

The Return of the Prodigal

**By
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Freeditorial 

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

I

"Stephen K. Lepper, Pork-Packing Prince, from Chicago, U. S. A., by White Star Line, for Liverpool." Such was the announcement with which the Chicago Central Advertiser made beautiful its list of arrivals and departures.

It was not exactly a definition of him. To be sure, if you had caught sight of him anywhere down the sumptuous vista of the first-class sleeping-saloon of the New York and Chicago Express, you would have judged it adequate and inquired no more. You might even have put him down for a Yankee.

But if, following him on this side of the Atlantic, you had found yourself boxed up with him in a third-class compartment on the London and Northwestern Railway, your curiosity would have been aroused. The first thing you would have noticed was that everything about him, from his gray traveling hat to the gold monogram on his portmanteau, was brilliantly and conspicuously new. Accompanied by a lady, it would have suggested matrimony and the grand tour. But there was nothing else to distract you from him. He let himself be looked at; he sat there in his corner seat, superbly, opulently still. And somehow it dawned on you that, in spite of some Americanisms he let fall, he was not, and never could have been, a Yankee. He had evidently forged ahead at a tremendous speed, but it was weight, not steam, that did it. He belonged to the race that bundles out on the uphill grade and puts its shoulders to the wheel, and on the down grade tucks its feet in, sits tight, and lets the thing fly, trusting twenty stone to multiply the velocity.

Then it would occur to you that he must have been sitting still for a considerable period. He was not stout—you might even have called him slender; but the muscles about his cheeks and chin hung a little loose from the bony framework, and his figure, shapely enough when he stood upright, yielded in a sitting posture to the pressure of the railway cushions.

That indicated muscular tissue, once developed by outdoor exercise, and subsequently deteriorated by sedentary pursuits. The lines on his forehead suggested that he was now a brain-worker of sorts.

Other lines showed plainly that, though his accessories were new, the man, unlike his portmanteau, had knocked about the world, and had got a good deal damaged in the process. The index and middle fingers of the left hand were wanting. You argued, then, that he had changed his trade more than once; while from the presence of two vertical creases on either side of a large and rather fleshy mouth, worn as it were by the pull of a bit, you further inferred that the energy he must have displayed somewhere was a thing of will rather than of temperament. He was a paradox, a rolling stone that had unaccountably contrived to gather moss.

And then you fell to wondering how so magnificently mossy a person came to be traveling third-class in his native country.

To all these problems, which did actually perplex the clergyman, his fellow-passenger, he himself provided the answer.

He had taken out his gold watch with a critical air, and timed the run from Liverpool to Crewe.

"Better service of trains than they used to have," he observed. "Same old snorer of an engine, though."

"You seem to know the line."

"It's not the first time I've ridden by it; nor yet the first time I've crossed the herring-pond."

"Are you making any stay in this country?"

"I am, sir."

He lapsed into meditation evidently not displeasing; then he continued: "When you've got a mother and two sisters that you haven't seen for over fifteen years, naturally you're not in such a particular durned hurry to get away."

"Your home is in America, I presume?"

"My home is in England. I've made my pile out there, sir, and I've come to stay. Like to see the Chicago Advertiser? It may amuse you."

The clergyman accepted the paper gratefully. It did amuse him. So much so that he read aloud several paragraphs, among others the one beginning "Stephen K. Lepper, Pork-packing Prince."

It was a second or two before the horror of the situation dawned on him. That dawn must have been reflected on his face, for his fellow-passenger began to snigger.

"Ah," said he, "you've tumbled to it. Sorry you spoke? Don't apologize for smiling, sir. I can smile, myself, now; but the first time I saw that paragraph it turned me pretty faint and green. That's the way they do things out there. Of course," he added, "I had to be put in; but I'm no more like a prince than I'm like a pork-packer."

What was he like? With the flush on his cheeks the laughter in his eyes he might have been an enormous schoolboy home for the holidays, and genially impudent on the strength of it.

"Fact is," he went on, "you didn't expect to find such a high personage in a third-class compartment. That put you off."

"Yes, I suppose it was that." It did seem absurd that a pork-packing prince, who could probably have bought up the entire rolling stock of the London and North-western, should be traveling third.

"You see, I never used to go anything but third on this old line or any other. I'm only doing it now to make sure I'm coming home. I know I'm coming home, but I want the feel of it."

He folded the Chicago Advertiser and packed it carefully in his portmanteau. "I'm keeping this to show my people," he explained. "It's the sort of thing that used to make my young sister grin."

"You have — er — a young sister?"

"I had two — fifteen years ago."

The clergyman again looked sorry he had spoken.

"All right — this time. They're not dead. Only one of them isn't quite so young as she used to be. The best of it is, it's a surprise visit I'm paying them. They none of them know I'm coming. I simply said I might be turning up one of these days — before very long."

"They won't be sorry to have you back again, I imagine."

"Sorry?"

He smiled sweetly and was silent for some minutes, evidently picturing the joy, the ecstasy, of that return. Then, feeling no doubt that the ice was broken, he launched out into continuous narrative.

"Going out's all very well," he said, "but it isn't a patch on coming home. Not but what you can overdo the thing. I knew a man who was always coming home — seemed as if he couldn't stop away. I don't know that his people were particularly glad to see him."

"How was that?"

"A bit tired of it, I suppose. You see, they'd given him about nine distinct starts in life. They were always shipping him off to foreign parts, with his passage paid and a nice little bit of capital waiting for him on the other side. And, if you'll believe me, every blessed time he turned up again, if not by the next steamer, by the next after that."

"What became of the capital?"

"Oh, that he liquidated. Drank it — see? We've all got our own particular little foibles, and my friend's was drink."

"I don't wish to appear prejudiced, but I think I should be inclined myself to call it a sin."

"You may call it a sin. It was the only one he'd got, of any considerable size. I suppose you'd distinguish between a sin and its consequences?"

"Most certainly," replied the clergyman unguardedly.

"Well. Then — there were the women — —"

"Steady, my friend, that makes two sins."

"No. You can't count it as two. You see, he never spoke to a girl till he was so blind drunk he couldn't tell whether she was pretty or ugly. Women were a consequence."

"That only made his sin the greater, sir."

"Ye — es. I reckon it did swell it up some. I said it was a big one. Still, it's not fair to him to count it as more than one. But then, what with gambling and putting a bit on here, and backing a friend's bill there, he managed to make it do duty for half a dozen. He seemed to turn everything naturally to drink. You may say he drank his widowed mother's savings, and his father's life insurance; and, when that was done, he pegged away at his eldest sister's marriage portion and the money that should have gone for his younger sister's education. Altogether he reduced 'em pretty considerably. Besides all that, he had the cussedest luck of any beggar I know.

"Not that he cared for his luck, as long as he got enough to drink. But he wore his friends out. At last they said they'd get up a subscription and pay his passage out to the States, if he'd swear never to show his ugly face in England again. Or at least not till he knew how to behave himself, which was safe enough, and came to the same thing, seeing that they didn't believe he'd ever learn. He didn't believe it himself, and would have sworn to anything. So they scraped together ten pounds for his passage, intermediate. He went steerage and drank the difference. They'd sent on five pounds capital to start him when he landed, and thought themselves very clever. The first thing he did was to collar that capital and drink it too. Then he went and worked in the store where he'd bought the drink, for the sake of being near it—he loved it so. Then—this is the queer part of the story—something happened. I won't tell you what it was. It happened

because it was the worst thing that could have happened—it was bound to happen, owing to his luck. Whatever it was it made him chuck drinking. He left the store where the stuff was, and applied for a berth in a big business in Chicago. It was a place where they didn't know him, else he wouldn't have got it.

"Then his luck turned. If it wasn't the same luck. Just because he hadn't an object in life now—didn't care about drinking any longer, nor yet about women, because of the thing that had happened, and so hadn't got any reasonable sort of use for money—he began to make it. That's the secret of success, that is. Because he didn't care what he called a tinker's cuss about being foreman he was made foreman—then, for the same reason, manager. Then he got sort of interested in seeing the money come in. He didn't want it himself, but it struck him that it wouldn't be a bad thing to pay back his mother and his sisters what they'd lost on him, besides making up for any little extra trouble and expense he might have been to them. He began putting dollars by just for that.

"I suppose you think that when he'd raked together enough dollars he sent them home straightaway? Not he. He wasn't such a blamed idiot. He knew it was no manner of good being in a hurry if you wanted to do a thing in style. He pouched those dollars himself and bought a small share in the business. He bought it for them, mind you. You'd have thought, now he was interested and had got back a sort of object in life, that his luck would have turned again, just to spite him. But it didn't. He rose and he rose, and after a bit they made him a partner. They had the capital, and he had the brain. He'd found out that he'd more brain than he knew what to do with. Regular nuisance it was—so beastly active. Used to keep him awake at night, thinking, when he didn't want to. However, it dried up and let him alone once he gave it the business to play with. At last the old partners dropped off the concern—gorged; and he stuck to it. By that time he had fairly got his hand in; and the last year it was just a sitting still and watching the long Atlantic roll of the dollars as they came tumbling in. He

stuck till he'd piled them up behind him, a solid cold five million. And now he's ramping on the home-path as hard as he can tear. The funny thing is that his people are as poor as church mice — three brown mice in a fusty little house like a family pew. But that's the house he's going to. And that five million's just as much theirs as it is his, and perhaps a little more."

"Ah," said his fellow-passenger, "that's pretty. That sort of thing doesn't often happen outside a fairy tale."

"No," said Stephen Lepper simply, "but he made it happen."

"Well?"

"Well? Do you think they'll be sorry to see him? I don't mean because of the dollars — they won't care about them."

"Of course they won't. My dear sir, it's fine — that story of yours. It's the Prodigal Son — with a difference."

"A difference? I believe you!"

At this point Stephen Lepper was struck with a humorous idea. It struck him on the back, as it were, in such a startling manner that he forgot all about the veil he had woven so industriously. (His companion, indeed, judged that he had adopted that subterfuge less as a concealment for his sins than as a decent covering for his virtues.)

"That prodigal knew what to do with his herd of swine, anyhow. He killed and cured 'em. And I reckon he'll order his own fatted calf — and pay for it."

He stood revealed.

The clergyman got down at Rugby. In parting he shook Mr. Stephen K. Lepper by the hand and wished him — for himself a happy home-coming, for his friend a good appetite for the fatted calf.

His hand was gripped hard, so that he suffered torture till the guard slammed to the door of the compartment and separated them.

Mr. Lepper thrust his head out of the window. "No fear!" he shouted.

The clergyman looked back once as the train moved out of the station. The head was there, uncovered, but still shouting.

"No durned — —"

He saw the gray hat waved wildly, but the voice was ravished from him by the wind of the train.

II

The train reached Little Sutton at seven. Just as he had traveled third-class, so he had preposterously planned to send his luggage on by carrier, and plod the five miles between town and station on foot. He wanted to keep up the illusion.

The station, anyhow, was all right. They had enlarged it a bit, but it was still painted a dirty drab (perhaps there used to be a shade more yellow ochre in the drab), and the Virginian creeper still climbed over the station master's box, veiling him as in a bower. If he could have swallowed up time (fifteen years of it) as the New York and Chicago Express swallowed up space, he might have felt himself a young man again, a limp young man, slightly the worse for drink, handed down to the porter like a portmanteau by the friendly arm of a fellow-passenger, on one of those swift, sudden, and ill-timed returns that preceded his last great exodus. Only that, whereas Stephen Lepper at thirty-nine was immaculately attired, the coat of that unfortunate young man hung by a thread or two, and his trousers by a button; while, instead of five million dollars piled at his back, he had but eighteenpence (mostly copper) lying loose in his front pockets. But Stephen Lepper had grown so used to his clothes and his millions that he carried them unconsciously. They offered no violence to the illusion. What might have destroyed it was the strange, unharmonizing fact that he was sober. But he had got used to being sober, too.

The road unrolled itself for two miles over the pale green downs. It topped the spine of a little hog-backed hill and dipped toward the town (road all right). To his left, on the crest of the hill, stood the old landmark, three

black elms in a field that was rased and bleached after the hay-harvest. They leaned toward each other, and between their trunks the thick blue-gray sky showed solid as paint (landmark all right).

In the queer deep light that was not quite twilight things were immobile and distinct, as if emphasizing their outlines before losing them. The illusion was acute, almost intolerable.

Down there lay the town, literally buried in the wooded combe. Slabs of gray wall and purple roof, sunk in the black-green like graves in grass. A white house here and there faced him with the stare of monumental marble. In the middle a church with a stunted spire squatted like a mortuary chapel. They had run up a gaudy red-brick villa or two outside, but on the whole Little Sutton was all right, too. He had always thought it very like a cemetery—a place where people lay buried till the Day of Judgment.

The man he had been was really dead and buried down there. It was as if a glorified Stephen Lepper stood up and contemplated his last resting-place. The clothes he wore were so many signs and symbols of his joyful resurrection. If any doubted, he could point to them in proof. Not that he anticipated this necessity. To be sure, his people had once regarded the possibility of a resurrection as, to say the least of it, antecedently improbable. They had even refused to accept his authentic letters, written on the actual paper of a temperance hotel, as sufficient proof of it. He had not altogether blamed them for their Sadducean attitude, being a little skeptical himself.

Nevertheless, the resurrection was an accomplished fact. There had been a woman in it. She was to have been his wife if she had lived. But she had not lived, and her death was the one episode as to which he had been reticent. She was the sort of woman that drives men to drink by marrying them; for she had a face like an angel and a tongue like a two-edged sword, sheathed in time of courtship. The miracle had happened so long ago that it had passed into the region of things unregarded because admitting of no

doubt. He had never been what you might call a confirmed drunkard—he hadn't been steady enough for that—and fifteen years of incontrovertible sobriety had effaced the fitful record of his orgies. So it never occurred to him now that his character could be regarded otherwise than with the confidence accorded to such solid and old-established structures as the Church or Bank. He dreaded no shrinking in the eyes of the three women he had come to see. But supposing—merely supposing—anything so unlikely as a mental reservation or suspension of judgment on their part, there was that solid pile of dollars at his back for proof. And because the better part of five million dollars cannot be produced visibly and bodily at a moment's notice, and because the female mind has difficulty in grasping so abstract an idea as capital, he had brought with him one or two little presents—tangible intimations, as it were, of its existence.

He had had two hours to spare at Liverpool before his train left Lime Street. They had flown in the rapture of his shopping. To follow his progress through Castle Street and Bond Street, the casual observer would have deemed him possessed by a blind and maniac lust of miscellaneous spending. But there had been method in that madness, a method simple and direct. He had stalked first of all into a great silk-mercantile and demanded a silk suitable for an old lady, a satin suitable for a young lady, another satin for a lady—not so young. Then, suddenly remembering that his mother used to yearn even in widowhood for plum color, while Minnie (who was pretty and had red hair) fancied a moss-green, and Kate (who was not pretty) a rose-pink, he neither paused nor rested till he had obtained these tints. Lace, too—his mother had had a perfect passion for lace, unsatisfied because of its ideal nature—a lace of her dreams. He had decided on one or two fine specimens of old point. He supposed this would be the nearest approach to the ideal, being the most expensive. Then he had to get a few diamond pins, butterflies, true-love knots, and so on, to fix it with. And, while he was about it, a diamond necklace, and a few little trifles of that sort for Minnie and Kate. Then their figures (dimly dowdy) had come back to him across the years, one plain, the other pretty but

peculiar. He accounted for that by remembering that Kate had been literary, while Minnie was musical.

So he had just turned in at a bookseller's and stated that he wanted some books—say about twenty or thirty pounds' worth. The man of books had gauged his literary capacity in a glance, and suggested that he had better purchase the Hundred Best Books. "Well," he had said (rather sharply, for time was getting on), "I reckon I don't want any but the best." In the same spirit he had approached the gentleman in the piano-forte emporium and ordered a Steinway Grand to be forwarded when he knew his permanent address. For as yet it was uncertain which county contained it, that princely residence—the old manor-house or baronial hall—in which henceforth they would live together in affluence. He didn't exactly see them there, those three queer, dowdy little women. God forgive him, it was his fault if they went shabby. He remembered how they used to stint themselves, eating coarse food and keeping no servant, so that Kate had never any time for her books nor Minnie for her music. He would change all that now.

As he walked on he dreamed a dream.

In the foreground of his dream (rich parqueterie) three figures went to and fro, one adorable in plum color and point lace; one, the one with the red hair, still beautiful in green; and one, not beautiful, but—well—elegant in pink. Now he saw a dining-room sumptuously furnished, a table white with silver and fine linen, and the same figures sitting at it, drinking champagne and eating the fool messes that women love to eat, queer things cooked in cream, and ice-puddings, and so on. And now it was a lofty music room, and Minnie taking the roof off with one of her So-nahters on the Steinway Grand; and now a library (the Hundred Best Books had grown into a library), and Kate, studious, virgin, inviolate in leisure. Then slap through it all went the little mother driving in her own carriage, a victoria for fine weather, a brougham for wet. (It was before the days of motor-cars.) Somewhere on the outskirts of his dream (moorland for

choice) there hovered a gentleman in shooting clothes, carrying a gun, or on the uttermost dim verge, the sky-line of it, the same vague form (equestrian) shot gloriously by. But he took very little interest in him.

Ah, there were the cross-roads and the Bald-faced Stag at the corner. Not a scrap changed since the last time he visited it—day when he rode the Major's roan mare slap through the saloon bar into the bowling-alley. Did it for a bet, and won it, too, and bought his mother a stuffed badger in a glass case with the money, as a propitiatory offering. Only another mile.

