

# **KIT'S MEDITATIONS**

**By**

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***Free*editorial** 

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## CHAPTER I

Kit was sitting in her own room in the Buckinghamshire cottage one day late in the following December, staring intently into the fire. The fire, it is true, was worth looking at, for it was made of that adorable combination, cedar-logs and peat, and it had attained to that fine flower of existence—a fragrant, molten core of heat, edged by little lilac-coloured bouquets of flame, smokeless and glowing, the very apotheosis of a fire. Outside, the world was shrouded and made dizzy in a trouble of eddying snow, and as the great sonorous blasts trumpeted and lulled again, the reds of the fire would brighten and fade in a sort of mysterious sympathy with the bugling riot overhead. But that Kit should be doing nothing but looking at the fire was an unusual thing; it was odd that she should be alone, even odder that, if alone, she should not be occupied. The toes of her bronze-coloured shoes rested on the fender, and she leaned forward in the low armchair in which she sat, stretching out her hands towards the heat, and the fire shining through the flesh of her fingers made them look as if they were lighted from within—things red and luminous in themselves. It was already growing dusk, but she had enough light to think by, and quite enough things to think about.

The room was furnished with great simplicity, but the educated eye could see how extremely expensive such simplicity must have been. There was a rug or two on the floor, a few tables and chairs of the Empire on the rugs, and a few pictures on the crimson satin walls. Kit herself perhaps was the most expensive thing present, for she wore her pearls, and they glowed like mist-smooled moons in the fire-light. But she did not look as happy as the possessor of her pearls or her excellent digestion ought to look. There was something of the hard, tired look of suffering, mental and physical, about her face, and though she was alone, she made, now and then, nervous, apprehensive little movements.

Everything was going wrong, from money upwards, or downwards; for at the present moment Kit hardly knew how to arrange the precedence of her various embarrassments. The financial ones were at any rate the most tangible, though perhaps the least feared, and for the fiftieth time that afternoon she ran over them.

In the beginning it had been altogether Jack's fault, but Kit was past finding either consolation or added annoyance in that. She had great faith in Alington's power of making their fortune, though personally he was detestable to her, for various excellent reasons, and she had wanted to invest the famous nest-egg, which from one cause and another had grown to upwards of three thousand pounds, in these mines under Alington's advice. After their last private interview she did not like to go to him straight,

and so asked Jack to tell her in what mines to place a little money she had saved. The word "saved," when used by Kit, always made Jack smile.

But he was absurd, and strongly opposed to her risking her "savings" at all. He had told her to make herself quite happy; if she would leave things to him, and go on "saving" quietly, there would be enough for both of them, a statement in itself repugnant and almost blasphemous to Kit, who firmly held the doctrine that there never can be enough money for one, still less for two.

"You don't know what it all means, Kit," he had said, "and for that matter I don't either. One day perhaps your shares will go down, and you will sell out in a panic and lose a lot, or you will not sell out and you will lose more. It is impossible for me always to be instructing you; I have not got the data myself. I leave it all to Alington. Besides, I didn't know you had any money to invest."

"That is my affair," said Kit; "I have been lucky lately."

"Then put it into consols, and don't gamble any more," said Jack, with the fine inconsistency of the gambling fever on him, "or come and talk about it some other time; I've got twenty hundred things to do now."

Then in a flare of pride and temper, Kit had determined to manage for herself, and had put a couple of thousand pounds into Carmel East. This was in November, at a time when, for some reason, known perhaps to Alington, but certainly to no one else in the market, Carmel was behaving in a peculiarly mercurial manner. A week after she had made her investment the pound shares, which were standing at a little above par, had declined rapidly to fourteen shillings. It might only be a bear raid, but she was too proud to ask Jack for advice again, and remembering his ill-omened remark about not selling and so losing more, she telegraphed to her broker to sell out at once. This done, the shares began to rise again, and in less than a fortnight's time, owing to telegrams and reports from the mine, they stood at nearly two pounds. She reckoned up, almost with tears, what she had lost, which, added to what she might have gained, formed a maddening total. Her eighteen hundred shares, if she had only held on, would have been worth close on three thousand six hundred pounds; instead, she had sold them when they stood at fourteen shillings for thirteen hundred pounds. And when Jack, a few mornings later, came into her room with a cheque for five hundred pounds, which he gave her, she felt that this only accentuated the bitterness of it.

"A little present, Kit," he said, "just for you to play about with. What a good thing you were wise, and did not concern yourself with things you did not understand! Oh, I bless the day when we went down to the City dinner and met Alington. You wore an orange dress, I remember: it would be rather graceful if you paid for it now."

"How much have you made, Jack?" she asked.

"Eight thousand, and I wish it was eighty. But that is the result of having no capital. I'm going to pay some bills—perhaps; but it is all very wearing."

Kit was not accustomed to cry over spilt milk, and Jack's present made up the greater part of what she had actually lost, though it was only a small proportion of what she

might have gained. One learns by experience, she thought; for experience is a synonym for one's mistakes, and she had been a consummate fool to be frightened. The mine was still quite young, and if within a few months the shares were worth double their original value, it was likely to be a good investment even at the present price, and again she invested two thousand pounds in it. Since then the price had steadily gone down, and the shares were quoted a week ago at nineteen shillings. But this time, though it taxed her admirable nerve, she was not going to be frightened, and with the object of averaging she had spent the remaining spoonfuls of her nest-egg in buying more, thus reducing the whole price to thirty-two shillings per share. Thus, when they again went up, as she still believed they would do, she would sell as soon as they touched two pounds, as Jack had sold, and clear, though not so much as he had done, still, something worth having. But the averaging had been singularly unsuccessful, and this morning the abominable things had stood again at fourteen shillings.

This had been too much for Kit's nerves, and she went to Jack with the whole story. He had simply shrugged his shoulders; he was odiously unsympathetic. The "I told you so" rejoinder is always irritating, and the irritation it produces varies directly according to the amount of damage involved. Kit's irritation, it follows, was considerable.

"Oh, Jack, what is the use of saying that?" she had cried angrily. "I come to be helped, not to be moralized to. I ask you now as a favour to telegraph to Mr. Alington. You say you know nothing about these things, although you are a director. Well, perhaps he does. And I want some money."

It was not wise, and Kit knew it even as she spoke, to take a fretful, discourteous tone. It had long been a maxim with her that courtesy was a duty, the greatest perhaps, which one owed to those with whom one was intimate, and that it was most foolish to let familiarity breed brusqueness. Besides, it never paid, except with tradesmen and others, to put your nose in the air, and, as a rule, she was not guilty of this breach of prudence. But to-day she was horribly worried, and anxious about many things, and that Jack should say "I told you so" seemed unbearable.

He did not reply immediately, and then, taking a cigarette from a table near him, "You usually do want some money," he remarked.

Kit made a great effort, and recovered her temper and her self-control.

"Dear Jack," she said, "I have been rude, and I apologize. But I very seldom am rude; do me the justice to admit that. Also I have been stupid and foolish. I am in an awful hole. Do telegraph to Alington, like a good boy, and ask him what I am to do. And I should really be very glad of a little money if you can spare it."

Jack looked at her curiously. It was utterly unlike Kit to behave like this. Her debts hitherto had sat lightly on her; she had often said that nothing was so nice as having money, and nothing so easy as to get along without it. Again, Kit's nest-egg of three thousand pounds seemed to him a surprising sum. She had not, as far as he knew, played much in the summer, and all the autumn, except for a fortnight she spent at

Aldeburgh, they had been together, and her winnings certainly could not have been a fifth of that. He could not conceive how she had got it.

"Look here, Kit," he said, "you shall have some money if you must, though just now I want literally every penny I can lay hands on for this mine affair. I am playing for big stakes. If the thing comes off as I expect—and, what is much more satisfactory, as Alington expects—we shall be rich, and when I say rich it means a lot. But I think we had better have a talk. Oh, I will telegraph to Alington about your affair at once."

Kit felt wretchedly nervous and upset that morning, and while Jack wrote the telegram, she threw herself into a chair that stood before the fire and lit a cigarette, hoping to soothe her jangled nerves. Snow had already begun to fall, the air was biting; she shivered. But after a few whiffs she threw the cigarette away. It tasted evilly in her mouth, and she felt an undefined dread of what was coming, and not in the least inclined for a talk. Luckily, Jack was going up to town in half an hour; the talk could not last long.

He waited till the servant had taken the telegram, and then came and stood in front of the fire.

"How did you get that three thousand pounds?" he asked abruptly.

"I won it. I have told you so," said Kit.

"Where? When? It is a large sum. You know, Kit, I don't often pry into your affairs. Don't be angry with me."

"My dear Jack, I don't keep a book with the names and addresses of all the people from whom I have won sixpence. Neither of us, if it comes to that, is famed for well-kept account-books. Where? At a hundred places. When? This last summer and autumn," and her voice died a little on the words.

Jack turned and flicked the ash off his cigarette. He knew that Kit could not have won that amount, and he hated to think that she was lying to him. True, he was asking the sort of question they did not ask each other, but he could not help it—the air was ominous. She must have borrowed it or been given it, and such a suspicion cut him to the quick, for though he, like her, did not give two thoughts to running up huge bills at tradesmen's risk, yet it was quite a different thing to borrow from one's own class (for he knew rightly that Kit would never be so foolish as to go to a money-lender), or to be given money by one's friends. And her manner was so strange. He could not avoid the thought that there was something behind.

"Did Alice Haslemere lend you some?" he asked suddenly.

Kit, taken off her guard, saw a gleam of hope.

"Yes," she said quickly, not meaning to lie. Then, remembering she had told him that she had won it, "No," she added in the same breath.

Jack made a quick step back to the table at which he had been writing.

"There is no manner of use in talking if you can't tell me the truth," he said. "How much money do you want, Kit?"

Kit tried to answer him, but could not. She was only conscious of a great desolating helplessness, and slowly the sobs gathered in her throat. Jack, waiting for her answer, heard a quick-taken breath, and in a moment he was by her, the best of him ready to help, if possible, forgetting everything except that Kit was in trouble.

"My poor old girl!" he said. "What is the matter? Is there something wrong, Kit? Won't you tell me? Indeed I am your friend. Don't cry so. Never mind; tell me some other time if you like. There, shall I leave you? Will you be better alone?"

Kit nodded her head, and he touched her lightly and kindly on the shoulder, and turned to go. But before he had got to the door she spoke.

"No, it is nothing, Jack," she said, controlling her voice with an effort. "I am out of sorts, I think. Never mind about the money. I can push along."

She got up from her chair and went towards the door.

"Don't worry, Jack," she said.

She went to her own room, where she knew that no one would disturb her, and shut herself in. Jack would be away all day, and till evening she would be alone. A few people were coming down with him then from town, among them Toby and his wife, Ted Comber, and several others of their set. On the whole, she was glad they were coming; it was better to be distracted than to brood over things which no brooding will mend. Above all, she wanted an interval in which Jack and she would not be alone. Perhaps after a few days he might forget or remember only vaguely the affair of this morning.

She had lunched alone in her sitting-room off a tray, for it was warmer there than in the dining-room, and had tried a dozen ways of making the hours pass. It was impossible to go out; the snow, which had begun before Jack had left, was getting momentarily thicker and falling in giddy, frenzied wreaths. The air was bitterly cold, and she could see but dimly through the whirling atmosphere the lines of shrubs in the garden, standing with thick white mantles on. A couple of puffy-feathered sparrows crouched on her window-sill, and Kit in the bitterness of her heart hated them, and, going to the window, frightened them away. They dropped stiffly down on the lawn below, and half walked, half fluttered, to the shelter of a bush near. Then a sudden compunction came over her, and, throwing open the window, she flung out the crumbs from her lunch-tray, but the sudden movement only scared them off altogether. She stood long at the window, looking out on to the blinding desolation, and then by a violent effort detached herself for the moment from all the things that troubled her. They would all have to be taken and dealt with, but she could do nothing alone. Jack had to be told something—Jack and another.

The electric light was out of order, and about a quarter past three of that howling winter's afternoon she left her place by the fire and her unread book and rang for lamps. Then there were orders also to be sent to the stables, and she detained the man a minute to give them, knowing that when he had gone she would be alone again. The omnibus and the brougham must both meet the train, and the horses must be roughed, and was

there any telegram for his lordship. One had come, and, guessing it was from Alington, she opened it.

"Bad slump in Carmel East," she read. "Cannot advise."

Kit crumpled the telegram up, and threw it impatiently into the grate. Here was another thing to be banished from her mind; truly this was a somewhat extensive exile. She determined not to sell; unless something happened to send the prices up, it would be a mere reminder of her losses to rescue so small a salvage from the wreck. She did not want a little money, she wanted a great deal, and she would just as soon have none as a little. So, having determined to dismiss the whole subject, she thought of nothing else for the next half-hour.

Outside the evening grew darker and wilder, and the windows on the north-east of her room, the quarter from which the wind blew, were already half blinded by the snow, and every now and then a furious, unseen hand would rattle their casements as if demanding instant admittance. The wind, which had been rising and falling and rising again all day in fitful gusts, now blew with an astonishing and ever increasing vehemence. The line would be deep in snow, perhaps almost impassable; in any case the train which should bring Jack and the rest must be late. Kit felt that the elements, the snow and the storm, were malignant beings fighting against her; the solitude of the next few hours became unbearable, and who knew how many hours she might still be alone? Quick to catch at relief, it seemed to her that to have people about, to have the ordinary innumerable duties of a hostess to perform, would be the solution of her troubles, and the omnibus full of folk who had already left London were so many anchors to her. She would have to talk, laugh, entertain people, be her normal self, and hours and days would pass without giving her time or opportunity for thought or regret. She tried to tell herself that her present difficulties, like the unanswered letters, would manage and answer themselves. The nights she did not fear: hitherto she hardly knew what it was to be awake, and even if one did, there were those convenient things like morphia which one could always take. Tea-time came; her room had grown intolerable to her, and she went to the hall, where they always had tea if there were people with them, waiting for the snow-muffled sounds of the carriage-wheels. The train was due half an hour before, and they might be here any moment if it had been punctual. Punctual she knew it could not be against this hurly-burly; but still, every minute that passed now was a minute in which they might have reached the station, less hopeless than those she had passed since lunch. The tea-things were brought in, and she ate a piece of bread-and-butter, thinking she would not make tea till they came, but the minutes went on pushing at the hands of the clock, and at last she made enough for herself, and drank a cup. But it seemed neither to warm nor invigorate her; the taste of the cream made her feel sick, and pouring the half of it away, she left the table, and came to sit nearer the fire, book in hand.

Outside the storm went on like some senseless lunatic symphony. Now the long steady note of a horn would blow weirdly in the chimney, and a choir of shrieking gusts like the violins would break in upon it, rising and rising higher and higher as if leading to some

stupendous climax. But no climax came; they would die down again with nothing gained, and the slow sobbing of 'cellos would answer them. Then for a moment there was hail mixed with the snow, and the sudden tattoo of the kettle-drums upon the window would seem to announce something, but nothing came except a long chromatic passage from the strings, leading nowhere, portending nothing. Then the horn in the chimney would have a bar or two, repeating its motif, as if to emphasize it, and strings and horns came in simultaneously in crazy music. Then for a moment there would be a dead, tense pause; the conductor seemed to stand with raised baton collecting the orchestra for the finale, but, instead of some immense riot of sound, only a flute would wail a broken note, and the whole movement begin again.

The noise maddened Kit; it seemed to her that her own thoughts were being made audible. Like the blind, senseless blasts, she would take up one meaningless strand of her life and try to weave it into some sort of pattern. But before she could hit on any idea, she would drop it again, and her mind would fly off now to that evening when she had cheated Alington at baccarat, now to the week at Aldeburgh, now to the affairs of Carmel East, and again, and yet again, to the week at Aldeburgh. It was all in fragments, loud, jangling, terrifying, with hysterical bursts of false feeling.

Then, for the first time in her life, the horror of the days that were gone, the horror of the moment, the horror of the future, seized Kit in their threefold grip, and shook her. She looked back on the years in which, day after day, she had clutched greedily, ravenously, at the pleasure of the moment; with both hands she had torn the blossoms off life, making herself great nosegays like a child in a hayfield, and now when she looked at them there was not a flower that was not withered and wilted. Through the past she had arrived at this awful present. She looked forward; the future was a blank, save for one red spot of horror in it, which would come closer and closer every day till it was on her. There was no escape for her.

Just then there was a lull in the mad symphony outside, and in the stillness she heard the soft thud of snow-clogged wheels pass by the windows. With a sense of relief, almost painful in its intensity, she ran to the door and flung it open, letting in a great buffet of snow-stifled wind that extinguished the lamps, and left only the misshapen shadows from the fire leaping monstrously on the walls. But instead of the omnibus she had expected, there was only a postman's cart, from which the man had already descended, blanketed in snow, with a telegram in his hand. He had just rung the bell.

Kit ran with it to the fire, and read it by the blaze. It was from Conybeare, sent off from two stations up the line.

"Blocked by snow," it said. "Line will not be clear till to-morrow morning."

A footman had come in answer to the bell. He found the door wide open, the snow blowing dizzily in, and on the hearthrug Kit, in a dead faint.



## CHAPTER II

### THE FIRST DEAL

Mr. Alington was an early riser, and it was barely half-past eight when he finished his plain but excellent breakfast the morning after he had received Jack's telegram about Kit's venture in Carmel East. A certain instinct of perfection was characteristic of him; all his habits of living were of a finished character. He lived plainly, and he would sooner have his simple eggs and bacon off fine china, with alternate mouthfuls of admirably crisp toast and the freshest butter, than have rioted in the feasts of Caligula with a napkin ever so slightly stained. The same snowfall which had blocked the line between Tilehurst and Goring had not spared London, and the streets on this Sunday morning were dumb and heavy with snow. Gangs of men were out at work clearing it away, and streaks and squares of brown, muddy pavement and roadway of contrasted sordidness were being disclosed in the solid whiteness of the street. Mr. Alington, looking from his window, was afraid that these efforts were likely to prove but lost labour, for the sky was still thick and overlaid with that soft, greasy look which portends more snow, and in spite of the hour, it was but an apology for twilight on to which he looked out. This thought was an appreciable pang to him. The street was empty but for the street-clearers, and had attained that degree of discomfort only realized in London after a snowfall. The gaunt, gray-faced houses opposite showed lights twinkling in their windows, and the yellow, unluminous atmosphere was like a jaundiced dream. The palace clock at the bottom of the street was still lit within, but it was no more than a blurred moon through the clogged air.

But Mr. Alington, after his first comprehensive glance, gave but little attention to these atrocities of climate. His reading-lamp shone cheerily on his desk, and on the very satisfactory papers lying there, and Carmel basked in a temperate sunshine. For up till now the ways of the new group had entirely fulfilled his expectations, which from the beginning had been sanguine, and the best, so he hoped, was yet to be. The scheme which he had formed in the summer, and which he had talked over with Jack in September, had been simple, ingenious, and on the safe side of excessive sharpness. The dear, delightful public, as he had foreseen, was quite willing to fall in with his scheme, and had seconded his plans for general enrichment—particularly his own—with openhanded patronage. The scheme in brief was as follows, had the public only known: It will be remembered that he had formed two companies, Carmel, and Carmel East and West, with capitals respectively of three hundred thousand and five hundred thousand pounds. Carmel East and West had exhibited remarkable fluctuations, as Kit knew to her loss, Alington, and Jack following his advice, to their gain, and the way in which this had been worked was simplicity itself. The shares had been issued at par, and had risen almost immediately to twenty-five shillings. This Alington was disposed to put down partly to his own reputation and as the result of reports from the mine, but chiefly—for

he was modest even when alone—to the effect of his noble body of directors. He as vendor had fifty thousand shares fully paid, and at this point he sold out, unloading very carefully under several names, and taking a very decent little profit for a man of simple tastes and butler-like appearance. The natural effect of this extensive sale was to cause the shares to drop, and the downward tendency was accelerated by unpromising news from the mine, which followed immediately on his sale. The ore, as stated in the prospectus, was refractory, and extracting it was both costly and yielded a very small percentage of gold. Mr. Alington, whom several large holders and substantial City men consulted about this time, was not sanguine. The results were bad, there was no denying it. Three weeks of a dropping market brought the shares to the condition they were in on that day of November on which Kit sold out for the first time, and they closed at thirteen and ninepence sellers, fourteen and threepence buyers. This seemed to Alington to be low enough for his second step, as he did not want the market to lose confidence altogether. He sent a telegram out to his manager in Australia, Mr. Linkwood, laconic, but to that intelligent fellow perfectly comprehensible:

"New process.—Alington," it ran.

He also sent one to Mr. Richard Chavasse:

"Invest."

The next morning he received from Mr. Linkwood the following reply:

"Carmel East. Ninety per cent. of gold extracted by Bülow process. Strong support by Australian markets.—Linkwood."

Now, the evening before certain large purchases in Carmel East had been made in England, not by the names under which Mr. Alington had previously unloaded, for the weakness of such a course was obvious, and he followed them up the next morning by a very large purchase in his own name, and by the publication of his telegram from Mr. Linkwood. He also saw several business men, to whom he gave a full explanation. He had telegraphed, he said with absolute truth, to his manager to try the Bülow process, and, as they saw, it had yielded admirable results. Instead of twenty, they got ninety per cent. of the gold out. Concerning the strong support of the Australian markets, they would no doubt receive further news by cable. He had no information later than that telegram which he had published.

The effect of this on a market already predisposed to go a-booming after Westralians was natural and inevitable. The shares went up nearly a half during the day, and next morning when a further private cable, instantly made public, recorded that that shrewdest of financiers, Mr. Richard Chavasse, had bought to the extent of forty thousand pounds, they ran past thirty shillings.

