to the westward, and then turned back and walked round the circle about the Royal Botanical Gardens and then southwardly toward Waterloo. They trudged and talked, and Manning struggled, as he said, to “get the hang of it all.”

It was a long, meandering talk, stupid, shameful, and unavoidable. Ann Veronica was apologetic to the bottom of her soul. At the same time she was wildly exultant at the resolution she had taken, the end she had made to her blunder. She had only to get through this, to solace Manning as much as she could, to put such clumsy plasterings on his wounds as were possible, and then, anyhow, she would be free—free to put her fate to the test. She made a few protests, a few excuses for her action in accepting him, a few lame explanations, but he did not heed them or care for them. Then she realized that it was her business to let Manning talk and impose his own interpretations upon the situation so far as he was concerned. She did her best to do this. But about his unknown rival he was acutely curious.

He made her tell him the core of the difficulty.

“I cannot say who he is,” said Ann Veronica, “but he is a married man.... No! I do not even know that he cares for me. It is no good going into that. Only I just want him. I just want him, and no one else will do. It is no good arguing about a thing like that.”

“But you thought you could forget him.”

“I suppose I must have thought so. I didn’t understand. Now I do.”

“By God!” said Manning, making the most of the word, “I suppose it’s fate. Fate! You are so frank so splendid!

“I’m taking this calmly now,” he said, almost as if he apologized, “because I’m a little stunned.”

Then he asked, “Tell me! has this man, has he DARED to make love to you?”

Ann Veronica had a vicious moment. “I wish he had,” she said.

“But—”

The long inconsecutive conversation by that time was getting on her nerves. “When one wants a thing more than anything else in the world,” she said with outrageous frankness, “one naturally wishes one had it.”

She shocked him by that. She shattered the edifice he was building up of himself as a devoted lover, waiting only his chance to win her from a hopeless and consuming passion.

“Mr. Manning,” she said, “I warned you not to idealize me. Men ought not to idealize any woman. We aren’t worth it. We’ve done nothing to deserve it. And it hampers us. You don’t know the thoughts we have; the things we can do and say. You are a sisterless man; you have never heard the ordinary talk that goes on at a girls’ boarding-school.”

“Oh! but you ARE splendid and open and fearless! As if I couldn’t allow! What are all these little things? Nothing! Nothing! You can’t sully yourself. You can’t! I tell you frankly you may break off your engagement to me—I shall hold myself still engaged to you, yours just the same. As for this infatuation—it’s like some obsession, some magic thing laid upon you. It’s not you—not a bit. It’s a thing that’s happened to you. It is like some accident. I don’t care. In a sense I don’t care. It makes no difference.... All the same, I wish I had that fellow by the throat! Just the virile, unregenerate man in me wishes that....

“I suppose I should let go if I had.

“You know,” he went on, “this doesn’t seem to me to end anything.

“I’m rather a persistent person. I’m the sort of dog, if you turn it out of the room it lies down on the mat at the door. I’m not a lovesick boy. I’m a man, and I know what I mean. It’s a tremendous blow, of course—but it doesn’t kill me. And the situation it makes!—the situation!”

Thus Manning, egotistical, inconsecutive, unreal. And Ann Veronica walked beside him, trying in vain to soften her heart to him by the thought of how she had ill-used him, and all the time, as her feet and mind grew weary together, rejoicing more and more that at the cost of this one interminable walk she escaped the prospect of—what was it?—“Ten thousand days, ten thousand nights” in his company. Whatever happened she need never return to that possibility.

“For me,” Manning went on, “this isn’t final. In a sense it alters nothing. I shall still wear your favor—even if it is a stolen and forbidden favor—in my casque.... I shall still believe in you. Trust you.”

He repeated several times that he would trust her, though it remained obscure just exactly where the trust came in.

“Look here,” he cried out of a silence, with a sudden flash of understanding, “did you mean to throw me over when you came out with me this afternoon?”

Ann Veronica hesitated, and with a startled mind realized the truth. “No,” she answered, reluctantly.

“Very well,” said Manning. “Then I don’t take this as final. That’s all. I’ve bored you or something.... You think you love this other man! No doubt you do love him. Before you have lived—”

He became darkly prophetic. He thrust out a rhetorical hand.

“I will MAKE you love me! Until he has faded—faded into a memory...”

He saw her into the train at Waterloo, and stood, a tall, grave figure, with hat upraised, as the carriage moved forward slowly and hid him. Ann Veronica sat back with a sigh of relief. Manning might go on now idealizing her as much as he liked. She was no longer a confederate in that. He might go on as the devoted lover until he tired. She had done forever with the Age of Chivalry, and her own base adaptations of its traditions to the compromising life. She was honest again.

But when she turned her thoughts to Morningside Park she perceived the tangled skein of life was now to be further complicated by his romantic importunity.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

THE COLLAPSE OF THE PENITENT

Part 1

Spring had held back that year until the dawn of May, and then spring and summer came with a rush together. Two days after this conversation between Manning and Ann Veronica, Capes came into the laboratory at lunch-time and found her alone there standing by the open window, and not even pretending to be doing anything.

He came in with his hands in his trousers pockets and a general air of depression in his bearing. He was engaged in detesting Manning and himself in almost equal measure. His face brightened at the sight of her, and he came toward her.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Nothing,” said Ann Veronica, and stared over her shoulder out of the window.

“So am I.... Lassitude?”

“I suppose so.”

“*I* can’t work.”

“Nor I,” said Ann Veronica.

Pause.

“It’s the spring,” he said. “It’s the warming up of the year, the coming of the light mornings, the way in which everything begins to run about and begin new things. Work becomes distasteful; one thinks of holidays. This year—I’ve got it badly. I want to get away. I’ve never wanted to get away so much.”

“Where do you go?”

“Oh!—Alps.”

“Climbing?”

“Yes.”

“That’s rather a fine sort of holiday!”

He made no answer for three or four seconds.

“Yes,” he said, “I want to get away. I feel at moments as though I could bolt for it.... Silly, isn’t it? Undisciplined.”

He went to the window and fidgeted with the blind, looking out to where the tree-tops of Regent’s Park showed distantly over the houses. He turned round toward her and found her looking at him and standing very still.

“It’s the stir of spring,” he said.

“I believe it is.”

She glanced out of the window, and the distant trees were a froth of hard spring green and almond blossom. She formed a wild resolution, and, lest she should waver from

it, she set about at once to realize it. “I’ve broken off my engagement,” she said, in a matter-of-fact tone, and found her heart thumping in her neck. He moved slightly, and she went on, with a slight catching of her breath: “It’s a bother and disturbance, but you see—” She had to go through with it now, because she could think of nothing but her preconceived words. Her voice was weak and flat.

“I’ve fallen in love.”

He never helped her by a sound.

“I—I didn’t love the man I was engaged to,” she said. She met his eyes for a moment, and could not interpret their expression. They struck her as cold and indifferent.

Her heart failed her and her resolution became water. She remained standing stiffly, unable even to move. She could not look at him through an interval that seemed to her a vast gulf of time. But she felt his lax figure become rigid.

At last his voice came to release her tension.

“I thought you weren’t keeping up to the mark. You—It’s jolly of you to confide in me. Still—” Then, with incredible and obviously deliberate stupidity, and a voice as flat as her own, he asked, “Who is the man?”

Her spirit raged within her at the dumbness, the paralysis that had fallen upon her. Grace, confidence, the power of movement even, seemed gone from her. A fever of shame ran through her being. Horrible doubts assailed her. She sat down awkwardly and helplessly on one of the little stools by her table and covered her face with her hands.

“Can’t you SEE how things are?” she said.

Part 2

Before Capes could answer her in any way the door at the end of the laboratory opened noisily and Miss Klegg appeared. She went to her own table and sat down. At the sound of the door Ann Veronica uncovered a tearless face, and with one swift movement assumed a conversational attitude. Things hung for a moment in an awkward silence.

“You see,” said Ann Veronica, staring before her at the window-sash, “that’s the form my question takes at the present time.”

Capes had not quite the same power of recovery. He stood with his hands in his pockets looking at Miss Klegg’s back. His face was white. “It’s—it’s a difficult question.” He appeared to be paralyzed by abstruse acoustic calculations. Then, very awkwardly, he took a stool and placed it at the end of Ann Veronica’s table, and sat down. He glanced at Miss Klegg again, and spoke quickly and furtively, with eager eyes on Ann Veronica’s face.

“I had a faint idea once that things were as you say they are, but the affair of the ring—of the unexpected ring—puzzled me. Wish SHE”—he indicated Miss Klegg’s back with a nod—“was at the bottom of the sea…. I would like to talk to you about this—soon. If you don’t think it would be a social outrage, perhaps I might walk with you to your railway station.”

“I will wait,” said Ann Veronica, still not looking at him, “and we will go into Regent’s Park. No—you shall come with me to Waterloo.”

“Right!” he said, and hesitated, and then got up and went into the preparation-room.

Part 3

For a time they walked in silence through the back streets that lead southward from the College. Capes bore a face of infinite perplexity.

“The thing I feel most disposed to say, Miss Stanley,” he began at last, “is that this is very sudden.”

“It’s been coming on since first I came into the laboratory.”

“What do you want?” he asked, bluntly.

“You!” said Ann Veronica.

The sense of publicity, of people coming and going about them, kept them both unemotional. And neither had any of that theatricality which demands gestures and facial expression.

“I suppose you know I like you tremendously?” he pursued.

“You told me that in the Zoological Gardens.”

She found her muscles a-tremble. But there was nothing in her bearing that a passer-by would have noted, to tell of the excitement that possessed her.

“I”—he seemed to have a difficulty with the word—“I love you. I’ve told you that practically already. But I can give it its name now. You needn’t be in any doubt about it. I tell you that because it puts us on a footing....”

They went on for a time without another word.

“But don’t you know about me?” he said at last.

“Something. Not much.”

“I’m a married man. And my wife won’t live with me for reasons that I think most women would consider sound.... Or I should have made love to you long ago.”

There came a silence again.

“I don’t care,” said Ann Veronica.

“But if you knew anything of that—”

“I did. It doesn’t matter.”

“Why did you tell me? I thought—I thought we were going to be friends.”

He was suddenly resentful. He seemed to charge her with the ruin of their situation. “Why on earth did you TELL me?” he cried.

“I couldn’t help it. It was an impulse. I HAD to.”

“But it changes things. I thought you understood.”

“I had to,” she repeated. “I was sick of the make-believe. I don’t care! I’m glad I did. I’m glad I did.”

“Look here!” said Capes, “what on earth do you want? What do you think we can do? Don’t you know what men are, and what life is?—to come to me and talk to me like this!”

“I know—something, anyhow. But I don’t care; I haven’t a spark of shame. I don’t see any good in life if it hasn’t got you in it. I wanted you to know. And now you know. And the fences are down for good. You can’t look me in the eyes and say you don’t care for me.”

“I’ve told you,” he said.

“Very well,” said Ann Veronica, with an air of concluding the discussion.