His road ran into the lighted High Street, through a black avenue of elms as through a tunnel. Reality assailed him with a thousand smells. No need to ask his way to the North End.

He turned off through an alley into a dark lane, bordered with limes. The thick, sweet scent dropped from the trees, a scent dewy with the childhood of the night. It felt palpable as a touch. It was as if he felt his mother's fingers on his face, and the kisses of his innocent girl-sisters.

He went slowly up the lane toward a low light at the end of it. At the corner, where it turned, was a small house black with ivy and fenced with a row of espalier limes. The light he made for came from the farthest window of the ground floor. Through a gap in the lime fence he could see into the room.

The house was sunk a little below the level of the lane, so that he seemed to be looking straight down into a pit of yellow light hollowed out of the blackness. Two figures sat knitting at the window on the edge of the pit. His mother and Kate. A third, in the center of the light, leaned her elbows on the table and propped her head on her hands. He knew her for Minnie by her red hair. Beyond them a side window was open to the night.

There were two ways by which he could approach them. He could go boldly in at the iron gate and up the flagged path to the front door. Or he could go round to the side, up the turning of the lane, where the garden wall rose high, into the back garden. Thence, through a thick yew arch into

a narrow path between the end of the house and the high wall. By the one way they would be certain to see him through the front window. By the other he would see them (through the side window) without being seen. Owing to a certain moisture and redness about his eyes and nose he was not yet quite ready to be seen. Therefore he chose the side way. Sitting on a garden seat in the embrasure of the arch, he commanded a slanting but uninterrupted view of the room and its inmates.

There, in the quiet, he could hear the clicking needles of the knitters, and the breathing of the red-haired woman. And he longed with a great longing for the sound of their voices. If one of them would only speak!

III

"The question is"—it was the red-haired girl who spoke, and her tone suggested that the silence marked a lull in some debate—"how much do you mean to advance me this year from the housekeeping?"

The younger of the two knitters answered without looking up.

"I've told you before; it depends upon circumstances."

"I see no circumstances."

"Don't you? I thought it was you who were so sure about Stephen's coming home?"

"That makes no difference. If he doesn't come I shall go away. If he does I shall go away and stay away. In that case I shall want more money, shan't I? not less." Minnie dug her sharp elbows into the table and thrust out her chin.

"You'll have to want," said Kate. "You know perfectly well that if he is here none of us can go away. We must keep together."

"Why must we?"

"Because it's cheaper."

"And suppose I choose to go? What's to keep me?"

"To keep you?"

"I see. You mean there won't be a penny to keep me?"

Kate was silent.

"If it hadn't been for Stephen I could have kept myself long ago—by my music. That's what I wanted."

"Well, you didn't get what you wanted. Women seldom do."

"I want to go to the Tanquerays. There's no reason why I shouldn't get that."

"You can't go to the Tanquerays as you are."

Minnie gazed at her clothes, then at her reflection in the opposite looking-glass.

She wore a shabby, low-necked gown of some bluish-green stuff, with a collar of coarse lace; also a string of iridescent shells. Under the flame of her hair her prettiness showed haggard and forlorn.

"Yes, you may well look at yourself. You must have new things if you go. That means breaking into five pounds."

Minnie's eyes were still fixed on the face in the looking-glass.

"It would be worth it," said she.

"It might be if you stopped five months. Not unless."

"Look here, Kate. It's all very well, but I consider that the house owes me that five pounds. Mayn't I have it, Stephen or no Stephen?"

"It's no use asking me now. It will depend on Stephen."

"And Stephen, I imagine, will depend on us."

"Probably. Do you hear what Minnie says, Mother?"

The old woman's hands knitted fiercely, while her sharp yellow face crumpled into an expression half peevish, half resigned.

"I hear what you both say, and I think I've got enough to worry me without you talking about Stephen coming home."

Her voice was so thin that even Minnie, not hearing, had missed the point. As for the man outside, he was still struggling with emotion, and had caught but a word here and there.

Kate's voice was jagged like a saw and carried farther. It was now that he really began to hear.

"Do you suppose he's made any money out there?"

"Did you ever hear of Stephen making money anywhere?"

"If he has he ought to be made to pay something to the housekeeping. It's only fair."

"If he's made anything," said Minnie, "he's spent it all. That's why he's coming. Look at the supper!"

The table before her was laid for the evening meal. She pointed to the heels of two loaves, a knuckle of ham, a piece of cheese, and some water in a glass jug. Oatmeal simmered on a reeking oil-stove in a corner of the room.

"How much will it cost to keep him?"

Kate's narrow, peaked face was raised in calculation. Kate's eyes became mean homes for meaner thoughts of which she was visibly unashamed.

"Ten shillings a week at the very least. Fifty-two weeks—that's twenty-six pounds a year. Or probably fifteen shillings—a man eats more than a woman, at any rate more butcher's meat—that's thirty-nine pounds. That's only what he eats," she added significantly. "What did you say, Mother?"

The old lady raised her voice, and the man outside took hope. "I say I think you're both very unfeeling. For all you know, poor fellow, he may be quite reformed."

"He may be. I know the chances are he won't," said Kate.

"How do you know anything about it, my dear?"

"I asked Dr. Minify. He has a wide enough experience of these cases."

Minnie turned fiercely round. "And what made you go and blab to him about it? I think you might wash your dirty linen at home."

"It's only what you'd have done yourself."

"Not to him."

"Why not?"

There was terror in Minnie's face. "He knows the Tanquerays."

"Well—it's your own fault. You went on about it till it got on my nerves, and the anxiety was more than I could bear. The porridge will be boiling over."

"Well?"

"Well, I can't mind porridge and my knitting at the same time."

Minnie threw herself back, pushing her chair with her feet. She rose and trailed sulkily across to the stove. As she moved a wisp of red hair, loosened from its coil, clung to her sallow neck. She was slip-shod and untidy.

She removed the porridge abstractedly. "What did he say?" she asked.

"He was extremely kind and sympathetic. He treated it as a disease. He said that in nine cases out of ten recovery is impossible."

"Well, I could have told you that. Anything more?"

"He says the chances are that he won't hold out much longer; his health must have broken up after all these years. I don't know how I can stand it, if it is. When I think of all the things that may happen. Paralysis perhaps, or epilepsy—that's far more likely. He's just the age."

"Is he? How awful! But, then, he'll have to go somewhere. You know we can't have him epilepsing all over the place here."

The old lady dropped her knitting to raise her hands.

"Minnie! Minnie! Have a little Trust. He may never come at all."

"He will. Trust him."

"After all," said Kate reflectively, "why should he?"

"Why? Why?" The girl came forward, spreading her large red hands before her. "Because we've paid all his debts. Because we've saved money and got straight again. Because we're getting to know one or two decent people, and it's taken us fifteen years to do it. Because we're beginning to enjoy ourselves for the first time in all our miserable lives. Because I've set my heart on staying with the Tanquerays, and Fred Tanqueray will be there. Because" — a queer, fierce light came into her eyes — "because I'm happy, and he means to spoil it all, as he spoilt it all before! As if I hadn't suffered enough."

"You? What have you suffered?" Kate's sharp face was red as she bent over a dropped stitch. Her hands trembled. "You were too young to feel anything."

"I wasn't too young to feel that I had a career before me, nor to care when it was knocked on the head. If it hadn't been for him my music wouldn't have come to an end as it did."

"Your music! If it hadn't been for him my engagement wouldn't have been broken off — as it was."

"Oh that? It was the one solitary good day's work Stephen ever did."

The old lady nodded shrewdly over her needles. "Yes, my dear, you might be thankful for that mercy. You couldn't have married Mr. Hooper. I'm afraid he wasn't altogether what he ought to be. You yourself suspected that he drank."

"Like a fish," interposed Minnie.

"I know" — Kate's hands were fumbling violently over her stitch — "but — but I could have reclaimed him."

Her eyes lost their meanness with the little momentary light of illusion.

Minnie laughed aloud. "If that's all you wanted, why didn't you try your hand on Stephen?"

"Don't, Minnie."

But Minnie did. "Fred Tanqueray doesn't drink; I wouldn't look at him if he did. What's more, he's a gentleman; I couldn't stand him if he wasn't. Catch him marrying into this family when he's seen Stephen."

"Minnie, you are too dreadful."

"Dreadful? You'd be dreadful if you'd cared as much for Charlie Hooper as I do for Fred Tanqueray."

"And how much does Mr. Tanqueray care for you?"

A dull flush spread over Minnie's sallow face; her lips coarsened. "I don't know; but it's a good deal more than your Hooper man ever cared for anybody in his life; and if you weren't such a hopeless sentimentalist you'd have seen that much. Of course I shan't know whether he cares or not — now."

And she wept, because of the anguish of her thirty years.

Then she burst out: "I hate Stephen. I don't care what you say — if he comes into this house I'll walk out of it. Oh, how I hate him!" Her loose mouth dropped, still quivering with its speech. Her face was one flame with her hair.

But Kate was cool and collected.

"Don't excite yourself. If it's only to influence Fred Tanqueray, he won't come," said Kate.

Then the red-haired woman turned on her, mad with the torture of her frustrate passion.

"He will come! He will come, I tell you. I've felt him coming. I've felt it in my bones. I've dreamt about it night after night. I've been afraid to meet the postman lest he should bring another letter. I've been afraid to go along the

station road lest I should meet him. I'm afraid now to look out of that window lest I should see him standing there with his face against the pane."

She crossed to the window and drew down the blind. For a moment her shadow was flung across it, monstrously agitated, the huge hands working.

The man outside saw nothing more, but he heard his mother's voice and he took hope again.

"For shame, Minnie, for shame, to speak of poor Steevy so. One would think you might have a little more affection for your only brother."

"Look here, Mother" (Minnie again!), "that's all sentimental humbug. Can you look me in the face and honestly say you'd be glad to see your only son?"

(The son's heart yearned, straining for the answer. It came quavering.)

"My dear, I shall not see him. I'm a poor, weak old woman, and I know that the Lord will not send me any burden that I cannot bear."

He crept from his hiding-place out into the silent lane. He had drawn his breath tight, but his chest still shook with the sob he had strangled. "My God!" he muttered, "I'll take off the burden."

Then his sob broke out again, and it sounded more like a laugh than a sob. "The dollars — they shall have them. Every blessed one of the damned five million!"

He looked at his watch by the light of the gas-lamp in the lane. He had just time to catch the last train down; time, too, to stop the carrier's cart with the gifts that would have told the tale of his returning.

So, with a quick step, he went back by the way he had come, out of the place where the dead had buried their dead — until the Day of Judgment.

THE GIFT

I

He had not been near her for two months. It was barely five minutes' walk from his house in Bedford Square to her rooms in Montagu Street, and last year he used to go to see her every week. He did not need the reminder of her letter, for he had been acutely aware, through the term that separated them, of the date when he had last seen her. Still, he was not sure how much longer he might have kept away if it had not been for the note that told him in two lines that she had been ill, and that she had—at last—something to show him. He smiled at the childlike secrecy of the announcement. She had something to show him. Her illness, then, had not impaired her gift, her charming, inimitable gift.

If she had something to show him he would have to go to her.

He let his eyes rest a moment on her signature as if he saw it for the first time, as if it renewed for him the pleasing impression of her personality. After all, she was Freda Farrar, the only woman with a style and an imagination worth considering; and he—well, he was Wilton Caldecott.

He would go over and see her now. He had an hour to spare before dinner. It was her hour, between the lamplight and the clear April day, when he was always sure of finding her at home.

He found her sitting in her deep chair by the hearth, her long, slender back bent forward to the fire, her hands glowing like thin vessels for the flame. Her face was turned toward him as he came in. Its small childlike oval showed sharp and white under her heavy wreath of hair—the face of a delicate Virgin of the Annunciation, a Musa Dolorosa, a terrified dryad of the plane-trees (Freda's face had always inspired him with fantastic images); a dryad in exile, banished with her plane-tree to the undelightful town.

She did not conceal from him her joyous certainty that he would come. She made no comment on his absence. It was one of her many agreeable

qualities that she never made comments, never put forth even the shyest and most shadowy claim. She took him up where she had left him, or, rather, where he had left her, and he gathered that she had filled the interval happily enough with the practice of her incomparable art.

The first thing she did now was to exhibit her latest acquisitions, her beautiful new reading-lamp, the two preposterous cushions that supported and obliterated her; while he saw (preposterous Freda, who had not a shilling beyond what the gift brought her) that she had on a new gown.

"I say," he exclaimed, "I say, what next?"

And they looked at each other and laughed. He liked the spirit in which Freda now launched out into the strange ocean of expenditure. It showed how he had helped her. He was the only influence which could have helped a talent so obscure, so uncertain, so shy.

It was the obscurity, the uncertainty, the shyness of it that charmed him most. It was the shyness, the uncertainty, the obscurity in her that held him, made it difficult to remove himself when he sank into that deep chair by her fireside, and she became silent and turned from him her small brooding face. It was as if she guarded obstinately her secret, as if he waited, was compelled to wait, for the illuminating hour.

"It's finished," she said, as if continuing some conversation they had had yesterday.

"Ah." He found himself returning reluctantly from his quest.

She rose and unlocked the cabinet where her slender sheaves were garnered. He came and took from her a sheaf more slender than the rest.

"Am I to read it, here and now?"

"If you will."

He sat down and read there and then. From time to time she let her eyes light on him, shyly at first, then rest, made quiet by his abstraction. She liked to look at him when he was not thinking of her. He was tall and

straight and fair; his massive, clean-shaven face showed a virile ashen shade on lip and chin. He had keen, kind eyes, and a queer mouth with sweet curves and bitter corners.

He folded the manuscript and turned it in his hands. He looked from it to her with considering, caressing eyes. What she had written was a love-poem in the divinest, the simplest prose. Such a poem could only have been written by his listening virgin, his dreaming dryad. He was afraid to speak of it, to handle its frail, half-elemental, half-spiritual form.

"Has it justified my sending for you?"

It had. It justified her completely. It justified them both. It justified his having come to her, his remaining with her, dining with her, if indeed they did dine. She had always justified him, made his coming to see her the natural, inevitable thing.

They sat late over the fire. They had locked the manuscript in its drawer again, left it with relief.

They talked.

"How many years is it since I first saw you?"

"Three years," she said, "and two months."

"And two months. Do you remember how I found you, up there, under the roof, in that house in Charlotte Street?"

"Yes," she said, "I remember."

"You were curled up on that funny couch in the corner, with your back against the wall — —"

"I was sitting on my feet to keep them warm."

"I know. And you wore a white shawl — —"

"No," she entreated, "not a shawl."

"A white something. It doesn't matter. I don't really remember anything but your small face, and your terrified eyes looking at me out of the corner, and your poor little cold hands."

She wondered, did he remember her shabby gown, her fireless room, the queer couch that was her bed, the hunger and the nakedness of her surroundings?

"You sat," she said, "on my trunk, the wooden one with the nails on it. It must have been so uncomfortable."

He said nothing. Even now, when those things were only a remembrance, the pity of them made him dumb.

"And the next time you came," said she, "you made a fire for me. Don't you remember?"

He remembered. He felt again that glow of self-congratulation which warmed him whenever he considered the comfort of her present state; or came into her room and found her accumulating, piece by piece, her innocent luxuries. Nobody but he had helped her. It was disagreeable to him to think that another man should have had a hand in it.

Yet there would be others. He had already revealed her to two or three.

"I wonder how you knew," she said.

"How I knew what?"

"That I was worth while."

He gave an inward start. She had made him suddenly aware that in those days he had not known it. He had had no idea what was in her. She had had nothing then "to show" him.

It was as if she were asking him, as if he were asking himself, what it was that had drawn him to her, when, in the beginning, it wasn't and couldn't have been the gift? Why had he followed her up when he might so easily have dropped her? He had found her, in the beginning, only because his old friend, Mrs. Dysart, had written to him (from a distance that left her

personally irresponsible), and had asked him to look for her, to discover what had become of her, to see if there was anything that he could do. Mrs. Dysart had intimated that she hardly thought anything could be done; that there wasn't, you know, very much in her—very much, that is to say, that would interest Wilton Caldecott. They had been simply pitiful, the girl's poor first efforts, the things that, when he had screwed his courage to the point of asking for them, were all she had to show him.

"I was too bad for words, you know," said she, tracking his thought.

"You were. You were."

"There wasn't a gleam, a spark — —"

"Not one."

They laughed. The reminiscence of her "badness" seemed to inspire them both with a secret exultation. They drew together, uncovering, displaying to each other the cherished charm of it. Neither could say why the thought of it was so pleasing.

"And look at you now," said Caldecott.

"Yes," she cried, "look at me now. What was it, do you think, that made the difference?"

That he had never really known.

"Oh, well, I suppose you're stronger, you know; and things are different."

"Things?" she repeated. Her lips parted and closed, as if she had been about to say something, and recalled it with a sharp indrawing of her breath.

"And so," she said presently, "you think that was it?"

"It may have been. Anyhow, you mustn't go getting ill."

"I don't think," she said, "there's any need. But don't be frightened. It won't go away."

"What won't?"

"The gift."

They laughed again. It was their own name for it.

"I wasn't thinking of it. I was thinking of you."

"It's the same thing," said she. "No. It won't go. It can't go. I've got it fast."

He rose. He looked down on her; he seemed to hesitate, to consider.

"I wonder," he said, "if I might ask my friend, Miss Nethersole, to call on you? She's Mrs. Dysart's niece."