A week later they stood at two pounds, owing to steady support from private investors. There was a spurious report that a dividend might be expected, so extraordinary successful had the month's crushing proved to be, and this was the unfortunate moment selected by Kit to make her second purchase. Simultaneously Alington, who for a week

past had been very carefully unloading, telegraphed to Jack to do the same, and sold out largely under his own name. A week passed, and the shares moved slowly back, depressed by these large sales, though there was still a considerable demand for them in England. Then came another telegram from Australia, saying the mine looked much less hopeful. The vein which they had been working so successfully for the past two or three months came suddenly to an end, owing to a dip in the strata, and if struck again, it could probably be struck only at a much deeper level. This would entail considerable development. Following on this came large sales in Australia, Mr. Richard Chavasse (in consequence of a wire from England) being among them, and the shares went down to nineteen shillings. Then the possibility of a war between England and France depressed them still further, and they subsided quietly to fourteen shillings, where, for all that Mr. Alington at present cared, they were at liberty to remain. Thus closed the first act of the great deal, leaving a suspicious market.

Such was the position on this Sunday morning with regard to Carmel East and West when Mr. Alington looked out on the snow-muffled street. He had been to a concert the afternoon before, where they had performed Palestrina's Mass in B flat and fragments of those sweet, austere melodies still haunted his head. Like many men who have a great aptitude for figures, he had a marvellous musical memory, and sitting down at his piano, he recalled gently several of the airs. That was the music which really appealed to him, pure, simple melody of a sacred kind. No one regretted more than he the utter decadence of English music, its fall from its natural genius, which came to perfection, so he considered, under the divine Purcell. It had become *déclassé*, in the most awful sense of that awful word. An exotic German growth had spread like some parasitic plant over it; the native taste was still there, and every now and then Parry, or some of his immediate school, would give one an air which was worthy of the English best, but otherwise everyone seemed emulous of indefinitely multiplying the most chaotic of Wagner, or the music of those people whose names ended in "owski." Then, and still from memory, by an act of unconscious cerebration, he played the last chorus out of "Blest Pair of Syrens," and, closing the piano, got up and went to his desk with tear-dimmed eyes, in harmony with himself.

He had anticipated events with the precision of a great general. The market had rushed, like starving folk when a granary is opened, at Carmel East and West, and after they had reached their highest point, and the big sales began, there had followed something like a panic. West Australian mines were still new to the public, and the greater financiers viewed them with suspicion. This sudden scare over Carmel East and West suited Mr. Alington exactly, for it would be sure to bring down the price of the second Carmel group—namely, the North, South, and Central mines. He had seen this six months ago, and had worked for this very end. At present he had no holdings in Mount Carmel, except those shares which he held to qualify as a director, and he had delayed any purchase in them till the panic created by the mercurial behaviour of the sister group should have brought down the price. The lower it went, the better would he be pleased,

for he intended to make a coup over this compared to which what he had pocketed over Carmel East and West should be a mere bagatelle. But for Carmel he required no adventitious aid from marquises, and consequently the sudden resignation of Tom Abbotsworthy from his board, which event had taken place the day before, did not trouble him at all, nor did he care to know what cause "his regret to find that press of work prevented him" covered. The mine he knew was a magnificent property, quite able to stand on its own feet, and in the prospectus he had purposely understated its probable value. In doing so, he was altogether free from possible censure; the mine had seemed to him promising, and he had said so, and when the shares were suitably low he intended to buy all he could lay hands on. Purposely, also, he had undercapitalized it; eventually he meant to issue fresh shares. The five hundred thousand pounds already subscribed was not more than sufficient to work Carmel North, and both Mount Carmel and Carmel South of the same group he believed to be as remunerative as the others. The panic over Carmel East and West had already affected the other group, and yesterday evening the one-pound shares, after a week's decline, stood at fifteen shillings. He proposed to let them go down, if they kindly would, till they had sunk to ten shillings or thereabouts, then buy for all he was worth, and send a telegram to Mr. Richard Chavasse to do the same. And at the thought of Mr. Richard Chavasse he put his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, leaned back in his chair, and laughed aloud with a great mellowness of sound.

In certain respects Mr. Alington, for all his staid conversation and butler-like appearance, was a true humorist; in this instance, at any rate, that he alone should appreciate his own joke was sufficient for him, and he required no sympathizer. Indeed, it would have spoiled it all if other people had been able to appreciate it. Though a modest man, he considered the Chavasse joke very entertaining, and the Chavasse joke was all his own, and the point of it as follows:

Some years ago, out in Australia, he had a Swiss valet, a clever, neat-handed rogue in his way, who one night was sufficiently ill-advised to open the house to burglars. But the alarm was given. Mr. Alington, with a revolver and pyjamas, came mildly but firmly downstairs, and though the burglars escaped, he held his valet in the hollow of his hand. The man stood detected, and, hoping to make the best of his miscarried job, confessed his complicity to his master. Mr. Alington made him give his confession in writing, and sent it to his bank for safe keeping, but for the time took no further steps.

But not long before the formation of this new company, four or five months only before his own departure for England, he parted company with his servant, who left Melbourne at once. Three months afterwards a gentleman with a fine moustache and a short beard appeared—a personal friend, it would seem, of Mr. Alington's, and a man of wealth, interested in Australian mines. A few weeks only after his arrival Mr. Alington left for England. Mr. Richard Chavasse, however, remained, cultivated and linguistic, and lived in Alington's house at, it was supposed, a suitable rent. Altogether he may be best described as a creation.

Here, again, as in so many of the dealings of Providence with man, Mr. Alington often marvelled to see the working of all things together towards good. In the first instance there had not been wanting to his forbearance to give Mr. Richard Chavasse over to the police a vague feeling of compassion at the thought of those deft, shirt-studding hands given over bleeding to oakum-picking and the sewing of mail-bags; and how amply was that sweet pity rewarded! A man bound to him by fear was a far safer repository for the large sums of money, amounting sometimes to forty or fifty thousand pounds, over which Mr. Chavasse had control, than someone over whom he held no such check. Should Mr. Chavasse attempt to get off with the money, or even—so stringent were Alington's regulations for the strict and sober conduct of his life—leave the colony, a wired word from him to the bank would place the ex-valet's confession of complicity in the burglary in the hands of the police. Alington, in fact, had speculated largely in Chavasses, and he had the wit to see from the beginning that the more comfortable position he gave him, the more man of wealth and mark he made him, the securer he himself would be. A beggar with power of attorney may easily decamp with the spoils, and possibly baffle pursuit, but for the solid man interested in mines, though slightly recluse and exclusive, it is hardly possible to evade capture. Besides, who in their senses would not prefer to live delicately than to dodge detectives? Certainly Mr. Chavasse was completely in his senses, and did not attempt escape. What Alington meant to do with him after the grand coup in Carmels he had not yet certainly determined.

In the interval Mr. Chavasse, ex-valet, lived in his house in Melbourne rent-free, and cost Mr. Alington perhaps eighty pounds a month. But how admirable an investment was that; and how small a percentage of his coinings for his master did that eighty pounds a month represent! Already it had often happened, as in the case of Carmel East, that Alington in England wanted to run up the price of some mine, and strong support in Australia was exactly what was needed to give a hesitating market confidence. Thus he exercised a dual control: here in England, no doubt, many investors followed his lead, for he was known to be an extremely shrewd man, with the instinct bred of knowledge equalled by none, and invariably his purchases seemed to herald a general advance. For as surely as Mr. Alington bought in London, so surely did a cable go out to Mr. Chavasse, "Invest balance," or "Invest half balance," and in due course came the answer, not necessarily to Alington—indeed, seldom to him—"Strong support in Australia." The plan was simple—all practical plans are: the valet had his choice between two courses of life—the one to live extremely comfortably in Alington's delightful house in Melbourne, passing pleasant, independent days, and occasionally, as the telegram came from England, making large purchases for this mine or that, or selling still in obedience; the other, to leave his comfortable house, and start off in an attempt to outrun the detectives: for as surely as he tried to escape, so surely would his confession lying at the bank pass into the hands of the police. Once a month, indeed, he had to send to England the statement of his accounts, and now and then he had been told that his cigar-bill was too large, or that whisky-and-soda for lunch would be a pleasant change from an

expensive Moselle. On leaving Australia, Mr. Alington had transferred to him absolutely certain shares, certificates and balance at the Melbourne bank in payment, it was supposed, of some large purchase; and not infrequently he could, if he chose, draw a cheque for as much as fifty thousand pounds to self. Thus, for a few weeks, perhaps, he would be able to career over the world; but from that moment he would be Mr. Richard Chavasse no longer, that solid, linguistic gentleman, but the man Chavasse, earnestly wanted by the police for burglary.

There was risk on both sides. Alington knew that to convict the man, if he was so insane as to try to escape, meant exposure of his own side of the bargain and good-bye to the dual control. In his heart of hearts, indeed, he had hardly determined what to do should Chavasse make so deplorable a blunder. No doubt he could be caught, no doubt his identity could be proved, and he could be landed in the place of tread-mills and oakum-picking, but there would be other revelations as well, not all touching Chavasse. However, he never seriously contemplated such possibilities, for he did not believe that the man would ever try to escape. He was comfortable where he was, and comfortable people will think twice before they risk a prosecution for burglary. Alington was far too acute to think of frightening him or keeping him continually cowering; exasperation might drive him to this undesirable ruin. Instead, he gave him a very fair allowance, and complaints as to the length of his cigar-bill were few. Indeed, he had gauged the immediate intentions of his ex-valet very correctly. Mr. Richard Chavasse had no present thoughts of attempting to liberate himself from his extremely tolerable servitude, and probably get in exchange something far less soft, while that confession of his lay at the bank. He had the dislike of risks common to men who have been detected once. If, however, he could by any plan, not yet formulated, manage to remove those risks, his conscience, he felt, would not tell him that he was bound in gratitude to Mr. Alington never to do anything for himself.

This morning, as Alington sat working in his well-lighted room, or looked out with kind and absent gaze into the snowy, sordid street, or laughed with pleasure at the thought of Mr. Richard Chavasse, he felt extremely secure, and humbly thankful to the Providence which had so guided his feet into the ways of respectability and wealth. Without being a miser in the ordinary usage of the word, he had that inordinate passion (in his case for money) which marks the monomaniac. Yet he remained extremely sane; his willingness to provide himself not only with the necessaries but also the luxuries which money will buy, remained, in spite of his passion for it, unimpaired. He was not extravagant, for extravagance, like other excess, was foreign to his mild and well-regulated nature, and had not been induced by the possession of wealth, but a scarce print he seldom left unpurchased. He gave, moreover, largely to charitable institutions, and the giving of money to deserving objects was a genuine pleasure to him, quite apart from the satisfaction he undoubtedly felt at seeing his name head a subscription list. In addition to his own great passion also, he had a thousand tastes and interests, a gift that even genius itself often lacks, and it may have been these on the one hand pulling against the

lust for money on the other that kept him so well-balanced, just as the telegraph post is kept straight by the strain on both sides. As well as the one great thing, the world held for him hundreds of desirable objects, and the hours in which he was not devoted to his business were not, as they are to so many, a blank and a pause. He closed his ledger and opened the passion music; he shut his piano and untied his portfolio of prints, and his sleek, respectable face would glow with inward delight at each. A certain kindliness of disposition, which was part of his nature, it must be confessed, he kept apart when he was engaged in business. This lived in an attic and never descended the stairs if he was at his desk. To give an instance, he had not the slightest impulse to help Kit in her difficulty, though a word from him would have shown her how in the next few months to make good her losses. She had chosen to mix herself up in business, and he became a business man from head to heels. It even gave him a little pleasure to see her flounder in so stranded a fashion, for he had not effaced, and did not mean to efface, from his mind the very shabby thing she had chosen to do to him on the night of the baccarat affair. Being very wealthy, it did not really matter to him whether she cheated him of a hundred pounds or a threepenny-bit, but he quite distinctly objected to being cheated of either. Had the last trump summoned him on the moment to the open judgment-books, he might have sworn truthfully enough that he had forgiven her, for he did not ever intend to make her suffer for it, even if he had the opportunity of doing so. Certainly he forgave her; he would not ever attempt to revenge himself on her, and he had not told a soul about it.

But her difficulties aroused no compassion in him, nor would they have done so even if she had never cheated him at baccarat. Business is business, and a statue of sentiment has no niche hewn in the mining market. One can do one's kindnesses afterwards, he said to himself, and, to do him justice, he often did.

For the present there was a lull in the Carmel transaction, and after a very short spell at the ledgers Mr. Alington closed them with a sigh. There were several receipts lying on his table, and he took them up, read each, and docketed it. One was for a considerable sum of money paid to a political agency. He hesitated a moment before putting the docket on it, and finally wrote on the top left-hand corner:

"Baronetcy."

## CHAPTER III

### LILY DRAWS A CHEQUE

Toby was sitting after breakfast in the dining-room of his house in town reading the Times. It had been settled for him by Lily before their marriage that he was to have some sort of a profession, and, the choice being left to him, he had chosen politics. He was proposing to stand for a perfectly safe borough in about a month's time, and though hitherto he had known nothing whatever about the public management of his country's affairs, since he was going to take a hand in them himself, he now set himself, or had set for him, day by day to read the papers. He had just got through the political leaders in the Times with infinite labour, and had turned with a sigh of relief for a short interval to the far more human police reports, when Lily came in with a note in her hand.

"Good boy," she said approvingly, and Toby rustled quickly back to the leaders again.

"A most important speech by the Screamer," he announced, honouring by this name a prominent member of the Cabinet. "He seems to suggest an Anglo-Russo-Germanic-French-Italian-American alliance, and says with some justice that it ought to be a very fairly powerful combination. It is directed, as far as I can make out, against Mr. and Mrs. Kruger."

Lily looked over his shoulder for a moment, and saw the justice of the résumé.

"Yes, read it all very carefully, very carefully indeed, Toby," she said. "But just attend to me a moment first; I shan't keep you."

Toby put down the paper with alacrity. The Sportsman tumbled out from underneath it, but he concealed this with the dexterity bred of practice.

"What is it?" he asked, vexed at the interruption, you would have said, but patient of it.

"Toby, speaking purely in the abstract, what do you do if a man wants to borrow money from you?" she asked.

"In the abstract I am delighted to lend it to him," he said. "In the concrete I tell him I haven't got a penny, as a rule."

"I see," said Lily; "but if you had, you would lend it him?"

"Yes; for, supposing that it is the right sort of person who asks you for money, it is rather a compliment. It must be a difficult thing to do, and it implies a sort of intimacy."

"And if it is the wrong sort of person?" asked Lily.

"The wrong sort of person has usually just that shred of self-respect that prevents him asking you."

Lily sighed, and pulled his hair gently, rather struck by his penetration, but not wishing to acknowledge it.

"Door-mats—door-mats!" she observed.

"All right; but why be personal? Who wants to borrow money from you, Lily?"



"I didn't say anyone did," she replied, throwing the note of her envelope into the grate. "Don't be inquisitive. I shall ask abstract questions if I like, and when I like, and how I like. Read the Screamer's speech with great care, and be ready by twelve. You are going to take me to the Old Masters."

She went out of the room, leaving Toby to his politics. But he did not at once pick up the paper again, but looked abstractedly into the fire. He did not at all like the thought that someone was borrowing money from his wife, for his brain involuntarily suggested to him the name of a possible borrower. Lily had held a note in her hand, he remembered, when she came into the room, and it was the envelope of it, no doubt, which she had thrown into the grate. For one moment he had a temptation to pick it up and see whether the handwriting confirmed his suspicions, the next he blushed hotly at the thought, and, picking up the crumpled fragment from the grate with the tongs, thrust it into the hottest core of the fire.

But the interruption had effectually destroyed his power of interesting himself in this world-wide combination against Mr. and Mrs. Kruger. There was trouble in the air; what trouble he did not know, but he had been conscious of it ever since he had gone down one day late in last December to stay with Kit and Jack at Goring, and they had been blocked by the snow a couple of stations up the line. He had noticed then, and ever since, that there was something wrong between Kit and his brother. Kit had been unwell when they were there: she had hardly appeared at all during those few days, except in the evenings. Then, it is true, she had usually eaten and drank freely, screamed with laughter, and played baccarat till the small hours grew sensibly larger. But underneath it all lay an obvious sense of effort and the thundery, oppressive feeling of trouble—something impossible to define, but impossible not to perceive. In a way, supposing it was Kit who wanted to borrow money from his wife, it would have been a relief to Toby; he would have been glad to know that cash alone was at the bottom of it all. He feared—he hardly knew what he feared—but something worse than a want of money.

He sat looking at the fire for a few minutes longer, and then, getting up, went to his wife's room. She was seated at the table, writing a note, and Toby noticed that her cheque-book was lying by her hand. He abstained carefully from looking even in the direction of the note she was writing, and stood by the window with his broad back to the room.

"Lily," he said, "will you not tell me who it is who wants to borrow money from you? For I think I know."

Lily put down her pen.

"Toby, you are simply odious," she said. "It is not fair of you to say that."

Toby turned round quickly.

"I am not a bit odious," he said. "If I had wanted not to play fair, I could have looked at the envelope you left in the dining-room grate. Of course, I burnt it without looking at it. But I thought of looking at it. I didn't; that is all."

Lily received this in silence. For all his freckles, she admired Toby too much to tell him so. And this simple act, necessitated by the crudest code of honour, impressed her.

"That is true," she said. "All the same, I don't think it is quite fair of you to ask me who it was."

Toby came across the room, and sat down by the fire. The suspicion had become a certainty.

"Lily, if it is the person I mean," he said, "it will be a positive relief to me to know it. Why, I can't tell you. I haven't spoken to you before about the whole thing; but since we went down to Goring on that snowy day I have had a horrible feeling that something is wrong. Don't ask me what: I don't know—I honestly don't know. But if it is only money I shall be glad."

Lily directed an envelope and closed it.

"Yes, it is Kit," she said at length.

"Ah, what have you done?"

"I have done what she asked."

"How much?" The moment after he was ashamed of the question; it was immaterial.

"That is my own affair, Toby," she said.

Toby poked the fire aimlessly, and a dismal, impotent anger against Kit burned in his heart.

"Borrowing! Kit borrowing!" he said at length.

"Of course, I haven't let her borrow," said Lily quietly, sealing the note.

"You have made her a present of it?"

"Oh, Toby, how you dot your i's this morning!" she said. "Shall I unseal what I have written, and put a postscript saying you wish it to be understood that so much interest is charged on a loan? No, I am talking nonsense. Come, it is time to go out. Kit is coming to see me this afternoon, soon after lunch, so we must be back before two."

"Kit coming to see you? What for?"

"She asked me if I would be in at three. I know no more. Oh, my good child, why look like a boiled owl?"

The boiled owl got up.

"It is a disgrace," he said; "I've a good mind to tell Jack."

"If you do," remarked Lily, "I shall get a divorce—that's all!"

"I'm not certain about the law in England," said Toby, with emphasis, "but I don't believe for a moment that they'd give it you for such a reason. But make the attempt. Try—do try."

"Certainly I should," said she. "But, seriously, Toby, you mustn't think of telling Jack. He and Kit have had a row, so I believe, and she doesn't like to ask him for money. I come next: I do really, because you haven't got any. Besides, you said it was rather a compliment being asked; I agree with you. But to tell Jack—preposterous!"

She stood in front of him, drawing on her long gloves, her eyes fixed on her hands. Then she looked up.

"Preposterous!" she said again.

Toby took one of the gloved hands in his.

"I love and honour you," he said simply.

"Thank you, Toby. And how dear it is to me to hear you say that, you know. So you'll be good, and let me manage my own affairs my own way?"

"For this time. Never again."

"As often as I wish, dear. Oh, am I a fool? You seem to think so."

"It's not that—oh, it's not that," said Toby. "Money—who cares? I don't care a damn—sorry—what you do with it. It doesn't interest me. But that Kit should ask you for money—oh, it beats me!"

"I think you are hard on her, Toby."

"You don't understand Kit," he said. "She is as thoughtless as a child in many things—I know that—but being thoughtless is not the same as being unscrupulous. And about money she is unscrupulous. Pray God it is only—" and he paused, "well, it is time for us to go out, if we want to see the Old Masters. Personally I don't; but you are a wilful woman. And I haven't even thanked you."

"I should advise you not," remarked Lily.

"Why? What would you do?" said the practical Toby.

"I should call you Evelyn for a month."

Toby was sent to a political meeting directly after lunch, and Lily was alone when Kit arrived. Fresh-faced as a child, and dressed with an exquisite simplicity, she rustled across the room, just as she rustled at church, and in her eye there was a certain soft pathos that was a marvel of art. A mournful smile held her mouth, and, giving a long sigh, she kissed Lily and sat down close beside her, retaining her hand. It is far more difficult to be a graceful recipient than a graceful donor in affairs of hard cash, and it must be acknowledged that Kit exhibited mastery in the precarious feat. With admirable grasp of the dramatic rights of the situation, for a long moment she said nothing, and only looked at Lily, and even the doubting Apostle might have gone bail that her feelings choked utterance. That she was very grateful for what Lily had done is true, if gratitude can be felt without generosity; but it was not her feelings that choked her utterance, so much as her desire to behave really beautifully, and express her feelings with the utmost possible charm. At last she spoke.

"What can I say to you?" she said. "Oh, Lily, if you only knew! What can you have thought of me? But you must believe I loathe myself for asking. And you—and you—"

Real moisture stood in Kit's eyes ready to fall. Lily was much moved and rather embarrassed. Passionate relief was in Kit's voice, beautifully modulated.

"Please say nothing more," she said. "It gave me real pleasure—I am speaking quite seriously—to do what I did. So all is said."