They walked side by side for a time.

“In that laboratory one gets to disregard these passions,” began Capes. “Men are curious animals, with a trick of falling in love readily with girls about your age. One has to train one’s self not to. I’ve accustomed myself to think of you—as if you were like every other girl who works at the schools—as something quite outside these possibilities. If only out of loyalty to co-education one has to do that. Apart from everything else, this meeting of ours is a breach of a good rule.”

“Rules are for every day,” said Ann Veronica. “This is not every day. This is something above all rules.”

“For you.”

“Not for you?”

“No. No; I’m going to stick to the rules.... It’s odd, but nothing but cliche seems to meet this case. You’ve placed me in a very exceptional position, Miss Stanley.” The note of his own voice exasperated him. “Oh, damn!” he said.

She made no answer, and for a time he debated some problems with himself.

“No!” he said aloud at last.

“The plain common-sense of the case,” he said, “is that we can’t possibly be lovers in the ordinary sense. That, I think, is manifest. You know, I’ve done no work at all this afternoon. I’ve been smoking cigarettes in the preparation-room and thinking this out. We can’t be lovers in the ordinary sense, but we can be great and intimate friends.”

“We are,” said Ann Veronica.

“You’ve interested me enormously....”

He paused with a sense of ineptitude. “I want to be your friend,” he said. “I said that at the Zoo, and I mean it. Let us be friends—as near and close as friends can be.”

Ann Veronica gave him a pallid profile.

“What is the good of pretending?” she said.

“We don’t pretend.”

“We do. Love is one thing and friendship quite another. Because I’m younger than you.... I’ve got imagination.... I know what I am talking about. Mr. Capes, do you think... do you think I don’t know the meaning of love?”

Part 4

Capes made no answer for a time.

“My mind is full of confused stuff,” he said at length. “I’ve been thinking—all the afternoon. Oh, and weeks and months of thought and feeling there are bottled up too.... I feel a mixture of beast and uncle. I feel like a fraudulent trustee. Every rule is against me—Why did I let you begin this? I might have told—”

“I don’t see that you could help—”

“I might have helped—”

“You couldn’t.”

“I ought to have—all the same.

“I wonder,” he said, and went off at a tangent. “You know about my scandalous past?”

“Very little. It doesn’t seem to matter. Does it?”

“I think it does. Profoundly.”

“How?”

“It prevents our marrying. It forbids—all sorts of things.”

“It can’t prevent our loving.”

“I’m afraid it can’t. But, by Jove! it’s going to make our loving a fiercely abstract thing.”

“You are separated from your wife?”

“Yes, but do you know how?”

“Not exactly.”

“Why on earth—? A man ought to be labelled. You see, I’m separated from my wife. But she doesn’t and won’t divorce me. You don’t understand the fix I am in. And you don’t know what led to our separation. And, in fact, all round the problem you don’t

know and I don't see how I could possibly have told you before. I wanted to, that day in the Zoo. But I trusted to that ring of yours."

"Poor old ring!" said Ann Veronica.

"I ought never have gone to the Zoo, I suppose. I asked you to go. But a man is a mixed creature.... I wanted the time with you. I wanted it badly."

"Tell me about yourself," said Ann Veronica.

"To begin with, I was—I was in the divorce court. I was—I was a co-respondent. You understand that term?"

Ann Veronica smiled faintly. "A modern girl does understand these terms. She reads novels—and history—and all sorts of things. Did you really doubt if I knew?"

"No. But I don't suppose you can understand."

"I don't see why I shouldn't."

"To know things by name is one thing; to know them by seeing them and feeling them and being them quite another. That is where life takes advantage of youth. You don't understand."

"Perhaps I don't."

"You don't. That's the difficulty. If I told you the facts, I expect, since you are in love with me, you'd explain the whole business as being very fine and honorable for me—the Higher Morality, or something of that sort.... It wasn't."

"I don't deal very much," said Ann Veronica, "in the Higher Morality, or the Higher Truth, or any of those things."

"Perhaps you don't. But a human being who is young and clean, as you are, is apt to ennoble—or explain away."

"I've had a biological training. I'm a hard young woman."

"Nice clean hardness, anyhow. I think you are hard. There's something—something ADULT about you. I'm talking to you now as though you had all the wisdom and charity in the world. I'm going to tell you things plainly. Plainly. It's best. And then you can go home and think things over before we talk again. I want you to be clear what you're really and truly up to, anyhow."

"I don't mind knowing," said Ann Veronica.

“It’s precious unromantic.”

“Well, tell me.”

“I married pretty young,” said Capes. “I’ve got—I have to tell you this to make myself clear—a streak of ardent animal in my composition. I married—I married a woman whom I still think one of the most beautiful persons in the world. She is a year or so older than I am, and she is, well, of a very serene and proud and dignified temperament. If you met her you would, I am certain, think her as fine as I do. She has never done a really ignoble thing that I know of—never. I met her when we were both very young, as young as you are. I loved her and made love to her, and I don’t think she quite loved me back in the same way.”

He paused for a time. Ann Veronica said nothing.

“These are the sort of things that aren’t supposed to happen. They leave them out of novels—these incompatibilities. Young people ignore them until they find themselves up against them. My wife doesn’t understand, doesn’t understand now. She despises me, I suppose.... We married, and for a time we were happy. She was fine and tender. I worshipped her and subdued myself.”

He left off abruptly. “Do you understand what I am talking about? It’s no good if you don’t.”

“I think so,” said Ann Veronica, and colored. “In fact, yes, I do.”

“Do you think of these things—these matters—as belonging to our Higher Nature or our Lower?”

“I don’t deal in Higher Things, I tell you,” said Ann Veronica, “or Lower, for the matter of that. I don’t classify.” She hesitated. “Flesh and flowers are all alike to me.”

“That’s the comfort of you. Well, after a time there came a fever in my blood. Don’t think it was anything better than fever—or a bit beautiful. It wasn’t. Quite soon, after we were married—it was just within a year—I formed a friendship with the wife of a friend, a woman eight years older than myself.... It wasn’t anything splendid, you know. It was just a shabby, stupid, furtive business that began between us. Like stealing. We dressed it in a little music.... I want you to understand clearly that I was indebted to the man in many small ways. I was mean to him.... It was the gratification of an immense necessity. We were two people with a craving. We felt like thieves. We WERE thieves.... We LIKED each other well enough. Well, my friend found us out, and would give no quarter. He divorced her. How do you like the story?”

“Go on,” said Ann Veronica, a little hoarsely, “tell me all of it.”

“My wife was astounded—wounded beyond measure. She thought me—filthy. All her pride raged at me. One particularly humiliating thing came out—humiliating for me. There was a second co-respondent. I hadn’t heard of him before the trial. I don’t know why that should be so acutely humiliating. There’s no logic in these things. It was.”

“Poor you!” said Ann Veronica.

“My wife refused absolutely to have anything more to do with me. She could hardly speak to me; she insisted relentlessly upon a separation. She had money of her own—much more than I have—and there was no need to squabble about that. She has given herself up to social work.”

“Well—”

“That’s all. Practically all. And yet—Wait a little, you’d better have every bit of it. One doesn’t go about with these passions allayed simply because they have made wreckage and a scandal. There one is! The same stuff still! One has a craving in one’s blood, a craving roused, cut off from its redeeming and guiding emotional side. A man has more freedom to do evil than a woman. Irregularly, in a quite inglorious and unromantic way, you know, I am a vicious man. That’s—that’s my private life. Until the last few months. It isn’t what I have been but what I am. I haven’t taken much account of it until now. My honor has been in my scientific work and public discussion and the things I write. Lots of us are like that. But, you see, I’m smirched. For the sort of love-making you think about. I’ve muddled all this business. I’ve had my time and lost my chances. I’m damaged goods. And you’re as clean as fire. You come with those clear eyes of yours, as valiant as an angel....”

He stopped abruptly.

“Well?” she said.

“That’s all.”

“It’s so strange to think of you—troubled by such things. I didn’t think—I don’t know what I thought. Suddenly all this makes you human. Makes you real.”

“But don’t you see how I must stand to you? Don’t you see how it bars us from being lovers—You can’t—at first. You must think it over. It’s all outside the world of your experience.”

“I don’t think it makes a rap of difference, except for one thing. I love you more. I’ve wanted you—always. I didn’t dream, not even in my wildest dreaming, that—you might have any need of me.”

He made a little noise in his throat as if something had cried out within him, and for a time they were both too full for speech.

They were going up the slope into Waterloo Station.

“You go home and think of all this,” he said, “and talk about it to-morrow. Don’t, don’t say anything now, not anything. As for loving you, I do. I do—with all my heart. It’s no good hiding it any more. I could never have talked to you like this, forgetting everything that parts us, forgetting even your age, if I did not love you utterly. If I were a clean, free man—We’ll have to talk of all these things. Thank goodness there’s plenty of opportunity! And we two can talk. Anyhow, now you’ve begun it, there’s nothing to keep us in all this from being the best friends in the world. And talking of every conceivable thing. Is there?”

“Nothing,” said Ann Veronica, with a radiant face.

“Before this there was a sort of restraint—a make-believe. It’s gone.”

“It’s gone.”

“Friendship and love being separate things. And that confounded engagement!”

“Gone!”

They came upon a platform, and stood before her compartment.

He took her hand and looked into her eyes and spoke, divided against himself, in a voice that was forced and insincere.

“I shall be very glad to have you for a friend,” he said, “loving friend. I had never dreamed of such a friend as you.”

She smiled, sure of herself beyond any pretending, into his troubled eyes. Hadn’t they settled that already?

“I want you as a friend,” he persisted, almost as if he disputed something.

Part 5

The next morning she waited in the laboratory at the lunch-hour in the reasonable certainty that he would come to her.

“Well, you have thought it over?” he said, sitting down beside her.

“I’ve been thinking of you all night,” she answered.

“Well?”

“I don’t care a rap for all these things.”

He said nothing for a space.

“I don’t see there’s any getting away from the fact that you and I love each other,” he said, slowly. “So far you’ve got me and I you.... You’ve got me. I’m like a creature just wakened up. My eyes are open to you. I keep on thinking of you. I keep on thinking of little details and aspects of your voice, your eyes, the way you walk, the way your hair goes back from the side of your forehead. I believe I have always been in love with you. Always. Before ever I knew you.”

She sat motionless, with her hand tightening over the edge of the table, and he, too, said no more. She began to tremble violently.

He stood up abruptly and went to the window.

“We have,” he said, “to be the utmost friends.”

She stood up and held her arms toward him. “I want you to kiss me,” she said.

He gripped the window-sill behind him.

“If I do,” he said.... “No! I want to do without that. I want to do without that for a time. I want to give you time to think. I am a man—of a sort of experience. You are a girl with very little. Just sit down on that stool again and let’s talk of this in cold blood. People of your sort—I don’t want the instincts to—to rush our situation. Are you sure what it is you want of me?”

“I want you. I want you to be my lover. I want to give myself to you. I want to be whatever I can to you.” She paused for a moment. “Is that plain?” she asked.