She consented, and with a terse good night he left her.

She, too, wondered and considered. She knew that she would some day have to reckon with his life, with the world that knew him, with the women whom he knew.

II

Freda and Miss Nethersole had met several times before the remarkable conversation that made them suddenly intimate.

That she would have, sooner or later, some remarkable conversation with Miss Nethersole was an idea that had dawned upon Freda from the first. But until the hour struck for them their acquaintance had been distant.

It had the fascination of deep distance. Freda had not been sure that she desired to break the charm. It seemed somehow to hold her safe. From what danger she would have found it hard to say, when Miss Nethersole covered her with so large and soft a wing. Still, they had come no nearer to the friendship which the older woman had offered as the end of their approaches.

It was as if Miss Nethersole were also bound under the charm. When Freda allowed herself to meditate profoundly she divined that what drew them on and held them back was an uncertainty regarding Wilton Caldecott. Neither knew in what place the other really held him. The first day they met each had searched, secretly, the other's face for some betrayal of his whereabouts; each, it had seemed to Freda, had shrunk from finding what

she looked for; shrunk even more from owning that there might be anything to find.

And he had hoped that she would "like Julia."

If reticence were required of them, Freda felt that her poor little face could never rival the inimitable reserves, the secure distinction of Miss Nethersole's. There was nothing, so to speak, to take hold of in Julia's dark, attenuated elegance; nothing that betrayed itself anywhere, from the slender brilliance of her deep-lidded, silent eyes, to her small flat chin, falling sheer from the immobile lower lip. Miss Nethersole's features and her figure were worn away to the last expression of a purely social intention. Quite useless to look for any signs of Wilton Caldecott's occupation. Freda was convinced that, if the lady possessed any knowledge of him, she would keep it concealed about her to the end of time. She was aware of Miss Nethersole's significance as a woman of the larger world. It was wonderful to think that she held the clue to the social labyrinth, in which, to Freda's vision, their friend's life was lost. She knew what ways he went. She could follow all his turnings and windings there; perhaps she could track him to the heart of the maze; perhaps she herself was the heart of it, the very secret heart. She sat alone for him there, in the dear silent place where all the paths led. The very thickness and elaboration of the maze would make their peace. Freda's heart failed her before the intricacy of Miss Nethersole's knowledge of him, the security of her possession. Miss Nethersole was valuable to him for her own sake, it being evident that she had no "gift."

It was her personal sufficiency, unsustained as she was by anything irrelevant, that made Julia so formidable.

She had never seemed more so to Freda than on this afternoon when they sat together among the adornments of her perfect drawing-room. Everything about Miss Nethersole was as delicate and finished as her own perfection. She was finely unconscious of all that Freda recognized in her. It seemed as if what she chiefly recognized in Freda was her gift. She had

been superbly impersonal in her praise of it. It was the divine thing given to Freda, hers and yet not hers, so wonderful, compared with the small pale creature who manipulated it, that it could be discussed with perfect propriety apart from her.

And to-day Wilton Caldecott's name had risen again in the discussion, when Julia had the air of insisting more than ever on the gift. It was almost as if she narrowed Freda down to that, suggesting that it was the only thing that counted in her intimacy with their friend.

"Yes," said Freda, "but the extraordinary thing is that I hadn't it when first he knew me."

"He saw what was in you."

"He said the other day he saw nothing. I was too bad for words."

"Oh, I know all about that. He told me."

"What did he tell you?"

"That you were like a funny little unfledged bird, trying to fly before its wing feathers were grown."

"I hadn't any. I hadn't anything of my own. Everything I have I owe to him."

"Don't say that. Why should you pluck off all your beautiful feathers to make a nest for his conceit?"

"Is he conceited?"

Freda said to herself, "After all, she doesn't count. She doesn't know him."

Miss Nethersole smiled. "He's a male man, my dear. If you want him to have an even higher idea of your genius than he has already, tell him — tell him you owe it all to him."

"Ah," said Freda, "you don't know him."

"I have known him," said Miss Nethersole, "for fifteen years. I knew him before he married."

She had proved incontestably the superiority of her knowledge. Freda felt as if Miss Nethersole were looking at her to see how she would take it. There was an appreciable moment in which she adjusted her mind to the suddenness of the revelation. Then she told herself that there was nothing in it that she had not reckoned with many times before. It left her relations with Wilton Caldecott where they were.

There was nothing in it that could change for her the unique and immaterial tie. She was even relieved by the certainty that it was not Julia Nethersole, then, after all. She had an idea that she would have grudged him to Julia Nethersole.

Julia was much too well-bred to show that she had the advantage. She took it for granted that Miss Farrar was also acquainted with the circumstances of Wilton Caldecott's marriage.

"That," said she, "is what makes him so extraordinarily interesting."

"His marriage" – Freda hesitated. She wondered if Miss Nethersole would really go into it.

"Some people's marriages are quite unilluminating. Wilton's, I always think, is the key to his character, sometimes to his conduct."

Freda held her breath. She saw that Miss Nethersole was about to go in deep.

"He has suffered" – Miss Nethersole went on – "all his life, from an over-developed sense of honor. He could see honor in situations where you wouldn't have said there was the ghost of an obligation. His marriage was not an affair of the heart. It was an affair of honor. The woman – she's dead now – was in love with him."

"Did you know her?"

"No. She was not the sort of person you do know. She was simply a pretty, underbred little governess. He met her – on the staircase, I imagine – in some house he was staying in, and, as I say, she was in love with him. She

was a scheming little wretch, and she and her people made him believe that he had compromised her in some shadowy way. I suppose he had paid her a little ordinary attention—I don't know the details. Anyhow, he was so fantastically honorable that he married her."

"Poor thing. It must have been awful for her, to be married in that way—for honor!"

"She didn't consider it awful in the least. She didn't mind what she was married for, so long as she was married. She was that sort. Do I bore you?"

"No. You interest me immensely."

"Of course they were miserable. He couldn't make her happy. Wilton is, in his way, a rather spiritual person, and his wife was anything but. Marriage can be an awful revelation to a nice woman. Sometimes it's a shock to a nice man. Wilton never got over his shock. It left him with a morbid horror of the thing. That's what has prevented him from marrying again."

Miss Nethersole drew a perceptible breath before going in deeper.

"I've heard people praising his faithfulness to his wife's memory. They little know. He was loyal enough to the poor woman while she lived, but he's giving her away now with a vengeance. Several very nice women would have been more than willing to marry him; but as soon as he knew it— —"

"Knew it? How could he know it?"

"Well, the ladies were very transparent, some of them. And when they weren't there was always some kind person there to make them so. And when he saw through them—he was off. You could see the horror of it coming over him, and his poor terrified eyes protesting—'I'd do anything for you—anything, my dear girl, but that.'"

Julia paused, as if on the brink of something still profounder. Evidently she abhorred the plunge, while Freda shrank from the horrible exposure of the shallower waters.

"And those women," said Julia, after meditation, "wondered why they lost their friend. They might have kept him if they'd only kept their heads."

It was at this point that Freda felt that Julia was trying to drag her in with her.

"How awful," said she, "to feel that you'd driven a man away!"

"It might be more awful," said Julia, "for him to feel he had to go."

"That's it," said Freda. "Had he?"

"Well, if he was honorable, what else was there for him to do?"

"To stay by those women, and see them through — if he was honorable."

"Oh — if they'd have been content with that. But you see, my dear, they all wanted to marry him."

"If they did," said Freda, "that shows that they didn't really care."

"They cared too much, I'm afraid."

"Oh, no. Not enough. If they'd cared enough they'd have got beyond that. However much they wanted it, they'd have given it up, rather than let him go."

As she said it she felt a blessed sense of relief. The deeper they went the more the waters covered her.

"You'll never get a man," said Julia, "to understand that. If he cares for a woman he won't be put off with anything short of marrying her. So he naturally supposes — —"

Julia had now gone as deep as she could go.

"Yes," said Freda. "It's in the things he naturally supposes that a man goes so wrong."

"Is it?" Julia paused again. "I don't know whether you realize it, but you and I are the only women Mr. Caldecott ever goes to see. I dare say you were surprised when he told you about me. I was amazed when he told me about you. I've no doubt he made each of us think we were the one

exception. You see, we are rather exceptional women, from his unhappy point of view. He knows that I understand him, and I'm sure he thinks that he understands you — — "

"So he feels safe with me?"

"Gloriously safe. You are a genius, above all the little feminine stupidities that terrify him so. From you he expects nothing but the unexpected. You're outside all his rules. I'm so much inside them that he knows exactly what to expect. So he's safe with both of us. It's the betwixt-and-between people that he dreads."

Julia rose up from the depths rosy and refreshed. Freda panted with a horrible exhaustion.

"I see," she said. And presently she found that it was time for her to go.

III

The cool, bright air out of doors touched her like a reminding hand. She turned awkwardly into the street that led from Bedford Square to her own place. Wilton Caldecott and she had often walked along that street together. She felt like one called upon to play a new part on a familiar stage, where every object suggested insanely, irrelevantly, the older inspiration.

Not that her conversation with Julia, or, rather (she corrected herself) Julia's conversation with her, had altered anything. It had all been so natural, so unamazing, like a conversation between two persons in a dream. They had both seemed so ripe for their hour that, when it struck, it brought no sense of the unusual. Only when she lit her lamp in her room, and received the full shock of the old intimate reality, did it occur to her that it was, after all, for Julia Nethersole, a rather singular outpouring. The more she thought of it the more startling it seemed — Julia's flinging off of the reticence that had wrapped her round. Freda was specially appalled by the audacity with which Julia had dragged Wilton Caldecott's history into the light of day. Her own mind had always approached it shyly and tenderly, with a sort of

feeling that, after all, perhaps she would rather not know. To Freda Julia seemed to have taken leave suddenly of her senses, to have abandoned all propriety. One did, at supreme moments, leave many things behind one; but Freda was not aware that any moment in their intercourse had yet counted as supreme.

Could Julia have meant anything by it? If so, what was it that she precisely meant? The beginning of their conversation provided no clue to its end. What possible connection could there be between her, Freda's gift, such as it was, and Wilton Caldecott's marriage?

But as she pieced together, painfully, the broken threads she saw that it did somehow hang together. She recalled that there had been something almost ominous in the insistence with which Julia had held her to her gift. Julia's manner had conveyed her disinclination to acknowledge Wilton's part in it, her refusal to regard him as indispensable in the case. She had implied, with the utmost possible delicacy, that it would be well for Freda if she could contrive to moderate her enthusiasm, to be a little less grateful; to cultivate, in a word, her independence.

It was then that she had gone down into her depths. And emerging, braced and bracing from the salt sea, she had landed Freda safe on the high ledge, where she was henceforth to stand solitary, guarding her gift.

It was, in short, a friendly warning to the younger woman to keep her head if she wished to keep their friend.

Freda remembered her first disgraceful fear of Julia, her feeling that Julia would presently take something – she hardly knew what – away from her. That came of letting her imagination play too freely round Wilton Caldecott's friend. What was there to alarm her in the candid Julia? Wasn't it as if Julia, in their curious conversation, had given herself up sublimely for Freda to look at and see for herself that there was nothing in her to be afraid of?

It was possible that Julia had seen things in her. Freda had a little thrill of discomfort at that thought; but she rallied from it bravely. What if Julia did see? She was not aware of anything that she was anxious to conceal from her. Least of all had she desired to hide her part in Wilton Caldecott. It was, if you came to think of it, the link between her and Julia, the ground of their acquaintance. She could not suspect Julia of any vulgar desire to take that away from her.

If there had been any lapse from high refinement it had been in her own little cry of "Ah, you don't know him," into which poor Freda now felt that she had poured the very soul of passionate possession. But Julia had been perfect. She had in effect said: "I see — and you won't mind my seeing — that your friendship for Wilton Caldecott is your dearest and purest possession, as it's mine. I'm not ashamed to own it. And I'll show you how to keep it. Take care of the gift — the gift. It'll see you both through." Julia had been fine. What else could she be? Of course she had seen; and she had sacrificed her reticence beautifully, because it was the only way. It was, said Freda to herself, what she would have done if she had been in Julia's place, and had seen.

Having reconstructed Julia, she unlocked the drawer that held the hidden treasure, the thing that he had said was so perfect, the last consummate manifestation of the gift. They had found between them the right word for it. It was only a gift, a thing that he had given her, that if he chose he could at any moment take away. What had come from her came only through him. She owned, with a sort of exultation, that there was nothing in the least creative in her. She had not one virile quality; only this receptivity of hers, infinitely plastic, infinitely tender. What lay in the lamplight under her caressing hand had been born of their friendship. It was their spiritual child.

She bowed her head and kissed it.

She said to herself: "It is not me, but his part in me that he loves. If I am true to it he will be true to me."

As she raised her head her eyes were wet with tears. She looked round the room. Everything in it (but the thing that lay there under her hand) seemed suddenly to have lost its interest and its charm. Something had gone from it, something that had been living with her in secret for many days, that could not live with her now any more. It had dropped into the deep when Julia stripped herself (it now seemed to Freda) and took her shining, sacrificial plunge.

"What, after all," said Freda, "has she taken from me? Nothing that I ever really had."

IV

It was Sunday afternoon. Caldecott made a point of going to see Miss Nethersole on Sunday afternoons. He felt so safe with Julia.

This particular Sunday afternoon was their first since Julia had become acquainted with Miss Farrar. It was therefore inevitable that their talk should turn to her.

"Your friend is charming," said Julia.

"Yes," he said, "yes." He seemed reluctant to acknowledge it. Julia made a note of the reluctance.

"You must be very proud of her."

He challenged the assertion with a glance which questioned her right to make it. Julia saw that his mind was balancing itself on some fine and perilous edge, and that it was as yet unaware of its peril.

"Of course you're proud of her," said she, in a voice that steadied him.

"Of course I am," he agreed.

"Is it really true that she owes everything to you?"

"No," he said, "it isn't in the least true."

"She says so."

"Oh, that's her pretty way of putting it."

"She thinks it."

"Not she. If she does it's because she's made that way. She's awfully nice, you know."

"She's too nice — to be allowed to — —"

"Well?"

"To throw herself away."

"She isn't throwing herself away. She's found the one thing she can do, and she's doing it divinely. I never met a woman who was so sure of herself."

"Oh, she's sure enough, poor child."

"I say, you don't mean to tell me you don't believe in her? Not that it matters whether you do or not."

"Thank you. I'm not talking about her genius, or whatever the thing is. I've no doubt it's everything you say. If she'd only keep to that — the one thing she can be sure of. Unless, of course, you've made her sure."

"What do you mean?"

"Ah, if I only knew what you meant."

"What I mean?"

"Yes, what you mean to do."

He laughed. "I don't mean to 'do' anything at present."

"Well, then — —"

"Why, what do you suppose I ought to do?"

"I don't know that it's for me to say."

"You may as well, while you're about it."

"If I could only make you see — —" She mentally drew back.

"Well? What do you want to make me see?"

"What you've done already to that unhappy woman."

"Unhappy? She's considerably happier than she was when I first knew her."

"That's it," she said, "that's just it. Where are your eyes? Can't you see she's in love with you?"

He did not meet her advancing gaze.

"What makes you think so?" he said.

"The way she talks about you."

He smiled. "You don't allow for picturesque exaggeration."

"My dear, when a woman exaggerates to that extent it generally means one thing."

"Not with her. She wouldn't do it if it meant that. She'd be afraid to let herself go. And she isn't afraid. She just piles it on because she's so sure of herself – so sure that she isn't what you say she is."

"I don't say she knows she's in love with you. She doesn't know it."

"Can you be in love without knowing it?"

"She could. If she knew it, do you think she'd have let me see it? And do you think I'd have given her away? I wouldn't now, only I know what you are, and she doesn't."

"No, indeed. You're right enough there."

They paused on that.

"You're quite sure," she said, "that you can't – –"

It was as if she probed him, delicately, on behalf of their tragic friend. She turned her eyes away as she did it, that she might not see him shrink.

"No," he said. "Never again. Never again."

She withdrew the pressure of the gentle finger that had given him pain. "I only thought –" she murmured.

"What did you think?"

"That it might be nice for both of you."

"It wouldn't be nice for either of us. Not nice at all."

"Well, then, I can only see one thing."

"I know. You're going to say I must leave off seeing her?"

"No. I don't say that."

"I do, though. If I were sure — —"

"You may be sure of one thing. That she doesn't know what's the matter with her—yet. She mustn't know. If you do go and see her, you must be careful not to let her find out. I did my best to hide it, to cover it up, so that she shouldn't see."

"Your suspicion?"

"What do you think we're made of? The truth—the truth."

"If this is the truth, I mustn't, of course, go near her. But I know you're mistaken."

"Have I ever been mistaken? Have I ever told you wrong?"

"Well, Julia, you're a very wise woman, and I'll admit that, when you've warned me off anybody, you've warned me for my good."

She colored. "I'm not warning you 'off' anybody now. I've warned you before for your own sake. I'm warning you this time for hers."

"I see. I see that, all right. But—you never saw a woman like her, did you? I wonder if you understand her."

"I do understand her. You can't look at her and not see that she has a profound capacity for suffering."

"I know."

Of course he knew. Hadn't he called her the Musa Dolorosa?

"Just because," said Julia, "she has imagination."

He had said good-bye and was going; but at the doorway he turned to her again.

"No," he said, "you're wrong, Julia. She's not like that."

Julia arched her brows over eyes tender with compassion — compassion for his infinite stupidity.