Kit had dropped her eyes as Lily spoke, but here she raised them again, and the genuineness of the eyes that met hers brought her more nearly to a sense of personal shame than anything had done for years; for even the most undulating poseur feels the force of genuineness when really brought into contact with it, for his own weapons crumple up before it like the paper lances and helmets with which children play. Kit's life, her words, her works, were and had always been hollow. But Lily's sincerity was dominant, compelling, and Kit's careful calculated manner, a subject of so great preoccupation but two seconds ago, slipped suddenly from her.

"Let me speak," she said. "I want to speak. You cannot guess in what perplexities I am. In a hundred thousand ways I have been a wicked little fool; and, oh, how dearly one pays for folly in this world!—more dearly than for anything else, I think. I have been through hell—through hell, I tell you!"

At last there was truth in Kit's voice, a genuineness beyond question. Her carefully studied speech and silences were swept away, as if by a wet sponge from a slate, and her soul spoke. A sudden unexpected, but imperative, need to speak to someone was upon her, to someone who was good, and these past weeks of silence were an intolerable weight. Goodness, as a rule, was synonymous in Kit's mind with dullness, but just now it had something infinitely restful and inviting about it. Her life with Jack had grown day by day more impossible; he, too, so Kit thought, knew that there was always with them some veiled Other Thing about which each was silent. Whether he knew what it was she did not even try to guess; but the small things of life, the eating and the drinking, the talk on indifferent subjects when the two were alone, became a ghastly proceeding in the invariable presence of the Other Thing. To Lily also that presence was instantly manifest, the trouble about which Toby had spoken that morning. It was there unmistakably, and she braced herself to hear Kit give bodily form to it, for she knew that was coming.

Kit dropped her eyes and went on hurriedly.

"I am in unutterable distress and perplexity," she said; "and I dread—oh, I dread what lies before me! For days and nights, ever since that snow-storm down at Goring, I have thought only of what I have to go through—what is within a few months inevitable. I have tried to conceal it from Jack. But you guess, Lily. You know, I even went to a doctor to ask if anything could be done——"

Lily looked up with a glance of astonished horror.

"Stop, stop," she said; "you are saying horrible things!"

"Yes, I am saying horrible things," went on Kit, with a strange calmness in her voice; "but I am telling you the truth, and the truth is horrible. The truth about a wicked person like me cannot be nice. You interrupted me. I went, as I told you, but when I got there I drove away again. I was not so wicked as I thought I was."

Lily gave a great sigh of relief. But she had not seen the Other Thing yet.

"Oh, my poor Kit," she said; "I am so sorry for you; but—but you see the same thing lies before me. But fear it? I thank God for it every moment of my life. Cannot you forget

pain, risk, danger of death, even in that? Nothing in this world seems to me to matter when perhaps soon one will be a mother. A mother—oh, Kit! I would not change places with anyone in earth or heaven."

Kit did not look up.

"It is different for you," she said.

"Different? How different?" she asked; but a sudden misgiving shook her voice. Outlines of the Other Thing were discernible.

A sudden spasm of impatience seized Kit.

"Ah, you are stupid!" she cried. "You good people are always stupid."

There was a long silence, and during that silence Lily knew Kit's secret, and as with everyone the world of trivial things swarmed into her mind. She heard the ticking of the clock, the low boom of life outside, the rustle of Kit's dress as she moved slightly. Something perfectly direct had to be said by the one or the other; anything else would be as out of place as a remark on the weather to a dying man.

"What am I to do?" asked Kit at length simply.

And the answer was as simple:

"Tell your husband."

"I think Jack would kill me if I told him," said Kit.

"I am very sure he would not. Besides, what does that matter? Oh, what does that matter?"

Kit looked up at her in silence, but after a moment Lily went on.

"Don't you see what I mean?" she said. "There are some situations in life, Kit, and this is one, where no side-issue, like being killed, comes in. There is, as God is above us, absolutely only one thing to be done, though there are a hundred arguments against it. What is the use of telling him? you might ask. Use? Of course there is no use. Why tell the disgrace? why make him miserable? why make him hate you, perhaps? Simply because you must—you must! Oh, my poor, poor Kit, I am so glad you told me! It must be something to tell anyone, even a feeble little fool like me. How could you have borne it alone? Oh, Kit, Kit!"

Again there was silence. Lily sat leaning forward in her chair, bending towards the other, with all the pure sweet womanliness of her nature yearning in her eyes. Perhaps she should have been shocked. She was not, for pity swallowed up the very ground on which censure should have stood. The two women, as asunder as the poles, were for the moment brought close by the Divine identical experience of their sex; yet what was to be to one the flower of her life and the crown of her womanhood, was to the other a bitterness ineffaceable, a shuddering agony.

"Oh, it is difficult, it is difficult!" went on Lily; "but when was anything worth doing easy? Does not all in you that you know to be best point one way? You cannot imagine going on living with Jack, day by day, week by week, without telling him. And when it comes——"

Lily broke off suddenly. Here was no question of words. What could argument do in a case that admitted of none? There was one thing—one thing only—to be done; all else was impossible. If Kit did not feel that in her very blood and bones, no words could conceivably make her. She had been sitting quite still and silent, apathetic apparently, during Lily's speech. After her outbreak at the beginning, such entire composure was unnatural. The two might have been talking of Danish politics for all the interest Kit seemed to take in the subject. Inwardly storm and tempest raged; old voices, memories, all that was innocent, called to her; the gales of her soul bugled and shook the foundations of her building, but as yet the moment had not come. Then suddenly the slightest tremor seemed to shake her, and Lily saw that she was beginning to feel, and that some fibre long dormant or numb was still vital.

"All I say to you seems nothing more than platitude, perhaps?" she went on; "but platitudes are worth consideration when one touches the great things of life—when interest, tact, inclination, cleverness, are all sunk, and we are left with the real things, the big things—goodness, wickedness, what is right, what is wrong."

Her tone had a pleading wistfulness in it, her eyes were soft with tenderness, and the simple, homely words had the force of their simplicity. Kit was drawing on her gloves very slowly, still not looking up.

"Tell me two things more," she said, with a tremor in her voice. "Do you shrink from me? And the wrong I have done to—to your unborn child, what of that?"

Lily rose and kissed her on the forehead.

"I have answered you," she said.

Kit got up, hands trembling and with twitching mouth.

"Let me go," she said. "Let me go at once. Come if I send for you."

She hurried from the room without further good-bye, and Lily was too wise to try to detain her. Her carriage was still waiting, and she stepped quickly into it.

"Home," she said.

Outside the air was brisk with spring, the streets clean and dry, and populous with alert faces. Shop-windows winked and sparkled in the lemon-coloured sunshine; at a corner was a barrow full of primroses from the country, and the news of the day lay on the cobbles of the crossing, with stones to keep it from flying, in scarlet advertisement. A shouting wind swept down Piccadilly, hats flapped and struggled, errand-boys whistled and chaffed, buses towered and nodded, hansom jingled and passed, but for once Kit was blind to this splendid spectacle of life. Her own brougham moved noiselessly and swiftly on its India-rubber tires, and she knew only, and that with a blank heaviness of spirit, that each beat of the horses' hoofs brought her a pace nearer to her home, to her husband—a step closer to what she was going to do.

She got out at her own door, and, to her question whether her husband was in, was told that he was up in his room. He had ordered the carriage, however, which brought her back, to wait, as he was going out.

Kit went quickly up the staircase and along the parquettèd floor of the passage, not loitering for fear she should not go at all. Jack was standing in front of his fireplace, an opened letter in his hand. As she came in he looked up.

Kit had advanced a few steps into the room, but stopped there, looking at him with eyes of mute entreaty. She had not stopped to think over what she should say, and though her lips moved she could not speak.

"What is it?" he said.

Kit did not reply, but her eyes dropped before his.

"What is the matter?" he asked again. "Are you ill, Kit?"

Then the inward storm broke. She half ran across the room and flung her arms round his neck.

"I wish I were dead!" she cried. "Jack, Jack—oh, Jack!"

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DARKENED HOUSE

Toby was just turning into the Bachelors' Club next morning after another terrible wrestle with the Screamer, when he ran into Ted Comber. They had met a dozen times since their interview in the Links Hotel at Stanborough last August; indeed, they were both of the snowed-up party which went to the cottage in Buckinghamshire in the winter. Toby, still in ignorance that his interference had only changed the scene of the week by the seaside, bore him no ill-will at all; in fact, having been extremely rude and dictatorial to him, he felt very much more kindly disposed to him afterwards, and, as usual, on meeting him to-day, he said "Hulloa!" in a genial and meaningless manner as they passed.

But this morning there was something comparatively dishevelled about Ted; the knotting of his tie was the work of a mere amateur, and he had no button-hole. As soon as he saw Toby he stopped dead.

"How is she?" he asked.

Toby stared.

"How is who?"

"Kit. Haven't you heard?"

Toby shook his head.

"I called there this morning," he said, "for Kit and I were going to an exhibition, and they told me she was ill in bed. And Jack would not see me."

"No, have heard nothing," said Toby. "Kit called on my wife yesterday, but I did not see her. Lily did not say anything about her being ill."

Lord Comber looked much relieved.

"I suppose it is nothing, then," he said; "I do hope so. It would be terrible for Kit to be ill, just when the season is beginning."

Toby stood for a moment thinking.

"Did you say Jack refused to see you?" he asked.

"Yes; I dare say he was very busy. No one sets eyes on him now that he has become a gold-miner. I am told he lives in the City, and plays dominoes in his leisure hours with stockbrokers. Probably he was only busy."

Toby bit his glove.

"Why else should he refuse to see you?" he asked.

"I can't think, because I'm really devoted to Jack. Well, good-bye, Toby. I'm so glad to have seen you. If there was anything serious, I'm sure they would have told you. Isn't the morning too heavenly?"

Lord Comber waved his hand delicately, and turned briskly into Piccadilly. He had really had rather a bad moment before he met Toby, and it was a great relief that that red-



headed barbarian knew nothing of Kit's illness. It could scarcely be anything serious. One way and another he had seen almost nothing of her since he was down at the cottage in December, for he himself had been out of England, and in the country, until this week, whereas the Conybeares had been almost entirely in London.

It was a delicious spring morning, and his spirits rose quickly as he went eastwards. He was proposing to do a little shopping in Bond Street, since Kit could not come to the exhibition, and visit his hairdresser and his tailor. A play had just come out at the Haymarket, in which the men wore very smart coats with a great deal of thick braid about them, and he intended to order a coat with thick braid at once. He remembered having seen in an old fashion-book of pictures of men with heavily braided coats, and had often thought how smart they looked. But they belonged to the crinoline age, and till now he had never seriously thought of getting one made. But this new play had quite convinced him; though they were the fashion when crinolines were in, they were not of the same ephemeral stamp as their feminine counterparts, and the late nineties should see them again.

Just at the corner of Half-Moon Street was a flower-seller, with bunches and button-holes of spring flowers. The girl who sold them was pretty, and he looked at her a moment deftly twisting the wire round the stalks, wondering where the lower orders got their good looks from. There were yellow jonquils, breathing a heavy incense; creamy narcissi with flaming orange-coloured centres; exquisite single daffodils, most classic of all flowers, pure and girlish-looking; double daffodils, which reminded him of the same girls grown older and rather stout, overdressed, with fringes; and small fragrant bunches of violets. For violets, except in so far as they were of a lovely colour, he did not care; they were as formless as cotton-wool when put together for a button-hole (the object of flowers), and the scent of them was so precisely like essence of violets as to be banale. But as he was dressed in dark blue serge, with a violet satin tie and a sapphire pin, he bought a bunch, and put it in his button-hole, completing his scheme of colour. He gave the girl a shilling, and when she would have offered him a heavy copper change, told her to keep it, and walked on with a little warm charitable feeling, unencumbered by the dead weight of so many pennies.

After his tailor's, a visit to Perrin's was necessary. He had a very particular hairdresser there, whom he must really take into serious consultation about certain gray hairs. There were at least a dozen of them above each of his ears, and they had appeared there during the last two or three months. All his family went gray early, and it was as well to face it. It was no use getting hair dyes, which might either ruin one's hair or be the wrong colour; it was only wise to consult the very best authorities, and if hair dye was necessary, let it be put on, at any rate directed, by a professional hand.

These were gloomy reflections; the shadow of age was beginning to peer over his shoulder, and he did not like it at all. He was as yet only thirty, but already ten years of being a young man, the only thing in the world worth being, were gone from him. Five years ago, men of forty, young for their age, were objects of amusing horror to him; their

whole life, so he thought, must be one effort to retain the semblance of youth, and their antics were grotesque to the *vraie jeunesse*. But now both the amusement and the horror were gone; it would soon be worth while trying to learn a wrinkle or two from them. At twenty-five forty had seemed beyond the gray horizons; at thirty it had come so near that already, and without glasses (which he did not need yet), one could see the details of that flat, uninteresting land. What he would do with himself when he was forty he could not imagine. Marry very likely.

But forty was still ten years off, thousands of days, and this morning was a jewel of spring, and he was so happy to think that probably Kit had nothing much amiss. Really, he had had some bad minutes, but Toby must have known if there had been anything wrong. So his spirits rebounded, and he resumed his reflections on age with a strong disposition towards cheerfulness as regards the outlook. When he looked over his contemporaries in his own mind, he candidly found himself younger than they. There was Tom Abbotsworthy, for instance, whose forehead was already nearly one with the top of his head, separated only by the most scannel isthmus of hair, and corrugated with wrinkles on its lower parts, smooth and shining above. There was Jack Conybeare, with a visible tinge of gray in his hair, and lines about his eyes which were plain even by candlelight. Ted congratulated himself, when he thought of Jack, on his having so promptly gone to the face masseur on his return from Aldeburgh in September. It had meant a week of tedious mornings, and an uncomfortable sort of mask at night over the upper part of the face two or three times a week ever since, but the treatment had been quite successful. "Not only," as the somewhat sententious professor of massage had said to him, "had the growth and spread of the lines been arrested, but some had actually been obliterated." He congratulated Ted on his elastic skin. Again, his teeth were good, and really the only reconnoitring-parties of age at present in sight were this matter of gray hairs and a tendency to corpulency. For the former he was going to take prompt steps this morning, and he had already begun a course of gritty biscuits, most nutritious, but entirely without starch, which promised success in point of the latter.

But while he was making his butterfly way down Piccadilly, occasionally sipping at a jeweller's, or hovering lightly over a print-shop, Toby, after a long meditation on the top step of the club, during which time the hall-porter had held the door open for him, turned away instead of going in, and went up Park Lane to his brother's house. Kit's bedroom was directly over the front-door, and, looking up, he saw that the blinds were still down. Jack was coming into the hall from his room when Toby entered, and, seeing him, stopped.

"I was just coming to see you, Toby," he said. "I am glad you have come."

Jack's face looked curiously aged and drawn, as if he had spent a week of sleepless nights, and Toby followed him in silence, with a heart sunk suddenly into his boots. There was deadly presage in the air. Jack preceded him into the smoking-room, and threw himself down in a chair.

"Oh, Jack, what is it?" asked Toby.

The two remained together for nearly an hour, and at the end of that time came out together again. Toby took his hat and gloves from the hall-table, and was putting on his coat, when the other spoke.

"Won't you go and see her?" he asked, and his voice was a little trembling.

"I think I can't," said Toby.

"Why not?"

Toby had thrust one hand through the arm of his coat, and with it dangling remained a moment thinking.

"For two reasons: she is your wife—yours," he said, "and I am your brother; also you were a brute, Jack."

"For both reasons see her," he said; and his voice was sorry and ashamed.

"And it will do no good," said Toby, still irresolute.

"But it will be a pleasure to Kit," said Jack. "Don't, for God's sake, be always thinking about doing good, Toby! Oh, it maddens me!"

Toby disengaged the coated arm, and leaned against the hall-table.

"I shouldn't know what to say," he replied.

"You needn't know; just go and see her." Jack spoke with some earnestness. "Go and see her," he went on. "I can't, and I must know how she is. Toby, I believe you are sorry for both of us. Well, if that is so, I am sure Kit would like to see you, and certainly I want you to go. She was asking for you, her maid told me, an hour ago."

"I'm a damned awkward sort of fellow," said Toby. "Suppose she begins to talk, God knows what I shall say."

"She won't; I know her better than you."

Toby put his hat down, and drew off a glove.

"Very well," he said. "Send for her maid."

Jack laid his hand on Toby's arm.

"You're a good fellow, Toby," he said, "and may God preserve you from the fate of your brother!"

Jack rang the bell, and sent for Kit's maid. The two brothers remained together in the hall without speaking till she came down again.

"Her ladyship will see Lord Evelyn now," she said.

Toby went up the staircase behind the woman. They came to Kit's door, and having tapped and been answered, he entered.

The blinds, as he had seen from the street, were down, and the room in low half-light. The dressing-table was close in front of the window, and in the dim rose light that filtered through the red stuff, he could at first see nothing but a faint sparkle of silver-backed brushes and bottles. Then to the right of the window the bed became outlined to his more accustomed gaze, and from it came Kit's voice, rather gentler and lower-pitched than its wont.

"Toby, it is dear of you to come to see me," she said. "But isn't it stupid of me? Directly after seeing Lily yesterday I came back here, and tripped on those steps leading from Jack's room. I came an awful bang. I must have been stunned, for I remember nothing till I found myself lying on the sofa here. Oh dear, I've got such a headache!"

Toby found himself suddenly encouraged. Of all moral qualities, he was disposed to put loyalty the first, and certainly Kit was being magnificently loyal. Her voice was perfectly her own; she did not say that she had stumbled over something of Jack's, still less that he, as Toby knew, had knocked her down. He drew a chair up to the bedside.

"It is bad luck, Kit," he said; "and really I am awfully sorry for you. Is your head very bad?"

"Oh, it aches!" said Kit; "but it was all my own fault. Now, if anyone else had been to blame for it, I should have been furious, and that would have made it ache worse." She laughed rather feebly. "So one is saved something," she went on, "and even with this head I am duly grateful. It is a day wasted, which is always a bore, but otherwise——"

And she stopped abruptly, for the glibness of her loyalty was suddenly cut short by a pang of pain almost intolerable, which pierced her like a sword. She bit the bedclothes in her determination not to cry aloud, and a twenty seconds' anguish left her weak and trembling.

"I wanted to see you, Toby," she said. "Just to tell you how, how——" And she paused a moment thinking that her insistence on the fact that her accident was no one's fault but her own, might seem suspicious—"how glad I was to see Lily yesterday!" she went on. "I wonder if she would come to see me; ask her. But you must go now; I can't talk. Just ring the bell as you go out. I want my maid."

She stretched a hand from under the bedclothes to him, and he took it with a sudden fright, feeling its cold feebleness.

"Good-bye, Kit," he said. "Get better soon."

She could not reply, for another sword of pain pierced her, and he went quickly out, ringing the bell as he passed the mantelpiece.

Jack was still in the hall when he came downstairs again, and he looked up in surprise at the speed of Toby's return.

"She fell down, she told me," he said. "You were quite right, Jack—not a word."

Jack had not time to reply when Kit's maid hurried downstairs into the hall.

"What is it?" asked Jack.

"Her ladyship is in great pain, my lord," she said. "She told me to send for the doctor at once."

Jack rang the bell and looked up at Toby blankly, appealingly.

"Go into your room, Jack," he said. "I'll send for the doctor, and do all that."

A footman was sent off at once for Kit's doctor, and Toby sat down at a writing-table in the hall and scribbled a note to his wife, to be taken by a messenger at once to his house.

If Lily was not at home, he was to find out where she had gone and follow her. The note only contained a few words:

"My Dearest: Kit is in trouble—worse than I can tell you. Come at once to her. She wants you.

"Toby."

When he had written and sent this, he went back to Jack. The latter was sitting at his table, his face in his hands, doing nothing. Toby went up to him.

"Come, Jack," he said, speaking as if with authority, "make an effort and pull yourself together. Get to your work, or try to. There is a pile of letters there you haven't looked at. Read them. Some may want answers. If so, answer them. I have sent for Kit's doctor, and for Lily."

Jack looked up.

"It isn't fit that Lily should come here," he said.

Toby thought of Kit's visit the afternoon before, and Lily's refusal to him to say anything of what it had been about. That it had been private was all she would tell him, and not about money. And as they were sitting alone in the evening he thought he saw her crying once.

"I think it is very possible she knows," he said. "Kit had a private talk with her yesterday. Wait till she comes."

Jack rose from his seat.

"Oh, Toby, if you had only telegraphed for me from Stanborough, instead of packing him off!"

"I wish to God I had!" said Toby drearily.

Jack took up his letters, as Toby had told him, and began opening them. There was one from Mr. Alington enclosing a cheque. He barely looked at it. Money, his heart's desire, had been given him, and the leanness of it had entered into his soul. But seeing the sense of Toby's advice to do something, he answered some of these letters, mechanically and correctly.

Before long Lily was announced, and Toby rose quickly, and went out into the hall to meet her.

"Ah, Toby," she said, "you did quite right to send for me. They just caught me before I went out. You needn't tell me anything. Kit told me all."

Toby nodded.

"Will you see Jack?" he asked.

"Yes, if he would care to see me. Ask him whether he will or not."

But Jack had followed Toby, and before he could answer had come out of his room.

"It is awfully good of you to come, Lily!" he said. "But go away again. It is not fit you should be here."

"If Kit wants me, I shall see her," she said. "Please let her know that I am here, Jack."

"It isn't fit," said Jack again.

"I think differently," said Lily gently. "Please tell her at once, Jack."

Jack looked at her a moment in silence, biting his lip nervously.