“If I didn’t love you better than myself,” said Capes, “I wouldn’t fence like this with you.

“I am convinced you haven’t thought this out,” he went on. “You do not know what such a relation means. We are in love. Our heads swim with the thought of being together. But what can we do? Here am I, fixed to respectability and this laboratory; you’re living at home. It means... just furtive meetings.”

“I don’t care how we meet,” she said.

“It will spoil your life.”

“It will make it. I want you. I am clear I want you. You are different from all the world for me. You can think all round me. You are the one person I can understand and feel—feel right with. I don’t idealize you. Don’t imagine that. It isn’t because you’re good, but because I may be rotten bad; and there’s something—something living and understanding in you. Something that is born anew each time we meet, and pines when we are separated. You see, I’m selfish. I’m rather scornful. I think too much about myself. You’re the only person I’ve really given good, straight, unselfish thought to. I’m making a mess of my life—unless you come in and take it. I am. In you—if you can love me—there is salvation. Salvation. I know what I am doing better than you do. Think—think of that engagement!”

Their talk had come to eloquent silences that contradicted all he had to say.

She stood up before him, smiling faintly.

“I think we’ve exhausted this discussion,” she said.

“I think we have,” he answered, gravely, and took her in his arms, and smoothed her hair from her forehead, and very tenderly kissed her lips.

Part 6

They spent the next Sunday in Richmond Park, and mingled the happy sensation of being together uninterruptedly through the long sunshine of a summer’s day with the ample discussion of their position. “This has all the clean freshness of spring and youth,” said Capes; “it is love with the down on; it is like the glitter of dew in the sunlight to be lovers such as we are, with no more than one warm kiss between us. I love everything to-day, and all of you, but I love this, this—this innocence upon us most of all.

“You can’t imagine,” he said, “what a beastly thing a furtive love affair can be.

“This isn’t furtive,” said Ann Veronica.

“Not a bit of it. And we won’t make it so.... We mustn’t make it so.”

They loitered under trees, they sat on mossy banks they gossiped on friendly benches, they came back to lunch at the “Star and Garter,” and talked their afternoon away in the garden that looks out upon the crescent of the river. They had a universe to talk about—two universes.

“What are we going to do?” said Capes, with his eyes on the broad distances beyond the ribbon of the river.

“I will do whatever you want,” said Ann Veronica.

“My first love was all blundering,” said Capes.

He thought for a moment, and went on: “Love is something that has to be taken care of. One has to be so careful.... It’s a beautiful plant, but a tender one.... I didn’t know. I’ve a dread of love dropping its petals, becoming mean and ugly. How can I tell you all I feel? I love you beyond measure. And I’m afraid.... I’m anxious, joyfully anxious, like a man when he has found a treasure.”

“YOU know,” said Ann Veronica. “I just came to you and put myself in your hands.”

“That’s why, in a way, I’m prudish. I’ve—dreads. I don’t want to tear at you with hot, rough hands.”

“As you will, dear lover. But for me it doesn’t matter. Nothing is wrong that you do. Nothing. I am quite clear about this. I know exactly what I am doing. I give myself to you.”

“God send you may never repent it!” cried Capes.

She put her hand in his to be squeezed.

“You see,” he said, “it is doubtful if we can ever marry. Very doubtful. I have been thinking—I will go to my wife again. I will do my utmost. But for a long time, anyhow, we lovers have to be as if we were no more than friends.”

He paused. She answered slowly. “That is as you will,” she said.

“Why should it matter?” he said.

And then, as she answered nothing, “Seeing that we are lovers.”

Part 7

It was rather less than a week after that walk that Capes came and sat down beside Ann Veronica for their customary talk in the lunch hour. He took a handful of almonds and raisins that she held out to him—for both these young people had given up the practice of going out for luncheon—and kept her hand for a moment to kiss her finger-tips. He did not speak for a moment.

“Well?” she said.

“I say!” he said, without any movement. “Let’s go.”

“Go!” She did not understand him at first, and then her heart began to beat very rapidly.

“Stop this—this humbugging,” he explained. “It’s like the Picture and the Bust. I can’t stand it. Let’s go. Go off and live together—until we can marry. Dare you?”

“Do you mean NOW?”

“At the end of the session. It’s the only clean way for us. Are you prepared to do it?”

Her hands clenched. “Yes,” she said, very faintly. And then: “Of course! Always. It is what I have wanted, what I have meant all along.”

She stared before her, trying to keep back a rush of tears.

Capes kept obstinately stiff, and spoke between his teeth.

“There’s endless reasons, no doubt, why we shouldn’t,” he said. “Endless. It’s wrong in the eyes of most people. For many of them it will smirch us forever.... You DO understand?”

“Who cares for most people?” she said, not looking at him.

“I do. It means social isolation—struggle.”

“If you dare—I dare,” said Ann Veronica. “I was never so clear in all my life as I have been in this business.” She lifted steadfast eyes to him. “Dare!” she said. The tears were welling over now, but her voice was steady. “You’re not a man for me—not one of a sex, I mean. You’re just a particular being with nothing else in the world to class with you. You are just necessary to life for me. I’ve never met any one like you. To have you is all important. Nothing else weighs against it. Morals only begin when that is settled. I sha’n’t care a rap if we can never marry. I’m not a bit afraid of anything—scandal, difficulty, struggle.... I rather want them. I do want them.”

“You’ll get them,” he said. “This means a plunge.”

“Are you afraid?”

“Only for you! Most of my income will vanish. Even unbelieving biological demonstrators must respect decorum; and besides, you see—you were a student. We shall have—hardly any money.”

“I don’t care.”

“Hardship and danger.”

“With you!”

“And as for your people?”

“They don’t count. That is the dreadful truth. This—all this swamps them. They don’t count, and I don’t care.”

Capes suddenly abandoned his attitude of meditative restraint. “By Jove!” he broke out, “one tries to take a serious, sober view. I don’t quite know why. But this is a great lark, Ann Veronica! This turns life into a glorious adventure!”

“Ah!” she cried in triumph.

“I shall have to give up biology, anyhow. I’ve always had a sneaking desire for the writing-trade. That is what I must do. I can.”

“Of course you can.”

“And biology was beginning to bore me a bit. One research is very like another.... Latterly I’ve been doing things.... Creative work appeals to me wonderfully. Things seem to come rather easily.... But that, and that sort of thing, is just a day-dream. For a time I must do journalism and work hard.... What isn’t a day-dream is this: that you and I are going to put an end to flummery—and go!”

“Go!” said Ann Veronica, clenching her hands.

“For better or worse.”

“For richer or poorer.”

She could not go on, for she was laughing and crying at the same time. “We were bound to do this when you kissed me,” she sobbed through her tears. “We have been all this time—Only your queer code of honor—Honor! Once you begin with love you have to see it through.”

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

THE LAST DAYS AT HOME

Part 1

They decided to go to Switzerland at the session's end. "We'll clean up everything tidy," said Capes....

For her pride's sake, and to save herself from long day-dreams and an unappeasable longing for her lover, Ann Veronica worked hard at her biology during those closing weeks. She was, as Capes had said, a hard young woman. She was keenly resolved to do well in the school examination, and not to be drowned in the seas of emotion that threatened to submerge her intellectual being.

Nevertheless, she could not prevent a rising excitement as the dawn of the new life drew near to her—a thrilling of the nerves, a secret and delicious exaltation above the common circumstances of existence. Sometimes her straying mind would become astonishingly active—embroidering bright and decorative things that she could say to Capes; sometimes it passed into a state of passive acquiescence, into a radiant, formless, golden joy. She was aware of people—her aunt, her father, her fellow-students, friends, and neighbors—moving about outside this glowing secret, very much as an actor is aware of the dim audience beyond the barrier of the footlights. They might applaud, or object, or interfere, but the drama was her very own. She was going through with that, anyhow.

The feeling of last days grew stronger with her as their number diminished. She went about the familiar home with a clearer and clearer sense of inevitable conclusions. She became exceptionally considerate and affectionate with her father and aunt, and more and more concerned about the coming catastrophe that she was about to precipitate upon them. Her aunt had a once exasperating habit of interrupting her work with demands for small household services, but now Ann Veronica rendered them with a queer readiness of anticipatory propitiation. She was greatly exercised by the problem of confiding in the Widgetts; they were dears, and she talked away two

evenings with Constance without broaching the topic; she made some vague intimations in letters to Miss Miniver that Miss Miniver failed to mark. But she did not bother her head very much about her relations with these sympathizers.

And at length her penultimate day in Morningside Park dawned for her. She got up early, and walked about the garden in the dewy June sunshine and revived her childhood. She was saying good-bye to childhood and home, and her making; she was going out into the great, multitudinous world; this time there would be no returning. She was at the end of girlhood and on the eve of a woman's crowning experience. She visited the corner that had been her own little garden—her forget-me-nots and candytuft had long since been elbowed into insignificance by weeds; she visited the raspberry-canes that had sheltered that first love affair with the little boy in velvet, and the greenhouse where she had been wont to read her secret letters. Here was the place behind the shed where she had used to hide from Roddy's persecutions, and here the border of herbaceous perennials under whose stems was fairyland. The back of the house had been the Alps for climbing, and the shrubs in front of it a Terai. The knots and broken pale that made the garden-fence scalable, and gave access to the fields behind, were still to be traced. And here against a wall were the plum-trees. In spite of God and wasps and her father, she had stolen plums; and once because of discovered misdeeds, and once because she had realized that her mother was dead, she had lain on her face in the unmown grass, beneath the elm-trees that came beyond the vegetables, and poured out her soul in weeping.

Remote little Ann Veronica! She would never know the heart of that child again! That child had loved fairy princes with velvet suits and golden locks, and she was in love with a real man named Capes, with little gleams of gold on his cheek and a pleasant voice and firm and shapely hands. She was going to him soon and certainly, going to his strong, embracing arms. She was going through a new world with him side by side. She had been so busy with life that, for a vast gulf of time, as it seemed, she had given no thought to those ancient, imagined things of her childhood. Now, abruptly, they were real again, though very distant, and she had come to say farewell to them across one sundering year.

She was unusually helpful at breakfast, and unselfish about the eggs: and then she went off to catch the train before her father's. She did this to please him. He hated travelling second-class with her—indeed, he never did—but he also disliked travelling in the same train when his daughter was in an inferior class, because of the look of the thing. So he liked to go by a different train. And in the Avenue she had an encounter with Ramage.

It was an odd little encounter, that left vague and dubitable impressions in her mind. She was aware of him—a silk-hatted, shiny-black figure on the opposite side of the Avenue; and then, abruptly and startlingly, he crossed the road and saluted and spoke to her.

“I MUST speak to you,” he said. “I can’t keep away from you.”

She made some inane response. She was struck by a change in his appearance. His eyes looked a little bloodshot to her; his face had lost something of its ruddy freshness.