"Oh, my dear!" she cried, and waved him away as a creature hopeless, impossible to help.

He closed the door and stood with his back to it, facing her.

"Well," he said, "you may be right; but before I do anything I must be sure."

"How do you propose to make sure?"

"I shall go and see her."

"Of course," said Julia, "you'll go and see her."

V

He went on to Montagu Street, so convinced was he that Julia was mistaken.

Freda knew well what she was going to say to him. She had chosen her path, the highest, the farthest from the abyss. Once there she could let herself go.

He himself led her there; he started her. He brought praises of the gift.

Other people, he said, were beginning to rave about it now.

"I wish they wouldn't," said she. "It makes me feel so dishonest."

"Dishonest?"

"As if I'd taken something that didn't belong to me. It doesn't belong to me."

"What doesn't?"

"It — the gift! I feel as if it had never had anything — really — to do with me."

"Ah, that's the way to tell that you've got it."

"I know, but I don't mean that. I mean—it does belong so very much to somebody else, that I ought almost to give it back."

He had always wondered how she did it. Now for one moment he believed that she was about to clear up her little mystery. She was going to tell him that she hadn't done it at all, that somebody else had borrowed her name for some incomprehensible purpose of concealment. She was going to make an end of Freda Farrar.

"Of course," she said, "I know you don't want it back."

"I?"

"Yes. It's really yours, you know. I should never have had it at all if it hadn't been for you."

"I'm very glad," he said gravely, "if I've helped you."

He was thinking, "She does really rather pile it on."

Freda went piling it on more. She felt continuously that the gift would see them through. She would hold it well before him, and turn it round and round, that he might see for himself that there was nothing that could be considered sinister behind it. Her passionate concentration on it would show that there was nothing behind, no vision of anything darker and deeper. It was as if she said to him, "I know the dreadful thing you're afraid of. I'm showing you what it is, so that you needn't think it's that."

Not that she was afraid of his thinking it. She had set her happiness high, in a pure serene place, safe from the visitations of his terror. She conceived that the peace of it might in time come to constitute a kind of happiness for him. That gross fear could never arise between him and her. All the same, she perceived that a finer misgiving might menace his perfect peace. He might, if he were subtle enough, imagine that she was giving him too much, and that he owed her something. His chivalry might become uneasy. She must show him how perfectly satisfied she was. He must see

that the thing she had hold of was great, was immense, that it filled her life to the brim, so that there wasn't any room for anything else. How could he owe her anything when he had given her that?

She must make him see it very clearly.

"It wasn't only that you helped," she said, "to bring it out of me. It wasn't in me. When it came, it seemed to come from somewhere outside. Somebody must have put it into me. I believe such a thing is possible. And there wasn't anybody, you know, but you."

"I doubt," said he, "the possibility. Anyhow, you may safely leave me out of it."

"Think," she said, "think of the time when you were left out of it, when it was only me. It's inconceivable — the difference — —"

"Let's leave it at that. Why rub the bloom off the mystery?"

"Do I rub the bloom off?"

"Yes, if you make out that I had anything to do with it."

"If it's mystery you want, don't you see that's the greatest mystery of all — your having had to do with it?"

"But why should I, of all people? Is there any sign of Freda Farrar in anything I did before I knew her?"

"Is there any sign of her in anything she did before she knew you?"

He was silent.

"Then," said Freda, "if it isn't you it's we. We've collaborated."

If he had not been illumined by the horrid light Julia had given him he would have said that this was only Freda's way, another form of her adorable extravagance. Now he wondered.

Poor Freda went on piling up her defenses. "Don't you see?" said she. "That's why I feel so sure of it. If it had been just me, I should never have been sure a minute. It might have gone any day, and I should have known

that there was no more where it came from. But, if it's you, I can simply lean back on it and rest. Don't you see?"

"No," he said, "I don't see."

(He was saying to himself: "I'm afraid Julia was right about her. Only she doesn't know it.")

"You must leave me out of it. You mustn't let yourself think that you rest on anything or anybody but yourself."

It was what Julia had said, searching her with her woman's eyes. He did not look at her as he said it.

Her nerves still shook under Julia's distant and delicate admonition to her to keep her head. It struck her that he was repeating the warning in a still more delicate and distant manner. She wondered was it possible that he was beginning to be afraid? Couldn't he see that he was safe with her? That they were safe with one another? What was she doing now but letting him see how safe they were? Hadn't she just given to their relations the last touch of spiritual completion? She had made a place for him where he could come and go at will, and rest without terror. Couldn't he see that she had set her house of life above all that, so high that nobody down here could see what went on up there, and wonder at his going out and coming in?

Keep her head, indeed! Her untroubled and untrammelled movements on her heights proved how admirably she kept it.

"You see," he continued, "it's not as if I could be always here, on the spot."

His voice still sounded the distant note of warning. It told her that there was something that he wished to make her see.

Her best answer to that was silence, and a sincere front intimating that she saw everything, and that there was nothing to touch her in the things he saw.

"And as it happens" (Caldecott's voice shook a little), "I'm going away next week. I shall be away a very long time."

She knew that he did not look at her now lest he should see her wince. She did not wince.

"Well," said she, "I shall be here when you come back."

It was then that she saw the terror in his face.

"Of course," he said, "I hope—very much—you will be here."

She felt that he, like Julia, was leading her to the edge of the deep dividing place, and that he paused miserably where Julia had plunged. She saw him trying to bridge the gulf, to cover it, with decent, gentle commonplaces and courtesies. Then he went away.

What had she done to make him afraid of her? Or was it what she had said? The other day, before she had seen Julia, she could have said anything to him. Now it seemed there was nothing that she could say.

What was it that he had seen in her?

That was it. With all his wonderful comprehension he had failed her in the ultimate test—the ability to see what was in her. He had seen nothing but one thing, the thing he was accustomed to see, the material woman's passion to pursue, to make captive, to possess. He would go thinking all his life that it was she who had failed, she who, by her vulgarity, had made it impossible for him to remain her friend. She supposed she had piled it up too high. It was her very defenses that had betrayed her, made her more flagrant and exposed.

She bowed herself for hours to the scourging of that thought till the thought itself perished from exhaustion.

She knew that it was not so. He held her higher than that.

He was not afraid. He was only sorry for her. He had tried to be more tender to her than she was herself. He was going away because his honor, his masculine honor, told him that if he could not marry her there was

nothing else for him to do. He was trying to spare her pain. It was very honorable of him, she knew.

But it would have been more honorable still if he had stayed; if he had trusted her to keep her friendship incorruptible by pain. Or rather, if he had seen that no pain could touch her, short of the consummate spiritual torture he was inflicting now.

There were moments when she stood back from the torture self-delivered. When she heard herself saying to him: "I know why you're going. It's because you think I wanted you to give me something that you can't give me. Don't you see that if you can't give it me it doesn't matter? It's, after all, so little compared with what you have given me. Is it honorable to take that away? Don't you see how you're breaking faith with me? Don't you see that you've made me ashamed, and that nothing can be worse to bear than that?"

Then she knew that she would never be able to say that to him. She would never be able to say anything to him any more. She wondered whether he had made those other women ashamed when he broke loose from them. Was she ashamed, did she suffer, the woman who had caught and held him, and hurt him so?

At the thought of his hurt her passion had such pity that it cried out in her, "What have they done to you that you can't see?"

VI

He went away the following week to the North, and remained there for six months. His honor prescribed a considerable term of absence. It compelled him to keep away from her for some time after his return. He told himself that she had the consolation of her gift.

Meanwhile no sign of it had reached him since the day he left her. Julia could give him no news of her; she believed, but was not certain, that Freda was away. When he called in Montagu Street he was told that Miss Farrar had given up her rooms and gone abroad.

He wrote to the address given him, and heard from her by return. She told him that she was very well; that San Remo was very beautiful; that she was sure he would be glad to hear that a small income had been left to her, enough to relieve her from the necessity of writing—she had not, in fact, written a line in the last year—otherwise, of course, he would have heard from her. "It rather looks," she added, "as if poverty had been my inspiration."

In every word he read her desire to spare him.

It had not stayed with her, then? The slender flame had died in her, the sudden spirit had fled. Well, if it had to go, it was better that it should go this way, all at once, rather than that they should have had to acknowledge any falling-off from the delicate perfection of her gift.

Three months later a letter from his friend, Mrs. Dysart, informed him of Freda's death at San Remo early in the spring.

Mrs. Dysart had seen her there. She was now staying with her niece, Julia Nethersole, and desired to see him. She was sure that he would want to hear about their friend.

He remembered Mrs. Dysart as a small, robust, iron-gray woman—sharp-tongued, warm-hearted, terrifically observant. Though childless, she had always struck him as almost savagely maternal. He dreaded the interview, for he had had some vague idea that she had not appreciated Freda. Besides, his connection with Miss Farrar was so public that Mrs. Dysart would have no delicacy in approaching it.

Mrs. Dysart proved more reticent than he had feared. The full flow of her reminiscences began only under pressure.

The news of Miss Farrar's death, she said, came to her as a shock, but hardly as a surprise.

"You were not with her, then?" he said.

"No one was with her."

The words dropped into a terrible silence. A sound broke it, the sound of some uneasy movement made by Julia.

"When did you see her last?" he asked.

"I saw her last driving on the sea front at San Remo. If you could call it seeing her. She was all huddled up in furs and rugs and things. Just a sharp white slip of a face and two eyes gazing at nothing out of the carriage window. She looked as if something had scared her."

And it was of her that he had been afraid!

"Do you know," he said presently, "what she died of?"

"No. It was supposed that, some time or other, she must have had some great shock."

Caldecott shifted his position.

"The doctors said there was no reason why she should have died. She could have lived well enough if she had wanted to. The terrible thing was that she didn't want. If you ask me what she died of I should say she was either scared to death or starved."

"Surely," he said, "surely she had enough?"

"Oh, she had food enough to eat, and clothes enough to cover her, and fire enough to warm her. But she starved."

"What do you suppose," said Julia, "the poor girl wanted?"

"Nothing, my dear, that you would understand."

He was at a loss to account for the asperity of the little lady's tone; but he remembered that Julia had never been a favorite with her aunt.

"I'm convinced," said Mrs. Dysart, "that woman died for want of something. Something that she'd got used to till it was absolutely necessary to her. Something, whatever it was, that had completely satisfied her. When she found herself without it, that, I imagine, constituted the shock. And she wasn't strong enough to stand it, that was all."

Mrs. Dysart spoke to her niece, but he felt that there was something in her, fiery and indignant, that hurled itself across Julia at him.

He changed the subject.

"She — she left nothing?"

"Not a note, not a line."

"Ah, well, what we have is beautiful enough for anybody."

"I wonder if you have any idea what you might have had? If you even knew what it was you had?"

"I never presumed," he said, "to understand her. I've hardly ever known any woman properly but one."

"And knowing one woman — properly or improperly — won't help you to understand another. I never knew there was so much in her."

"She didn't know it herself. She used to say it wasn't in her. It was the most mysterious thing I ever saw."

It was his turn to shelter himself behind Freda's gift. He piled up words, and his mind cowered behind them, thinking no thought, seeing nothing but Freda's dead face with its shut eyes.

"What was it?" he said. "Where did it come from?"

"It came," said Mrs. Dysart, "from somewhere deep down in her heart, a part of her that had only one chance to show itself." She rose and delivered herself of all her fire. "There was something in Freda infinitely greater, infinitely more beautiful, than her gift. It showed itself only once in her life. When it couldn't show itself any more the gift left her. We can't account for it."

He followed her to the door. She pressed his hand as she said good-bye to him, and he saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"I told you," she said, "to do all you could for her. She knew that you had done — all you could."

He bowed his head to her rebuke.

VII

Upstairs Julia was waiting for him. Her pale face turned to him as he came in.

He saw a hunger in it that was not of the soul.

He had never been greatly interested in Julia's soul, and till now her face had told him nothing of it. It had clipped it tight, like the covers of a narrow book. He had never cared to open it. Freda's soul was like an illuminated missal, treasured under transparence; its divine secret flamed, unafraid, in scarlet and gold.

He did not take his seat beside her, but stood off from her, distant and uneasy. She rose and laid her hand upon his arm, and he drew back from her touch.

"Wilton," she said, "you are not going to let this trouble you?"

"What's the good of talking? It won't undo what we did."

"What we did?"

"I, then."

"What else could you do?"

He did not answer, and she murmured, "Or I? I was right. She was in love with you."

He turned on her.

"I wish," he said, "you had never told me."

THE FAULT

I

Gibson used to say that he would never marry, because no other woman could be half as nice as his own mother. Then, of course, he broke his mother's heart by marrying a woman who was not nice at all.

He was a powerful fellow with a plain, square face, and a manner that was perfection to the people whom he liked. Unfortunately they were very few. He did not like any of the ladies whom his mother wanted him to like, not even when they reproduced for him her gentle, delicate distinction.

The younger Mrs. Gibson had none of it. But she had ways with her, and a power that was said to reside supremely in her hands, her arms, and her hair. Especially her hair (she was the large white and golden kind). It was long as a lasso and ample as a cloak. Gibson loved her hair. The sight and the scent of it filled him with folly. He liked to braid and unbraid it, to lay his face against it, to plunge his hands through the coolness into the warmth of it.

It seemed to him to give out the splendor and vitality of her, to have a secret sympathy with the thought that stirred beneath it.

She had a trick, when she was thinking of caressing it, of winding and unwinding the little curls that sprang, aureolewise, above her temples. That was one of her ways, and it brought her hands and arms into play with stupendous effect.

He would sit opposite her a whole evening, watching it, dumb with excess of happiness.

It took him six months to find out that the trick he admired so much was a sign that his wife was bored to extinction.

"Is there anything you want?" he said.

She laughed hysterically.

"You've only to say what you want, and I'll get it for you, if it can be got."

"It could be got all right," said she. "But I doubt whether you'd care very much to get it."

"What is it? Tell me — tell me."

"Well — you're very nice, my dear, I know. But before I married you I used — though you mightn't think it — to be received in society."

He took her back to it. He said he was a selfish brute to want to keep her to himself. That speech amused Mrs. Gibson immensely. She had a curious and capricious sense of humor. It made her very adaptable and tided them both over a sharp season of infelicity.

Hitherto Mrs. Gibson had been merely bored. Now she was seized with a malady of unrest. Any other man but Gibson would have been driven mad with her nerves.

"You're doing too much, you know," he said, soothing her. "You're tired."

She raised her eyebrows.

"Oh, no," she said, "not tired."

He meditated.

"What you want," said he, "is a thorough change."

"My dear," said she, "I didn't know you were so clever."

"Would you like me to take a cottage in the country?"

"A cottage? In the country?"

"Well, of course, not too far from town. Some place where I could run down for the week-ends."

"You couldn't," said she, "be running down oftener?"

"No," he said, "I'm afraid I couldn't just at present."

"Don't you think it might be a trifle lonely?"

"You can have anyone you like to stay with you."

She smiled.

"And you really want to take it? This cottage?"

"Yes."

"Well, then," said she, "take it by all means, and lose no time."

He took it, and went down with her for the first week-end.

It was a tiny place. But some one had built a comfortable smoking-room at the back. It opened by glass doors into the garden.

One Sunday evening they were sitting together in the smoking-room when she flung herself down on the floor beside him and laid her head on his knee. She seized his hand and drew it down to her.

"As you are going to leave me to-morrow," she said, "you can stroke my hair to-night."

He went down every week-end. And every week-end he found an improvement in his wife's health. When he complimented her upon her appearance, she told him she had been gardening. He took it as an excellent sign that she should be fond of gardening.

Then one day Gibson (who worked like ten horses to provide all the things that his wife wanted) got ill and was told to take a month off in the country.

That was in the middle of the week. He saw his doctor early in the evening and took the last train down. The cottage was several miles from the nearest telegraph office, so that he arrived before the wire that should have announced his coming.

A short cut from the station brought him to the back of the house through a little wood that screened it. The wood path led into his garden by a private gate which was always locked.

He climbed the gate and crossed the grass plot to the glass doors of the smoking-room. The lamps were lit there, and Gibson, as he approached, could see his wife sitting in the low chair opposite his. His heart bounded at the sight of her. He was glad to think that she sat in his room when he

was away. He walked quickly over the grass and stood at the glass doors looking in.

She was lying back in the low chair. In his chair, which a curtain had concealed from him until now, there sat a man he knew. He recognized the narrow shoulders and the head with the sleek brown hair, showing a little sallow patch of baldness at the back. From a certain tenseness in the man's attitude he knew that his gaze was fastened on the woman who faced them. Her left arm was raised, its long, loose sleeve fell back and bared it. Her fingers twisted and untwisted a little straying curl.

The man could bear it no longer. He jumped up and went to her. He knelt beside her. With one hand he seized her arm by the full white wrist and dragged it down and held it to his lips. The other hand smoothed back her hair into its place and held it there. His fine, nervous fingers sank through the deep, silky web to the white, sensitive skin. The woman threw back her head and closed her eyes, every nerve throbbing felinely under the caress she loved.

The man rose with an uneasy movement that brought him to the back of her chair. He stooped and whispered something. She flung up her arms and drew down his face to hers under the white arch they made.

Gibson did nothing scandalous. He went round quietly to the front door and let himself in with his latch-key. When he entered the smoking-room he found his wife there alone. She stood on his hearth, and met him with hard eyes, desperate and defiant.

"What have you to say for yourself?" he said.

"Everything," said she. "Of course you will divorce me."