"Ah God!" he cried, suddenly stung by some helpless remorse and regret, and without more words he went upstairs to see whether Kit would see her. He could not bring himself to go into the room, but asked through the maid. Soon he appeared again at the head of the stairs, beckoning to Lily, who was waiting in the hall below, and she went up. He held the door of Kit's bedroom open for her, and she went in.

The room was very dark, and, like Toby, it took her a few seconds before she could distinguish objects. From the corner to the right of the rose-square of the window came a faint moaning. Lily walked across to the bedside.

"Kit," she said, "my poor Kit! I have come."

There was silence, and the moaning ceased. Then came Kit's voice in a whisper:

"Lily," she said, "I told him. I told him all. Then—then—I somehow fell down those stairs leading from his room, and hurt myself awfully. My fault entirely.... I was not looking where I was going. Oh, I have felt so terribly ill since this morning, and it is only morning still, isn't it? Have they sent for the doctor?"

"Yes, they expect him immediately. Oh, Kit, are you not glad you told him? It was the only way. Now you have done all you can. It would be worse to bear if you had not told him. Oh, I wish—I wish I could take the pain instead of you! Hold my hand. Grip it with all your force; it will make the pain seem easier. And oh, Kit, pray to God without ceasing."

"I can't—I can't," moaned Kit; "I never pray. I have not prayed for years."

"Pray now, then. If you have turned your back on Him, He has never turned His back on you. The Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief, born of a woman! Only be willing to let Him help you—that is sufficient. Think of the graciousness of that! And this is the very week of His Passion."

"I can't pray," moaned Kit again; "but pray for me."

The grip of Kit's hand tightened in Lily's, and she could feel the stones in her rings biting into her flesh. Yet she hardly felt it; she was only aware of it. And her whole soul went up in supplication.

"O most pitiful, have pity," she said. "Help Kit in the hour of her need; deliver her body from pain and death, and her soul, above all, from sin. Give her amendment of life, and time to amend, and the will to amend. Make her sorry. Oh, Almighty One, stand near one of Thy children in her pain and need. Help her—help her!"

The door of the room opened quietly, and Dr. Ferguson entered. He held in his hand a little bag. He went to the window and drew up the blinds, letting in a splash of primrose-coloured sunshine; then shook hands with Lily, who rose at his entrance, in silence.

"You had better leave us, Lady Evelyn," he said. "Please send the nurse up as soon as she comes."

Lily turned to the bedside once more before leaving the room, and Kit smiled in answer to her. Her face was terribly drawn and white, and the dew of pain stood on her forehead. Lily bent and kissed her, and left the room.

She rejoined Toby and Jack in the smoking-room. Jack got up when she entered with eyes of questioning.

"The doctor is with her," said Lily. "He will be sure to tell us as soon as he can."

"Do you think she is very bad?"

"I don't know. She is in dreadful pain. How on earth did she manage to fall so badly down these steps?"

"Did she tell you that?"

"Yes; she said it was entirely her own fault."

Jack turned away a moment.

"I knocked her down," he said at length.

Lily's eye flashed, but grew soft again.

"Don't let her know that you have told me," she said. "Oh, poor Jack!"

Jack turned to her again quickly.

"Lily, do you think she will die?" he asked. "And will it be that which killed her?"

"Don't say such things, Jack," said Lily firmly. "You have no right to say or think them yet. We must hope for the best. Dr. Ferguson will certainly tell us as soon as he knows."

For another half-hour they sat there, the most part in silence. Lily took up a book, but did not read it; Jack sat at a table beginning letter after letter, and tearing them up again, and all waited in the grip of sickening, quaking suspense for the doctor's report. Footsteps, which at such times fall with a muffled sound, moved about the house, and occasionally the ceiling jarred with the reverberation of a step in Kit's room, which was overhead. Lunch was announced, but still none of them moved. At last a heavy footstep came downstairs, the door of the smoking-room opened, and Dr. Ferguson entered.

"It is a very grave case," he said quietly. "I should like another opinion, Lord Conybeare."

Jack had faced round in his chair, and sat for a moment in silence, biting the end of his pen. His hands were perfectly steady, but one of his eyebrows kept twitching, and the colour was struck from his face.

"Please telegraph, or send a carriage to whomever you wish for," he said.

"A hansom will be quickest," said Dr. Ferguson, "unless you have horses already in. Excuse me, I will write a note."

Toby got up.

"I'll take it, Jack," he said. "Lily's carriage is still waiting."

"Thank you, Lord Evelyn," said the doctor. "Sir John Fox will certainly see you if you send your card in. He will be at home now. In fact I need not write. Bring him back with you, please."

Toby left the room, and Dr. Ferguson got up.

"She is very ill?" said Jack.

"Yes, the condition may become critical in an hour or two. I shall then"—and he looked at Jack—"I shall then have to try to save Lady Conybeare at whatever cost."

Jack gave a sudden short crack of laughter, but recovered himself.

"Meanwhile, Lord Conybeare," continued the doctor, "you are to consider yourself a patient too. I insist on your having lunch."

"I can't eat," said Jack.

"Excuse me, but you have got to. And you too, Lady Evelyn. By the way, Lady Conybeare tells me she had a fall. That, of course, caused this premature event. When did it happen?"

For a moment Jack swayed where he stood, and sat down again heavily. He seemed about to speak; but Lily interrupted him quickly:

"Yesterday afternoon, about four o'clock. Lady Conybeare told me about it. Please come in to lunch, Dr. Ferguson, unless you are going upstairs again at once, in which case I will send you some up. Come, Jack."

Toby returned before long, bringing Sir John with him. The two doctors had a short consultation together, and then went upstairs again.

Outside the muffled house the spring day ran its course of exquisite hours. The trees in the Park opposite were already covered with little green buds, not yet turned black by the soot of the city, and the flower-beds were bright and heavily fragrant with big, succulent hyacinths. Up and down Park Lane surged the busy traffic; now a jingling hansom would cut in front of a tall, nodding bus, now a dray would slowly cross the Park gate, damming up for a moment the two tides of carriages passing in and out. The great bourdon hum of London droned like some overlaid bee, still intent on gathering more riches, and the yearly renewal of the lease of life granted every springtime made gay the tenants of this goodly heritage of earth. Inside the house Jack and Lily sat alone, for she had sent Toby away for an hour or two to get some air. They hardly spoke to each other; each listened intently for a foot on the stairs.

About four o'clock, just as the sun, still high, was beginning to cut the rim of the taller trees in the Park, Dr. Ferguson entered. He beckoned to Jack, who left the room. Outside in the hall he stopped.

"You must decide," he said. "We cannot possibly save the mother and the child."

"Save the mother!" cried Jack. "Oh, save her!"

His voice was suddenly raised almost to a shriek, and through the closed door, Lily, hearing it, started up. In another moment he came back into the room, trembling frightfully, with a wild, scared look.

"Jack! Jack!" she said. "My poor fellow! be brave. What is it?"

"They have to try to save one," said Jack. "Oh, Lily!" And with a sudden upheaval of his nature, and an uprising of all that was tender and remorseful, long overlaid by his selfish, unscrupulous life, he gave way utterly and abandonedly. "Oh, Kit! Kit!" he moaned. "If she dies it will be my doing. I shall have murdered her. And we have been



married six years! She was not twenty when we married—a child almost. And what have I done for her? Have I ever made this wicked, difficult business of life any easier for her? I, too, have been false and faithless, and when poor, brave Kit came to tell me—what she told me—I did that which may have killed her. She has to bear it all, and I, brute, bully and coward, go scot-free. She fell like a log, and I was not sorry, only frightened. And she told you, she told Toby, she told the doctor, that she had fallen herself. Poor, loyal Kit! And I am a fine fellow to be loyal to! O God! God! God!"

He writhed on the sofa, where he had flung himself in dumb, twisted agony. The pains of hell, a soul knowingly lost, were his. All the love he had once borne to Kit, all the years of their excellent comradeship together, rose and filled the cup of unutterable remorse.

Lily, woman to her heart's core, was one throb of pity for them both, and could scarce find words.

"Oh, Jack!" she said; "there is hope. It is not hopeless. They did not say that. It is awful; but be strong. We have to wait."

He did not answer her, but lay like a man dead, his face hidden in the elbow of his arm. Lily saw it was no use attempting to reach him by any words. For the time he lay outside the range of human sympathy, inaccessible. The outer darkness of remorse and regret was round him, not to be illuminated, but unpierceable and of necessity so. He was not a good man, but an utterly bad one would not have so suffered.

So they sat silent, and the sun sank lower behind the trees, till at length a few rays through the yet thinly clad branches came in level at the window. Suddenly Jack sat up.

"I hear a step," he said, and next moment Lily perceived it, too.

"Go into the hall to them, Jack," she said, thinking that he would rather face the inevitable moment of news alone.

"I can't," said he.

The step came down the stairs, across the flagged hall, and Dr. Ferguson entered.

"She will pull through," he said. "Unless anything quite unforeseen happens, Lady Conybeare will do well."

## CHAPTER V

### TOBY ACTS WITHOUT SPEAKING

Ted Comber had passed an arduous but most satisfactory morning. His own particular hairdresser had been kind, sympathetic and consoling. Gray hairs were there, and it was no use denying it; but there was a wonderful new preparation, not really a hair-dye, but a natural product, which, like everything else connected with the hair, cost ten and sixpence the bottle, and was to be confidently recommended. He would send it round to South Audley Street. A little to be applied with a brush every day to the parts affected, and the smell was not unpleasant.

From there he had gone to his tailor's, and had a long talk to Mr. Barrett, who fully appreciated the solemnity of the braid idea, and said it might be an epoch. Down the edge of the coat—exactly so—and the waistcoat in the same manner, very broad. And what did his lordship think about the treatment of the trouser? Braid on the outside of the leg, or not? And his lordship thought braid. The suit could be ready by Saturday evening, and so Ted could wear it for the first time on Easter Sunday, said kind Mr. Barrett.

He came out of the shop humming a tune, very much pleased with himself and braid and Mr. Barrett. Mr. Barrett always consulted him as if his advice was worth having, with a bent back. To be a sort of arbiter elegantiarum in town was one of Ted's nasty little ideals, and he contrasted himself with a friend of his who was being measured as he came out, who, making some suggestion, not to Mr. Barrett, but only to an assistant, received the curt reply, "Not worn like that now, sir." How different would be the reception of any suggestion of his! Mr. Barrett would look respectfully thoughtful for a moment or two, and then say, "Very becoming, very becoming indeed." As likely as not he would recommend the same innovation to the next customer, endorsing it with, "Lord Comber has just ordered a coat of that cut, sir."

It was already after one when he left Bond Street, and he turned briskly homewards. The morning was so lovely that he determined to walk, and he reached home just before lunch. The inimitable preparation had already arrived from Perrin's, and he went up to his bedroom to try its properties. It was dark chestnut in colour, with a curious pungent smell about it, and he applied it carefully, as directed, to the affected regions. The affected regions smarted a little at the application, but the pain could not be called really serious.

Though Ted had passed such assiduous hours since breakfast, the afternoon was so pleasant that he determined to have another stroll before tea. He had seen no one he knew that day except Toby, and he yearned for a little light conversation. So, after changing his blue suit for a more rigorous costume, soon after four he was on his airy way to the Bachelors' Club. Tea and toast always tasted so good at the Bachelors' Club, and he liked to think he was a Bachelor. It was pleasant also, as he walked up the steps,

to contrast the sunny content of his five o'clock mood with his moment of real anxiousness this morning.

The reading-room was nearly empty, and he sank peacefully into his favourite chair by the window, and took up the Pall Mall. He abstained from the leading article, and from "Silk and Stuff," or something of the kind, at the bottom of the first page, cast a vague eye over "The Wares of Autolycus," without any definite idea as to what they might be, and turned to the small paragraphs to which he bore a closer affinity. Royal Highnesses were doing various tedious things, race-meetings among them; the German Emperor had written a hymn, or climbed a tree, or ridden a locomotive; and about half-way down the page he saw the following:

"The Marchioness of Conybeare is lying in a very critical condition at her residence in Park Lane."

Ted read it through once, hardly grasping it, and once more, thinking he must be the victim of some gigantic practical joke. The next moment he got hastily up from his chair, and at the door ran into an apologetic waiter, who was bringing his delicious tea and toast. But he did not pause for that, and going out into the street hailed a hansom, directing the man to drive him to Toby's house. They would be sure to know there, and, for private reasons of his own, he did not wish after his repulse of this morning to make a target of himself again at Park Lane.

Now, barely half a minute before his hansom drew up there, Toby, who had been sent out by his wife to get air, had come in. He was intending to see whether there were any letters for either of them, and then walk back to Park Lane. His straightforward, wholesome soul was full to brimming, and the ingredients of that cup were sympathy for Jack, anxiety for Kit, and blind anger and hatred for Ted. He was not a canting analyst, and could not have said which ingredient usurped proportion, nor did he cultivate mixed emotions, and the three existed quite separately and individually, making him as wretched as his nature permitted him to be. Between them all he felt pulled in pieces; any conclusion to either would make the other two more bearable.

He found a couple of letters lying on the hall-table for his wife, and putting them in his pocket to take back to her, he was just turning to leave the house again, when the front-door bell rang. The man who had let him in was still there, and Toby, half-way between unreasonable hope and sickening apprehension, thinking that it might be some news from Park Lane, advanced also towards the door, so that when it was opened he was close to it. Outside, on the topmost of the four steps that led up from the pavement, in the most well-cut of raiment, the glossiest of patent-leather shoes, and the most faultless of hats, stood Ted Comber.

Toby gave one short gasp, licked his lips with the tip of his tongue, took one step towards him, and knocked him backwards down the four steps. A cry of passionate dismay escaped the falling body; the faultless hat rolled under the hansom, the gold-crutched stick flew in a wide parabola into the area, and Toby, smiling for the first time since that morning, and not caring to improve or spoil the situation with words, walked

away. The only regret that lingered in his mind was that there had not been a fuller gathering to observe the scene; however, the cabman and his own footman had an uninterrupted view of what had taken place.

So Toby's footsteps went briskly away along the wet pavement—there had been a cool spring shower some half-hour ago—and the footman at the front-door and the cabman on his exalted perch were left staring. The horse had shied and swerved at this considerable commotion on the pavement, and before the driver could stop it had taken a couple of prancing steps forward, bringing the off wheel with devilish precision over Ted's hat, crushing it lengthways. Its unenviable proprietor lay fallen across the pavement, his chestnut curls within a few inches of the curb, for the moment stunned. Returning consciousness reminded him of a severe pain on the side of his head, a really acute anguish in his right elbow, another hardly less distressing in his shoulder, and two more in his leg. Then he picked himself up, and a being more sunk beneath the zones of pity, take him body and mind together, could scarcely have been found in all big London. His frock coat was a fricassée of dirt, his face was vanished in a splash of mud, the elbow of his right sleeve, whence came one of the most excruciating pains, was torn through shirt, and as he got up he could feel the grating of his broken watch-glass. A footman, discreetly but undisguisedly grinning, watched him from the door of Toby's house, a cabman from his perch. Dignity is scarcely compatible with dirt, and Ted knew it. He picked up his hat, which looked as if a drunken man had been trying to fold an opera hat the wrong way, and the battered remnants of what so lately had been so fine climbed into the hansom again, and requested to be driven home. It had not been a very successful visit.

His reflections were not the most enviable. That act of Toby's, for which he was now but a sorry parcel of aches, meant the worst. And at that thought all that was passably decent in the man came to the surface. There was not enough to cover a large surface, but there was a little. He pushed open the trap at the top of the hansom and changed his destination to Park Lane. Aching and bleeding as he was, he would not wait, wait, wait for tardy news. Nor was his anxiety wholly selfish; he had—God knows what proportion this bore to the whole—a fear based on affection. Then, having given the order, he devoted himself to patching up a very sorry object.

His face was bleeding under the right eye, and his cheek was scratched and raw; it seemed as if all the stray small objects in a London street had been inlaid into it in layers by an unpractised hand. His elbow was cut, his knee was cut, and both ached like toothache. But he mopped and brushed and dabbed till the balance of dirt was on his handkerchief, and when that was clear, realizing that to touch the breaches any more meant the transference of the dirt back again, he leaned idly against the cushions of the cab, in a state of mind compounded of anxiety and unutterable depression. Little had he supposed that the mirrors in the corners, often by him so satisfiedly and light-heartedly used, would ever have reflected so battered a self.

There was a carriage at the door when he drove up, but it gave him access, and after ringing the bell he huddled back into his cab again. Even now, when, to do him justice, he was a prey to the most poignant emotions that had ever touched his putty soul, the instinct of regard for his own appearance, the desire to shield the shattering it had undergone, asserted itself. He leaned forward in the hansom when the front-door was opened, showing to the footman only his undamaged left.

"How is Lady Conybeare?" he asked.

"A great improvement, my lord," said the man.

"Thanks. Please tell the coachman to drive to , South Audley Street."

Kit was alive—better. His spirits, elastic as his complimented skin, instantly began to recover themselves, and his thoughts straying out of selfishness, absorbed for an hour in another, turned homewards again like sheep to their fold. He had been afraid that he had dropped that nice box of toys, the world, and that they would have been broken. But it seemed that it was not so. He had dropped them, it is true, and some of them, himself particularly, were rather scratched and muddy, but they were not broken. He could play with them a long time yet.

Instinctively again he turned to the slip of looking-glass in the corner of his hansom. His scratched face had stopped bleeding, and it did not look so bad as he had feared. His hat, it is true, was a sorry sight, but it is easy to get new hats, and the thought that Toby's barbarous revenge had mainly spent itself on a Lincoln and Bennett was even a little amusing. Much more important was the patch of whitening hair above his ear, and he turned his face sideways to examine it. Even that one application of the dark fluid he had made just before lunch had already changed it; the white hairs seemed to have been blotted with colour. How delightful!

He paid the cabman, let himself into the house, and went with a slight limp up to his bedroom, where he rang for his valet. He had had a fall, he explained, and must change his clothes and have a bath. Also, he would dine by himself at home, and a telegram must go at once to the Haslemers to say that he had hurt himself and could not come. On the whole, he was not sorry to absent himself. Lady Haslemere had really become rather tiresome lately. She was always talking about bulls and bears, and Ted did not care in the least for the menagerie of the City. His warm bath with pine in it was soon ready, and he went to repair the damages of the day.

As he dressed he reviewed the agitations of the hour that had passed. An undignified part had been thrust on him by Toby, for the most complacent cannot flatter themselves that they show a brave figure when they are forcibly laid on pavements. But it was in the very nature of the case that the reason of the blow prevented the story going abroad. It was impossible that Toby should cause it to be known that he had knocked him down, for people would ask why. Secrecy, at any rate, was desired on both sides. As far, then, as that most unpleasant moment was to be regarded, he had only to apply vaseline to his cuts, order some new clothes, and live the occurrence down; not publicly—that would have been trying—but privately. He had only to get over it himself. Anyhow, Toby knew

by this time how completely his bumble-bee diplomacy at Stanborough had miscarried, and at that thought the smarting of his own wounds grew appreciably less. Decidedly it had not been a pleasant moment when he flew backwards on to the pavement, but it was over. He smarted far more under the effect of the insult than under the insult itself. It was very like Toby, he thought, to deal with him in that manner. Anyhow, there was a smart in Toby's soul which no vaseline could reach.

Against the violence that had been done him he could set the news of Kit's ameliorated condition. He told himself with sublime naïveté that it was worth while being knocked down to learn that. His anxiety had been terrible, really terrible, and he could not but balance that weight removed against other unpleasantnesses. Things were not so bad as they might have been. But it had been terrible, and he easily persuaded himself that he was suffering horribly. What had happened he did not yet exactly know; in any case it was horrible, and it would be wise not to dwell on it. He would know to-morrow, and as he brushed his hair he saw again with satisfaction the working of his pungent fluid.

He felt battered and tired, and, putting on a floss-silk dressing-gown, lay down on the sofa in his bedroom, and rang the bell for tea. Really, he had been through a life-time of suffering since he rang the bell for tea an hour before at the Bachelors' Club, and he desired that restorative agent most acutely. Most of all—and this was highly characteristic—he desired to dismiss the experiences of the day from his mind. It had all been extremely unpleasant, and there was a good deal that was unpleasant still hanging about, like the sultriness of a thundery day, low and imminent. But at the moment he could do nothing: no step that he could take would make matters better, no effort of will would disperse the thunder-clouds, and it was idle to brood over things, and mar one's natural cheerfulness with morose and gloomy reflections. His bright, shallow personality reflected like a wayside puddle whatever was immediately above it, and held no darkling shadows or remote lights of its own, and he was rightly very careful of the buoyancy of his spirits, since that was the best of him, and undeniably of the greatest use.

There was a small table by his hand, with the gold-topped scent-bottle, the evening paper, and a few yellow-covered French books on it. He sprinkled his forehead with the scent, threw the evening paper away, for there was a little paragraph in it which he wanted to forget, and took up Gautier's "Mademoiselle de la Maupin," and opened it at random. He read a page or two, and became interested, absorbed. The magic of words, a spell more potent than any wizard's incantation, took hold of him, and the indoor hot-house atmosphere of infinitesimal intrigue was most congenial. The low roar of London traffic outside grew dumb, the agitations of harsh experience grew remoter, the events of the day became to him as the remembrance of some book he had read, and the book he was reading grew flushed with the realities of life.

Toby in the meantime, after his short and decisive interview without words on the doorstep, had walked back to Park Lane, and got there not very many minutes after his

interviewer had made his call. He went straight into Jack's room, and found Lily there alone. Question and answer were alike needless; her face answered what he had not audibly asked.

"She will get through," she said. "They think she will certainly get through."

Toby threw his hat on to the sofa.