He began a jerky, broken conversation that lasted until they reached the station, and left her puzzled at its drift and meaning. She quickened her pace, and so did he, talking at her slightly averted ear. She made lumpish and inadequate interruptions rather than replies. At times he seemed to be claiming pity from her; at times he was threatening her with her check and exposure; at times he was boasting of his inflexible will, and how, in the end, he always got what he wanted. He said that his life was boring and stupid without her. Something or other—she did not catch what—he was damned if he could stand. He was evidently nervous, and very anxious to be impressive; his projecting eyes sought to dominate. The crowning aspect of the incident, for her mind, was the discovery that he and her indiscretion with him no longer mattered very much. Its importance had vanished with her abandonment of compromise. Even her debt to him was a triviality now.

And of course! She had a brilliant idea. It surprised her she hadn’t thought of it before! She tried to explain that she was going to pay him forty pounds without fail next week. She said as much to him. She repeated this breathlessly.

“I was glad you did not send it back again,” he said.

He touched a long-standing sore, and Ann Veronica found herself vainly trying to explain—the inexplicable. “It’s because I mean to send it back altogether,” she said.

He ignored her protests in order to pursue some impressive line of his own.

“Here we are, living in the same suburb,” he began. “We have to be—modern.”

Her heart leaped within her as she caught that phrase. That knot also would be cut. Modern, indeed! She was going to be as primordial as chipped flint.

Part 2

In the late afternoon, as Ann Veronica was gathering flowers for the dinner-table, her father came strolling across the lawn toward her with an affectation of great deliberation.

“I want to speak to you about a little thing, Vee,” said Mr. Stanley.

Ann Veronica’s tense nerves started, and she stood still with her eyes upon him, wondering what it might be that impended.

“You were talking to that fellow Ramage to-day—in the Avenue. Walking to the station with him.”

So that was it!

“He came and talked to me.”

“Ye—e—es.” Mr. Stanley considered. “Well, I don’t want you to talk to him,” he said, very firmly.

Ann Veronica paused before she answered. “Don’t you think I ought to?” she asked, very submissively.

“No.” Mr. Stanley coughed and faced toward the house. “He is not—I don’t like him. I think it inadvisable—I don’t want an intimacy to spring up between you and a man of that type.”

Ann Veronica reflected. “I HAVE—had one or two talks with him, daddy.”

“Don’t let there be any more. I—In fact, I dislike him extremely.”

“Suppose he comes and talks to me?”

“A girl can always keep a man at a distance if she cares to do it. She—She can snub him.”

Ann Veronica picked a cornflower.

“I wouldn’t make this objection,” Mr. Stanley went on, “but there are things—there are stories about Ramage. He’s—He lives in a world of possibilities outside your imagination. His treatment of his wife is most unsatisfactory. Most unsatisfactory. A bad man, in fact. A dissipated, loose-living man.”

“I’ll try not to see him again,” said Ann Veronica. “I didn’t know you objected to him, daddy.”

“Strongly,” said Mr. Stanley, “very strongly.”

The conversation hung. Ann Veronica wondered what her father would do if she were to tell him the full story of her relations with Ramage.

“A man like that taints a girl by looking at her, by his mere conversation.” He adjusted his glasses on his nose. There was another little thing he had to say. “One has to be so careful of one’s friends and acquaintances,” he remarked, by way of transition. “They mould one insensibly.” His voice assumed an easy detached tone. “I suppose, Vee, you don’t see much of those Widgetts now?”

“I go in and talk to Constance sometimes.”

“Do you?”

“We were great friends at school.”

“No doubt.... Still—I don’t know whether I quite like—Something ramshackle about those people, Vee. While I am talking about your friends, I feel—I think you ought to know how I look at it.” His voice conveyed studied moderation. “I don’t mind, of course, your seeing her sometimes, still there are differences—differences in social atmospheres. One gets drawn into things. Before you know where you are you find yourself in a complication. I don’t want to influence you unduly—But—They’re artistic people, Vee. That’s the fact about them. We’re different.”

“I suppose we are,” said Vee, rearranging the flowers in her hand.

“Friendships that are all very well between school-girls don’t always go on into later life. It’s—it’s a social difference.”

“I like Constance very much.”

“No doubt. Still, one has to be reasonable. As you admitted to me—one has to square one’s self with the world. You don’t know. With people of that sort all sorts of things may happen. We don’t want things to happen.”

Ann Veronica made no answer.

A vague desire to justify himself ruffled her father. “I may seem unduly—anxious. I can’t forget about your sister. It’s that has always made me—SHE, you know, was drawn into a set—didn’t discriminate Private theatricals.”

Ann Veronica remained anxious to hear more of her sister’s story from her father’s point of view, but he did not go on. Even so much allusion as this to that family shadow, she felt, was an immense recognition of her ripening years. She glanced at

him. He stood a little anxious and fussy, bothered by the responsibility of her, entirely careless of what her life was or was likely to be, ignoring her thoughts and feelings, ignorant of every fact of importance in her life, explaining everything he could not understand in her as nonsense and perversity, concerned only with a terror of bothers and undesirable situations. “We don’t want things to happen!” Never had he shown his daughter so clearly that the womenkind he was persuaded he had to protect and control could please him in one way, and in one way only, and that was by doing nothing except the punctual domestic duties and being nothing except restful appearances. He had quite enough to see to and worry about in the City without their doing things. He had no use for Ann Veronica; he had never had a use for her since she had been too old to sit upon his knee. Nothing but the constraint of social usage now linked him to her. And the less “anything” happened the better. The less she lived, in fact, the better. These realizations rushed into Ann Veronica’s mind and hardened her heart against him. She spoke slowly. “I may not see the Widgetts for some little time, father,” she said. “I don’t think I shall.”

“Some little tiff?”

“No; but I don’t think I shall see them.”

Suppose she were to add, “I am going away!”

“I’m glad to hear you say it,” said Mr. Stanley, and was so evidently pleased that Ann Veronica’s heart smote her.

“I am very glad to hear you say it,” he repeated, and refrained from further inquiry. “I think we are growing sensible,” he said. “I think you are getting to understand me better.”

He hesitated, and walked away from her toward the house. Her eyes followed him. The curve of his shoulders, the very angle of his feet, expressed relief at her apparent obedience. “Thank goodness!” said that retreating aspect, “that’s said and over. Vee’s all right. There’s nothing happened at all!” She didn’t mean, he concluded, to give him any more trouble ever, and he was free to begin a fresh chromatic novel—he had just finished the Blue Lagoon, which he thought very beautiful and tender and absolutely irrelevant to Morningside Park—or work in peace at his microtome without bothering about her in the least.

The immense disillusionment that awaited him! The devastating disillusionment! She had a vague desire to run after him, to state her case to him, to wring some understanding from him of what life was to her. She felt a cheat and a sneak to his unsuspecting retreating back.

“But what can one do?” asked Ann Veronica.

Part 3

She dressed carefully for dinner in a black dress that her father liked, and that made her look serious and responsible. Dinner was quite uneventful. Her father read a draft prospectus warily, and her aunt dropped fragments of her projects for managing while the cook had a holiday. After dinner Ann Veronica went into the drawing-room with Miss Stanley, and her father went up to his den for his pipe and pensive petrography. Later in the evening she heard him whistling, poor man!

She felt very restless and excited. She refused coffee, though she knew that anyhow she was doomed to a sleepless night. She took up one of her father’s novels and put it down again, fretted up to her own room for some work, sat on her bed and meditated upon the room that she was now really abandoning forever, and returned at length with a stocking to darn. Her aunt was making herself cuffs out of little slips of insertion under the newly lit lamp.

Ann Veronica sat down in the other arm-chair and darned badly for a minute or so. Then she looked at her aunt, and traced with a curious eye the careful arrangement of her hair, her sharp nose, the little drooping lines of mouth and chin and cheek.

Her thought spoke aloud. “Were you ever in love, aunt?” she asked.

Her aunt glanced up startled, and then sat very still, with hands that had ceased to work. “What makes you ask such a question, Vee?” she said.

“I wondered.”

Her aunt answered in a low voice: “I was engaged to him, dear, for seven years, and then he died.”

Ann Veronica made a sympathetic little murmur.

“He was in holy orders, and we were to have been married when he got a living. He was a Wiltshire Edmondshaw, a very old family.”

She sat very still.

Ann Veronica hesitated with a question that had leaped up in her mind, and that she felt was cruel. “Are you sorry you waited, aunt?” she said.

Her aunt was a long time before she answered. “His stipend forbade it,” she said, and seemed to fall into a train of thought. “It would have been rash and unwise,” she said at the end of a meditation. “What he had was altogether insufficient.”

Ann Veronica looked at the mildly pensive gray eyes and the comfortable, rather refined face with a penetrating curiosity. Presently her aunt sighed deeply and looked at the clock. “Time for my Patience,” she said. She got up, put the neat cuffs she had made into her work-basket, and went to the bureau for the little cards in the morocco case. Ann Veronica jumped up to get her the card-table. “I haven’t seen the new Patience, dear,” she said. “May I sit beside you?”

“It’s a very difficult one,” said her aunt. “Perhaps you will help me shuffle?”

Ann Veronica did, and also assisted nimbly with the arrangements of the rows of eight with which the struggle began. Then she sat watching the play, sometimes offering a helpful suggestion, sometimes letting her attention wander to the smoothly shining arms she had folded across her knees just below the edge of the table. She was feeling extraordinarily well that night, so that the sense of her body was a deep delight, a realization of a gentle warmth and strength and elastic firmness. Then she glanced at the cards again, over which her aunt’s many-ringed hand played, and then at the rather weak, rather plump face that surveyed its operations.

It came to Ann Veronica that life was wonderful beyond measure. It seemed incredible that she and her aunt were, indeed, creatures of the same blood, only by a birth or so different beings, and part of that same broad interlacing stream of human life that has invented the fauns and nymphs, Astarte, Aphrodite, Freya, and all the twining beauty of the gods. The love-songs of all the ages were singing in her blood, the scent of night stock from the garden filled the air, and the moths that beat upon the closed frames of the window next the lamp set her mind dreaming of kisses in the dusk. Yet her aunt, with a ringed hand flitting to her lips and a puzzled, worried look in her eyes, deaf to all this riot of warmth and flitting desire, was playing Patience—playing Patience, as if Dionysius and her curate had died together. A faint buzz above the ceiling witnessed that petrography, too, was active. Gray and tranquil world! Amazing, passionless world! A world in which days without meaning, days in which “we don’t want things to happen” followed days without meaning—until the last thing happened, the ultimate, unavoidable, coarse, “disagreeable.” It was her last evening in that wrappered life against which she had rebelled. Warm reality was now so near her she could hear it beating in her ears. Away in London even now Capes was packing and preparing; Capes, the magic man whose touch turned one to trembling fire. What was he doing? What was he thinking? It was less than a day now, less than twenty hours. Seventeen

hours, sixteen hours. She glanced at the soft-ticking clock with the exposed brass pendulum upon the white marble mantel, and made a rapid calculation. To be exact, it was just sixteen hours and twenty minutes. The slow stars circled on to the moment of their meeting. The softly glittering summer stars! She saw them shining over mountains of snow, over valleys of haze and warm darkness.... There would be no moon.