"Will a separation not satisfy you?"

"No," she said, "it will not. If you haven't had proof enough I can give you more. Or you can ask the servants."

He had always given her what she wanted. He gave it her now.

II

Gibson went back to his mother.

The incident left him apparently unscathed. He showed no signs of trouble until four years after, when his mother died. Then the two shocks rolled into one, and for a year Gibson was a wreck.

At last he was told, as he had been told before, to stop work and go away — anywhere — for a rest. He went to a small seaside town in East Devon.

The man's nature was so sound that in a month's time he recovered sufficiently to take an interest in what was going on around him.

He was lodged in one of a row of small houses facing the esplanade. Each had its own plot of green garden spread before it, and a flagged pathway leading from the gate to the door. Path and garden were raised a good half-foot above the level of the sidewalk, and this half-foot, Gibson observed, was a serious embarrassment to his next-door neighbors.

Twice a day a bath-chair with an old gentleman in it would emerge from the doorway of the house next door. It was drawn by two little ladies, a dark one and a fair one, whom Gibson judged to be the old gentleman's daughters. He must have weighed considerably, that old gentleman, and the ladies (especially the dark one) were far too young and small and tender for such draft-work. Four times a day at the garden-gate a struggle took place between little ladies and the bath-chair. Gibson could see them from his window where he lay, supine in his nervous apathy. Their going out was only less fearful than their coming in. Going out, it was very hard to prevent the back wheels from slipping down with a bump on to the pavement and shaking the old gentleman horribly. Coming in, they risked overturning him altogether.

You would not have known that there was any struggle going on. The old gentleman bore himself with so calm and high a heroism; the little ladies were sustained by so pure a sense of the humors of the bath-chair. No sharp, irritating cries escaped them. They did nothing but laugh softly as

they pulled and pushed and tugged with their women's arms, and heaved with delicate shoulders, or hung on, in their frenzy, from behind while the bath-chair swayed ponderously and perilously above the footway.

Gibson sometimes wondered whether he oughtn't to rush out and help them. But he couldn't. He didn't really care.

His landlady told him that the old gentleman was a General Richardson, that he was paralyzed, that his daughters waited on him hand and foot, that they were too poor to afford a man-servant to look after him and push the bath-chair. It wasn't much of a life, the woman said, for the two young ladies. Gibson agreed that it wasn't much of a life, certainly.

What pleased him was the fine levity with which they took it. He was always meeting them in their walks on the esplanade. Sometimes they would come racing down the wind with the bath-chair, their serge skirts blown forward, their hair curling over the brims of their sailor hats. (The dark one was particularly attractive in a high wind.) Then they would come back much impeded, their skirts wrapped tight above their knees, their little bodies bent to the storm, their faces wearing still that invincible gaiety of theirs. Sometimes, on a gentle incline, they would let the bath-chair run on a little by itself, till it threatened a dangerous independence, when they would fly after it at the top of their speed and arrest it just in time. Gibson could never make out whether they did this for their own amusement or the old gentleman's. But sometimes, when the General came careering past him, he could catch the glance of a bright and affable eye that seemed to call on him to observe the extent to which an old fellow might enjoy himself yet.

Gibson's lodging gave him endless opportunity for studying the habits of his little ladies. He learned that they did everything in turns. They took it in turns to pull the bath-chair and to push it. They took it in turns to read aloud to the old gentleman, and to put him to bed at night and get him up in the morning. They took it in turns to go to church (did they become

suddenly serious, he wondered, there?), and in turns to air themselves on a certain little plateau on the cliffside.

He was next to find out that they nursed the monstrous ambition of urging the bath-chair up the hill and landing it on the plateau. Gibson was sorry for them, for he knew they could never do it. But such was their determination that each time he encountered them on the hill they had struggled a little farther up it.

The road had a sort of hump in it just before it forked off on to the cliff. That baffled them.

At last, as he himself was returning from the plateau, he came upon the sisters right in the middle of the rise, locked in deadly combat with the bath-chair. Pressed against it, shoulder to shoulder, they resisted its efforts to hurl itself violently backward down the hill. The General, as he clung to the arms of the chair, preserved his attitude of superb indifference to the event.

Gibson leaped to their assistance. With a threefold prodigious effort they topped the rise, and in silence, in a sort of solemn triumph, the bath-chair was wheeled on to the plateau.

He liked the simplicity with which they accepted his aid, and he liked the way they thanked him, both sisters becoming very grave all at once. It was the fair one who spoke. The dark one only bowed and smiled as he lifted his cap and turned away.

"It's all very well," he heard her saying, "but how are we going to get him down again?"

How were they?

He hung about the cliffside till the time came for them to return, when he presented himself as if by accident.

"You must allow me," he said, "to see you safe to the bottom of the hill."

They allowed him.

"You see" (the General addressed his daughters as they paused halfway), "we've accomplished it, and no bones are broken."

"Yes," said Gibson, "but isn't the expedition just a little dangerous?"

"Ah," said the General, "I've risked my life too many times to mind a little danger now."

Gibson's eyebrows said plainly, "It wasn't your life, old boy, I was thinking of."

The sisters looked away.

"You must never attempt that again," he said gravely, as he parted from them at the foot of the hill.

Gibson felt that he had done a good morning's work. He had saved the lives of the three Richardsons, and he had found out that the fair one's name was Effie, and the dark one's Phœbe.

After that the acquaintance ripened. They exchanged salutes whenever they met. Then Gibson, moved beyond endurance by their daily strife with the bath-chair, was generally to be seen at their gateway in time to help them.

As the days grew longer the Richardsons began to take their tea out of doors on their grass-plot. And then it seemed to strike them all at once that the gentleman next door was lonely, and one afternoon they invited him to tea.

Then Gibson had his tea served on his grass plot, and invited the Richardsons, and the Richardsons (they were so absurdly grateful) invited him to supper and to spend the evening. They thanked him for coming. "It was such a pleasure," Effie said (Effie was the elder), "such a great pleasure to Father."

Gibson hardly thought his society could be a pleasure to anyone, but he tried to make himself useful. He engaged himself as the General's bath-

chair man. He bowled him along at the round pace he loved, while the little ladies, Effie and Phœbe, trotted after them, friendly and gay.

And he began to go in and out next door as a matter of course, till it was open to the little sisters to regard him as their own very valuable property. But they were not going to be selfish about him. Oh, no! They took him, as they took everything else, in turns. They tried hard to divide him fairly. If he attached himself to Effie (the fair one), Effie would grow uneasy, and she would get up and positively hand him over to Phœbe (the dark one). If Phœbe permitted herself to talk to him for any while, her eyes would call to Effie, and when Effie came she would slip away and take up her sad place by the General's armchair. In their innocent rivalry it was who could give him more up to the other. And, as Phœbe was the more determined little person, it was Phœbe who generally had it her own way. "Father," too, came in for his just share. Gibson felt that he would not be tolerated on any footing that kept "Father" out of it. There was also a moment in the evening when he would be led up to the armchair, and both Effie and Phœbe would withdraw and leave him to that communion.

There was a third sister he knew now. She was the eldest, and her name was Mary. She was away somewhere in the north, recovering, he gathered, from "Father" (of course, they took it in turns to recover from him), while Father wandered up and down the south coast, endeavoring, vainly, to recover from himself. They told Gibson that the one thing that spoiled it all (the joy, they meant, of their intercourse with him) was the thought that Mary was "missing it." Had Mary been there she would have had to have her share, her fourth.

Presently he realized that Phœbe (he supposed because of her superior determination) had effaced herself altogether. She was always doing dreary things, he noticed, out of her turn. Then he perceived a change in her. Little Phœbe, in consequence of all the dreary things she did, was beginning to grow thin and pale. She looked as though she wanted more of the tonic air of the cliffside. She did still take her turn at climbing to the

plateau and sitting there all alone. But that, Gibson reflected, was after all, for Phœbe, a very dreary thing to do.

One evening he took courage, and asked Phœbe to come for a walk to the cliffside with him.

Phœbe did not answer all at once. She shrank, he could see, from the enormity of having him all to herself.

"Go," said Effie, "it will do you worlds of good."

"You go."

Effie laughed and shook her head.

"Come too, then. Mr. Gibson, say she's to come too."

"You know," said Effie, "it's my turn to stay with Father."

She said it severely, as if Phœbe had been trying unfairly to deprive her of a privilege and a delight. They were delicious, Phœbe and Effie, but it was Phœbe that he wanted this time.

They set out at a brisk pace that brought the blood to Phœbe's cheeks and made her prettier than ever. Phœbe, of course, had done her best to make her prettiness entirely unobtrusive. She wore a muslin skirt and a tie, and a sailor hat that was not specially becoming to her small head, and her serge skirt had to be both wide and short because of pushing the bath-chair about through all kinds of weather. But the sea wind caught her; it played with her hair; it blew a little dark curl out of place to hang distractingly over Phœbe's left ear; it blew the serge skirt tight about her limbs, and showed him, in spite of Phœbe, how prettily Phœbe was made.

"Why didn't you back me up?" said Phœbe. "She wanted to come all the time."

He turned, as he walked, to look at her.

"Why didn't I back you up? Do you really want to know why?"

Whenever he took that tone Phœbe looked solemn and a little frightened. She was frightened now, too frightened to answer him.

"Because," said he, "I wanted you all to myself."

"Oh — —" Phœbe drew a long, terrified breath.

There are many ways of saying "Oh," but Gibson had never, never in his whole life heard any woman say it as Phœbe said it then. It meant that she was staggered at anybody's having the temerity to want anything all to himself.

"Do you think me very selfish?"

Phœbe assured him instantly that that had never been her idea of him.

"Shall I tell you who is selfish?"

Phœbe's little mouth hardened. She was so dreadfully afraid that he was going to say "Your father."

"You," he said, "you."

"I'm afraid I am," said she. "It's so hard not to be."

He stood still in his astonishment, so that she had to stand still, too.

"Of course it's hard not to give up things, when you like giving them up. But your sister likes giving them up, too, and it's selfish of you to prevent her, isn't it?"

"Oh, but you don't know what it's been — Effie's life and Mary's."

"And yours — —"

"Oh, no, I'm happy enough. I'm the youngest."

"You mean you've had a year or two less of it."

"Yes. They never told me, for fear of making me unhappy, when Father's illness came."

"How long ago was that?"

"Five years ago. I was at school."

He made a brief calculation. During the two years of his married life Phœbe had been a child at school.

"And two years," said Phœbe, "is a long time to be happy in."

"Yes," he said, "it's a long time."

"And then," she went on presently, "I'm so much stronger than Effie and Mary."

"Not strong enough to go dragging that abominable bath-chair about."

"Not strong enough? Look — —"

She held out her right arm for him to look at; under her muslin blouse he saw its tense roundness, and its whiteness through the slit above her wrist.

His heart stirred in him. Phœbe's arms were beautiful, and they were strong to help.

"I wish," he said, "I could make it better for you."

"Oh, but you have made it better for us. You can't think what a difference you've made."

"Have I? Have I?"

"Yes. Effie said so only the other day. She wrote it to Mary. And Mary says it's a shame she can't be here. It is, you know. It makes us feel so mean having you all to ourselves like this."

He laughed. He laughed whenever he thought of it. There was nobody who could say things as Phœbe said them.

"I wish," said she, "you knew Mary. You'd like her so."

"I'm sure I should if she's at all like you."

(Her innocence sheltered him, made him bold.)

"Oh, but she isn't."

And he listened while she gave him a long list of Mary's charms. (Dear little, tender, unconscious Phœbe.)

"She sounds," he said, "very like you."

"She isn't the least bit like me. You don't know me."

"Don't I?"

"Mary's coming back at the end of the month. Then either I or Effie will go away. Do you think you'll still be here?"

He seemed to her to answer absently.

"Which of you, did you say, was going away?"

"Well — it's Effie's turn."

"Yes," he said, "I think I shall still be here."

One night, a week later, the two sisters sat talking together long after "Father" had been put to bed.

"Phœbe," said Effie, "why did you want me to come with you and Mr. Gibson?"

"Because — —" said Phœbe.

"My dear, it's you he likes, not me."

"Don't, Effie."

"But it's true," said Effie.

"How can you tell?" said Phœbe, and she felt perfidious.

"Isn't he always going about with you?"

But Phœbe was ingenious in the destruction of her own joy.

"Oh," said she, "that's his cunning. He likes you dreadfully. He goes about with me, just to hide it."

"You goose."

"Are you sure, Effie, you don't care?"

"Not a rap."

"You never have? Not in the beginning?"

"Certainly not in the beginning. I only thought he might be nice for you."

"You didn't even want to divide him?"

Effie shook her head vehemently.

"Well — he's the only thing I ever wanted all to myself. If — — " Then Phœbe looked frightened. "Effie," she said, "he's never said anything."

"All the same, you know."

"Can you know?"

"I think so," said Effie.

III

Gibson had been talking a long time to Phœbe. They were sitting together on the beach, under the shadow of the cliff. He was trying to form Phœbe's mind. Phœbe's mind was deliciously young, and it had the hunger and thirst of youth. A little shy and difficult to approach, Phœbe's mind, but he had found out what it liked best, and it pleased him to see how confidingly and delicately it, so to speak, ate out of his hand.

He puzzled her a good deal. And she had a very pretty way of closing her eyes when she was puzzled. In another woman it would have meant that he was boring her; Phœbe did it to shut out the intolerable light of knowledge.

"Ah! — don't," he cried.

"Don't shut my eyes? I always shut my eyes when I'm trying to think," said Phœbe.

He said nothing. That was not what he had meant when he had said "Don't."

"Am I boring you?" he said presently. His tone jarred a little on Phœbe; he had such a nice voice generally.

"No," said she. "Why?"

"Because you keep on doing that."

"Doing what?"

"That."

"Oh! — this?"

She put up her hand and untwisted the little tendril of brown hair that hung deliciously over her left ear.

"I always do that when I'm thinking."

He very nearly said, "Then, for God's sake, don't think."

But Phœbe was always thinking now. He had given her cause to think.

He began to hate the little brown curl that hung over her left ear, though it was anguish to him to hate anything that was Phœbe's. He looked out with nervous anxiety for the movement of her little white hand. He said to himself, "If she does it again, I can't come near her any more."

Yet he kept on coming; and was happy with her until Phœbe (poor, predestined little Phœbe) did it again. Gibson shuddered with the horror of the thing. He kept on saying to himself, "She's sweet, she's good, she's adorable. It isn't her fault. But I can't — I can't sit in the room with it."

And the next minute Phœbe would be so adorable that he would repent miserably of his brutality.

Then, one hot, still evening, he was alone with her in the little sitting-room. Outside, on the grass plot, her father sat in his bath-chair while Effie read aloud to him (out of her turn). Her voice made a cover for Gibson's voice and Phœbe's.

Phœbe was dressed (for the heat) in a white gown with wide, open sleeves. Her low collar showed the pure, soft swell of her neck to the shoulder-line.

She was sitting upright and demure in a straight-backed chair, with her hands folded quietly in her lap.

"That isn't a very comfortable chair you've got," he said.

He knew that she was tired with pushing the bath-chair about all day.

"It's the one I always sit in," said Phœbe.

"Well, you're not going to sit in it now," he said.

He drew the armchair out of its sacred corner and made her sit in that. He put a cushion at her head and a footstool at her feet.

"You make my heart ache," he said.

"Do I?"

He could not tell whether the little shaking breath she drew were a laugh or a sigh.

She lay back, letting her tired body slacken into rest.

The movement loosened the little combs that kept the coil of her brown hair in place. Phœbe abhorred dishevelment. She put up her hands to her head. Her wide sleeve fell back, showing the full length of her white arms.

He saw another woman stretching her arms to the man who leaned above her. He saw the movement of her hands—hands of the same texture and whiteness as her body, instinct with its impulses. A long procession of abominations passed through the white arch of her arms—the arch she raised in triumph and defiance, immortalizing her sin.

He was very tender with Phœbe that night, for his heart was wrung with compunction.

"She's adorable," he said to himself; "but I can't live with that."

Gibson left by the early train next day. He went without saying good-bye and without leaving an explanation or an address.

Phœbe held her head high, and said, day after day, "There's sure to be a letter."

Three weeks passed and no letter came. Phœbe saw that it was all over.

One day she was found (Effie found her) on her bed, crying. She was so weak she let Effie take her in her arms.

"If I only knew what I had done," she said. "Oh, Effie! what could have made him go away?"

"I can't tell, my lamb. You mustn't think about him any more."

"I can't help thinking. You see, it's not as if he hadn't been so nice."

"He couldn't have been nice to treat you that way."

"He didn't," said Phoebe fiercely. "He didn't treat me any way. I sometimes think I must have made it all up out of my own head. Did I?"

"No, no. I'm sure you didn't."

"It would have been awful of me. But I'd rather be awful than have to think that he was. What is my worst fault, Effie?"

"Your worst fault, in his eyes, is that you have none."

Phoebe sat up on the edge of the bed. She was thinking hard. And as she thought her hand went up, caressing unconsciously the little brown curl.

"If I only knew," said she, "what I had done!"

Gibson never saw Phoebe Richardson again. But a year later, as he turned suddenly on to the esplanade of a strange watering-place, he encountered the bath-chair, drawn by Effie and another lady. He made way, lifting his cap mechanically to its occupant.

The General looked at him. The courteous old hand checked itself in the salute. The affable smile died grimly.

Effie turned away her head. The other lady (it must have been "Mary") raised her eyes in somber curiosity.