"Thank God! oh, thank God!" he cried. "Where is Jack?"

"Upstairs. They let him see her for a moment. He will be down again immediately. But they could not save both Kit and the child, Toby."

Toby sat down by his wife.

"Oh, Lily, what a difference five hours can make!" he observed with that grasp of the obvious which distinguished him. "By the way, I met someone when I was out."

"Whom?"

"Him. I went home to see if there were any letters for either of us—oh, there were two for you; catch hold—and as I came out I found him on the doorstep."

"What had he come for?"

"I didn't ask him. But I know what he went for. Spread-eagle on the pavement. All in his beautiful clothes. And the hansom went over his hat; damned neat it was. Oh, Lily, that made me feel better, and I felt, too, it was a good omen. I wish you had been there. You would have roared."

"Toby, you are a barbarian! What good does that do?" she said with severity.

"What that sort of a man wants is pain," remarked Toby.

"Was he much hurt?" asked Lily with extreme composure.

"I don't know. I hope so. I hope he was very much hurt."

"Do you mean you left him lying there?"

"Yes. He may be there now."

Lily's severity broke down.

"Then please have him taken away before I get back," she said. "Ah, here's Jack!"

Jack could not speak, nor was there need, but he shook hands, first with Lily, then with his brother, and nodded to them. Then suddenly his mouth grew tremulous, and he sat down quickly by the table, and covered his face with his hands.

Lily looked at Toby, and in answer to her look he went out of the room. As she passed Jack, following her husband, she laid her hand for one moment on his bowed shoulder, and went out also, closing the door behind her softly.

## CHAPTER VI

### LILY'S DESIRE

Toby and his wife left London the day before Easter to spend a fortnight at the cottage in Buckinghamshire, which Jack had lent them. Kit was going on as well as possible, but she could not yet be moved; they hoped, however, that both of them would come down to Goring before the others left. Mrs. Murchison was also spending Easter there, before she went back to America, where she purposed at present to be with her husband for a fortnight at least.

She had arrived just before tea, the others having come down in the morning, and was a torrent of amazing conversation.

"And then on Tuesday," she was saying, "I dined with dear Ethel Tarling at the Criterion. We had a beautiful dinner, and most amusing; and all during dinner some glee-club sang in the gallery those delicious English what-do-you-call-thems, only I don't mean meringues."

"Madrigals?" suggested Lily, in the wild hope it might be so.

"Madrigals, yes! They sang madrigals in the gallery—'Celia's Arbour' and 'Glorious Apollyon from on high beheld us.'"

Lily gave a little spurt of uncontrollable laughter.

"Always making fun of your poor old mother, you naughty child!" said Mrs. Murchison, with great good-humour. "Toby, you should teach her better. And then afterwards we went to the Palace Theatre to see the Biography. Most interesting it was, and the one from the front of a train made me feel quite sick and giddy—most pleasant. Oh! and I remember that it was that evening we heard about poor Lady Conybeare. How sad! I called there this morning, and they said she was much better, which is something."

"Yes, we hope that Jack and Kit will both come down here in ten days or so," said Toby.

"And Lord Comber, too," went on Mrs. Murchison guilelessly. "It was that same day he had a fall, and bruised himself very badly. Misfortunes never come singly. Did you not hear? He fell on his head, and I should think it was lucky he did not get percussion of the brain."

Toby did not glance at his wife.

"Very lucky," he said.

"Was it not? Then I spent Wednesday at Oxford, which I was determined to see before I left England. Most beautiful and interesting it is. I lunched with the Master of Magdalen College, whom I met in London several times, and saw the statue they put up on the place where Shelley died."

"I thought he was drowned," said Lily.

"Very likely, dear," said Mrs. Murchison; "and now I come to think of it, the place is near the river, so I expect they put it up as near as they could. You couldn't wish to see them



put a recumbent statue, a very recumbent statue indeed, so it is, in ten feet of water, dear," she observed, with great justice.

Mrs. Murchison sipped her tea in a very ecstasy of content. It was barely a year since she had first seen Toby, and marked him down as the ideal husband for Lily; and there they were all three of them, drinking tea, as she said to herself, in the stately homes of England, how beautiful they stand! Her siege of London had been rapid and brilliantly successful. The fortifications had fallen sudden and flat, like the walls of Jericho; and she made no more of dining at the Criterion with that marvellous Lady Tarling than of washing her hands or going to America.

"Yes, the Master of Magdalen College was most kind," continued Mrs. Murchison, "and said he remembered Toby well. Dear me, what a lot I shall have to tell your father, Lily! And after lunch—really, a most excellent lunch, I assure you, with quails in asps—we went down to the Ibis."

"To the where?" asked Lily.

"To the river," said Mrs. Murchison, suspecting a difficulty, "and saw where the college boats rowed their races—torpedoes, I think the Master called them, and I remember wondering why. His own torpedo won the last races."

Here Toby choked violently over his tea, and left the room with a rapid uneven step.

"Perhaps it's not torpedoes, then," went on his mother-in-law, supposing that he would have corrected her if he had been able to speak; "but it's something very like. Dear me, what a terrible noise poor Toby makes! Had we better go and pat him on the back? Then yesterday I went to the 'Messiah' at the Albert Hall, which made me cry."

Mrs. Murchison looked welcomingly at Toby, who here reappeared again, rather red and feeble.

"Dear Toby," she said, "it's just lovely to think of you and Lily so settled and titled and happy; and when I'm on the ocean, I shall often go to my state-room, and count the days till I come back. I must be in America at least a fortnight, if not ten days; and I shall try and persuade Mr. Murchison to come across with me when I return. I'm very lucky about ships: I go out in the Lucania, and come back in the Campagna. And is there anyone else coming down here before I go on Wednesday, or shall we have a nice little no-place-like-home all by ourselves?"

"Oh, we are going to be simply domestic," said Lily, rising, "and we shan't have a soul beside ourselves. You know both Toby and I are naturally most domestic animals. We neither of us have any passion for the world. We like being out of doors, and playing the fool, and having high-tea—don't we, Toby?"

"I have no passion for high-tea," remarked Toby.

"Oh yes, you have. Don't be stupid! I don't mean literal high-tea, but figurative high-tea."

"The less literalness there is about high-tea, the better I like it," said Toby.

Lily passed behind his chair and pulled his wiry hair gently.

"Lord Evelyn Ronald Anstruther D'Eyncourt Massingbird, M.P., is not such a fool as a person might suppose," she remarked. "At times he shows glimmerings of sense. His love for figurative high-teas as opposed to figurative high-dinners is an instance. Don't blush, Toby. You've little else to be proud of."

"I've got you to be proud of," remarked Toby, bending back his head to look at her.

Mrs. Murchison rustled appreciatively. That was the sort of thing which English people could say naturally without gush or affectation. A Frenchman would have bowed, put his heels together, and kissed his wife's hand. An Italian would have struck the region of his heart. An American would have expressed it in four-syllable periphrasis. But Toby did none of these things. He said it quite simply, lit a cigarette, and growled:

"Leggo my hair, Lily!"

Lily "leggoed" his hair.

"He is trying to blow rings," she explained, "but he can only blow ribands and streamers. Also, he looks like an owl when he tries. Rings on his fingers and bells on his toes," she added with immense thoughtfulness. "Toby, I'll buy you a peal of bells if you will promise to wear them on your toes."

Toby got up from his chair.

"If anyone has anything else of a peculiarly personal nature to say about me, now is their time," he remarked; "otherwise, we'll go out. Dear me! the last time I was here we got snowed up at Pangbourne, and slept in the Elephant Inn, and I remember I dreamed about boiled rabbit. I seldom dream, but I remember it when I do."

Lily sighed.

"Yes, and poor Kit was waiting for us all here. She was quite alone, mother, and had an awful *crise des nerves* over it."

"I should have thought she was the last person in the world to be nervous," said Mrs. Murchison.

"Oh, *crise des nerves* is not nervousness," said Lily; "it is being strung up, and run down, and excited."

"My mother," remarked Mrs. Murchison, "was of a very nervous temperament. I have seen her on the coldest days suddenly empty a carafe of water over the fire, for fear of the house catching. And evenings she would sometimes blow out the candle for the same reason."

Toby giggled explosively.

"And the cruel part was," continued Mrs. Murchison, "that throughout life she was afraid of the dark, in which the blowing out of the candles naturally left her. So, between her dread of a conflagration and her terror of the dark, it was out of the fireplace into the fire."

"Frying-pan, mother," said Lily.

"Maybe, dear; I thought it was fireplace. But it's six of one and half a dozen of another. Poor Mommer! she had a very nervous and excitable temperament, with sudden bursts of anger. At such times she would take out her false teeth—she suffered from early

decay—and dash them to the ground, though it meant slops till they got repaired. Most excitable she was."

"Very trying," said Toby rather tremulously.

"No, we didn't find her trying, Toby," said this excellent lady. "We were very fond of her. Poor dear Mommer!"

She sighed heavily, with memory-dim eyes, and Toby's laughter died in his mouth. Mrs. Murchison got up.

"Well, I shall put on my hat," she said, "and come out with you both. I brought an evening paper down with me, but there is nothing in it, except that there has been a terrible tomato in the West Indies, destroying five villages—tornado, I should say—and great loss of life."

She went out of the room to fetch her hat, and Lily and Toby were left alone. Toby looked furtively up, wondering what he should meet in Lily's eye. Her face, like his, was struggling for gravity, and both shook with hardly-suppressed laughter. Neither could speak, and they turned feebly away from each other, Toby leaning with trembling shoulder on the mantelpiece, and Lily biting her lip as she looked helplessly out over lawn and river. Now and then there would come from one or other a sobbing breath, and neither dared look round. Once Lily half turned towards her husband, to find him half turned towards her with a crimson strangling face, and both looked hastily away again. The plight was desperate, and after a moment Lily said, in a choking, baritone voice:

"Toby, stop laughing."

There was no answer, and she gave him another moment for recuperation. Out of the corner of her eye she saw him wiping away the moisture of laughter. Then with a violent effort he subdued the muscles round his mouth.

"She's an old darling," he said; "but, Lily, I shouldn't have liked your grandmother."

Lily heaved a long sigh, herself again.

"Toby, you behaved very well," she said, "and mother is an old darling. Come, we'll go out."

Mrs. Murchison took her cheerful presence away after three days, as she was sailing to America almost immediately, and the two were alone for the next week. Spring had definitely come, and day after golden day ran its course. Life, eternally renewed with the year, had burst from its winter chrysalis, and stood poised a moment with quivering, expanding wings before launching itself into the half-circle of summer months. Everywhere, on field and tree, the effervescence of green and growing things foamed like some exquisite froth. One morning they would rise to see that the green buds on the limes had split, shedding their red sheaths; on another, the elms were in sudden tiny leaf; on another, the mesh of new foliage round the willows of the water's edge would make a delighted wonder for them. The meadows were scarce starred with pink-edged daisies when the buttercups sowed a sunshine on the fields, and in cool, damp places yellow-eyed forget-me-nots reflected the pale blue they gazed at so steadfastly. Toby and his wife would spend long, lazy mornings in the punt or drive about the deep-banked,

primrosed lanes—he all tenderness and solicitude for her, she happier than she had known it was given to mankind to be. They talked but little; to both it seemed that their joy lay beyond the region of words.

On the evening of one such day they were strolling about the garden as dusk fell. Birds called in the thickets and shrubs, now and then a rising fish broke the mirror of the river, and each moment the smell of the earth, as the dew fell, grew more fragrant.

"I wish we were going to stay here a long time," said Lily, her arm in his; "but we must go up to London when Parliament meets after the Easter holidays. The M.P.! Good gracious, Toby, to think that the welfare of your country depends upon a handful of people of whom you are one!"

"Parliament may go hang," said Toby, "and Jack will be delighted to let us stay here just as long as you like."

"I am sure of it, but I don't like. What do you suppose I wanted you to get into Parliament for, if you were not going near the House?"

"Never could guess," said Toby. "It's much more important that you should stop here if you want to."

"Don't be foolish—but, oh, Toby, when my time comes let me come down here again. It was here we were engaged; let it be here you take your first-born in your arms. I do want that."

She turned to him with the light of certain motherhood in her eyes, a thing so wonderful that the souls of all men are incomplete until they have seen it, and her beauty and her love for him made him bow his head in awe. His wholesome humble soul was lost in an amazement of love and worship.

"It shall be so, Toby?" she asked, with a woman's delight in learning how unnecessary that question was. "Will my lord grant the request of his handmaiden?"

"Ah, don't," he said suddenly. "Don't say that, even in jest."

"Then will you, Toby?" she asked.

"If my queen wills it," said he.

"Nor must you say that, even in jest," she said.

"I don't; I say it in earnest—in deadly earnest. It is the truest thing in the world."

"In the world? Oh, Toby, a big place! Then that is settled."

She took his arm again, and they strolled slowly over the short velvet of the grass.

"Toby, there is another thing I want," she said after a moment.

"It is yours—you know that."

"I'm glad of it, then, because I don't think you will like it. It is this: I want you to see Lord Comber, and just shake hands with him."

Toby stopped.

"I can't," he said—"I simply can't."

"Think over it. You see, Toby, it is like this: you are part of me, and before this wonderful thing that is coming comes, I want to be 'all square' with everybody in the world. That's one of your silly golf expressions, so you'll understand it. And I can't be while you are not. Don't misunderstand me; it isn't that I don't feel as you do about him, and if I had been you and knocked him down as you did, I think I should have kicked him as he lay on the pavement. But now it is over."

"Lily, you don't know what you ask," said Toby. "If I had any reason to believe the man was sorry, that he had even any idea what a vile worm he is, it would be different. No doubt he had a bad time that day, for, as I told you, his tie was no better tied than mine; but having a bad time is not the same as being sorry, is it?"

"No," said Lily thoughtfully; "but whether he's sorry or not is not our concern; it doesn't affect what we ought to feel. He was vile; if he had not been, there would be nothing to forgive. Besides, you knocked him down. People ought to shake hands after they have fought; and I want you to."

"That is the best argument you have given me yet," said Toby.

"I don't want it to be an argument at all; I don't want my wish to be any reason at all why you should do it. You must do it because you agree with me."

"But I don't," said Toby.

"Well, tell me when you would shake hands with him," she said. "Would you this day fifty years?"

"No," said Toby.

"Would you if he was dying, or if you were?"

"I think I should; yes, I should."

"Oh, but, Toby, it is far more important to live in charity with people than to die in charity with them! Oh, indeed—indeed it is!" She stopped, and turned round, facing him, and all her soul shone in her eyes. "Indeed it is, Toby!" she said again.

Toby looked at her for a long moment, then drew her nearer him.

"Oh, my love!" he said, "what have I done to deserve any part of you? It is as you wish; how can you doubt it? How can I do otherwise?"

She smiled at him.

"But why do you do as I wish, Toby?" she asked. "It must not be because I want you to."

Toby was much moved; never before had the wonder and splendour of love so held him.

"Oh, my beloved," he said, "it is because God has ordained that all you wish is right; I can give you no other reason."

Dusk began to fall layer on layer over the sky. In the west the sunken sun still illuminated a fleece of crimson cloud that hovered above it, and round them the gray, long English twilight grew more solemn and intense. The outlines of shadows melted and faded into the neutral tint of night, and from the house behind, and from the cottages that clustered together across the river, lights began to twinkle, and the wheeling points of remotest heaven were lit overhead. The crimson in the west died into

the velvet blue of the sky, and in the east the horizon was dove-coloured with the imminent moon-rise. And as the two walked they spoke together, as they had not spoken before, of the dear event which June should bring.

To Lily, the happiness which, please God, should be hers lay in depths too abysmal for thought to plumb; and Toby for the first time fully understood how compassion, and no other feeling, had whole possession of her soul, when she had been with Kit and Jack all that terrible day, hardly more than a week ago. For that which had been to Kit a thing to dread was to the other the crown of her life, and that the experience to herself so blessed could be anything different to another woman called for pure pity. And other feelings—amazement, horror, shame—were trivial and superficial compared to that; it swept them utterly out of possibility of existence. The woman, the mother, had been between them a bond insoluble.

And Kit, so Toby thought, had felt something of this. For the five days that had followed, he himself had seen almost nothing of his wife; she had been all day at the house in Park Lane, and had twice slept there. Kit in the weakness and exhaustion of those days had held on, as if to a rock, to the sweet strength and womanliness of the other; that was the force that pulled her back to life.

That evening when they went in, Lily found waiting for her a letter from Jack, saying that the doctor had sanctioned Kit's being moved in a week's time, provided she went on as well as she was doing, and that they proposed to come down to Goring. One condition, however, Jack made himself, that Lily should telegraph quite candidly (he trusted her for this) whether she and Toby would rather they did not come. She laughed as she read the note, and sent her answer without even consulting Toby.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SECOND DEAL

It was some eight weeks after Easter that Mr. Alington decided to make the next move in the game of Carmel, a move which should be decisive and momentous. He would have preferred for certain reasons to put it off a little while yet, for he had much on his hands, but the balance on the whole inclined to immediate action. During the last four or five months he had done a considerable deal of business as a company-promoter, and at the present moment had some half-million of pounds engaged in other affairs than mines. Motor-cars in particular had much occupied him, and he was the happy possessor of many patents for noiseless tires, automatic brakes, simpler steering-apparatus, and what not. He was a man of really large ideas where money was concerned, and a perfect godsend to patentees, for his policy was to buy up any invention concerning motors which possessed even the most modest merit, in the hopes that, say, in two years' time every motor-car that was built must probably carry one or more of the patents owned by him. He had, indeed, at the present moment in England not more than twenty thousand pounds which he could conveniently devote to the booming of Carmel, but there was lodged with Mr. Richard Chavasse in Melbourne a sum of not less than fifty thousand pounds, with which it was his purpose to supply the "strong support in Australia," to the end that Carmel should rise rainbow-hued above the ruck of all other mines. Altogether his position was a good one, for the last six weeks had brought him from his manager the most excellent private accounts of the mine, which for the most part he had saved up till the booming began. Mr. Linkwood also advised very strongly a fresh issue of shares. They had at present, for instance, only an eighty-stamp mill, whereas at the rate at which they were now getting gold out there was easily work for a mill of a hundred and fifty or two hundred stamps.

It was on this "strong support in Australia" by the convenient Mr. Chavasse that Mr. Alington chiefly relied; that at any rate should be the final touch. He intended first of all to make a large purchase of his own in England, ten thousand shares at least, and immediately publish encouraging news from the mine. This he would preface, as he had so often done before, by a wire to Mr. Richard Chavasse, which in a few hours would bring forth the accustomed reply, "Strong support in Australia."

But though he would have preferred having a somewhat larger sum at his own disposal for the grand coup, he had reason for wishing to start the boom at once. Speculators had recovered from the scare of Carmel East and West, and already, before he had himself moved in the matter, the quotation for Carmel had risen from its lowest price of ten to eleven shillings up to sixteen. This was sufficient in his opinion to show that the public was already nibbling, for professional operators, he knew, were not entering this market, and this was the correct moment to give the fresh impetus. There had been a

nineteen days' account just before Easter, which had made the market dull, but since then it had begun to show more vitality.

Other reasons also were his. He was beginning, for instance, to be a little nervous about the immediate success of his dealings in the motor trade. His patents were floated into companies, but in few instances only had the shares been well supported, and in more than one he had incurred a loss—recoverable no doubt in time—which even to a man of his means was serious. Worse than that, if this ill-success continued, it would not be the best thing for his name, and he was most anxious to get Carmel really a-booming while his prestige was still high. Again, many fresh mines had been started in Western Australia since the original flotation of the Carmel group, and his financial sense led him to distrust the greater part of them. Several had been grossly mismanaged from the first, some grossly misrepresented. Others he suspected did not exist at all, and he wished to hit the psychological moment when speculators were ready, as the improvement in Carmel shares had shown, to invest, and before they had seen too much of West Australian mines to make them shy. That moment he considered had come.

Accordingly he instructed his broker to make his own large purchase. This was ten days before settling day, and he hoped to sell out again before those ten days were passed. He had at first intended to purchase only ten thousand shares, but going over his scheme step by step, and being unable to see how it was possible, with this combination of satisfactory news from the mine, his own purchase, and Mr. Chavasse's strong support in Australia, that the shares could fail to rise, he decided to purchase five thousand shares more than he could pay for. It was humanly impossible that the shares should not rise. Consequently on Thursday he telegraphed out to his manager to send a long cablegram embodying all the private news he had himself been receiving for two months back, to his broker, made his own purchase on Friday morning, and the same afternoon sent a cipher telegram to Mr. Chavasse, telling him to invest the whole of his capital then lying at Melbourne Bank in Carmel, and another in cipher to the manager, bidding him wire "Strong support in Australia." Thus in twenty-four hours his coup was made, and he went back to his Passion Music and his prints, to wait quietly for the news of the strong support in Australia. Already in a few hours after his own purchase, backed up as it was with the first of the favourable reports from the mine, the shares had risen three-eighths; the effect on the market, therefore, of the Australian support, he considered, level-headed man of business as he was, to be inevitable.

He was dining out that evening with Lord Haslemere, and was disposed in anticipation to enjoy himself. Lady Haslemere, it is true, was apt to be tedious when she talked about her own transactions in the City, and asked him whether the rise in some mine of which nobody had even heard was likely to continue, and was it not clever of her to have bought the shares at one and a half, for within a week they had risen to two and a sixteenth. She got the tip out of Truth. Mr. Alington, however, had all the indifference of the professional in money matters to the scannel operations of the amateur, and when in answer to a question of his it appeared that Lady Haslemere had only twenty shares



in this marvellous mine, and had worked herself up into a perfect fever of indecision as to whether they should take her certain eleven pounds profit, or be very brave and fly at fourteen, he felt himself really powerless to understand her agitations.