“I believe after all it’s coming out!” said Miss Stanley. “The aces made it easy.”

Ann Veronica started from her reverie, sat up in her chair, became attentive. “Look, dear,” she said presently, “you can put the ten on the Jack.”

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

IN THE MOUNTAINS

Part 1

Next day Ann Veronica and Capes felt like newborn things. It seemed to them they could never have been really alive before, but only dimly anticipating existence. They sat face to face beneath an experienced-looking rucksack and a brand new portmanteau and a leather handbag, in the afternoon-boat train that goes from Charing Cross to Folkestone for Boulogne. They tried to read illustrated papers in an unconcerned manner and with forced attention, lest they should catch the leaping exultation in each other’s eyes. And they admired Kent sedulously from the windows.

They crossed the Channel in sunshine and a breeze that just ruffled the sea to glittering scales of silver. Some of the people who watched them standing side by side thought they must be newly wedded because of their happy faces, and others that they were an old-established couple because of their easy confidence in each other.

At Boulogne they took train to Basle; next morning they breakfasted together in the buffet of that station, and thence they caught the Interlaken express, and so went by way of Spies to Frutigen. There was no railway beyond Frutigen in those days; they sent their baggage by post to Kandersteg, and walked along the mule path to the left of

the stream to that queer hollow among the precipices, Blau See, where the petrifying branches of trees lie in the blue deeps of an icy lake, and pine-trees clamber among gigantic boulders. A little inn flying a Swiss flag nestles under a great rock, and there they put aside their knapsacks and lunched and rested in the mid-day shadow of the gorge and the scent of resin. And later they paddled in a boat above the mysterious deeps of the See, and peered down into the green-blues and the blue-greens together. By that time it seemed to them they had lived together twenty years.

Except for one memorable school excursion to Paris, Ann Veronica had never yet been outside England. So that it seemed to her the whole world had changed—the very light of it had changed. Instead of English villas and cottages there were chalets and Italian-built houses shining white; there were lakes of emerald and sapphire and clustering castles, and such sweeps of hill and mountain, such shining uplands of snow, as she had never seen before. Everything was fresh and bright, from the kindly manners of the Frutigen cobbler, who hammered mountain nails into her boots, to the unfamiliar wild flowers that spangled the wayside. And Capes had changed into the easiest and jolliest companion in the world. The mere fact that he was there in the train alongside her, helping her, sitting opposite to her in the dining-car, presently sleeping on a seat within a yard of her, made her heart sing until she was afraid their fellow passengers would hear it. It was too good to be true. She would not sleep for fear of losing a moment of that sense of his proximity. To walk beside him, dressed akin to him, rucksacked and companionable, was bliss in itself; each step she took was like stepping once more across the threshold of heaven.

One trouble, however, shot its slanting bolts athwart the shining warmth of that opening day and marred its perfection, and that was the thought of her father.

She had treated him badly; she had hurt him and her aunt; she had done wrong by their standards, and she would never persuade them that she had done right. She thought of her father in the garden, and of her aunt with her Patience, as she had seen them—how many ages was it ago? Just one day intervened. She felt as if she had struck them unawares. The thought of them distressed her without subtracting at all from the oceans of happiness in which she swam. But she wished she could put the thing she had done in some way to them so that it would not hurt them so much as the truth would certainly do. The thought of their faces, and particularly of her aunt's, as it would meet the fact—disconcerted, unfriendly, condemning, pained—occurred to her again and again.

"Oh! I wish," she said, "that people thought alike about these things."

Capes watched the limpid water dripping from his oar. “I wish they did,” he said, “but they don’t.”

“I feel—All this is the rightest of all conceivable things. I want to tell every one. I want to boast myself.”

“I know.”

“I told them a lie. I told them lies. I wrote three letters yesterday and tore them up. It was so hopeless to put it to them. At last—I told a story.”

“You didn’t tell them our position?”

“I implied we had married.”

“They’ll find out. They’ll know.”

“Not yet.”

“Sooner or later.”

“Possibly—bit by bit.... But it was hopelessly hard to put. I said I knew he disliked and distrusted you and your work—that you shared all Russell’s opinions: he hates Russell beyond measure—and that we couldn’t possibly face a conventional marriage. What else could one say? I left him to suppose—a registry perhaps....”

Capes let his oar smack on the water.

“Do you mind very much?”

He shook his head.

“But it makes me feel inhuman,” he added.

“And me....”

“It’s the perpetual trouble,” he said, “of parent and child. They can’t help seeing things in the way they do. Nor can we. WE don’t think they’re right, but they don’t think we are. A deadlock. In a very definite sense we are in the wrong—hopelessly in the wrong. But—It’s just this: who was to be hurt?”

“I wish no one had to be hurt,” said Ann Veronica. “When one is happy—I don’t like to think of them. Last time I left home I felt as hard as nails. But this is all different. It is different.”

“There’s a sort of instinct of rebellion,” said Capes. “It isn’t anything to do with our times particularly. People think it is, but they are wrong. It’s to do with adolescence.

Long before religion and Society heard of Doubt, girls were all for midnight coaches and Gretna Green. It's a sort of home-leaving instinct."

He followed up a line of thought.

"There's another instinct, too," he went on, "in a state of suppression, unless I'm very much mistaken; a child-expelling instinct.... I wonder.... There's no family uniting instinct, anyhow; it's habit and sentiment and material convenience hold families together after adolescence. There's always friction, conflict, unwilling concessions. Always! I don't believe there is any strong natural affection at all between parents and growing-up children. There wasn't, I know, between myself and my father. I didn't allow myself to see things as they were in those days; now I do. I bored him. I hated him. I suppose that shocks one's ideas.... It's true.... There are sentimental and traditional deferences and reverences, I know, between father and son; but that's just exactly what prevents the development of an easy friendship. Father-worshipping sons are abnormal—and they're no good. No good at all. One's got to be a better man than one's father, or what is the good of successive generations? Life is rebellion, or nothing."

He rowed a stroke and watched the swirl of water from his oar broaden and die away. At last he took up his thoughts again: "I wonder if, some day, one won't need to rebel against customs and laws? If this discord will have gone? Some day, perhaps—who knows?—the old won't coddle and hamper the young, and the young won't need to fly in the faces of the old. They'll face facts as facts, and understand. Oh, to face facts! Gods! what a world it might be if people faced facts! Understanding! Understanding! There is no other salvation. Some day older people, perhaps, will trouble to understand younger people, and there won't be these fierce disruptions; there won't be barriers one must defy or perish.... That's really our choice now, defy—or futility.... The world, perhaps, will be educated out of its idea of fixed standards.... I wonder, Ann Veronica, if, when our time comes, we shall be any wiser?"

Ann Veronica watched a water-beetle fussing across the green depths. "One can't tell. I'm a female thing at bottom. I like high tone for a flourish and stars and ideas; but I want my things."

Part 2

Capes thought.

“It’s odd—I have no doubt in my mind that what we are doing is wrong,” he said. “And yet I do it without compunction.”

“I never felt so absolutely right,” said Ann Veronica.

“You ARE a female thing at bottom,” he admitted. “I’m not nearly so sure as you. As for me, I look twice at it…. Life is two things, that’s how I see it; two things mixed and muddled up together. Life is morality—life is adventure. Squire and master. Adventure rules, and morality—looks up the trains in the Bradshaw. Morality tells you what is right, and adventure moves you. If morality means anything it means keeping bounds, respecting implications, respecting implicit bounds. If individuality means anything it means breaking bounds—adventure.

“Will you be moral and your species, or immoral and yourself? We’ve decided to be immoral. We needn’t try and give ourselves airs. We’ve deserted the posts in which we found ourselves, cut our duties, exposed ourselves to risks that may destroy any sort of social usefulness in us…. I don’t know. One keeps rules in order to be one’s self. One studies Nature in order not to be blindly ruled by her. There’s no sense in morality, I suppose, unless you are fundamentally immoral.”

She watched his face as he traced his way through these speculative thickets.

“Look at our affair,” he went on, looking up at her. “No power on earth will persuade me we’re not two rather disreputable persons. You desert your home; I throw up useful teaching, risk every hope in your career. Here we are absconding, pretending to be what we are not; shady, to say the least of it. It’s not a bit of good pretending there’s any Higher Truth or wonderful principle in this business. There isn’t. We never started out in any high-browed manner to scandalize and Shelleyfy. When first you left your home you had no idea that *I* was the hidden impulse. I wasn’t. You came out like an ant for your nuptial flight. It was just a chance that we in particular hit against each other—nothing predestined about it. We just hit against each other, and here we are flying off at a tangent, a little surprised at what we are doing, all our principles abandoned, and tremendously and quite unreasonably proud of ourselves. Out of all this we have struck a sort of harmony…. And it’s gorgeous!”

“Glorious!” said Ann Veronica.

“Would YOU like us—if some one told you the bare outline of our story?—and what we are doing?”

“I shouldn’t mind,” said Ann Veronica.

“But if some one else asked your advice? If some one else said, ‘Here is my teacher, a jaded married man on the verge of middle age, and he and I have a violent passion for one another. We propose to disregard all our ties, all our obligations, all the established prohibitions of society, and begin life together afresh.’ What would you tell her?”

“If she asked advice, I should say she wasn’t fit to do anything of the sort. I should say that having a doubt was enough to condemn it.”

“But waive that point.”

“It would be different all the same. It wouldn’t be you.”

“It wouldn’t be you either. I suppose that’s the gist of the whole thing.” He stared at a little eddy. “The rule’s all right, so long as there isn’t a case. Rules are for established things, like the pieces and positions of a game. Men and women are not established things; they’re experiments, all of them. Every human being is a new thing, exists to do new things. Find the thing you want to do most intensely, make sure that’s it, and do it with all your might. If you live, well and good; if you die, well and good. Your purpose is done.... Well, this is OUR thing.”

He woke the glassy water to swirling activity again, and made the deep-blue shapes below writhe and shiver.

“This is MY thing,” said Ann Veronica, softly, with thoughtful eyes upon him.

Then she looked up the sweep of pine-trees to the towering sunlit cliffs and the high heaven above and then back to his face. She drew in a deep breath of the sweet mountain air. Her eyes were soft and grave, and there was the faintest of smiles upon her resolute lips.

Part 3

Later they loitered along a winding path above the inn, and made love to one another. Their journey had made them indolent, the afternoon was warm, and it seemed impossible to breathe a sweeter air. The flowers and turf, a wild strawberry, a rare butterfly, and suchlike little intimate things had become more interesting than mountains. Their flitting hands were always touching. Deep silences came between them....

“I had thought to go on to Kandersteg,” said Capes, “but this is a pleasant place. There is not a soul in the inn but ourselves. Let us stay the night here. Then we can loiter and gossip to our heart’s content.”

“Agreed,” said Ann Veronica.

“After all, it’s our honeymoon.”