Phoebe was not with them. Gibson supposed that she was away somewhere, recovering, in her turn.

WILKINSON'S WIFE

I

Nobody ever understood why he married her.

You expected calamity to pursue Wilkinson—it always had pursued him—; but that Wilkinson should have gone out of his way to pursue calamity (as if he could never have enough of it) really seemed a most unnecessary thing.

For there had been no pursuit on the part of the lady. Wilkinson's wife had the quality of her defects, and revealed herself chiefly in a formidable reluctance. It was understood that Wilkinson had prevailed only after an austere struggle. Her appearance sufficiently refuted any theory of unholy fascination or disastrous charm.

Wilkinson's wife was not at all nice to look at. She had an insignificant figure, a small, square face, colorless hair scraped with difficulty to the top of her head, eyes with no lashes to protect you from their stare, a mouth that pulled at an invisible curb, a sallow skin stretched so tight over her cheek-bones that the red veins stood stagnant there; and with it all, poor lady, a dull, strained expression hostile to further intimacy.

Even in her youth she never could have looked young, and she was years older than Wilkinson. Not that the difference showed, for his marriage had made Wilkinson look years older than he was; at least, so it was said by people who had known him before that unfortunate event.

It was not even as if she had been intelligent. Wilkinson had a gentle passion for the things of intellect; his wife seemed to exist on purpose to frustrate it. In no department of his life was her influence so penetrating and malign. At forty he no longer counted; he had lost all his brilliance, and had replaced it by a shy, unworldly charm. There was something in Wilkinson that dreamed or slept, with one eye open, fixed upon his wife. Of course, he had his blessed hours of deliverance from the woman. Sometimes he would fly in her face and ask people to dine at his house in

Hampstead, to discuss Roman remains, or the Troubadours, or Nietzsche. He never could understand why his wife couldn't "enter," as he expressed it, into these subjects. He smiled at you in the dimmest, saddest way when he referred to it. "It's extraordinary," he would say, "the little interest she takes in Nietzsche."

Mrs. Norman found him once wandering in the High Street, with his passion full on him. He was a little absent, a little flushed; his eyes shone behind his spectacles; and there were pleasant creases in his queer, clean-shaven face.

She inquired the cause of his delight.

"I've got a man coming to dine this evening, to have a little talk with me. He knows all about the Troubadours."

And Wilkinson would try and make you believe that they had threshed out the Troubadours between them. But when Mrs. Norman, who was a little curious about Wilkinson, asked the Troubadour man what they had talked about, he smiled and said it was something—some extraordinary adventure—that had happened to Wilkinson's wife.

People always smiled when they spoke of her. Then, one by one, they left off dining with Wilkinson. The man who read Nietzsche was quite rude about it. He said he wasn't going there to be gagged by that woman. He would have been glad enough to ask Wilkinson to dine with him if he would go without his wife.

If it had not been for Mrs. Norman the Wilkinsons would have vanished from the social scene. Mrs. Norman had taken Wilkinson up, and it was evident that she did not mean to let him go. That, she would have told you with engaging emphasis, was not her way. She had seen how things were going, socially, with Wilkinson, and she was bent on his deliverance.

If anybody could have carried it through, it would have been Mrs. Norman. She was clever; she was charming; she had a house in Fitzjohn's Avenue, where she entertained intimately. At forty she had preserved the

best part of her youth and prettiness, and an income insufficient for Mr. Norman, but enough for her. As she said in her rather dubious pathos, she had nobody but herself to please now.

You gathered that if Mr. Norman had been living he would not have been pleased with her cultivation of the Wilkinsons. She was always asking them to dinner. They turned up punctually at her delightful Friday evenings (her little evenings) from nine to eleven. They dropped in to tea on Sunday afternoons. Mrs. Norman had a wonderful way of drawing Wilkinson out; while Evey, her unmarried sister, made prodigious efforts to draw Wilkinson's wife in. "If you could only make her," said Mrs. Norman, "take an interest in something."

But Evey couldn't make her take an interest in anything. Evey had no sympathy with her sister's missionary adventure. She saw what Mrs. Norman wouldn't see—that, if they forced Mrs. Wilkinson on people who were trying to keep away from her, people would simply keep away from them. Their Fridays were not so well attended, so delightful, as they had been. A heavy cloud of dulness seemed to come into the room, with Mrs. Wilkinson, at nine o'clock. It hung about her chair, and spread slowly, till everybody was wrapped in it.

Then Evey protested. She wanted to know why Cornelia allowed their evenings to be blighted thus. "Why ask Mrs. Wilkinson?"

"I wouldn't," said Cornelia, "if there was any other way of getting him."

"Well," said Evey, "he's nice enough, but it's rather a large price to have to pay."

"And is he," cried Cornelia passionately, "to be cut off from everything because of that one terrible mistake?"

Evey said nothing. If Cornelia were going to take him that way, there was nothing to be said!

So Mrs. Norman went on drawing Wilkinson out more and more, till one Sunday afternoon, sitting beside her on the sofa, he emerged positively splendid. There were moments when he forgot about his wife.

They had been talking together about his blessed Troubadours. (It was wonderful the interest Mrs. Norman took in them!) Suddenly his gentleness and sadness fell from him, a flame sprang up behind his spectacles, and the something that slept or dreamed in Wilkinson awoke. He was away with Mrs. Norman in a lovely land, in Provence of the thirteenth century. A strange chant broke from him; it startled Evey, where she sat at the other end of the room. He was reciting his own translation of a love-song of Provence.

At the first words of the refrain his wife, who had never ceased staring at him, got up and came across the room. She touched his shoulder just as he was going to say "Ma mie."

"Come, Peter," she said, "it's time to be going home."

Wilkinson rose on his long legs. "Ma mie," he said, looking down at her; and the flaming dream was still in his eyes behind his spectacles.

He took the little cloak she held out to him, a pitiful and rather vulgar thing. He raised it with the air of a courtier handling a royal robe; then he put it on her, smoothing it tenderly about her shoulders.

Mrs. Norman followed them to the porch. As he turned to her on the step, she saw that his eyes were sad, and that his face, as she put it, had gone to sleep again.

When she came back to her sister, her own eyes shone and her face was rosy.

"Oh, Evey," she said, "isn't it beautiful?"

"Isn't what beautiful?"

"Mr. Wilkinson's behavior to his wife."

II

It was not an easy problem that Mrs. Norman faced. She wished to save Wilkinson; she also wished to save the character of her Fridays, which Wilkinson's wife had already done her best to destroy. Mrs. Norman could not think why the woman came, since she didn't enjoy herself, since she was impenetrable to the intimate, peculiar charm. You could only suppose that her object was to prevent its penetrating Wilkinson, to keep the other women off. Her eyes never left him.

It was all very well for Evey to talk. She might, of course, have been wiser in the beginning. She might have confined the creature to their big monthly crushes, where, as Evey had suggested, she would easily have been mislaid and lost. But so, unfortunately, would Wilkinson; and the whole point was how not to lose him.

Evey said she was tired of being told off to entertain Mrs. Wilkinson. She was beginning to be rather disagreeable about it. She said Cornelia was getting to care too much about that Wilkinson man. She wouldn't have minded playing up to her if she had approved of the game; but Mrs. Wilkinson was, after all, you know, Mr. Wilkinson's wife.

Mrs. Norman cried a little. She told Evey she ought to have known it was his spirit that she cared about. But she owned that it wasn't right to sacrifice poor Evey. Neither, since he had a wife, was it altogether right for her to care about Wilkinson's spirit to the exclusion of her other friends.

Then, one Friday, Mrs. Norman, relieving her sister for once, made a discovery while Evey, who was a fine musician, played. Mrs. Wilkinson did, after all, take an interest in something; she was accessible to the throbbing of Evey's bow across the strings.

She had started; her eyes had turned from Wilkinson and fastened on the player. There was a light in them, beautiful and piercing, as if her soul had suddenly been released from some hiding-place in its unlovely house. Her

face softened, her mouth relaxed, her eyes closed. She lay back in her chair, at peace, withdrawn from them, positively lost.

Mrs. Norman slipped across the room to the corner where Wilkinson sat alone. His face lightened as she came.

"It's extraordinary," he said, "her love of music."

Mrs. Norman assented. It was extraordinary, if you came to think of it. Mrs. Wilkinson had no understanding of the art. What did it mean to her? Where did it take her? You could see she was transported, presumably to some place of chartered stupidity, of condoned oblivion, where nobody could challenge her right to enter and remain.

"So soothing," said Wilkinson, "to the nerves."

Mrs. Norman smiled at him. She felt that, under cover of the music, his spirit was seeking communion with hers.

He thanked her at parting; the slight hush and mystery of his manner intimated that she had found a way.

"I hope," she said, "you'll come often – often."

"May we? May we?" He seemed to leap at it – as if they hadn't come often enough before!

Certainly she had found the way – the way to deliver him, the way to pacify his wife, to remove her gently to her place and keep her there.

The dreadful lady thus creditably disposed of, Wilkinson was no longer backward in the courting of his opportunity. He proved punctual to the first minute of the golden hour.

Hampstead was immensely interested in his blossoming forth. It found a touching simplicity in the way he lent himself to the sympathetic eye. All the world was at liberty to observe his intimacy with Mrs. Norman.

It endured for nine weeks. Then suddenly, to Mrs. Norman's bewilderment, it ceased. The Wilkinsons left off coming to her Friday

evenings. They refused her invitations. Their behavior was so abrupt and so mysterious that Mrs. Norman felt that something must have happened to account for it. Somebody, she had no doubt, had been talking. She was much annoyed with Wilkinson in consequence, and, when she met him accidentally in the High Street, her manner conveyed to him her just resentment.

He called in Fitzjohn's Avenue the next Sunday. For the first time he was without his wife.

He was so downcast, and so penitent, and so ashamed of himself that Mrs. Norman met him halfway with a little rush of affection.

"Why have you not been to see us all this time?" she said.

He looked at her unsteadily; his whole manner betrayed an extreme embarrassment.

"I've come," he said, "on purpose to explain. You mustn't think I don't appreciate your kindness, but the fact is my poor wife" — (She knew that woman was at the bottom of it!) — "is no longer — up to it."

"What is the wretch up to, I should like to know?" thought Mrs. Norman.

He held her with his melancholy, unsteady eyes. He seemed to be endeavoring to approach a subject intimately and yet abstrusely painful.

"She finds the music—just at present—a little too much for her; the vibrations, you know. It's extraordinary how they affect her. She feels them—most unpleasantly—just here." Wilkinson laid two delicate fingers on the middle buttons of his waistcoat.

Mrs. Norman was very kind to him. He was not very expert, poor fellow, in the fabrication of excuses. His look seemed to implore her pardon for the shifts he had been driven to; it appealed to her to help him out, to stand by him in his unspeakable situation.

"I see," she said.

He smiled, in charming gratitude to her for seeing it.

That smile raised the devil in her. Why, after all, should she help him out?

"And are you susceptible to music—in the same unpleasant way?"

"Me? Oh, no—no. I like it; it gives me the very greatest pleasure." He stared at her in bewilderment and distress.

"Then why," said Mrs. Norman sweetly, "if it gives you pleasure, should you cut yourself off from it?"

"My dear Mrs. Norman, we have to cut ourselves off from a great many things—that give us pleasure. It can't be helped."

She meditated. "Would it be any good," she said, "if I were to call on Mrs. Wilkinson?"

Wilkinson looked grave. "It is most kind of you, but—just at present—I think it might be wiser not. She really, you know, isn't very fit."

Mrs. Norman's silence neither accepted nor rejected the preposterous pretext. Wilkinson went on, helping himself out as best he could:

"I can't talk about it; but I thought I ought to let you know. We've just got to give everything up."

She held herself in. A terrible impulse was upon her to tell him straight out that she did not see it; that it was too bad; that there was no reason why she should be called upon to give everything up.

"So, if we don't come," he said, "you'll understand? It's better—it really is better not."

His voice moved her, and her heart cried to him, "Poor Peter!"

"Yes," she said; "I understand."

Of course she understood. Poor Peter! so it had come to that?

"Can't you stay for tea?" she said.

"No; I must be going back to her."

He rose. His hand found hers. Its slight pressure told her that he gave and took the sadness of renunciation.

That winter Mrs. Wilkinson fell ill in good earnest, and Wilkinson became the prey of a pitiful remorse that kept him a prisoner by his wife's bedside.

He had always been a good man; it was now understood that he avoided Mrs. Norman because he desired to remain what he had always been.

III

There was also an understanding, consecrated by the piety of their renunciation, that Wilkinson was only waiting for his wife's death to marry Mrs. Norman.

And Wilkinson's wife was a long time in dying. It was not to be supposed that she would die quickly, as long as she could interfere with his happiness by living.

With her genius for frustrating and tormenting, she kept the poor man on tenter-hooks with perpetual relapses and recoveries. She jerked him on the chain. He was always a prisoner on the verge of his release. She was at death's door in March. In April she was to be seen, convalescent, in a bath-chair, being wheeled slowly up and down the Spaniard's Road. And Wilkinson walked by the chair, his shoulders bent, his eyes fixed on the ground, his face set in an expression of illimitable patience.

In the summer she gave it up and died; and in the following spring Wilkinson resumed his converse with Mrs. Norman. All things considered, he had left a decent interval.

By autumn Mrs. Norman's friends were all on tiptoe and craning their necks with expectation. It was assumed among them that Wilkinson would propose to her the following summer, when the first year of his widowhood should be ended. When summer came there was nothing between them that anybody could see. But it by no means followed that there was nothing to be seen. Mrs. Norman seemed perfectly sure of him. In her intense sympathy for Wilkinson she knew how to account for all his

hesitations and delays. She could not look for any passionate, decisive step from the broken creature he had become; she was prepared to accept him as he was, with all his humiliating fears and waverings. The tragic things his wife had done to him could not be undone in a day.

Another year divided Wilkinson from his tragedy, and still he stood trembling weakly on the verge. Mrs. Norman began to grow thin. She lost her bright air of defiance, and showed herself vulnerable by the hand of time. And nothing, positively nothing, stood between them, except Wilkinson's morbid diffidence. So absurdly manifest was their case that somebody (the Troubadour man, in fact) interposed discreetly. In the most delicate manner possible, he gave Wilkinson to understand that he would not necessarily make himself obnoxious to Mrs. Norman were he to approach her with—well, with a view to securing their joint happiness—happiness which they had both earned by their admirable behavior.

That was all that was needed: a tactful friend of both parties to put it to Wilkinson simply and in the right way. Wilkinson rose from his abasement. There was a light in his eye that rejoiced the tactful friend; his face had a look of sudden, virile determination.

"I will go to her," he said, "now."

It was a dark, unpleasant evening, full of cold and sleet.

Wilkinson thrust his arms into an overcoat, jammed a cap down on his forehead, and strode into the weather. He strode into Mrs. Norman's drawing-room.

When Mrs. Norman saw that look on his face she knew that it was all right. Her youth rose in her again to meet it.

"Forgive me," said Wilkinson. "I had to come."

"Why not?" she said.

"It's so late."

"Not too late for me."

He sat down, still with his air of determination, in the chair she indicated. He waved away, with unconcealed impatience, the trivialities she used to soften the violence of his invasion.

"I've come," he said, "because I've had something on my mind. It strikes me that I've never really thanked you."

"Thanked me?"

"For your great kindness to my wife."

Mrs. Norman looked away.

"I shall always be grateful to you," said Wilkinson. "You were very good to her."

"Oh, no, no," she moaned.

"I assure you," he insisted, "she felt it very much. I thought you would like to know that."

"Oh, yes." Mrs. Norman's voice went very low with the sinking of her heart.

"She used to say you did more for her—you and your sister, with her beautiful music—than all the doctors. You found the thing that eased her. I suppose you knew how ill she was—all the time? I mean before her last illness."

"I don't think," said she, "I did know."

His face, which had grown grave, brightened. "No? Well, you see, she was so plucky. Nobody could have known; I didn't always realize it myself."

Then he told her that for five years his wife had suffered from a nervous malady that made her subject to strange excitements and depressions.

"We fought it," he said, "together. Through it all, even on her worst days, she was always the same to me."

He sank deeper into memory.

"Nobody knows what she was to me. She wasn't one much for society. She went into it" (his manner implied that she had adorned it) "to please me, because I thought it might do her good. It was one of the things we tried."

Mrs. Norman stared at him. She stared through him and beyond him, and saw a strange man. She listened to a strange voice that sounded far off, from somewhere beyond forgetfulness.

"There were times," she heard him saying, "when we could not go out or see anyone. All we wanted was to be alone together. We could sit, she and I, a whole evening without saying a word. We each knew what the other wanted to say without saying it. I was always sure of her; she understood me as nobody else ever can." He paused. "All that's gone."

"Oh, no," Mrs. Norman said, "it isn't."

"It is." He illuminated himself with a faint flame of passion.

"Don't say that, when you have friends who understand."

"They don't. They can't. And," said Wilkinson, "I don't want them to."

Mrs. Norman sat silent, as in the presence of something sacred and supreme.

She confessed afterward that what had attracted her to Peter Wilkinson was his tremendous capacity for devotion. Only (this she did not confess) she never dreamed that it had been given to his wife.

MISS TARRANT'S TEMPERAMENT

I

She had arrived.

Fanny Brocklebank, as she passed the library, had thought it worth while to look in upon Straker with the news.

Straker could not help suspecting his hostess of an iniquitous desire to see how he would take it. Or perhaps she may have meant, in her exquisite benevolence, to prepare him. Balanced on the arm of the opposite chair, the humor of her candid eyes chastened by what he took to be a remorseful pity, she had the air of preparing him for something.