This evening directly after dinner she collared and cornered him, and finance was in her eye.

"I want to have a serious financial talk with you," she said, "so we'll go into the other drawing-room, where we shall be alone. Come, Mr. Alington."

Good manners insisted on obedience, but it was an ill-content financier who followed her. For Lady Devereux, who played Bach quite divinely, was among Lady Haslemere's guests, and even as he left the room to talk over his hostess's microscopic operations on the Stock Exchange, he saw her go across to the piano. It is true that he preferred a very large round sum of money of his own to half an hour of fugues and preludes, but he infinitely preferred half an hour of fugues and preludes to about seven and sixpence of Lady Haslemere's.

She lit a cigarette with a tremulous hand.

"I want to ask your advice very seriously," she said. "I put three hundred pounds into Carmel a week ago, and since then the shares have gone up a half. Now, what do you advise me to do, Mr. Alington? Shall I sell out, or not? I don't want to make such a mess as poor dear Kit did. She really was too stupid! She took no one's advice, and lost most frightfully. Poor thing! she has no head. All her little nest-egg, she told me. But I mean to put myself completely into your hands. Do you expect Carmel will go higher?"

Mr. Alington stroked the back of his head, and tried hard to look genial yet serious. But it was difficult. Lady Haslemere had closed the door between them and the next room, and he could hear faintly and regretfully those divine melodies on the Steinway grand. And here was this esteemed lady, who was quite as rich as anyone need be—certainly so rich as to be normally unconscious of the presence or absence of a fifty-pound note—consulting him gravely (she had let her cigarette go out in her anxiety) about these infinitesimal affairs. If she had had a fortune at stake, he would willingly have given her his very best attention, regretting only that Lady Devereux had chosen this moment for playing Bach; but to be shut off from that exquisite treat for a small sum affecting a woman who was not affected by small sums was trying.

"I can't undertake to advise you, Lady Haslemere," he said; "but I can tell you what I have done myself: I have bought twenty-five thousand shares in Carmel to-day, and have not the faintest intention of selling out to-morrow."

Lady Haslemere clasped her hands. This was a flash of lightning against her night-light.

"Good gracious! aren't you nervous?" she cried. "I shouldn't be able to eat or sleep. Twenty-five thousand—and they've gone up three-eighths to-day. Why, you've scored over nine thousand pounds since this morning!"

"About that—if I sold, that is to say, which I don't mean to do."

"And so you are going to chance the mine going still higher?"

"Certainly. I believe in it. I also believe the price will rise very considerably yet."

Lady Haslemere bit her lip; she was clearly summoning up all her powers of resolution, and Mr. Alington for the moment felt interested. He was, as he might have told you, a bit of an observer. Whether or no Lady Haslemere won eleven pounds or fourteen he did not care at all, but that she should care so much was instructive. Then she struck her knee lightly with her fan.

"I shall not touch my three hundred," she said, and she turned on Mr. Alington a face portentous with purpose.

Mr. Alington sat equally grave for a moment, but the corners of his mouth lost their sedateness, and at last they both broke out laughing.

"Oh, I know how ridiculous it must seem to you," said Lady Haslemere; "but if you have never earned a penny all your life, you have no idea how extraordinarily interesting it is to do so. You may think that it can't matter to me whether I gain ten pounds or lose twenty. But to gain it oneself—oh, that is the thing!"

Mr. Alington smiled with peculiar indulgence. "Well, frankly, it is inexplicable to me," he said. "Now, if you were playing for a large stake I could understand it, though I seldom get excited myself. Well, that is what I am going to do; I am going to play for a very big stake indeed, and I confidently expect to turn up a natural. Have you anything more to ask me?—for if not, and you will allow me, I shall go and listen to Lady Devereux. I have been so much looking forward to hearing her play again."

Lady Haslemere rose. She had wanted to have a general financial talk as well about Chaffers and Brownhills and Modder B, but the oracle had spoken about her grand coup, which was the main point.

"Yes, she plays divinely, does she not?" she said. "I knew Lady Devereux would be a magnet to draw you here. How busy you must have been lately, Mr. Alington! One has not seen you anywhere."

"Very busy indeed. But I intend to take a holiday after the Carmel deal is over."

"A deal? Do you call it a deal?" she asked. "I always thought a deal meant something rather questionable?"

Mr. Alington paused quite as long as usual before replying.

"Oh no; one uses 'deal' as quite a general term for an operation," he said.

They went back into the other drawing-room, and Mr. Alington, with an elaborate softness, drew a chair up near the piano. Lady Devereux played with exquisite delicacy and sobriety, in the true spirit in which to interpret that sweet, formal music. She did not thunder and thump, she did not cover swift, catchy runs with the loud pedal, but let each note fill its own minute, inevitable place. She did not extemporize a rallentando where passages were difficult, and make up for this by hurrying over minims, or give you a general idea of a bar. She played the music exactly as it was written with extreme simplicity. There were some twenty people in the room, some whispering together (for Lady Devereux played so well that nobody talked very loud when she was at the piano), some smoking, some playing cards, some passing under their breath the most screaming scandals; and the music was like a breath of fresh air let into a stuffy room. And by the

piano, with his sleek face reposeful, beatific, and wearing an expression of sensual piety about it, sat the only listener—a man whose soul was steeped in money, whose God was Mammon, who could roll on like some Juggernaut-car over the bodies of those he had ruined without one thought of pity or remorse. Yet the melody enchained him; while it lasted he was a child—a child, it is true, with respectable gray whiskers and an expansive baldness on the head, but happy, heedless of anything else in the world except the one exquisite tune, the one delicious moment.

Before long a baccarat table was made up, but he did not move from his place by the piano. Lady Devereux, a pretty, good-natured woman, who got on capitally with everybody except her husband, who, in turn, got on admirably with or without her, was delighted to go on playing to him, for she saw how real and how cultivated his enjoyment of her music was, and though she lost charmingly at baccarat, she really preferred playing even to one appreciative listener. She had an excellent memory, her taste was his, and the two wandered long in the enchanted land of early melody.

At last she rose, and with her Mr. Alington.

"I need not even thank you," he said; "for you know, I believe, what it has been to me. You are going to play? Baccarat for Bach! Dear lady, how shocking! I think I shall go home. I do not want to disturb the exquisite memories. I shall remember this evening." He stood for a moment with her hand in his. His face looked like the representation of some realistic saint in bad stained glass.

"Good-night," he said. "And I, too, go and daub myself in actualities. But at soul I am no realist."

It was a fine summer evening, fresh and caressing to the diner-out, and he walked back from Berkeley Street slowly, with the musician ascendant over the financier.

Of late he had been very much absorbed in business, and had heard hardly any music, and thus this evening had been really an immense treat. After all, there was nothing so essentially delightful to the bones and blood of the man as this: he was still conscious that the passion for money-making which was his, was, as he expressed it, with more fervour than it was his wont to throw into his daily conversation, a daubing in actualities; and to-night it was with a sense of distaste, rising almost to repugnance, that he contemplated an hour at his desk. The work, he knew, would bring its own consolations and rewards, but as he started back he wished neither to be consoled nor rewarded. Of late, also, his delight in the polished artifices of money-making had been on the wane; for months now he had entertained, even in his hours of triumphant finance, the idea of retiring altogether from business when once he had brought to its inevitable climax this affair of the Carmel mines.

To-night this desire to concern himself no more in the jostle of the Tokenhouse land was more than usually potent, taking almost the form of resolve. Had an angel or devil, it mattered not which, offered him success such as he anticipated in these mines upon the signing of a bond that he would mine and motor no more, he would have signed. What

allurements had that peaceful picture! He would sell out (so he figured to himself) his interest in all other businesses, invest his whole fortune in something safe and reliable, perhaps even consols; he would drop the Financial Times and take in the Musical Observer, and lead the life that in sober earnest he at the moment utterly believed himself to prefer. He had long been building a charming and palatially-simple house in Sussex, where in his declining years he proposed to spend the greater part of his time. There, with his prints, his music, and his gardening, he would pass slow, charming, uneventful days. The "long dark autumn evenings" would wean him from his garden-beds to his priceless portfolios, the turning year entice him to his garden-beds again. He would watch the jostle and the race for money with fatherly, Lucretian unconcern. He was tired, he felt sure he was tired, of the eternal struggle for what he held in sufficiency. How gross a parody of existence was the present for a man of truly artistic tastes and sensibilities! In ten days, if things went even passably well, he would have made enough to enable him to gratify these tastes to the full, and, soberly, he wanted no more than that. His beautiful home would be habitable within the year. He would have enough to marry on, for he fully intended to marry, since matrimony was a distinct factor in the social world, and he could say, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years." He was not given to excess of eating, drinking, or merriment—all that was foreign to him—but he would certainly have a string quartette belonging to his very complete establishment.

Mr. Alington had all the coolness in action which ensures success in most human pursuits, from the art of war to the art of making money, and the absence of which postulates a corresponding inefficiency in all practical undertakings. He never lost his head, nor got either frightened or exalté when he was at his work; but the intervals, after he had committed himself to some course of action, and before that action had produced its fruits, were sometimes tense periods to him. He went, no doubt, at forced draught when the great coups were being made, and after he had taken his headlong excursions Nature demanded a readjustment, and his fibres were relaxed. These periods of relaxation he usually tided over by the indulgence of his artistic tastes, which he used as a man of less fine sensibilities might use morphia or alcohol. But to-night the fugues and preludes so deftly exhibited by Lady Devereux seemed only temporarily efficacious. For a while they moved him, but he had not been home an hour when the effect wore off and left him, financially speaking, staring wide-awake.

Again and again he reviewed the natural effect of what he had done, the normal behaviour of the market towards the events which should be developed next day. Already the prices of Carmel were rising; to-morrow would come the announcement of strong support from Australia, and later in the day the more specific news that Mr. Richard Chavasse—that hard-headed operator—had bought to the extent of fifty thousand pounds. Logically, for the money-market is as subject to logical conclusions as any set of syllogisms, its prices must leap. News of the most satisfactory description would continue to arrive from the mine; in a day or two, in a week at the outside, the

shares should stand at not less than four to five—no feverish price, but well warranted, so thought Mr. Alington, by its inherent excellence. There was no doubt there would be some slight fall owing to realizations, but that, so he imagined, would be only a temporary reaction. By settling-day, ten days from now, his twenty-five thousand shares bought in England should be worth more than four times their present value; his fifty thousand pounds invested by Mr. Richard Chavasse something over two hundred thousand. After that a firm good-bye to clamorous gold-getting.

He strolled backwards and forwards in his room, now stopping to look for a moment at one of his beloved prints, now lighting a cigarette or sipping a little mild whisky-and-soda. How admirably, he reflected, had his Carmel group hitherto turned out! How alluring had been his board of directors, how convincing to the public mind of the security of a scheme to which hereditary legislators lent their honoured names! Already more than one new board had copied his example, but it had been a great thing to be first in the field; the novelty of the idea was half its success.

But now his noble colleagues might go hang, for all he cared; they had served their turn and been his bell-wethers to the public. Jack Conybeare, he knew, had followed him in this last Carmel speculation, investing largely; he was a shrewd fellow, so thought Alington, and would have made a good business man had not the onus of hereditary obligations borne him elsewhere; and if he himself had been intending to start new companies, he would not have been sorry to have him again on his board—no mere name this time, but a man likely to be of practical use.

Yes; indeed he had struck a vein! Though he believed that ninety per cent. of success is due to effort and wisdom, he had got, like most speculators, a secret faith in that "tide in the affairs of men." It was impossible not to believe in strokes of luck; if things showed a general tendency to prosper, it was well to put many things in hand at once. The stars or some occult influence happened to be favourable just then; in the remote, conjectured heavens there was a conjunction of planets of notable benignity to you; it was your chance; the line was clear; hurry, hurry, while it lasted! In the same way one had at other times to work with sobbing steps through a mire of ill-luck. Perversity for the moment characterized the universe; inanimate objects were malign; sheathed, hooded presences waited to clutch you. Nothing went right; the images of the gods were set awry; ominous mutterings were heard (not fancied) from the shrine. Then was the time to venture little, not to ride unmanageable horses, not to use new silk umbrellas, to go gently, neither praising nor complaining, for fear of further provoking the blind forces that strike; above all, not to think to repair ill-luck by wild strokes. In the nature of this world things would come round; a calm, dewy dawn would break on the low-roofed night. Wait!

For a year his good luck had held. People whom he wished to know had been glad to know him; he was already much at home in London. Carmel East and West had behaved with filial piety to their founder, and the greater Carmel seemed likely to turn out a son as dutiful, but more magnificent. His name would almost certainly be included in the list

of Birthday honours, for he had made himself most useful to the Conservative party, and was contesting an impossible seat, for which it had been really difficult to find a candidate, and he had given in a princely manner to the party's funds. Recognition, he had reason to believe, was almost certain, and he would be delighted to be a baronet.

Again that discreet rogue Mr. Richard Chavasse had played his part admirably in the pleasant rôle allotted to him. Like a person of sense, he had accepted the soft inevitable, and had preferred to live very comfortably at Melbourne rather than attempt to get away with the large balance which stood to his name. He had not probably realized that it would have been almost impossible for Mr. Alington to bring him to justice, for the exposure of the "strong support in Australia" would have been inevitable. Or perhaps some feeling of gratitude to his benefactor had touched the accomplice of thieves; the criminal class had been diminished by one—a pleasant thought. The arrangement, however, had been a scheme of mutual advantage, and the man, at any rate, had been sensible enough to see that. It would almost immediately be necessary to think what must be done with that great operator, for to-morrow's purchase would be his last. Mr. Alington, in a gentle glow of charity, was determined to act most kindly to him; his confession should be destroyed, and perhaps he should have a couple of hundred pounds as well, and certainly some pious exhortations. Indeed, the only eclipse of the lucky star had been the motor business. There were ugly losses in his ledger over that—uglier than he had quite realized; but Carmel should gently heal the sore places with a golden lotion.

Next morning came a very favourable report from the mine, and about mid-day the news of the strong support in Australia. The price had been opened at a little over thirty shillings, the mine was eagerly inquired for, and for a couple of hours it rose steadily, and as it rose seemed to get more and more in demand. Then one of those strange periodical madresses which sometimes affect that shrewd body the Stock Exchange took possession. Everything else was neglected; it seemed that the whole world contained only one thing worth buying, and that shares in Carmel. Men bought and sold, and bought and sold again; now for half an hour would come a run of realizations, and the price would sink like a back-drawing wave in a swiftly advancing tide; but in another hour that was forgotten; the tide had risen again, covering the lost ground, and those who had realized were cursing their premature prudence, and bought again. Steady-going, unemotional operators lost their heads and joined in the wild skying of Carmel without a shred of justification, only hoping that they would find everyone else a shade madder than they, and that they would clear out on the top. Men sold at three and a half, bought again at four, sold at four and a half, and were not yet content. Nobody quite knew what was happening, except that they feverishly desired shares in Carmel, and that those shares were getting every moment more expensive. Bears who had sold ten minutes before came tumbling over each other to secure their shares before they had gone up out of sight, and having got them, as likely as not turned bulls and bought again, on the chance of Carmel going higher, though half an hour ago they had sold in

the hope of its going lower. All day this went on, and about an hour before the closing of the market Alington, reading the tape record at his club, saw that the shares stood at five and a half—higher than he had ever hoped they would go in a week.

For a moment he hesitated. If he chose, there was now within his grasp all that he had been playing for. A hansom to the City; two careful words to his broker, for the unloading must be done very swiftly; then to his music and his baronetcy. In an hour the market would close till Monday, for Saturday was a holiday; but before Monday, on the other hand, would come fresh news from the mine. He debated with himself intently for a moment, and as he waited the tape ticked under his hand.

"Carmel," it spelled out, "five and five-eighths, five and three-quarters."

That was enough. For to-day nothing could stop the rise. There would be time to sell on Monday morning.

He called for a hansom; he was going to spend from Friday till Monday in the country, and not having more than enough time to catch the train, drove straight to Waterloo, where his valet would meet him with his luggage.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MR. ALINGTON LEAVES LONDON

Mr. Alington had never felt more at peace with himself, or in more complete harmony with his environment (a crucial test of happiness), than when he drove off to Waterloo from the doors of the Beaconsfield Club, of which he had lately become a member, after reading the last quotation of Carmel. All his life he had been working towards the consummation which was now practically his. His desire was satisfied, he had enough. A few forms only still remained to be put through, and he would be finally quit of all markets. On Monday morning his broker would sell for him every share he held in Carmel. On Monday morning, too, would that shrewd operator, Mr. Richard Chavasse, follow, as if by telepathic sympathy, the workings of Mr. Alington's mind, arriving at the same just conclusions, and a close with the offer made him by the Varalet Company in Paris for all the patents he owned in the motor business en bloc—at a considerable sacrifice, it is true—completed his financial career. Keen, active, and full of the most flattering triumphs as had been his progress towards this acme of his fortunes, yet he had never thought of it as anything but a progress, a road leading to a goal. Never had he let the edge of his artistic sensibilities get blunt or rusty from want of use, and he found, now that his more material work was over, that he himself, the vital and essential man, who dwelt in the financier, looked forward, like an eager youth on the threshold of manhood, to the real and full life which he was about to enter.

Humble thankfulness and grateful contentment with the dealings of Providence with him was his also. He had fifty years behind him; pleasant years and wholesome with hard work, during which he had used to great advantage many excellent gifts. The business of his life hitherto had been to make money; in that he had shown himself to be on the large scale. But more essential to him throughout all these years had been his growing artistic perceptions, his increasing love of beauty; that he felt to be the reason and the spring of his happiness. In this regard he had ever cultivated, with the assiduous patience born of love, his natural taste. That keen appreciation of Palestrina and the early melodists was no original birthright of his; it was a cultivated pleasure; a pleasure, no doubt, of which the germ was inborn, but cultivated to a high degree and with effort, because, simply, he believed it to be his duty to make the most of a gift.

In this matter of duty he had often suffered much wrong. The charitable impulse which had led him, one day in the spring, to draw so large a cheque to Mr. Metcalfe, had been an unjust derision in Jack's mouth. Alington really believed (and the most transcendent honesty cannot get below a genuine belief) that part of that notable cheque should be entered as a business transaction, part on the page devoted to charity. He may have deceived himself, but he was not aware of it; he acted, as far as he knew, with the most judicial fairness in the partition of its entry.



But now for weeks past he had looked forward to the day when he should pass out of the money-making world to a fairer and more melodious one. He had no insane ambition to make inordinate wealth, nor to add a million to his million; his wealth he had steadily regarded as a means to an end, that end being the power to gratify his artistic tastes to the full. He did not forget to pray at his prie-dieu morning and evening, nor had he forgotten it on the most feverish days of finance, and he was at peace, imperfectly, no doubt, but, as far as his capabilities went, perfectly, with regard to death and what lay beyond. Meantime this life held for him much that was beautiful, much that was wonderful. He desired to realize its wonder and beauty as completely as possible. All his life he had been a getter of money, or so the world held him. But now no more. On Monday morning all his connection with the market would be severed, the real man should lead his real life.

These thoughts passed through his brain in a gentle glow of intimate pleasure, as his hansom went briskly towards Waterloo. He was going to spend this Friday till Monday with Mrs. Murchison, in her charming house on the Winchester downs, where the invigorating unused air would make more temperate this really tropical weather. A terrific heat-wave, from a positively scalding sea, had drowned London these last few days; the city had been a burning fiery furnace, and the consolation of being cast there, of having got there unwillingly, was denied him, for the flames had been of his own self-seeking. He might, indeed, as soon as he had made the grand coup, three days ago, have left London, and waited for the inevitable result in cool retirement, but this retreat from the scene of action had been morally impossible to him. Never before, as far as he remembered, had an operation so taken hold of him; never before had the tickings of the tape, or the call-whistle of his telephone, been of so breathless an urgency. Exciting as had often been the satisfaction with which he had watched the climbing of a quotation from twos into threes, or threes into fours, he could not recollect a restlessness so feverish as that with which he had watched the rise of Carmel. For this had been the comble of all: the rise of the price meant to him a perfect freedom from all future rises. To see Carmel quoted above five had been equivalent to his emancipation from all that should hereafter touch the nerves. Yet here was one weak spot. He had seen the quotation of over five and a half ticked out by the tape, yet he had not instantly sold. The old Adam in his case, as in so many others, had inconveniently and inconsistently survived. He had not been able to resist the temptation of wanting to be richer than he truly wanted to be. But in order to cut himself off from any such weakness in the future, he immediately pushed open the trap-door, and told his driver to stop at the nearest telegraph office, and ten minutes after he had taken his final step, wiring both to his broker in London, and in cipher to Mr. Chavasse, at Melbourne, to sell out on Monday morning.

But this weakness was but inconsiderable. He had attained success all down the line; the only wavering had been between completeness and more than completeness. Here, as was natural, the instinct of years stepped in. The habit of making ten pounds in

complete safety was more potent than the certainty of making nine. His own large purchase had heralded the rise, the good news from the mine had shouted an endorsement, the "strong support in Australia," the news of which had reached the market with the infallible result so long foreseen by him, had put the seal on certainty. The deal was beyond doubt.

At last and at last! This crippling of his life was over; he was free from the necessity of money-making, free also, thank God! from the desire. He no longer wanted more than he certainly had. How much can be said of how few!

His inward happiness seemed reflected in all sorts of small external ways. His horse was fast, his driver nimble at picking an unsuspected way, and the porters at Waterloo, miraculously recovered from the paralysis of the brain induced by Ascot week, not only were in accord as to the platform from which his train would start, but, a thing far more rare and precious, were one and all perfectly correct in their information.