“All we shall get,” said Ann Veronica.

“This place is very beautiful.”

“Any place would be beautiful,” said Ann Veronica, in a low voice.

For a time they walked in silence.

“I wonder,” she began, presently, “why I love you—and love you so much?... I know now what it is to be an abandoned female. I AM an abandoned female. I’m not ashamed—of the things I’m doing. I want to put myself into your hands. You know—I wish I could roll my little body up small and squeeze it into your hand and grip your fingers upon it. Tight. I want you to hold me and have me SO.... Everything. Everything. It’s a pure joy of giving—giving to YOU. I have never spoken of these things to any human being. Just dreamed—and ran away even from my dreams. It is as if my lips had been sealed about them. And now I break the seals—for you. Only I wish—I wish to-day I was a thousand times, ten thousand times more beautiful.”

Capes lifted her hand and kissed it.

“You are a thousand times more beautiful,” he said, “than anything else could be.... You are you. You are all the beauty in the world. Beauty doesn’t mean, never has meant, anything—anything at all but you. It heralded you, promised you....”

Part 4

They lay side by side in a shallow nest of turf and mosses among bowlders and stunted bushes on a high rock, and watched the day sky deepen to evening between the vast precipices overhead and looked over the tree-tops down the widening gorge. A distant suggestion of chalets and a glimpse of the road set them talking for a time of the world they had left behind.

Capes spoke casually of their plans for work. “It’s a flabby, loose-willed world we have to face. It won’t even know whether to be scandalized at us or forgiving. It will hold aloof, a little undecided whether to pelt or not—”

“That depends whether we carry ourselves as though we expected pelting,” said Ann Veronica.

“We won’t.”

“No fear!”

“Then, as we succeed, it will begin to sidle back to us. It will do its best to overlook things—”

“If we let it, poor dear.”

“That’s if we succeed. If we fail,” said Capes, “then—”

“We aren’t going to fail,” said Ann Veronica.

Life seemed a very brave and glorious enterprise to Ann Veronica that day. She was quivering with the sense of Capes at her side and glowing with heroic love; it seemed to her that if they put their hands jointly against the Alps and pushed they would be able to push them aside. She lay and nibbled at a sprig of dwarf rhododendron.

“FAIL!” she said.

Part 5

Presently it occurred to Ann Veronica to ask about the journey he had planned. He had his sections of the Siegfried map folded in his pocket, and he squatted up with his legs crossed like an Indian idol while she lay prone beside him and followed every movement of his indicatory finger.

“Here,” he said, “is this Blau See, and here we rest until to-morrow. I think we rest here until to-morrow?”

There was a brief silence.

“It is a very pleasant place,” said Ann Veronica, biting a rhododendron stalk through, and with that faint shadow of a smile returning to her lips....

“And then?” said Ann Veronica.

“Then we go on to this place, the Oeschinensee. It’s a lake among precipices, and there is a little inn where we can stay, and sit and eat our dinner at a pleasant table that looks upon the lake. For some days we shall be very idle there among the trees and rocks. There are boats on the lake and shady depths and wildernesses of pine-wood. After a day or so, perhaps, we will go on one or two little excursions and see how good your head is—a mild scramble or so; and then up to a hut on a pass just here, and out upon the Blumlis-alp glacier that spreads out so and so.”

She roused herself from some dream at the word. “Glaciers?” she said.

“Under the Wilde Frau—which was named after you.”

He bent and kissed her hair and paused, and then forced his attention back to the map. “One day,” he resumed, “we will start off early and come down into Kandersteg and up these zigzags and here and here, and so past this Daubensee to a tiny inn—it won’t be busy yet, though; we may get it all to ourselves—on the brim of the steepest zigzag you can imagine, thousands of feet of zigzag; and you will sit and eat lunch with me and look out across the Rhone Valley and over blue distances beyond blue distances to the Matterhorn and Monte Rosa and a long regiment of sunny, snowy mountains. And when we see them we shall at once want to go to them—that’s the way with beautiful things—and down we shall go, like flies down a wall, to Leukerbad, and so to Leuk Station, here, and then by train up the Rhone Valley and this little side valley to Stalden; and there, in the cool of the afternoon, we shall start off up a gorge, torrents and cliffs below us and above us, to sleep in a half-way inn, and go on next day to Saas Fee, Saas of the Magic, Saas of the Pagan People. And there, about Saas, are ice and snows again, and sometimes we will loiter among the rocks and trees about Saas or peep into Samuel Butler’s chapels, and sometimes we will climb up out of the way of the other people on to the glaciers and snow. And, for one expedition at least, we will go up this desolate valley here to Mattmark, and so on to Monte Moro. There indeed you see Monte Rosa. Almost the best of all.”

“Is it very beautiful?”

“When I saw it there it was very beautiful. It was wonderful. It was the crowned queen of mountains in her robes of shining white. It towered up high above the level of the pass, thousands of feet, still, shining, and white, and below, thousands of feet below, was a floor of little woolly clouds. And then presently these clouds began to wear thin and expose steep, deep slopes, going down and down, with grass and pine-trees, down and down, and at last, through a great rent in the clouds, bare roofs, shining like

very minute pin-heads, and a road like a fibre of white silk-Macugnana, in Italy. That will be a fine day—it will have to be, when first you set eyes on Italy.... That's as far as we go."

"Can't we go down into Italy?"

"No," he said; "it won't run to that now. We must wave our hands at the blue hills far away there and go back to London and work."

"But Italy—"

"Italy's for a good girl," he said, and laid his hand for a moment on her shoulder. "She must look forward to Italy."

"I say," she reflected, "you ARE rather the master, you know."

The idea struck him as novel. "Of course I'm manager for this expedition," he said, after an interval of self-examination.

She slid her cheek down the tweed sleeve of his coat. "Nice sleeve," she said, and came to his hand and kissed it.

"I say!" he cried. "Look here! Aren't you going a little too far? This—this is degradation—making a fuss with sleeves. You mustn't do things like that."

"Why not?"

"Free woman—and equal."

"I do it—of my own free will," said Ann Veronica, kissing his hand again. "It's nothing to what I WILL do."

"Oh, well!" he said, a little doubtfully, "it's just a phase," and bent down and rested his hand on her shoulder for a moment, with his heart beating and his nerves a-quiver. Then as she lay very still, with her hands clinched and her black hair tumbled about her face, he came still closer and softly kissed the nape of her neck....

Part 6

Most of the things that he had planned they did. But they climbed more than he had intended because Ann Veronica proved rather a good climber, steady-headed and plucky, rather daring, but quite willing to be cautious at his command.

One of the things that most surprised him in her was her capacity for blind obedience. She loved to be told to do things.

He knew the circle of mountains about Saas Fee fairly well: he had been there twice before, and it was fine to get away from the straggling pedestrians into the high, lonely places, and sit and munch sandwiches and talk together and do things together that were just a little difficult and dangerous. And they could talk, they found; and never once, it seemed, did their meaning and intention hitch. They were enormously pleased with one another; they found each other beyond measure better than they had expected, if only because of the want of substance in mere expectation. Their conversation degenerated again and again into a strain of self-congratulation that would have irked an eavesdropper.

“You’re—I don’t know,” said Ann Veronica. “You’re splendid.”

“It isn’t that you’re splendid or I,” said Capes. “But we satisfy one another. Heaven alone knows why. So completely! The oddest fitness! What is it made of? Texture of skin and texture of mind? Complexion and voice. I don’t think I’ve got illusions, nor you.... If I had never met anything of you at all but a scrap of your skin binding a book, Ann Veronica, I know I would have kept that somewhere near to me.... All your faults are just jolly modelling to make you real and solid.”

“The faults are the best part of it,” said Ann Veronica; “why, even our little vicious strains run the same way. Even our coarseness.”

“Coarse?” said Capes, “We’re not coarse.”

“But if we were?” said Ann Veronica.

“I can talk to you and you to me without a scrap of effort,” said Capes; “that’s the essence of it. It’s made up of things as small as the diameter of hairs and big as life and death.... One always dreamed of this and never believed it. It’s the rarest luck, the wildest, most impossible accident. Most people, every one I know else, seem to have mated with foreigners and to talk uneasily in unfamiliar tongues, to be afraid of the knowledge the other one has, of the other one’s perpetual misjudgment and misunderstandings.

“Why don’t they wait?” he added.

Ann Veronica had one of her flashes of insight.

“One doesn’t wait,” said Ann Veronica.

She expanded that. "*I* shouldn't have waited," she said. "I might have muddled for a time. But it's as you say. I've had the rarest luck and fallen on my feet."

"We've both fallen on our feet! We're the rarest of mortals! The real thing! There's not a compromise nor a sham nor a concession between us. We aren't afraid; we don't bother. We don't consider each other; we needn't. That wrappered life, as you call it—we've burned the confounded rags! Danced out of it! We're stark!"

"Stark!" echoed Ann Veronica.

Part 7

As they came back from that day's climb—it was up the Mittaghorn—they had to cross a shining space of wet, steep rocks between two grass slopes that needed a little care. There were a few loose, broken fragments of rock to reckon with upon the ledges, and one place where hands did as much work as toes. They used the rope—not that a rope was at all necessary, but because Ann Veronica's exalted state of mind made the fact of the rope agreeably symbolical; and, anyhow, it did insure a joint death in the event of some remotely possibly mischance. Capes went first, finding footholds and, where the drops in the strata-edges came like long, awkward steps, placing Ann Veronica's feet. About half-way across this interval, when everything seemed going well, Capes had a shock.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Ann Veronica, with extraordinary passion. "My God!" and ceased to move.

Capes became rigid and adhesive. Nothing ensued. "All right?" he asked.

"I'll have to pay it."

"Eh?"

"I've forgotten something. Oh, cuss it!"

"Eh?"

"He said I would."

"What?"

"That's the devil of it!"

“Devil of what?... You DO use vile language!”

“Forget about it like this.”

“Forget WHAT?”

“And I said I wouldn’t. I said I’d do anything. I said I’d make shirts.”

“Shirts?”

“Shirts at one—and—something a dozen. Oh, goodness! Bilking! Ann Veronica, you’re a bilker!”

Pause.

“Will you tell me what all this is about?” said Capes.

“It’s about forty pounds.”

Capes waited patiently.

“G. I’m sorry.... But you’ve got to lend me forty pounds.”

“It’s some sort of delirium,” said Capes. “The rarefied air? I thought you had a better head.”

“No! I’ll explain lower. It’s all right. Let’s go on climbing now. It’s a thing I’ve unaccountably overlooked. All right really. It can wait a bit longer. I borrowed forty pounds from Mr. Ramage. Thank goodness you’ll understand. That’s why I chucked Manning.... All right, I’m coming. But all this business has driven it clean out of my head.... That’s why he was so annoyed, you know.”

“Who was annoyed?”

“Mr. Ramage—about the forty pounds.” She took a step. “My dear,” she added, by way of afterthought, “you DO obliterate things!”