Yes. She had arrived. She was upstairs, over his very head — resting.

Straker screwed up his eyes. Only by a prodigious effort could he see Miss Tarrant resting. He had always thought of her as an unwinking, untiring splendor, an imperishable fascination; he had shrunk from inquiring by what mortal process she renewed her formidable flame.

By a gesture of shoulders and of eyebrows Fanny conveyed that, whatever he thought of Philippa Tarrant, she was more so than ever. She — she was simply stupendous. It was Fanny's word. He would see. She would appear at teatime. If he was on the terrace by five he would see something worth seeing. It was now a quarter to.

He gathered that Fanny had only looked in to tell him that he mustn't miss it.

Not for worlds would he have missed it. But the clock had struck five, and Straker was still lingering in the library over the correspondence that will pursue a rising barrister in his flight to the country. He wasn't in a hurry. He knew that Miss Tarrant would wait for her moment, and he waited too.

A smile of acclamation greeted his dilatory entrance on the terrace. He was assured that, though late, he was still in time. He knew it. She would not appear until the last guest had settled peaceably into his place, until the

scene was clear for her stunning, her invincible effect. Then, in some moment of pause, of expectancy — —

Odd that Straker, who was so used to it, who knew so well how she would do it, should feel so fresh an interest in seeing her do it again. It was almost as if he trembled for her and waited, wondering whether, this time, she would fail of her effect, whether he would ever live to see her disconcerted.

Disconcerting things had happened before now at the Brocklebanks', things incongruous with the ancient peace, the dignity, the grand style of Amberley. It was owing to the outrageous carelessness with which Fanny Brocklebank mixed her house parties. She delighted in daring combinations and startling contrasts. Straker was not at all sure that he himself had not been chosen as an element in a daring combination. Fanny could hardly have forgotten that, two years ago, he had been an adorer (not altogether prostrate) of Miss Tarrant, and he had given her no grounds for supposing that he had changed his attitude. In the absence of authentic information Fanny could only suppose that he had been dished, regularly dished, first by young Reggy Lawson and then by Mr. Higginson. It was for Mr. Higginson that Philippa was coming to Amberley — this year; last year it had been for Reggy Lawson; the year before that it had been for him, Straker. And Fanny did not scruple to ask them all three to meet one another. That was her way. Some day she would carry it too far. Straker, making his dilatory entrance, became aware of the distance to which his hostess had carried it already. It had time to grow on him, from wonder to the extreme of certainty, in his passage down the terrace to the southwest corner. There, on the outskirts of the group, brilliantly and conspicuously disposed, in postures of intimate communion, were young Laurence Furnival and Mrs. Viveash. Straker knew and Fanny knew, nobody indeed knew better than Fanny, that those two ought never to have been asked together. In strict propriety they ought not to have been at Amberley at all. Nobody but Fanny would have dreamed of asking them, still less of combining them with old Lady Paignton, who was propriety itself. And

there was Miss Probyn. Why Miss Probyn? What on earth did dear Fanny imagine that she could do with Mary Probyn—or for her, if it came to that? In Straker's experience of Fanny it generally did come to that—to her doing things for people. He was aware, most acutely aware at this moment, of what, two years ago, she would have done for him. He had an idea that even now, at this hour, she was giving him his chance with Philippa. There would no doubt be competition; there always had been, always would be competition; but her charming eyes seemed to assure him that he should have his chance.

They called him to her side, where, with a movement of protection that was not lost on him, she had made a place for him apart. She begged him just to look at young Reggy Lawson, who sat in agony, sustaining a ponderous topic with Miss Probyn. He remembered Reggy? Her half-remorseful smile implied that he had good cause to remember him. He did. He was sorry for young Reggy, and hoped that he found consolation in the thought that Mr. Higginson was no longer young.

He remarked that Reggy was looking uncommonly fit. "So," he added irrelevantly, "is Mrs. Viveash. Don't you think?"

Fanny Brocklebank looked at Mrs. Viveash. It was obvious that she was giving her her chance, and that Mrs. Viveash was making the very most of it. She was leaning forward now, with her face thrust out toward Furnival; and on her face and on her mouth and in her eyes there burned visibly, flagrantly, the ungovernable, inextinguishable flame. As for the young man, while his eyes covered and caressed her, the tilt of his body, of his head, of his smile, and all his features expressed the insolence of possession. He was sure of her; he was sure of himself; he was sure of many things. He, at any rate, would never be disconcerted. Whatever happened he was safe. But she—there were things that, if one thing happened, she would have to face; and as she sat there, wrapped in her flame, she seemed to face them, to fling herself on the front of danger. You

could see she was ready to take any risks, to pay any price for the chance that Fanny was giving her.

It really was too bad of Fanny.

"Why did you ask them?" Straker had known Fanny so long that he was privileged to inquire.

"Because — they wanted to be asked."

Fanny believed, and said that she believed, in giving people what they wanted. As for the consequences, there was no mortal lapse or aberration that could trouble her serenity or bring a blush to her enduring candor. If you came a cropper you might be sure that Fanny's judgment of you would be pure from the superstition of morality. She herself had never swerved in affection or fidelity to Will Brocklebank. She took her excitements, lawful or otherwise, vicariously in the doomed and dedicated persons of her friends. Brocklebank knew it. Blond, spectacled, middle-aged, and ponderous, he regarded his wife's performances and other people's with a leniency as amazing as her own. He was hovering about old Lady Paignton in the background, where Straker could see his benignant gaze resting on Furnival and Mrs. Viveash.

"Poor dears," said Fanny, as if in extenuation of her tolerance, "they are enjoying themselves."

"So are you," said Straker.

"I like to see other people happy. Don't you?"

"Yes. If I'm not responsible for their — happiness."

"Who is responsible?" She challenged.

"I say, aren't you?"

"Me responsible? Have you seen her husband?"

"I have."

"Well — —" she left it to him.

"Where is Viveash?"

"At the moment he is in Liverpool, or should be — on business."

"You didn't ask him?"

"Ask him? Is he the sort you can ask?"

"Oh, come, he's not so bad."

"He's awful. He's impossible. He — he excuses everything."

"I don't see him excusing this, or your share in it. If he knew."

"If he knew what?"

"That you'd asked Furny down."

"But he doesn't know. He needn't ever know."

"He needn't. But people like Viveash have a perfect genius for the unnecessary. Besides — —"

He paused before the unutterable, and she faced him with her smile of innocent interrogation.

"Well," he said, "it's so jolly risky. These things, you know, only end one way."

Fanny's eyes said plainly that to their vision all sorts of ways were possible.

"If it were any other man but — —" He stopped short at Furnival's name.

Fanny lowered her eyes almost as if she had been convicted of indiscretion.

"You see," she said, "any other man wouldn't do. He's the one and only man. There never was any other. That's the awful part of it for her."

"Then why on earth did she marry the other fellow?"

"Because Furny couldn't marry her. And he wouldn't, either. That's not his way."

"I know it's not his way. And if Viveash took steps, what then?"

"Then perhaps — he'd have to."

"Good Lord — —"

"Oh, it isn't a deep-laid plan."

"I never said it was."

He didn't think it. Marriages had been made at Amberley, and divorces, too; not by any plan of Fanny's, but by the risks she took. Seeing the dangerous way she mixed things, he didn't, he couldn't suspect her of a plan, but he did suspect her of an unholy joy in the prospect of possible explosions.

"Of course," she said, reverting to her vision, "of course he'd have to."

She looked at Straker with eyes where mischief danced a fling. It was clear that in that moment she saw Laurence Furnival the profane, Furnival the scorner of marriage, caught and tied: punished (she scented in ecstasy the delicate irony of it), so beautifully punished there where he had sinned.

Straker began to have some idea of the amusement Fanny got out of her house parties.

For a moment they had no more to say. All around them there was silence, born of Mrs. Viveash and her brooding, of young Reggy's trouble with Miss Probyn, and of some queer triangular complication in the converse of Brocklebank, Lady Paignton, and Mr. Higginson. In that moment and that pause Straker thought again of Miss Tarrant. It was, he said to himself, the pause and the moment for her appearance. And (so right was he in his calculation) she appeared.

II

He saw her standing in the great doorway of the east wing where the three steps led down on to the terrace. She stood on the topmost step, poised for her descent, shaking her scarf loose to drift in a white mist about her. Then she came down the terrace very slowly, and the measured sweep of her limbs suggested that all her movements would be accomplished to a large rhythm and with a superb delay.

Her effect (she had not missed it) was to be seen in all its wonder and perfection on Laurence Furnival's face. Averted suddenly from Mrs. Viveash, Furnival's face expressed the violence of his shock and his excitement. It was clear that he had never seen anything quite like Philippa Tarrant before, and that he found her incredibly and ambiguously interesting. Ambiguously – no other word did justice to the complexity of his facial expression. He did not know all at once what to make of Philippa, and, from further and more furtive manifestations of Furnival's, Straker gathered that the young man was making something queer. He had a sort of sympathy with him, for there had been moments when he himself had not known exactly what to make. He doubted whether even Fanny Brocklebank (who certainly made the best of her) had ever really known.

Whatever her inscrutable quality, this year she was, as Fanny had said, more so than ever. She was stupendous; and that although she was not strictly speaking beautiful. She had no color in her white face or in her black hair; she had no color but the morbid rose of her mouth and the brown of her eyes. Yet Mrs. Viveash, with all her vivid gold and carmine, went out before her; so did pretty Fanny, though fresh as paint and burnished to perfection; as for the other women, they were nowhere. She made the long golden terrace at Amberley a desert place for the illusion of her somber and solitary beauty. She was warm-fleshed, warm-blooded. The sunshine soaked into her as she stood there. What was more, she had the air of being entirely in keeping with Amberley's grand style.

Straker saw that from the first she was aware of Furnival. At three yards off she held him with her eyes, lightly, balancing him; then suddenly she let him go. She ceased to be aware of him. In the moment of introduction she turned from him to Straker.

"Mr. Straker – but – how delightful!"

"Don't say you didn't expect to see me here."

"I didn't. And Mr. Higginson!" She laughed at the positive absurdity of it.

"And Mr. Lawson and Miss Probyn."

She held herself a little back and gazed upon the group with her wide and wonderful eyes.

"You look," she said, "as if something interesting had happened."

She had seated herself beside Straker so that she faced Mrs. Viveash and young Furnival. She appeared not to know that Furnival was staring at her.

"She's the only interesting thing that's happened—so far," he muttered. (There was no abatement of his stare.) Mrs. Viveash tried to look as if she agreed with him.

Miss Tarrant had heard him. Her eyes captured and held him again, a little longer this time. Straker, who watched the two, saw that something passed between them, between Philippa's gaze and Furnival's stare.

III

That evening he realized completely what Fanny had meant when she said that Philippa was more so than ever. He observed this increase in her quality, not only in the broad, massive impression that she spread, but in everything about her, her gestures, her phrases, the details of her dress. Every turn of her head and of her body displayed a higher flamboyance, a richer audacity, a larger volume of intention. He was almost afraid for her lest she should overdo it by a shade, a touch, a turn. You couldn't get away from her. The drawing-room at Amberley was filled with her, filled with white surfaces of neck and shoulders, with eyes somber yet aflood with light, eyes that were perpetually at work upon you and perpetually at play, that only rested for a moment to accentuate their movement and their play. This effect of her was as of many women, approaching, withdrawing, and sliding again into view, till you were aware with a sort of shock that it was one woman, Philippa Tarrant, all the time, and that all the play and all the movement were concentrated on one man, Laurence Furnival.

She never let him alone for a minute. He tried, to do him justice he tried—Straker saw him trying—to escape. But, owing to Miss Tarrant's multiplicity and omnipresence, he hadn't a chance. You saw him

fascinated, stupefied by the confusion and the mystery of it. She carried him off under Mrs. Viveash's unhappy nose. Wherever she went she called him, and he followed, flushed and shamefaced. He showed himself now pitifully abject, and now in pitiful revolt. Once or twice he was positively rude to her, and Miss Tarrant seemed to enjoy that more than anything.

Straker had never seen Philippa so uplifted. She went like the creature of an inspiring passion, a passion moment by moment fulfilled and unappeased, renascent, reminiscent, and in all its moments gloriously aware of itself.

The pageant of Furnival's subjugation lasted through the whole of Friday evening. All Saturday she ignored him and her work on him. You would have said it had been undertaken on Mrs. Viveash's account, not his, just to keep Mrs. Viveash in her place and show her what she, Philippa, could do. All Sunday, by way of revenge, Furnival ignored Miss Tarrant, and consoled himself flagrantly with Mrs. Viveash.

It was on the afternoon of Sunday that Mr. Higginson was seen sitting out on the terrace with Miss Tarrant. Reggy Lawson had joined them, having extricated himself with some dexterity from the toils of the various ladies who desired to talk to him. His attitude suggested that he was taking his dubious chance against Mr. Higginson. It was odd that it should be dubious, Reggy's chance; he himself was so assured, so engaging in his youth and physical perfection. Straker would have backed him against any man he knew.

Fanny Brocklebank had sent Straker out into the rose garden with Mary Probyn. He left Miss Tarrant on the terrace alone with Mr. Higginson and Reggy. He left her talking to Mr. Higginson, listening to Mr. Higginson, behaving beautifully to Mr. Higginson, and ignoring Reggy. Straker, with Mary Probyn, walked round and round the rose garden, which was below Miss Tarrant's end of the terrace, and while he talked to Mary Probyn he counted the rounds. There were twenty to the mile. Every time he turned he had Miss Tarrant full in view, which distracted him from Mary Probyn.

Mary didn't seem to mind. She was a nice woman; plain (in a nice, refined sort of way), and she knew it, and was nice to you whether you talked to her or not. He did not find it difficult to talk to Mary: she was interested in Miss Tarrant; she admired her, but not uncritically.

"She is the least bit too deliberate," was her comment. "She calculates her effects."

"She does," said Straker, "so that she never misses one of them. She's a consummate artist."

He had always thought her that. (Ninth round.) But as her friend he could have wished her a freer and sincerer inspiration. After all, there was something that she missed.

(Tenth round.) Miss Tarrant was still behaving beautifully to Mr. Higginson. Mary Probyn marveled to see them getting on so well together. (Fifteenth round.)

Reggy had left them; they were not getting on together quite so well.

(Twentieth round.) They had risen; they were coming down the steps into the garden; Straker heard Miss Tarrant ordering Mr. Higginson to go and talk to Miss Probyn. He did so with an alacrity which betrayed a certain fear of the lady he admired.

Miss Tarrant, alone with Straker, turned on him the face which had scared Mr. Higginson. She led him in silence and at a rapid pace down through the rose garden and out upon the lawn beyond. There she stood still and drew a deep breath.

"You had no business," she said, "to go away like that and leave me with him."

"Why not? Last year, if I remember — —"

He paused. He remembered perfectly that last year she had contrived pretty often to be left with him. Last year Mr. Higginson, as the Liberal candidate for East Mickleham, seemed about to achieve a distinction,

which, owing to his defeat by an overwhelming majority, he had unfortunately not achieved. He had not been prudent. He had stood, not only for East Mickleham, but for a principle. It was an unpopular principle, and he knew it, and he had stuck to it all the same, with obstinacy and absurdity, in the teeth, the furiously gnashing teeth, of his constituency. You couldn't detach Mr. Higginson from his principle, and as long as he stuck to it a parliamentary career was closed to him. It was sad, for he had a passion for politics; he had chosen politics as the one field for the one ponderous talent he possessed. The glory of it had hung ponderously about Mr. Higginson last year; but this year, cut off from politics, it was pitiable, the nonentity he had become. Straker could read that in his lady's alienated eyes.

"Last year," he continued, "you seemed to find him interesting."

"You think things must be what they seem?"

Her tone accused him of insufficient metaphysical acumen.

"There is no necessity. Still, as I said, last year — —"

"Could Mr. Higginson, in any year, be interesting?"

"Did you hope," Straker retorted, "to make him so by cultivating him?"

"It's impossible to say what Mr. Higginson might become under — centuries of cultivation. It would take centuries."

That was all very well, he said to himself. If he didn't say that Miss Tarrant had pursued Mr. Higginson, he distinctly recalled the grace with which she had allowed herself to be pursued. She had cultivated him. And, having done it, having so flagrantly and palpably and under Straker's own eyes gone in for him, how on earth did she propose to get out of it now? There was, Straker said to himself again, no getting out of it. As for centuries — —

"Let us go back," he persisted, "to last year."

"Last year he had his uses. He was a good watch-dog."

"A what?"

"A watch-dog. He kept other people off."

For a moment he was disarmed by the sheer impudence of it. He smiled a reminiscent smile.

"I should have thought his function was rather, wasn't it, to draw them on?"

Her triumphing eyes showed him that he had given himself into her hands. He should have been content with his reminiscent smile. Wasn't he, her eyes inquired, for a distinguished barrister, just a little bit too crude?

"You thought," she said, "he was a decoy-duck? Why, wouldn't you have flown from your most adored if you'd seen her — with Mr. Higginson?"

Thus deftly she wove her web and wound him into it. That was her way. She would take your own words out of your mouth and work them into the brilliant fabric, tangling you in your talk. And not only did she tangle you in your talk, she confused you in your mental processes.

"You didn't seriously suppose," she said, "that I could have had any permanent use for him?"