To Mr. Alington, though his nature was far removed from the cynical, this seemed almost too good to be true, till, in his benignant strolls up and down the line of carriages, he met his hostess, Mrs. Murchison. She was feeling the heat acutely, but was inclined to be talkative.

"So you've come by the early train," she said. "Well, I call that just friendly, and it's the early bird that catches the train, Mr. Alington, and here we are. But the heat is such that if I was wicked and died this moment, I fancy I should send for a thicker mantle, and that's a chestnut. Lady Haslemere comes down by the four something, which slips a carriage at Winchester—or is it five?—which I think perilous. They cast you adrift, the Lord knows where, for I inquired about it, without engine, and if you haven't got an engine, where are you? A straw hat—that's just what we are going to be; a straw-hat party like Lady Conybeare and the tea-gowns, and dinner in the garden."

"That will be delicious," said Mr. Alington after his usual pause. "Dinner out of door is the only possible way of feeding without the impression of being fed. I always——"

"Well, that's just beautifully put," interrupted Mrs. Murchison. "You get so much all-fresco out of doors. And that's what I missed so much in my last visit to America, where I stopped a fortnight nearly. The set-banquet, with all the ceremonial of the Barmecides, like what Mr. Murchison rejoices in, and the colour he turns over his dinner, seems to me an utter nihilism of the flow of soul. Why, there's Lady Haslemere! So she's caught the early bird too."

Lady Haslemere, according to her invariable habit, only arrived at the station one minute before the starting of the train, in a great condition of fuss, but she pressed Mr. Alington's hand warmly.

"You were quite right," she said: "I didn't sell out two days ago, and, oh! the difference to me. I have just this moment sold at five and three-quarters. Only think!"

"I congratulate you heartily," said Mr. Alington, with a smile of kind indulgence; "I too am going to sell on Monday morning."

A shade of vexation crossed Lady Haslemere's face.

"Do you think it will go higher again?" she asked.

"A shade, very likely. But possibly it may react a little. I was in two minds myself as to whether I should sell to-day."

Lady Haslemere's brow cleared.

"Oh, well, one can't always sell out at the very top," she said; "but it will be annoying to me if it goes to six. Two hundred and forty times five shillings. Ye-s."

"I think you have done very well," said Mr. Alington, with just a shade of reproof in his voice.

The financier travelled in a smoking compartment, the two ladies in a carriage to themselves, and as the train slid out towards Vauxhall high among the house-roofs, Mr. Alington felt that in more than this literal sense he was leaving London, that busy brain of the world, behind and below him. And though his parting glances were certainly not regretful, they were very kindly. He had been well treated by this inn at which he had passed so many years, laboriously building his house and the fortunes of his house. That was done; he needed hired chambers no longer. The newsboys, who at this very station had looked on him as a regular purchaser of the more financial of the evening papers, found him to-day quite indifferent to their wares, and even the placard "Extraordinary Scenes on the Stock Exchange" met an uninterested eye. One boy, indeed, had been so accustomed to give him the Evening Standard that, seeing his large profile against the carriage window before the train started, had without request handed him in the paper. But Mr. Alington pushed it gently aside.

"Not to-day, my lad—not to-day," he had said; "but here's your penny for you."

The carriage was empty and, as London fell back behind the train, Mr. Alington's spirits, usually so equable and so seldom falling below the temperate figures of content, or rising into feverish altitudes, became strangely light and buoyant. He had often wondered in anticipation how this moment—the moment of casting off from him the chains of fortune-building—would affect him. Exciting and exhilarating hours had often been his; numerous had been the triumphs which his clear-sighted scrutiny of the financial heavens had brought him. He had felt a real passion for his pursuit; but the joy of the pursuit had never blinded him to the fact that it was an object he was pursuing. He wanted a certain amount of money, and he had now got it, and already the joy of having attained had swallowed up the lesser joy of attaining. He had often asked himself whether the habit and the desire of obtaining were not becoming too integral a part of him; whether, when his purpose was achieved, he would not feel suddenly let down—put out of employment. If that should prove to be so, he felt that his life would largely be a failure: he would have elevated the means into the end.

But the moment had come; it was his now, and he knew within himself that he had kept clear of so deplorable an error. He felt like a boy leaving school after a successful term, having won, and having deserved to win, some arduously-reached distinction. The thought gave gaiety to his glance: his eye sparkled unwontedly, he had a mind to dance. But the mood deepened; the surface gaiety became transformed into a thankfulness of a

far more vital kind, and as the train devoured the miles between Clapham Junction and Waterloo, he knelt down on the dusty carpet of his carriage, and, with bared head and closed eyes, he thanked God for having given him the brain and the will to succeed, and, during that pursuit of the transient stuff, for not having let his heart be hardened at the daily touch of gold. Money-making, in the moment of this success, he still saw to be not an end in itself. The danger of that insidious delusion he had escaped. And before he rose he registered a vow to use the fortune of which he had thus been made steward temperately and wisely.

A large party was going to gather at Mrs. Murchison's next day, but till then there would only be the three who had come down by this train, and four or five more who had proposed to embark on the danger of the slip-carriage train, which would, if it ever came to port, land them in Winchester in time for dinner.

Mr. Alington had eagerly accepted the earlier invitation, in order that he might spend the Saturday in examining the monuments and antiquities of the old town. He had brought with him a compendious green guide to the city, and having mastered its principal contents in the train, he was able to point out to the ladies the buildings of interest which they passed in their drive out. The college, above all, attracted his benevolent gaze, and his pale-blue eyes grew dim as they rolled by those lines of gray wall, the dimpling river which crossed beneath the road, the mellow brick of the Warden's house, and the delicate grace of the chapel tower, which dominated and blessed the whole.

"A priceless heritage! A priceless heritage!" he murmured. "Nothing can make up to me for not having been to one of the great public schools. The boys seem careless enough, heedless enough, God bless them!" he said, as a laughing mob of them streamed out of the college gate; "but the gracious influences are entering and working in them every day, every hour, forming an unsuspected foundation for the after-years. The peace and the coolness of this sweet corner of the world is becoming a part of them. All that I have missed—all that I have missed!"

He sighed softly, while Lady Haslemere yawned elaborately behind her hand. But the elaborate yawn ended in a perfectly natural laugh.

"Dear Mr. Alington," she said, "you are quite deliciously unexpected and appropriate. For you to be discontented with your lot is a splendid absurdity. I would have lived in a suburb all my life if to-day I could have sold your number of Carmel shares at the price I got."

Mr. Alington looked at her a moment, pained but forbearing.

"So would I," he said. Then, leading the talk away from anything so intimate to him, "Ah, that delicious stretch of water-meadow!" he said. "There is no green so vivid and delicate as that of English fields. And hark to the cool thunder of the weir."

A far-away rapture illumined his stout face, and Mrs. Murchison, who had made a speciality of Nature, struck in:

"There is a solidarity about English landscape which I do not find in our country," she said. "Like Mr. Alington, I could listen to that weir till I became an octogeranium. 'Peace with plenty,' as Lord Beaconsfield used to say. I was down at Goring yesterday with dear Lily, and we sat on the lawn till midnight, or it might have been later, and I had a long discussion with Jack Conybeare about the duties of the London County Council. Most rural and refreshing it was! Ah, dear me!"

Mrs. Murchison sighed, not because she was sad, but because her feelings outstripped her power of expression.

"So green and beautiful!" she murmured, as a sort of summary.

Lady Haslemere put up her parasol, extinguishing the view for miles round.

"Mr. Alington, do give me a hint as to what to go for next week. Will there be a rise in South Africans, do you think?"

The rapture died from Mr. Alington's face, but it gave place to a purely benignant expression. He shook his head gently.

"I cannot say," he answered. "I have followed nothing during these last weeks except the fortunes of Carmel. But any broker will advise you, Lady Haslemere."

Mrs. Murchison's house stood high on the broad-backed down, to the south of the town, and up at this height there was a wonderful freshness in the air, and the heat was without the oppressiveness of London. A vast stretch of rolling country spread out on every side, and line upon line of hills followed each other like great waves into the big distance. Though the drought had been so severe, the reservoirs of the sub-lying chalk had kept the short, flower-starred grass still green, and the long-continued heat had not filched from it its exquisite and restful colour.

Alington took off his hat and let the wind lift his rather scanty hair. It was an extreme pleasure to him to get out from the overheated stagnation of London streets into this unvitiated air, and he wondered at the keenness of his enjoyment. He had never been a great lover of the country, but it seemed to him to-day as if a heavy accumulation of years had been lifted off him, disclosing capacities for enjoyment which none, himself perhaps least of all, had suspected could be his. He gently censured himself in this regard. He had made a mistake in thus stifling and shutting up so pure and proper a source of pleasure. He would certainly take himself to task for this, and put himself under the tuition of country sights and sounds.

They had tea under the twinkling shade of a pine copse at the end of the lawn, and presently after Mr. Alington again took his straw hat, with the design of a stroll in the fresh cool of the approaching evening. The other two ladies preferred to enjoy it in inaction, waiting for the arrival of the adventurous slip-carriage guests, about whose fate Mrs. Murchison reiterated her anxiety.

So Mr. Alington, secretly not ill-pleased, started alone. He was about half-way down the drive, when he met a telegraph-boy going towards the house, and, in his expansive, kindly manner, detained him a moment with a few simple questions as to his name and

age. Finally, just as he turned to walk on, he asked him for whom he was delivering a telegram, and the boy, drawing it out of his pouch, showed him the address.

Mr. Alington opened it slowly, wondering, as he had often wondered before, why the envelope was orange and the paper pink. It was from his brokers, and very short; but he looked for some considerable time at the eight words it contained:

"Terrible panic in Carmels. Shares unnegotiable.

Wire instructions."

At first he read it quite blankly; it seemed to him that the words, though they were simple and plain enough, conveyed nothing to his mind. Then suddenly a huge intense light, hot and dazzling beyond description, appeared to have been uncovered somewhere in his brain, and the words burned and blinded him. He let the pink paper fall, bowing and sidling on the gravel of the drive, then stooped down with a curious groping manner and picked it up again. He put it neatly back inside the envelope, and asked the boy for a form, on which he scribbled a few words.

"Do nothing," he wrote. "I will come up immediately."

He gave the boy a shilling, waving away the change, and then, going to the grassy bank that bounded the drive, he sat down. Except for that moment, when his brain, no doubt instantaneously stunned, refused to tell him the meaning of the words, it had been absolutely composed and alert. The telegram gave no hint as to the cause of this panic, but without casting about for other possibilities, he put it down at once to his one weak point, Mr. Chavasse. That determined, he gave it no further thought, but wondered idly and without much interest what he felt. But this was beyond him. He had no idea what he felt, except that he was conscious of a slight qualm of sickness, so slight and so purely physical, to all seeming, that he would naturally have put it down, had it not appeared simultaneously with this news, to some small error of diet. Otherwise his brain, though perfectly clear and capable of receiving accurate impressions, was blank. There was a whisper of fir-trees round him, and little points of sunlight flickered on the yellow gravel of the drive as the branches stirred in the wind. Lady Haslemere's voice sounded thin and high from the lawn near—he had always remarked the unpleasant shrillness of her tones—and his straw hat had fallen off. He was conscious of no dismay, no agony of regret that he had not sold out two hours ago, no sense of disaster.

He sat there five minutes at the outside, and then went back to the lawn. The ladies looked up in surprise at the quickness of his return, but neither marked any change in his sleek features nor uncertainty in his step. His voice, too, when he spoke, was neither hurried, unsteady, nor differently modulated.

"Mrs. Murchison," he said, "I have just received the worst news about—about a venture of mine, which is of some importance. In fact, there has been, I fear, a great panic on the Stock Exchange over Carmel. May I be driven back to the station at once? It is necessary I should return to London. It is a great regret to me to miss my visit. Lady Haslemere, I congratulate you on your promptitude in selling."

He stood there bland and respectable for a moment, while Mrs. Murchison murmured incoherent sympathy, surprised at the extraordinary ease with which polite commonplace rose to his lips. The courteous necessary words seemed to speak themselves, without any direction from him. The blow that had fallen upon him must, he thought, have descended internally, for his surface behaviour seemed as equable as ever. He was conscious only of the continuance of the qualm of sickness, and of a little uncertainty in movement and action.

He had intended, for instance, as far as he intended anything, to go away as soon as he had said good-bye, and wait for the carriage alone. But he found himself lingering; his feet did not take him away, and he wondered why. His straw hat was in his hand, and he fanned himself with it, though he did not feel hot. Perceiving this, yet still holding it, he stopped fanning, and bit the rim gently; then, aware that he was doing that, he put it on again.

"So good-bye," he said for the second time. "Ah, Lady Haslemere, you asked me for a tip. Well, if this panic is really serious—and I have no doubt it is—buy Carmels at the lower price, for all you are worth, if you have the nerve. I assure you that you cannot find a better investment. Good-bye, good-bye again. Perhaps—oh no, it doesn't signify. May I order the carriage, then, Mrs. Murchison? Thank you so much!" He lifted his hat, turned, and went to the house.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE SLUMP

The London evening papers that day were full of the extraordinary scenes that had taken place on the Stock Exchange. Before the opening of the market that morning Carmel had been eagerly inquired for, owing to the activity produced by the very extensive purchases on the day before, and an hour before mid-day news had been cabled from Australia that there was very strong support in the market there for the same, Mr. Richard Chavasse alone having purchased fifty thousand pounds' worth of the shares. Closely following on this came news from the mine itself: the last crushing had yielded five ounces to the ton, and a new, unsuspected reef had been struck. The combination of these causes led to one of the most remarkable rises in price ever known. The market (so said one correspondent) completely lost its head, and practically no business was done except by the mining brokers. The shares that day had started a little above thirty shillings, and by four o'clock they had reached the astounding figure of £ s. d. A well-known broker who had been interviewed on the subject said that never in the course of a long experience had he known anything like it. Sober, steady dealers, in his own words, went screaming, raving mad. A boom in Westralian gold, it is true, had long been expected, but nothing could account for this extraordinary demand. No doubt the fact that Mr. Alington had purchased largely the day before had prepared the way for it, for he was considered among mining operators the one certain man to follow.

But the sequel to this unparalleled rise was even more remarkable. Buying, as had been stated, was much stimulated by the news of strong support in Australia (indeed, it was this that had been the signal for the rush); but about four o'clock, when the shares were at their highest, and some considerable realizations were being made, though the buying still went on, a sudden uneasiness was manifested. This was due to the fact that the telegram announcing the strong support in Australia was contradicted by another and later one, saying that the market in Carmel was absolutely inactive. Upon this, first a general distrust of the telegrams from the mine itself was manifested, and then literally in a few minutes a panic set in, as unaccountable as the previous rise; business came to a standstill, for in half an hour everyone was wanting to sell Carmel, and buyers could not be found. A few of the heaviest plungers cleared out, with thousands to their credit, but the majority of holders were caught. The shares became simply unnegotiable. The market closed on a scene of the wildest confusion, and when the Exchange was shut the street became impassable. To a late hour a mob of excited jobbers continued trying to sell, and just before going to press came a report that Mr. Alington, who had left town that day, but suddenly returned, was picking up all the shares he could lay hands on at a purely nominal figure. Settling-day, it would be remembered, occurred next week. A committee of the Stock Exchange was going to investigate the matter of the false telegram.



Kit and Jack had come down to Goring that day to join Toby and his wife there. Kit was steadily gaining strength, but this evening, being a little tired, she had gone to bed before dinner, and now, dinner being just over, Lily had left the others to see how she was. Neither Jack nor Toby was given to sitting over wine, and as soon as Lily went upstairs, they removed into the hall to smoke. The evening paper had just come in, and Jack took it up with some eagerness, for his stake in Carmel was a large one. He read through the account of what had taken place quite quietly, and leaned back in his chair thinking. Unlike Lady Haslemere, a few nights ago, he did not let his cigarette go out. At length he spoke.

"I expect I have gone smash, Toby," he said. He threw him over the paper. "Read the account of what happened to-day on the Stock Exchange," he added.

Toby did not reply, but took the paper.

"The only thing to be thankful for is that I didn't sell out just before the panic," remarked Jack.

Toby read on in silence till he had finished it.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because it would look as if I had known that the first telegram was false. What extraordinary nerve Alington must have! Do you see that he has been buying every share he can lay hands on?"

"I don't understand about the first telegram," said Toby.

"Nor do I, thank God!"

"Supposing it is a real smash, will you have lost much, Jack?"

"Eight thousand pounds—more than that, indeed, unless the price goes up again before settling-day, for I've only paid for about half my shares."

Toby was silent a moment, wondering how Jack had ever had eight thousand pounds to invest of late years. The latter understood the silence, and acknowledged the justice of his difficulty.

"I made three thousand over Carmel East and West," he explained. "That with my year's salary as director, makes eight. I invested it all, and bought more."

Toby looked up.

"Did that fellow give you five thousand a year as director?" he asked.

"That fellow did."

Toby whistled.

"A committee of the Stock Exchange is going to investigate the whole affair, it appears," he said. "Won't that be rather unpleasant if they get into salaries?"

"Exceedingly. Mind you don't let Kit know, Toby, until one has more certain news."

He took a turn up and down the room in silence.

"Extremely annoying," he said, with laudable moderation; "and I can't imagine what has happened, or who is responsible for the first telegram. Alington cannot have caused it to be sent merely to make the market active, for it was certain to be contradicted."

A man came into the room with a telegram on a salver, and handed it to Jack.

"Reply paid, my lord," he said.

Jack turned it over in his hand without opening it, unable to make the effort. Then he suddenly tore it open, and unfolded the thin pink sheet. It was from Alington.

"Can you meet me to-morrow morning at my rooms, St. James's Street?" it ran.

He scribbled an affirmative, and gave it back to the man.

"I shall have to go up to-morrow," he said to Toby; "Alington wants me to meet him in London; I shall go, of course. What a blessing one is a gentleman, and doesn't scream and sweat! Now, not a word to anyone; it may not be as bad as it looks."

Jack started off early next morning, and drove straight to Alington's rooms. Sounds of piano-playing came from upstairs, and this somehow gave him a sense of relief. "People in extremis do not play pianos," he said to himself, as he mounted the stairs. Alington got up as soon as he came in.

"I am glad you were able to come," he said; "it was expedient—necessary almost—that I should see you."

"What has happened?" asked Jack.

Mr. Alington took a telegram from his pocket, and handed it to him.

"The unexpected—it always does: this, in fact."

Jack took it and read:

"Chavasse left for England by P. and O. yesterday."

"You don't understand, my dear Conybeare, do you?" he said. "It is a very short story, and quite a little romance in its way."

And, in a few words, he told Jack the story of the burglary, Chavasse's confession, and his idea of using him as an independent operator in Australia.

"I make no doubt what has occurred," he said. "The man has drawn out the somewhat considerable balance I left at Melbourne for him to invest when ordered, and has taken it off with him. He has also, I expect, got hold of his own confession—a clever rogue."

"But the telegram?" asked Jack. "Who sent the telegram about the strong support in Australia?"

Mr. Alington opened his mild eyes to their widest.

"I, my dear fellow!" he said; "at least, of course I caused it to be sent. As usual, two days ago, I despatched one cipher telegram to this valet of mine, telling him to invest, and another to my manager telling him to wire, 'Strong support in Australia.' He did as I told him; Chavasse did not. That is all."

Jack was silent a moment, but it did not take him long to grasp the whole situation, for it was very simple.

"And what next?" he said.

Alington shrugged his shoulders.

"Unless the shares go up again before next settling-day, I shall almost certainly be bankrupt," he said.

"Then why, if the papers were correctly informed, did you go on buying last night?"

"Because I could get Carmel dirt cheap," he said. "If they go up, I am so much the richer; if they do not, I am done in any case. This unfortunate contretemps about my foolish valet does not affect the value of the mine. The gold is there just the same."

"But nobody will believe that," put in Jack.

"For the present, as you say—for the immediate present—they will not realize it. They will think themselves lucky to part with their shares enormously below their value. My fortune depends on how soon they realize it."

"There will be an inquiry into the matter?"

"Undoubtedly. Bogus telegrams are not officially recognised by the Stock Exchange."

Alington was certainly at his best, so thought Jack, when things happened. His sleek, unhurried respectability, a little trying and conventional at ordinary times, though unaltered in itself, became admirable, a rare manifestation of self-control. No flurried quickening marked his precise, unhurried sentences; they remained just as leisurely as ever. As in the days when Carmel East and West was behaving in so mercurial a manner, though so consonantly with his wishes, so now, when the greater coup had struck so back-handedly against himself, he did not cease to be imperturbably calm and lucid. Though without breeding in the ordinary sense of the word, he had to a notable extent that most characteristic mark of breeding, utter absence of exaltation in unexpected prosperity and complete composure in disaster. There was nothing affected about him; he was, as always, unimpulsive master of himself, and this, which in the social mill seemed a lack of animation, in the mill of adversity became a thing to respect.

"You take it very quietly," said Jack.

"It is mere habit," said Alington. "By the way, I hope, my dear fellow, that your wife is better?"

"Much better, thanks. We went to Goring yesterday."

"So I saw in the papers. How much had you in Carmel?"

"Eight thousand pounds cash. And half of my shares I have bought only, not paid for."

"Ah! will that be a difficulty?"

"More like an impossibility, unless they go up before settling-day."

"I am sorry for that," said Alington, "for I should have recommended your buying even more. I am going to bluff the thing out. I am going to buy and buy. Chavasse may go hang. I shall make no attempt to get him or his—my—fifty thousand pounds."

"Fifty thousand!" exclaimed Jack involuntarily.