Part 8

They found themselves next day talking love to one another high up on some rocks above a steep bank of snow that overhung a precipice on the eastern side of the Fee glacier. By this time Capes’ hair had bleached nearly white, and his skin had become a skin of red copper shot with gold. They were now both in a state of unprecedented

physical fitness. And such skirts as Ann Veronica had had when she entered the valley of Saas were safely packed away in the hotel, and she wore a leather belt and loose knickerbockers and puttees—a costume that suited the fine, long lines of her limbs far better than any feminine walking-dress could do. Her complexion had resisted the snow-glare wonderfully; her skin had only deepened its natural warmth a little under the Alpine sun. She had pushed aside her azure veil, taken off her snow-glasses, and sat smiling under her hand at the shining glories—the lit cornices, the blue shadows, the softly rounded, enormous snow masses, the deep places full of quivering luminosity—of the Taschhorn and Dom. The sky was cloudless, effulgent blue.

Capes sat watching and admiring her, and then he fell praising the day and fortune and their love for each other.

“Here we are,” he said, “shining through each other like light through a stained-glass window. With this air in our blood, this sunlight soaking us.... Life is so good. Can it ever be so good again?”

Ann Veronica put out a firm hand and squeezed his arm. “It’s very good,” she said. “It’s glorious good!”

“Suppose now—look at this long snow-slope and then that blue deep beyond—do you see that round pool of color in the ice—a thousand feet or more below? Yes? Well, think—we’ve got to go but ten steps and lie down and put our arms about each other. See? Down we should rush in a foam—in a cloud of snow—to flight and a dream. All the rest of our lives would be together then, Ann Veronica. Every moment. And no ill-chances.”

“If you tempt me too much,” she said, after a silence, “I shall do it. I need only just jump up and throw myself upon you. I’m a desperate young woman. And then as we went down you’d try to explain. And that would spoil it.... You know you don’t mean it.”

“No, I don’t. But I liked to say it.”

“Rather! But I wonder why you don’t mean it?”

“Because, I suppose, the other thing is better. What other reason could there be? It’s more complex, but it’s better. THIS, this glissade, would be damned scoundrelism. You know that, and I know that, though we might be put to it to find a reason why. It would be swindling. Drawing the pay of life and then not living. And besides—We’re going to live, Ann Veronica! Oh, the things we’ll do, the life we’ll lead! There’ll be trouble in it at times—you and I aren’t going to run without friction. But we’ve got the brains to get over that, and tongues in our heads to talk to each other. We sha’n’t hang

up on any misunderstanding. Not us. And we're going to fight that old world down there. That old world that had shoved up that silly old hotel, and all the rest of it.... If we don't live it will think we are afraid of it.... Die, indeed! We're going to do work; we're going to unfold about each other; we're going to have children."

"Girls!" cried Ann Veronica.

"Boys!" said Capes.

"Both!" said Ann Veronica. "Lots of 'em!"

Capes chuckled. "You delicate female!"

"Who cares," said Ann Veronica, "seeing it's you? Warm, soft little wonders! Of course I want them."

Part 9

"All sorts of things we're going to do," said Capes; "all sorts of times we're going to have. Sooner or later we'll certainly do something to clean those prisons you told me about—limewash the underside of life. You and I. We can love on a snow cornice, we can love over a pail of whitewash. Love anywhere. Anywhere! Moonlight and music—pleasing, you know, but quite unnecessary. We met dissecting dogfish.... Do you remember your first day with me?... Do you indeed remember? The smell of decay and cheap methylated spirit!... My dear! we've had so many moments! I used to go over the times we'd had together, the things we'd said—like a rosary of beads. But now it's beads by the cask—like the hold of a West African trader. It feels like too much gold-dust clutched in one's hand. One doesn't want to lose a grain. And one must—some of it must slip through one's fingers."

"I don't care if it does," said Ann Veronica. "I don't care a rap for remembering. I care for you. This moment couldn't be better until the next moment comes. That's how it takes me. Why should WE hoard? We aren't going out presently, like Japanese lanterns in a gale. It's the poor dears who do, who know they will, know they can't keep it up, who need to clutch at way-side flowers. And put 'em in little books for remembrance. Flattened flowers aren't for the likes of us. Moments, indeed! We like each other fresh and fresh. It isn't illusions—for us. We two just love each other—the real, identical other—all the time."

“The real, identical other,” said Capes, and took and bit the tip of her little finger.

“There’s no delusions, so far as I know,” said Ann Veronica.

“I don’t believe there is one. If there is, it’s a mere wrapping—there’s better underneath. It’s only as if I’d begun to know you the day before yesterday or there-abouts. You keep on coming truer, after you have seemed to come altogether true. You… brick!”

Part 10

“To think,” he cried, “you are ten years younger than I!… There are times when you make me feel a little thing at your feet—a young, silly, protected thing. Do you know, Ann Veronica, it is all a lie about your birth certificate; a forgery—and fooling at that. You are one of the Immortals. Immortal! You were in the beginning, and all the men in the world who have known what love is have worshipped at your feet. You have converted me to—Lester Ward! You are my dear friend, you are a slip of a girl, but there are moments when my head has been on your breast, when your heart has been beating close to my ears, when I have known you for the goddess, when I have wished myself your slave, when I have wished that you could kill me for the joy of being killed by you. You are the High Priestess of Life….”

“Your priestess,” whispered Ann Veronica, softly. “A silly little priestess who knew nothing of life at all until she came to you.”

Part 11

They sat for a time without speaking a word, in an enormous shining globe of mutual satisfaction.

“Well,” said Capes, at length, “we’ve to go down, Ann Veronica. Life waits for us.”

He stood up and waited for her to move.

“Gods!” cried Ann Veronica, and kept him standing. “And to think that it’s not a full year ago since I was a black-hearted rebel school-girl, distressed, puzzled, perplexed,

not understanding that this great force of love was bursting its way through me! All those nameless discontents—they were no more than love's birth-pangs. I felt—I felt living in a masked world. I felt as though I had bandaged eyes. I felt—wrapped in thick cobwebs. They blinded me. They got in my mouth. And now—Dear! Dear! The dayspring from on high hath visited me. I love. I am loved. I want to shout! I want to sing! I am glad! I am glad to be alive because you are alive! I am glad to be a woman because you are a man! I am glad! I am glad! I am glad! I thank God for life and you. I thank God for His sunlight on your face. I thank God for the beauty you love and the faults you love. I thank God for the very skin that is peeling from your nose, for all things great and small that make us what we are. This is grace I am saying! Oh! my dear! all the joy and weeping of life are mixed in me now and all the gratitude. Never a new-born dragon-fly that spread its wings in the morning has felt as glad as I!"

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

IN PERSPECTIVE

Part 1

About four years and a quarter later—to be exact, it was four years and four months—Mr. and Mrs. Capes stood side by side upon an old Persian carpet that did duty as a hearthrug in the dining-room of their flat and surveyed a shining dinner-table set for four people, lit by skilfully-shaded electric lights, brightened by frequent gleams of silver, and carefully and simply adorned with sweet-pea blossom. Capes had altered scarcely at all during the interval, except for a new quality of smartness in the cut of his clothes, but Ann Veronica was nearly half an inch taller; her face was at once stronger and softer, her neck firmer and rounder, and her carriage definitely more womanly than it had been in the days of her rebellion. She was a woman now to the tips of her fingers; she had said good-bye to her girlhood in the old garden four years and a quarter ago. She was dressed in a simple evening gown of soft creamy silk, with a yoke of dark old embroidery that enhanced the gentle gravity of her style, and her black hair flowed off her open forehead to pass under the control of a simple ribbon of silver. A silver necklace enhanced the dusky beauty of her neck. Both husband and

wife affected an unnatural ease of manner for the benefit of the efficient parlor-maid, who was putting the finishing touches to the sideboard arrangements.

“It looks all right,” said Capes.

“I think everything’s right,” said Ann Veronica, with the roaming eye of a capable but not devoted house-mistress.

“I wonder if they will seem altered,” she remarked for the third time.

“There I can’t help,” said Capes.

He walked through a wide open archway, curtained with deep-blue curtains, into the apartment that served as a reception-room. Ann Veronica, after a last survey of the dinner appointments, followed him, rustling, came to his side by the high brass fender, and touched two or three ornaments on the mantel above the cheerful fireplace.

“It’s still a marvel to me that we are to be forgiven,” she said, turning.

“My charm of manner, I suppose. But, indeed, he’s very human.”

“Did you tell him of the registry office?”

“No—o—certainly not so emphatically as I did about the play.”

“It was an inspiration—your speaking to him?”

“I felt impudent. I believe I am getting impudent. I had not been near the Royal Society since—since you disgraced me. What’s that?”

They both stood listening. It was not the arrival of the guests, but merely the maid moving about in the hall.

“Wonderful man!” said Ann Veronica, reassured, and stroking his cheek with her finger.

Capes made a quick movement as if to bite that aggressive digit, but it withdrew to Ann Veronica’s side.

“I was really interested in his stuff. I WAS talking to him before I saw his name on the card beside the row of microscopes. Then, naturally, I went on talking. He—he has rather a poor opinion of his contemporaries. Of course, he had no idea who I was.”

“But how did you tell him? You’ve never told me. Wasn’t it—a little bit of a scene?”

“Oh! let me see. I said I hadn’t been at the Royal Society soiree for four years, and got him to tell me about some of the fresh Mendelian work. He loves the Mendelians because he hates all the big names of the eighties and nineties. Then I think I remarked that science was disgracefully under-endowed, and confessed I’d had to take to more profitable courses. ‘The fact of it is,’ I said, ‘I’m the new playwright, Thomas More. Perhaps you’ve heard—?’ Well, you know, he had.”

“Fame!”

“Isn’t it? ‘I’ve not seen your play, Mr. More,’ he said, ‘but I’m told it’s the most amusing thing in London at the present time. A friend of mine, Ogilvy’—I suppose that’s Ogilvy & Ogilvy, who do so many divorces, Vee?—‘was speaking very highly of it—very highly!’” He smiled into her eyes.

“You are developing far too retentive a memory for praises,” said Ann Veronica.

“I’m still new to them. But after that it was easy. I told him instantly and shamelessly that the play was going to be worth ten thousand pounds. He agreed it was disgraceful. Then I assumed a rather portentous manner to prepare him.”

“How? Show me.”

“I can’t be portentous, dear, when you’re about. It’s my other side of the moon. But I was portentous, I can assure you. ‘My name’s NOT More, Mr. Stanley,’ I said. ‘That’s my pet name.’”

“Yes?”

“I think—yes, I went on in a pleasing blend of the casual and sotto voce, ‘The fact of it is, sir, I happen to be your son-in-law, Capes. I do wish you could come and dine with us some evening. It would make my wife very happy.’”

“What did he say?”

“What does any one say to an invitation to dinner point-blank? One tries to collect one’s wits. ‘She is constantly thinking of you,’ I said.”

“And he accepted meekly?”