"Fifty thousand! Indeed, I could not before the ship touches at the Cape. But if I buy, and am known to be buying, it is still conceivable that confidence may be restored, that the damage done by that absurd, unreasonable panic yesterday may be repaired. I don't say that the rush for shares was not insane, but the panic was not less so. And now, my dear fellow, I congratulate you on the way you have taken it. You would make a financier. *Æquam memento rebus in arduis!* How Horace has the trick of stating simple things inspiritingly! A divine gift."

"But what do you suppose they will find out at the inquiry?" asked Jack.

"Ah, you need not fear the inquiry in the least. That will not touch your salary as director, which is the sort of thing which I see you have on your mind. No. What would perhaps be serious for you is, if I became bankrupt. Then, it is true, my private accounts where your salary figures would be made public. The surest means of avoiding that is that shares should go up again before settling-day. It is with this view I am buying now; with this view I should recommend you to desperate measures! Desperate? Oh, certainly! But I must remind you that the case is fairly so. I see it is lunch time. You will lunch here, of course?"

Kit had not yet risen when Jack went up to London that morning, and she found Lily alone in the garden when she came down. Her illness had left her very weak and frail, and though she was getting on rapidly, she felt very different from the Kit who, a few weeks ago, would dress twenty times a day for twenty engagements, and sit up half the night with baccarat. Physically and mentally, she had been much jarred by a very sudden and startling pull-up. All her life she had been content to go drifting giddily along, asking only of the moment that it should amuse her; and in those days when she lay in the darkened room it seemed as if somebody, not herself, had asked her some serious and frightening questions. At any rate, she had a scare, if no worse, and she felt disposed to go cautiously. Out of she knew not where had leaped the forces that strike, that pay the wages of all action, of sin, of virtue, of justice and injustice, and to her had wages been given. She had heard of such things before; cant phrases of childhood reminded her that one reaped as one had sown, that causes lead to effects, but until now she had not any more certain news of them. But during those three days of semi-consciousness, in which she had clung instinctively to Lily, it was as if some piece of herself, dormant and overlaid for the most part by the entertainment of ordinary everyday living, had, in the disablement of that, reasserted itself, and now that she was winning her way back to normal conditions this new consciousness had not been stilled again.

Lily, whom she had hitherto regarded as enviably rich, rather proper and guindée, had touched some chord in her which did not cease to vibrate. Of all people in the world, Kit would, à priori, have considered her the one who would naturally have shunned her. Hitherto she had regarded her, viewed by any intimate standard, with all the complete indifference with which people who do not consider themselves good look upon those whom they regard as being so, and the sinner is always sublimely incurious of the attitudes and actions of the saint. But Lily had come to her in her need; guindée as she might be, she had yet been a comfort and an encouragement to her in the hopelessness of her desolation, just as if she was not, as Kit supposed she must be, shocked at her. Afterwards, during her convalescence, for days a secret fear had beset Kit that the moment would come when Lily would talk to her seriously, "jaw her," as she put it to herself—very sweetly and gently, no doubt, but still "jaw" her. That would spoil it all. But

day had added itself to day, and the "jaw" was still unspoken. Lily was only more patient with her than anyone, and more comfortable. She was not amusing, but Kit for once did not want to be amused. Her presence was pleasant; it was what Kit wanted, and this gave her food for thought.

More than once, again, during those darkened days Kit had broken down, cried herself nearly hysterical, and it was Lily who had soothed her back from the borders of insanity. She had not asked after the state of Kit's soul, or urged repentance on her; she had not been improving, or told her that pain was sent her for a good reason. Once, indeed, as we have seen, she had prayed with her, and Kit, who would naturally have screamed at such an idea, or told all her friends what liberties a quite nice sister-in-law sometimes took, did neither. She found—it may have been imagination—that it did her good. All these things she had revolved secretly, but often, while they were staying at Goring, and they seemed to her significant. Her mind, indeed, used them as its ordinary provender, going to graze on them habitually.

Lily and Toby were off next day, and when Kit came down on the Sunday morning following Jack's departure to London, she had determined to talk to Lily. It struck her as odd that three weeks ago she should have been so nervous that Lily was going to talk to her, whereas now she herself was about to give her an intentional opportunity of doing so. Also to-morrow she would be left alone with Jack, who would return then, and sooner or later she and he would have to talk. Hitherto both of them had avoided the one subject which filled their minds: while in London it was an ever-present dread to each that some day this must come, each continually apprehensive that the other would begin, yet half longing to get it over. Both knew that the thing had to be talked out, there was no getting over that; nor was it any use waiting till the narcotic accumulation of time should dim the memories of that scene when Kit had told him all, and been answered by a blow. There are certain things which no lapse of time will ever cover: this was one. Words had to pass between them, and what those words should be neither could guess. Here was another reason why Kit wanted to be talked to by Lily.

They walked up and down the lawn for a few minutes, speaking of indifferent things, and Lily made some reference to her leaving on the next day.

"And I shall be alone with Jack," said Kit simply, but with purpose.

"Yes," said the other. Then, after a pause: "You must have things to say to each other, Kit. Jack told Toby yesterday he had hardly had a word with you since you were ill."

Kit stopped.

"I dread it," she said, "and I know it must come. But, Lily, what is to be said on either side? what can be said?"

"Ah, it's no use thinking over what you are going to say," said Lily. "You will say what you must, what you feel."

"I don't know what I feel," said Kit. "Let us sit down; it is warm. And I want to talk to you."

They sat down on a garden-seat, shaded by the fan-branched cedar and looking out over the haze of summer sunshine and the slow, strong river.

"I don't know what I feel," said Kit again.

"Try to tell me as best you can," said Lily quietly.

"Well, I won't be dishonest with myself, I am sure of that," said Kit. "Just now I have a horror of what—of what is past. But how can I know from what it springs? It may be only because the terrible consequences are still vivid to me. I have been wicked all my life—it is no use pretending otherwise. I have never tried to do good or to be good. Well, I get paid out for a bad thing I have done. Is it not most probable that I have a horror of it only because the punishment is very fresh to me?"

"That is something," said Lily. "If punishment makes you detest what you did, it is doing its work."

"Ah, but the burglar who is caught doesn't detest burglary, really. He may not commit it again, but that is a very different matter. You beat a dog for chasing a cat; when it sees a cat next time, it probably will put its tail down, but you have not eradicated its tendencies, or changed its nature."

Kit paused. She was groping about helplessly in her dim-lit soul.

"You are a good woman, Lily," she said. "You don't and you can't understand a person like me. Oh, my dear, I should never have got through it but for you! I want to be good—before God, I believe I want to be good, but I don't know what it means. I can only say that I will not do certain things again. But how feeble is that! I want to see Ted again—oh, how I want to!—but I believe that I want not to. Is that any good? I want to love Jack again. I did once, indeed I did, and I want him to love me. That is hopeless: he never will."

Lily was puzzled. Kit's difficulties seemed, somehow, so elementary that explanation was impossible. But she knew that it was only through the acknowledgment and the facing of them that her salvation lay. Kit was a child in matters of morals, and perfectly undeveloped; but, luckily, plain simplicity is the one means by which to approach children. Tact, finesse, all the qualities which Kit had and she had not were unneeded here.

"Kit, dear, it doesn't matter, so to speak, whether Jack loves you or not," she said. "Anyhow, it doesn't concern what you must do. Oh, you will not find things easy, and I never heard that one was intended to. You will find a thousand things you want to do, and must not, a thousand things you must do which are hard—harder than the old bazaar-opening, Kit. I am assuming, of course, that, on the whole, you want to be good. There is the great thing, broadly stated."

Kit nodded her head.

"I don't know. I suppose I do," she said.

"Well, there is no master key to it," said Lily. "Separately and simply you have to take each thing, and do it or avoid it. You will need endless patience. I don't want to preach to

you, and I don't know how; but you have asked me to help you. Your life has been passed in a certain way: you have told me certain things about it. On the whole, you wish the future to be different. Forget the past, then—try to forget it. Do not dwell on it: it is a bad companion. It will only paralyze you, and you need all your power for what lies in front of you."

"Do you mean I must renounce the world, and all that?" asked Kit.

"No, nor go into a nunnery. You have a duty towards Jack. Do it; above all, keep on doing it, every day and always. Consider whether there are not many things, harmless in themselves, which lead to things not harmless. Avoid them."

"Don't flirt, you mean?" said Kit quite sincerely.

Lily paused a moment. There was a certain coarse simplicity about Kit which was at once embarrassing and helpful. Never were appearances more misleading; for Kit, with her pallor and exquisite face, looked the very image of a refined woman of the world, one who lived aloof from the grossness of life, yet of fine and complicated fibre. Instead, as far as present purposes were concerned, she was as ignorant as a child, but without innocence. She had lost the latter without remedying the former.

"Certainly don't flirt," she said; "but don't do a great deal more than that. Remember that you are a certain power in the world—many people take their tone from such as you—and let that power be on the right side. One knows dimly enough what goodness is, but one knows it sufficiently. I don't want you to be a raving reformer: that is not in your line. Set your face steadily against a great many things which are commonly done by the people among whom you move."

"The things I have done all my life," said Kit.

"Yes, the things you have done all your life."

Kit sat silent, and the gentleness of her face to this straight speech was touching. At last she looked up.

"And will you help me?" she asked. "Oh, Lily! I have been down into hell. And I didn't believe in it till I went there. But so it is—an outer darkness."

She said it quite simply and earnestly, without bitterness, or the egotism which want of reticence so often carries with it. Round them early summer was bright with a thousand blossoms and melodies; the mellow jangle of church bells was in the air; the time of the singing-bird had come.

"But I can't feel—I am numb. I don't know where to go, or where I am going," she went on, her voice rising. "I only know that I don't want to go back to the life I have hitherto led; but there is nothing else. The great truths—God, religion, goodness—which mean so much, so everything to you, are nothing to me. I feel no real desire to be good, and yet I want to be not wicked. One suffers for being wicked. I can get no higher than that."

"Stick to that, dear Kit," said Lily. "I can tell you no more. Only I know—I know that, if one goes on doing the thing one believes to be best, even quite blindly, the time comes

that one's eyes are slowly opened. Out of the darkness comes day. One sees from where one has come. Then one look, and on again."

"But for ever, till the end of one's life?" asked Kit.

"Till the end of one's life. And the effort to behave decently has a great reward, which is decent behaviour."

"And Jack—what am I to say to Jack?"

"All you feel."

"Jack will think it so queer," said Kit.

"You did not see Jack when you were at your worst that afternoon. Oh, Kit! it is an awful thing to see the helpless anguish of a man. He will not have forgotten that."

"Jack in anguish?" asked Kit.

"Yes; just remember that it was so. Here's Toby. I thought he was at church. What a heathen my husband is!"

Toby strolled up, with his pipe in his mouth.

"I meant to go to church," he said; "but eventually I decided to take—to take my spiritual consolation at home."

"I, too, Toby," said Kit.



## CHAPTER X

### TOBY DRAWS THE MORAL

Toby was sitting in the smoking-room of the Bachelors' Club some weeks later on a hot evening in July. The window was open, and the hum of London came booming in soft and large. It was nearly midnight, and the tide of carriages had set westward from the theatres, and was flowing fast. The pavements were full, the roadway was roaring, the season was gathered up for its final effort. Now and then the door opened, and a man in evening dress would lounge in, ring for a whisky-and-soda, and turn listlessly over the leaves of an evening paper, or exchange a few remarks with a friend. As often as the door opened Toby looked up, as if expecting someone.

It had already struck midnight half an hour ago when Jack entered. He looked worried and tired, and by the light of a match for his cigarette, which he lit as he crossed the room to where Toby was sitting, the lines round his eyes, noticed and kindly commiserated a few months before by Ted Comber, seemed deeper and more harshly cut. He threw himself into a chair by Toby.

"Drink?" asked the other.

"No, thanks."

Toby was silent a moment.

"I'm devilish sorry for you, Jack," he said at length. "But I see by the paper that it is all over."

"Yes; they finished with me this afternoon. Alington will have another week of it. Jove! Toby, for all his sleekness and hymn-singing, he is an iron fellow! He's got some fresh scheme on hand, and he's going about it with all his old quiet energy, and asked me to join him; but I told him I'd had enough of directorships. But there's a strong man for you! He is knocked flat, he picks himself up and goes straight on."

He picked up the paper, and turned to the money-market.

"And here's the cruel part of it all," he said, "for both of us: Carmel is up to four pounds again. If they had only given him another month, he would have been as rich as ever, instead of having to declare bankruptcy; and I—well, I should have had a pound or two more. Lord! on what small things life depends!"

Toby was silent.

"About the Park Lane house," he said, after a pause. "I talked it over with Lily, and if you'll let us have it at that price, we shall be delighted to take it. We only have our present house on a yearly lease, which expires in July."

"You're a good fellow, Toby."

"Oh, that's all rot!" said Toby. "Lily and I both want your house. It isn't as if we were doing you a kindness—it isn't really, Jack. But it's such rough luck on you having to turn out. Of course, you and Kit will always come there whenever you like."

Jack lit another cigarette, flicking the end of the old one out of the window.

"I think I will have a drink, Toby," he said; "my throat is as dry as dust answering so many pertinent and impertinent questions, as to what I received as director, and what I made over Carmel East and West. They let me off nothing, and the Radical papers will be beautiful for the next week or two. They'll be enough to make one turn Radical."

"Poor old Jack! Whisky? Whisky-and-soda, waiter—two. Well, it's all over."

"Ted Comber was in court to-day," continued Jack, "all curled, and dyed, and brushed, and manicured. He watched me all the time, Toby. Upon my word, I think that was the worst part of the whole show."

Toby showed his teeth for a moment.

"I've made it up with him, I'm sorry to say," he remarked. "Lily insisted on it. We shook hands, and I was afraid he was going to kiss me."

"By the way, how is Lily?"

"Happy as a queen when I left her this morning, and the boy, oh! Jack, a beauty. He was shouting fit to knock the house down: you could have heard him in Goring. I left early, but Kit got up and breakfasted with me. Knowing how she hates getting up early, I put that down at its proper value. But she didn't attend to me much: she has no thoughts except for Lily and the boy."

"Kit has behaved like a real trump all through this," said Jack. "Never a word or a look of reproach to me. She's just been cheery, and simple, and splendid. You know, Toby, she is utterly changed since—since that time before Easter. We had a long talk the day after you and Lily left us there two months ago. I was never so surprised in my life."

"At what?"

"At what she said, and at what I said—perhaps most of what I said. She told me she was going to try not to be such a brute. And, upon my soul, I thought it was an excellent plan. I said I would try too."

Toby laughed.

"There's your whisky," he said. "Hang it all! I haven't got any money. You'll have to pay for it yourself, Jack—and mine, too. So you and Kit made a bargain?"

Jack glanced round the room, which had emptied of all its well-dressed, weary occupants. He and Toby were alone.

"Yes, we made a bargain. The worst of it was that neither of us know how to try, so we consulted Lily. Did it ever occur to you, Toby, that you have married the nicest girl that ever breathed?"

"I had an idea of it. It was Kit's doing, too. Funny, that."

"Well, Lily told us. She said some damned clever things. She said that turning over a new leaf meant not even looking back once to the old one. You know, Toby, that's devilish good. I thought she'd tell us to think what brutes we had been, and repent. Not a bit of it. We've just got to go straight on. Don't grin; I'm perfectly serious."

"I'm sure you are. I was only grinning at the notion of Lily telling you to repent. You know, if there are two things that girl is not, Jack, they are a preacher and a prig."

"You're quite right, and I always thought that to be good you had to be either one or the other, and probably both. She tells me it is not necessarily so, and so Kit and I are going to set to work. We are not going to run up any more huge bills which we can't pay; we are not going to invent or to listen to scandalous stories about other people; and we are going to flirt. We suggested that, and Lily thought it would do to begin upon. Also I was to tell the truth about Alington's bankruptcy. I did that. Really, Toby, it's very easy to tell the truth: it requires no effort of the imagination. But the truth is a brute when it comes out."

Toby looked up smiling, but Jack was perfectly grave and serious.

"Yes, you may think I don't mean it," he said, "but I do. We mean to reform, in fact; God knows it is high time. Kit and I have lived in what I suppose you would call rather a careless manner all these years, and we have come to an almighty, all-round smash. We had a very serious talk—we had never talked seriously before, as far as I can remember—and we are going to try to do better."

Jack got up and went to the window, and leaned out for a moment into the warm summer night. Then he turned into the room again.

"We are indeed," he said. "Good-night, Toby;" and he walked off.

Ted Comber had been to the opera that night, and was going on to a dance. They had been doing the "Meistersingers," and it was consequently after twelve when he got out. The dance was in Park Lane, and he turned into the Bachelors' Club to freshen himself before going on. He had spent a really delightful day; for he had lunched with amusing people, had sat an hour listening to Jack Conybeare's examination in the Alington bankruptcy case, and had had the opportunity of telling a very exalted personage about it afterwards, making him laugh for ten minutes, and Ted, who had a fine loyal regard for exalted personages—some people called him a snob—was proportionately gratified. Of course it was too terrible for poor Jack, but it was absurd not to see the light side of it when properly considered.

"I was really so sorry for him I didn't know what to do," he had said to Lady Coniston at dinner. "Isn't it too terrible?" and they had both burst into shrieks of laughter, and discussed the question from every point and wondered how dear Kit took it.

The freshening up in the lavatory of the Bachelors' Club meant some little time and delicacy of touch. He had to be careful how he washed his face, for he had taken pains with it. Certainly the effect was admirable; for the least touch of rouge on the cheek-bone, and positively only the shadow of an antimony pencil below his eyes had given his face the freshness of a boy's. He looked at himself quite candidly in the glass, and said, "Not a day more than twenty-five." For he was no friend of false modesty, and any modesty he might have assumed about himself would have been undeniably false.

All this care for one's appearance, it is true, made a terrible hole in one's time; but if it lengthened one's youth, it was an excellent investment of hours. There was nothing that

could weigh against that paramount consideration. He dried his hands, still looking at himself, and put on his rings. A touch of the hairbrush was necessary, and for his hands the file of the nail-scissors. Then he put on his coat again and went into the hall. Jack Conybeare was in the act of coming out of the smoking-room.

Ted had only a short moment for reflection, and almost without a pause he went on, meeting Jack.

"Good-evening, Jack," he said; "are you coming to the Tauntons'? Kit is in the country still, is she not?"

Jack had stopped on seeing him, and looked him over slowly from head to heel; then he walked by him without speaking, and went out.

Ted was only a little amused, and more than a little annoyed. Just now it did not matter much what Jack did, but, being wise in his generation, he did not care about being cut by anybody. The Conybeares would probably pick up again in a year or two, and to be cut by the master of quite one of the nicest houses in London was a bore. Besides, he was in an acme of good-fellowship after his amusing day.

He went on into the smoking-room to look round before proceeding to his dance. Toby was still sitting in the window where Jack had left him. Since their reconciliation a day or two before, Ted had felt most friendly towards him, and he went delicately across the room to him, looking charming.

"I just met Jack in the hall," he said; "he looks terribly tired and old."

Toby bristled like a large collie dog.

"Naturally," he said.

"In fact, he was rather short with me," said Ted plaintively.

This was too much. Toby got up.

"Naturally," he said again.

The poor little butterfly felt quite bruised. Really, the Conybeares had not any manners. It serves so little purpose to be rude to anyone, and it was so easy and repaying to be pleasant. He knew this well, for the whole of his nasty little life was spent in reaping the fruits of being constantly pleasant to people. They asked you to dinner, they asked you to stay at their country houses, and having asked you once they asked you again, because you took the trouble to talk and amuse people. What more can a butterfly want than a sunny garden with flowers always open? Such a simple need! so easy to satisfy!

Well, there was a delicious flower open in Park Lane, and he went on to his dance. He must really give up the Conybeares, he thought; they were becoming too prickly. He had written twice to Kit, and had received no answer. Jack had given him a dead cut; Toby was a bear. And he sighed gently, thinking how stupid it was of the flowers to shut themselves up.

As soon as he had gone, Toby resumed his seat by the window. During the last few months he had touched life in a way he had never done before. To him this business of living had hitherto been a cheery, comfortable affair; the question of taking it seriously,

even of taking it at all, had never formally presented itself to him. Then quite suddenly, as it were, as he paddled pleasantly along, he had got out of his depth. The great irresistible forces of life had swept him away, the swift current of love had borne him far out into the great ocean of human experience. Then, still encircled by that, he had seen storm-clouds gather, grim tempests had burst in hail and howling wind, the sea had grown black and foam-flecked. He had seen the tragedy of his brother's home—sin and its wages ruthlessly paid. There were such things as realities. And after that what? Into what new forms would the wreckage be fashioned, these riven planks of a pleasure-boat? But underneath the lightness of Jack's words to-night there had lain, Toby felt, a seriousness which was new. And the change in Kit was more marked still.

Outside, the world rolled on its way, and each unit in the crowd moved to his appointed goal, some of set purpose, others unconscious of it, but none the less on an inevitable way. In the brains of men stirred the thoughts which, for good or ill, should be the heritage of the next generation, part of their instinctive equipment. The vast design was being worked out, unerringly, unceasingly, unhurried and undelayed, through the sin of one, the virtue of another. To fall itself and to fail was but a step towards the ultimate perfection; behind all worked the Master-hand. By strange pathways and chance meetings, by the death of the scarcely born and the innocent, by the unscathed life and health of the guiltiest, by love and beautiful things and terrible things, had all reached the spot where they stood to-day. Devious might be the paths they should hereafter follow, but He who had led them thus far knew.

And as Toby thought on these things, moved beyond his wont, he looked out, and saw with a strange quickening of the blood that in the east already there were signs that out of night was shortly to be born another day.

**THE END**

*Freeditorial* 