“Practically. What else could he do? You can’t kick up a scene on the spur of the moment in the face of such conflicting values as he had before him. With me behaving as if everything was infinitely matter-of-fact, what could he do? And just then Heaven sent old Manningtree—I didn’t tell you before of the fortunate intervention of Manningtree, did I? He was looking quite infernally distinguished, with a wide crimson

ribbon across him—what IS a wide crimson ribbon? Some sort of knight, I suppose. He is a knight. 'Well, young man,' he said, 'we haven't seen you lately,' and something about 'Bateson & Co.'—he's frightfully anti-Mendelian—having it all their own way. So I introduced him to my father-in-law like a shot. I think that WAS decision. Yes, it was Manningtree really secured your father. He—"

"Here they are!" said Ann Veronica as the bell sounded.

Part 2

They received the guests in their pretty little hall with genuine effusion. Miss Stanley threw aside a black cloak to reveal a discreet and dignified arrangement of brown silk, and then embraced Ann Veronica with warmth. "So very clear and cold," she said. "I feared we might have a fog." The housemaid's presence acted as a useful restraint. Ann Veronica passed from her aunt to her father, and put her arms about him and kissed his cheek. "Dear old daddy!" she said, and was amazed to find herself shedding tears. She veiled her emotion by taking off his overcoat. "And this is Mr. Capes?" she heard her aunt saying.

All four people moved a little nervously into the drawing-room, maintaining a sort of fluttered amiability of sound and movement.

Mr. Stanley professed a great solicitude to warm his hands. "Quite unusually cold for the time of year," he said. "Everything very nice, I am sure," Miss Stanley murmured to Capes as he steered her to a place upon the little sofa before the fire. Also she made little pussy-like sounds of a reassuring nature.

"And let's have a look at you, Vee!" said Mr. Stanley, standing up with a sudden geniality and rubbing his hands together.

Ann Veronica, who knew her dress became her, dropped a curtsy to her father's regard.

Happily they had no one else to wait for, and it heartened her mightily to think that she had ordered the promptest possible service of the dinner. Capes stood beside Miss Stanley, who was beaming unnaturally, and Mr. Stanley, in his effort to seem at ease, took entire possession of the hearthrug.

“You found the flat easily?” said Capes in the pause. “The numbers are a little difficult to see in the archway. They ought to put a lamp.”

Her father declared there had been no difficulty.

“Dinner is served, m’m,” said the efficient parlor-maid in the archway, and the worst was over.

“Come, daddy,” said Ann Veronica, following her husband and Miss Stanley; and in the fulness of her heart she gave a friendly squeeze to the parental arm.

“Excellent fellow!” he answered a little irrelevantly. “I didn’t understand, Vee.”

“Quite charming apartments,” Miss Stanley admired; “charming! Everything is so pretty and convenient.”

The dinner was admirable as a dinner; nothing went wrong, from the golden and excellent clear soup to the delightful iced marrons and cream; and Miss Stanley’s praises died away to an appreciative acquiescence. A brisk talk sprang up between Capes and Mr. Stanley, to which the two ladies subordinated themselves intelligently. The burning topic of the Mendelian controversy was approached on one or two occasions, but avoided dexterously; and they talked chiefly of letters and art and the censorship of the English stage. Mr. Stanley was inclined to think the censorship should be extended to the supply of what he styled latter-day fiction; good wholesome stories were being ousted, he said, by “vicious, corrupting stuff” that “left a bad taste in the mouth.” He declared that no book could be satisfactory that left a bad taste in the mouth, however much it seized and interested the reader at the time. He did not like it, he said, with a significant look, to be reminded of either his books or his dinners after he had done with them. Capes agreed with the utmost cordiality.

“Life is upsetting enough, without the novels taking a share,” said Mr. Stanley.

For a time Ann Veronica’s attention was diverted by her aunt’s interest in the salted almonds.

“Quite particularly nice,” said her aunt. “Exceptionally so.”

When Ann Veronica could attend again she found the men were discussing the ethics of the depreciation of house property through the increasing tumult of traffic in the West End, and agreeing with each other to a devastating extent. It came into her head with real emotional force that this must be some particularly fantastic sort of dream. It seemed to her that her father was in some inexplicable way meaner-looking than she had supposed, and yet also, as unaccountably, appealing. His tie had demanded

a struggle; he ought to have taken a clean one after his first failure. Why was she noting things like this? Capes seemed self-possessed and elaborately genial and commonplace, but she knew him to be nervous by a little occasional clumsiness, by the faintest shadow of vulgarity in the urgency of his hospitality. She wished he could smoke and dull his nerves a little. A gust of irrational impatience blew through her being. Well, they'd got to the pheasants, and in a little while he would smoke. What was it she had expected? Surely her moods were getting a little out of hand.

She wished her father and aunt would not enjoy their dinner with such quiet determination. Her father and her husband, who had both been a little pale at their first encounter, were growing now just faintly flushed. It was a pity people had to eat food.

"I suppose," said her father, "I have read at least half the novels that have been at all successful during the last twenty years. Three a week is my allowance, and, if I get short ones, four. I change them in the morning at Cannon Street, and take my book as I come down."

It occurred to her that she had never seen her father dining out before, never watched him critically as an equal. To Capes he was almost deferential, and she had never seen him deferential in the old time, never. The dinner was stranger than she had ever anticipated. It was as if she had grown right past her father into something older and of infinitely wider outlook, as if he had always been unsuspectedly a flattened figure, and now she had discovered him from the other side.

It was a great relief to arrive at last at that pause when she could say to her aunt, "Now, dear?" and rise and hold back the curtain through the archway. Capes and her father stood up, and her father made a belated movement toward the curtain. She realized that he was the sort of man one does not think much about at dinners. And Capes was thinking that his wife was a supremely beautiful woman. He reached a silver cigar and cigarette box from the sideboard and put it before his father-in-law, and for a time the preliminaries of smoking occupied them both. Then Capes flittered to the hearthrug and poked the fire, stood up, and turned about. "Ann Veronica is looking very well, don't you think?" he said, a little awkwardly.

"Very," said Mr. Stanley. "Very," and cracked a walnut appreciatively.

"Life—things—I don't think her prospects now—Hopeful outlook."

"You were in a difficult position," Mr. Stanley pronounced, and seemed to hesitate whether he had not gone too far. He looked at his port wine as though that tawny ruby

contained the solution of the matter. “All’s well that ends well,” he said; “and the less one says about things the better.”

“Of course,” said Capes, and threw a newly lit cigar into the fire through sheer nervousness. “Have some more port wine, sir?”

“It’s a very sound wine,” said Mr. Stanley, consenting with dignity.

“Ann Veronica has never looked quite so well, I think,” said Capes, clinging, because of a preconceived plan, to the suppressed topic.

Part 3

At last the evening was over, and Capes and his wife had gone down to see Mr. Stanley and his sister into a taxicab, and had waved an amiable farewell from the pavement steps.

“Great dears!” said Capes, as the vehicle passed out of sight.

“Yes, aren’t they?” said Ann Veronica, after a thoughtful pause. And then, “They seem changed.”

“Come in out of the cold,” said Capes, and took her arm.

“They seem smaller, you know, even physically smaller,” she said.

“You’ve grown out of them…. Your aunt liked the pheasant.”

“She liked everything. Did you hear us through the archway, talking cookery?”

They went up by the lift in silence.

“It’s odd,” said Ann Veronica, re-entering the flat.

“What’s odd?”

“Oh, everything!”

She shivered, and went to the fire and poked it. Capes sat down in the arm-chair beside her.

“Life’s so queer,” she said, kneeling and looking into the flames. “I wonder—I wonder if we shall ever get like that.”

She turned a firelit face to her husband. “Did you tell him?”

Capes smiled faintly. “Yes.”

“How?”

“Well—a little clumsily.”

“But how?”

“I poured him out some port wine, and I said—let me see—oh, ‘You are going to be a grandfather!’”

“Yes. Was he pleased?”

“Calmly! He said—you won’t mind my telling you?”

“Not a bit.”

“He said, ‘Poor Alice has got no end!’”

“Alice’s are different,” said Ann Veronica, after an interval. “Quite different. She didn’t choose her man.... Well, I told aunt.... Husband of mine, I think we have rather overrated the emotional capacity of those—those dears.”

“What did your aunt say?”

“She didn’t even kiss me. She said”—Ann Veronica shivered again—“‘I hope it won’t make you uncomfortable, my dear’—like that—‘and whatever you do, do be careful of your hair!’ I think—I judge from her manner—that she thought it was just a little indelicate of us—considering everything; but she tried to be practical and sympathetic and live down to our standards.”

Capes looked at his wife’s unsmiling face.

“Your father,” he said, “remarked that all’s well that ends well, and that he was disposed to let bygones be bygones. He then spoke with a certain fatherly kindliness of the past....”

“And my heart has ached for him!”

“Oh, no doubt it cut him at the time. It must have cut him.”

“We might even have—given it up for them!”

“I wonder if we could.”

“I suppose all IS well that ends well. Somehow to-night—I don’t know.”

“I suppose so. I’m glad the old sore is assuaged. Very glad. But if we had gone under—!”

They regarded one another silently, and Ann Veronica had one of her penetrating flashes.

“We are not the sort that goes under,” said Ann Veronica, holding her hands so that the red reflections vanished from her eyes. “We settled long ago—we’re hard stuff. We’re hard stuff!”

Then she went on: “To think that is my father! Oh, my dear! He stood over me like a cliff; the thought of him nearly turned me aside from everything we have done. He was the social order; he was law and wisdom. And they come here, and they look at our furniture to see if it is good; and they are not glad, it does not stir them, that at last, at last we can dare to have children.”

She dropped back into a crouching attitude and began to weep. “Oh, my dear!” she cried, and suddenly flung herself, kneeling, into her husband’s arms.

“Do you remember the mountains? Do you remember how we loved one another? How intensely we loved one another! Do you remember the light on things and the glory of things? I’m greedy, I’m greedy! I want children like the mountains and life like the sky. Oh! and love—love! We’ve had so splendid a time, and fought our fight and won. And it’s like the petals falling from a flower. Oh, I’ve loved love, dear! I’ve loved love and you, and the glory of you; and the great time is over, and I have to go carefully and bear children, and—take care of my hair—and when I am done with that I shall be an old woman. The petals have fallen—the red petals we loved so. We’re hedged about with discretions—and all this furniture—and successes! We are successful at last! Successful! But the mountains, dear! We won’t forget the mountains, dear, ever. That shining slope of snow, and how we talked of death! We might have died! Even when we are old, when we are rich as we may be, we won’t forget the tune when we cared nothing for anything but the joy of one another, when we risked everything for one another, when all the wrappings and coverings seemed to have fallen from life and left it light and fire. Stark and stark! Do you remember it all?... Say you will never forget! That these common things and secondary things sha’n’t overwhelm us. These petals! I’ve been wanting to cry all the evening, cry here on your shoulder for my petals. Petals!... Silly woman!... I’ve never had these crying fits before....”

“Blood of my heart!” whispered Capes, holding her close to him. “I know. I understand.”