Straker's smile paid tribute to her crowning cleverness. He didn't know how much permanence she attached to matrimony, or to Mr. Higginson, but he knew that she had considered him in that preposterous relation. She faced him and his awful knowledge and floored him with just that—the thing's inherent, palpable absurdity. And if that wasn't clever of her! — —

"Of course not." He was eager in his assent; it was wrung from him. He added with apparent irrelevance, "After all, he's honest."

"You must be something."

She turned to him, radiant and terrible, rejoicing in her murderous phrase. It intimated that only by his honesty did Mr. Higginson maintain his foothold on existence.

"I think," said Straker, "it's time to dress for dinner."

They turned and went slowly toward the house. On the terrace, watch in hand, Mr. Higginson stood alone and conspicuous, shining in his single attribute of honesty.

That evening Furnival sought Straker out in a lonely corner of the smoke-room. His face was flushed and defiant. He put it to Straker point-blank.

"I say, what's she up to, that friend of yours, Miss T-Tarrant?"

He stammered over her name. Her name excited him.

Straker intimated that it was not given him to know what Miss Tarrant might or might not be up to.

Furnival shook his head. "I can't make her out. Upon my honor, I can't."

Straker wondered what Furny's honor had to do with it.

"Why is she hanging round like this?"

"Hanging round?"

"Yes. You know what I mean. Why doesn't somebody marry her?" He made a queer sound in his throat, a sound of unspeakable interrogation.

"Why haven't you married her yourself?"

Straker was loyal. "You'd better ask her why she hasn't married me."

Furnival brooded. "I've a good mind to."

"I should if I were you," said Straker encouragingly.

Furnival sighed heavily. "Look here," he said, "what's the matter with her? Is she difficult, or what?"

"Frightfully difficult," said Straker, with conviction. His tone implied that Furnival would never understand her, that he hadn't the brain for it.

IV

And yet, Straker reminded himself, Furnival wasn't an ass. He had brain for other things, for other women; for poor Nora Viveash quite a remarkable sufficiency of brain, but not for Philippa Tarrant. You could see

how he was being driven by her. He was in that state when he would have done anything to get her. There was no folly and no extravagance that he would not commit. And yet, driven as he was, it was clear that he resented being driven, that he was not going all the way. His kicking, his frantic dashes and plunges, showed that the one extravagance, the one folly he would not commit was matrimony.

Straker saw that very plainly. He wondered whether Miss Tarrant would see it, too, and if she did whether it would make any difference in her method.

It was very clear to Straker that Miss Tarrant was considering Furnival, as she had considered him, as she had considered young Reggy Lawson, as she had considered Mr. Higginson, who was not so young. As for Reggy and his successor, she had done with them. All that could be known of their fatuity she knew. Perhaps they had never greatly interested her. But she was interested in Laurence Furnival. She told Straker that he was the most amusing man of her acquaintance. She was, Straker noticed, perpetually aware of him. All Monday morning, in the motor, Miss Tarrant in front with Brocklebank, Furnival with Mrs. Viveash, and Straker behind, it was an incessant duel between Furnival's eyes and the eyes that Miss Tarrant had in the back of her head. All Monday afternoon she had him at her heels, at her elbow. With every gesture she seemed to point to him and say: "Look at this little animal I've caught. Did you ever see such an amusing little animal?"

She was quite aware that it was an animal, the creature she had captured and compelled to follow her; it might hide itself now and then, but it never failed to leap madly forward at her call. The animal in Furnival, so simple, so undisguised, and so spontaneous, was what amused her.

Its behavior that Monday after tea on the terrace was one of the most disconcerting things that had occurred at Amberley. You could see that Mrs. Viveash couldn't bear it, that she kept looking away, that Brocklebank didn't know where to look, and that even Fanny was perturbed.

As for Mr. Higginson, it was altogether too much for him and his honesty. He was visibly alienated, and from that moment he devoted himself and his honesty to Mary Probyn.

Young Reggy was alienated, too, so profoundly that he spoke about it aside to Straker.

"Between you and me," said young Reggy, "it's a bit too strong. I can't stick it, the way she goes on. What does she mean by it, Straker?"

People were always appealing to Straker to tell them what women meant by it. As if he knew.

He was glad to see that young Reggy had turned, that he could turn. He liked Reggy, and he felt that he owed him a good deal. If it had not been for Reggy he might, two years ago, have been numbered as one of the fallen. He had been pretty far gone two years ago, so far that he had frequently wondered how it was that he had not fallen. Now it was clear to him. It had been her method with Reggy that had checked his own perilous approaches. It had offended his fine sense of the fitting (a fastidiousness which, in one of her moods of ungovernable frankness, she had qualified as "finicking"). For Reggy was a nice boy, and her method had somehow resulted in making him appear not so nice. It nourished and brought to the surface that secret, indecorous, primordial quality that he shared, though in less splendor and abundance, with Laurence Furnival. He had kept his head, or had seemed inimitably to have kept it. At any rate, he had preserved his sense of decency. He was incapable of presenting on the terrace at Amberley the flaming pageant of his passion. Straker was not sure how far this restraint, this level-headedness of young Reggy, had been his undoing. It might be that Miss Tarrant had required of him a pageant. Anyhow, Reggy's case had been very enlightening to Straker.

And it was through Reggy, or rather through his own intent and breathless observation of the two, that Straker had received his final illumination. It had come suddenly in one inspiring and delivering flash; he could recall even now his subsequent sensations, the thrilling lucidity of soul, the

prodigious swiftness of body, after his long groping in obscurities and mysteries. For it had been a mystery to him how she had resisted Reggy in his young physical perfection and with the charm he had, a charm that spiritualized him, a charm that should have appealed to everything that was supersensuous in Philippa Tarrant (and Philippa would have had you believe that there was very little in her that was not). It was incomprehensible therefore to Straker how any woman who had a perfect body, with a perfect heart in it, could have resisted Reggy at his best – and for Mr. Higginson.

To be sure, compared with Mr. Higginson he was impecunious; but that, to Straker's mind, was just what gave him, with the other things, his indomitable distinction. Reggy's distinction stood straight and clean, naked of all accessories. An impecuniousness so unexpressed, so delicate, so patrician could never have weighed with Philippa against Reggy's charm. That she should deliberately have reckoned up his income, compared it with Mr. Higginson's, and deducted Reggy with the result was inconceivable. Whatever Straker had thought of her he had never thought of her as mercenary. It wasn't that. He had found out what it was. Watching her at play with Reggy's fire (for to the inconspicuous observer the young man had flamed sufficiently), it had struck Straker that she herself was flameless.

It was in the nature of Reggy's perfection that it called, it clamored for response. And Philippa had not responded. She hadn't got it in her to respond.

All this came back vividly to Straker as he watched her now on the terrace, at play with the fiercer conflagration that was Laurence Furnival.

She was cold; she had never kindled, never would, never could kindle. Her eyes did, if you like; they couldn't help it—God made them lights and flames—but her mouth couldn't. To Straker in his illumination all the meaning of Philippa Tarrant was in her mouth. The small, exquisite thing lacked fulness and the vivid rose that should have been the flowering of

her face. A certain tightness at the corners gave it an indescribable expression of secrecy and mystery and restraint. He saw in it the almost monstrous denial and mockery of desire. He could not see it, as he had seen Nora Viveash's mouth, curved forward, eager, shedding flame at the brim, giving itself to lips that longed for it. Philippa's mouth was a flower that opened only at the touch, the thrill of her own gorgeous egoism. He read in it the triumph of Philippa over the flesh and blood of her race. She had nothing in her of the dead. That was the wonder of her. The passion of the dead had built up her body to the semblance and the promise of their own delight; their desire, long forgotten, rose again, lightening and darkening in her amazing eyes; the imperishable instinct that impelled them to clothe her in their flesh and blood survived in her, transfigured in strange impulses and intuitions, but she herself left unfulfilled their promise and their desire.

Yes—that was what her mouth meant; it was treacherous; it betrayed the promise of her body and her eyes. And Furnival was feeding his infatuation on the meanings of her eyes and of her body—meanings that were unmistakable to Straker.

As if she had known what the older man was thinking of her, Philippa rose abruptly and turned her back on Furnival and began to make violent love to old Lady Paignton. Her eyes challenged Straker's across the terrace. They said: "Look at me. I will be as beautiful for this old lady as for any male thing on earth. More beautiful. Have I ever set my cap so becomingly at any of you as I am setting it now at her? Have you ever seen finer eyes than these that I make at her, that I lavish on her out of the sheer exuberance of my nature? Very well, then; doesn't that prove that you're wrong in all things you've been thinking about me. I know what you've been thinking!"

As if she knew what he was thinking she made herself beautiful for him. She allowed him presently to take her for a walk, for quite a long walk. The woods of Amberley lured them, westward, across the shining fields. They

went, therefore, through the woods and back by the village in the cool of the evening.

He had seldom, he might say he had never, seen Philippa in so agreeable a mood. She had sunk her sex. She was tired of her terrible game, the game that Straker saw through; she was playing another one, a secret, innocent, delightful game. She laid herself out to amuse Straker, instead of laying him out (as he put it), on the table, to amuse herself.

"Philippa," he said, "you've been adorable for the last half hour."

"For the last half hour I've been myself."

She smiled as if to herself, a secret, meditative smile. The mystery of it was not lost on Straker.

"I can always be myself," she said, "when I'm with you."

"For half an hour," he murmured.

She went on. "You're not tiresome, like the others. I don't know what there is about you, but you don't bore me."

"Perhaps not—for half an hour."

"Not for millions of half hours."

"Consecutive?"

"Oh, yes."

She tilted her head back and gazed at him with eyes narrowed and slanting under their deep lids.

"Not in an immortality," she said.

She laughed aloud her joyous appreciation of him.

Straker was neither uplifted nor alarmed. He knew exactly where he stood with her. She was not considering him; she was not trying to get at him; she was aware of his illumination and his disenchantment; she was also aware of his continuous interest in her, and it was his continuous interest, the study that he made of her, that interested Philippa. She was anxious

that he should get her right, that he should accept her rendering of herself. She knew at each moment what he was thinking of her, and the thing that went on between them was not a game—it was a duel, an amicable duel, between her lucidity and his. Philippa respected his lucidity.

"All the same," said Straker, "I am not the most amusing man you know. You don't find me exciting."

"No." She turned it over. "No; I don't find you at all exciting or very amusing. How is it, then, that you don't bore me?"

"How can I say?"

"I think it is because you're so serious, because you take me seriously."

"But I don't. Not for a moment. As for an immortality of seriousness — —"

"At least," she said, "you would admit that possibly I might have a soul. At any rate, you behave as if you did."

He dodged it dexterously.

"That's where the immortality comes in, is it?"

"Of course," said Philippa.

V

She went on amusing Straker all evening, and after dinner she made him take her into the conservatory.

The conservatory at Amberley is built out fanwise from the big west drawing-room on to the southwest corner of the terrace; it is furnished as a convenient lounge, and you sit there drinking coffee, and smoking, and admiring Brocklebank's roses, which are the glory of Amberley. And all among Brocklebank's roses they came upon Furnival and Mrs. Viveash.

Among the roses she shimmered and flushed in a gown of rose and silver. Among the roses she was lovely, sitting there with Furnival. And Straker saw that Miss Tarrant was aware of the loveliness of Mrs. Viveash, and that her instinct woke in her.

She advanced, trailing behind her the long, diaphanous web of her black gown. When she was well within the range of Furnival's sensations she paused to smell a rose, bending her body backward and sideward so that she showed to perfection the deep curved lines that swept from her shoulders to her breasts, and from her breasts downward to her hips. A large diamond star hung as by an invisible thread upon her neck: it pointed downward to the hollow of her breasts. There was no beauty that she had that was not somehow pointed to, insisted on, held forever under poor Furnival's excited eyes.

But in a black gown, among roses, she showed disadvantageously her dead whiteness and her morbid rose. She was aware of that. Mrs. Viveash, glowing among the roses, had made her aware.

"Why did we ever come here?" she inquired of Straker. "These roses are horribly unbecoming to me."

"Nothing is unbecoming to you, and you jolly well know it," said Furnival. She ignored it.

"Just look at their complexions. They oughtn't to be allowed about."

She picked one and laid it against the dead-white hollow of her breast, and curled her neck to look at it there; then she shook her head at it in disapproval, took it away, and held it out an inch from Furnival's face. He recoiled slightly.

"It won't bite," she murmured. "It'll let you stroke it." She stroked it herself, with fingers drawn tenderly, caressingly, over petals smooth and cool as their own skin. "I believe it can feel. I believe it likes it."

Furnival groaned. Straker heard him; so did Mrs. Viveash. She stirred in her seat, causing a spray of Dorothy Perkins to shake as if it indeed felt and shared her terror. Miss Tarrant turned from Furnival and laid her rose on Mrs. Viveash's shoulder, where it did no wrong.

"It's yours," she said; "or a part of you."

Mrs. Viveash looked up at Furnival, and her face flickered for a moment. Furnival did not see her face; he was staring at Miss Tarrant.

"Ah," he cried, "how perfect! You and I'll have to dry up, Straker, unless you can go one better than that."

"I shouldn't dream," said Straker, "of trying to beat Miss Tarrant at her own game."

"If you know what it is. I'm hanged if I do."

Furnival was tearing from its tree a Caroline Testout, one of Brocklebank's choicest blooms. Miss Tarrant cried out:

"Oh, stop him, somebody. They're Mr. Brocklebank's roses."

"They ain't a part of Brockles," Furnival replied.

He approached her with Brocklebank's Caroline Testout, and, with his own dangerous, his outrageous fervor, "You say it f-f-feels," he stammered. "It's what you want, then—something t-tender and living about you. Not that s-scin-t-tillating thing you've got there. It tires me to look at it." He closed his eyes.

"You needn't look at it," she said.

"I can't help it. It's part of you. I believe it grows there. It makes me look at it."

His words came shaken from him in short, savage jerks. To Straker, to Mrs. Viveash, he appeared intolerable; but he had ceased to care how he appeared to anybody. He had ceased to know that they were there. They turned from him as from something monstrous, intolerable, indecent. Mrs. Viveash's hands and mouth were quivering, and her eyes implored Straker to take her away somewhere where she couldn't see Furnival and Philippa Tarrant.

He took her out on to the terrace. Miss Tarrant looked after them.

"That rose belongs to Mrs. Viveash now," she said. "You'd better go and take it to her."

Furnival flung the Caroline Testout on the floor. He trod on the Caroline Testout. It was by accident, but still he trod on it; so that he seemed much more brutal than he was.

"It's very hot in here," said she. "I'm going on to the terrace."

"Let's go down," said he, "into the garden. We can talk there."

"You seem to be able to talk anywhere," said she.

"I have to," said Furnival.

She went out and walked slowly down the terrace to the east end where Straker sheltered Mrs. Viveash.

Furnival followed her.

"Are you coming with me or are you not?" he insisted. "I can't get you a minute to myself. Come out of this, can't you? I want to talk to you."

"And I," said Miss Tarrant, "want to talk to Mrs. Viveash."

"You don't. You want to tease her. Can't you leave the poor woman alone for a minute? She's happy there with Straker."

"I want to see how happy she is," said Miss Tarrant.

"For God's sake!" he cried. "Don't. It's my last chance. I'm going to-morrow." Miss Tarrant continued to walk like one who did not hear. "I may never see you again. You'll go off somewhere. You'll disappear. I can't trust you."

Suddenly she stood still.

"You are going to-morrow?"

"Not," said Furnival, "if you'd like me to stay. That's what I want to talk to you about. Let's go down into the east walk. It's dark there, and they can't hear us."

"They have heard you. You'd better go back to Mrs. Viveash."

His upper lip lifted mechanically, but he made no sound. He stood for a moment staring at her, obstructing her path. Then he turned.

"I shall go back to her," he said.

He strode to Mrs. Viveash and called her by her name. His voice had a queer vibration that sounded to Miss Tarrant like a cry.

"Nora — you'll come with me, won't you?"

Mrs. Viveash got up without a word and went with him. Miss Tarrant, standing beside Straker on the terrace, saw them go down together into the twilight of the east walk between the yew hedges.

Philippa said something designed to distract Straker's attention; and still, with an air of distracting him, of sheltering her sad sister, Mrs. Viveash, she led him back into the house.

Furnival returned five minutes later, more flushed than ever and defiant.

That night Straker, going down the long corridor to his bedroom, saw Fanny Brocklebank and Philippa in front of him. They went slowly, Fanny's head leaning a little toward Philippa's. Not a word of what Philippa was saying reached Straker, but he saw her turn with Fanny into Fanny's room. As he passed the door he was aware of Fanny's voice raised in deprecation, and of Philippa's, urgent, imperative; and he knew, as well as if he had heard her, that Philippa was telling Fanny about Furnival and Nora Viveash.

VI

It was as if nothing had happened that Philippa came to him on the terrace the next morning (which was a Tuesday) before breakfast. As if nothing had happened, as if she had hardly met Furnival, as if she were considering him for the first time, she began cross-questioning Straker.

"You know everybody. Tell me about Laurence Furnival. Is he any good?"

Straker replied that she had better inquire at the Home Office, the scene of Furnival's industry.

Philippa waved the Home Office aside. "I mean, will he ever do anything?"

"Ask Fanny Brocklebank."

He knew very well that she had asked her, that she had got out of Fanny full particulars as to Furnival's family and the probable amount of his income, and that she had come to him as the source of a finer information.

"Fanny wouldn't know," said she.

"Then," said Straker, "ask Mrs. Viveash."

She turned on him a cold and steady gaze that rebuked his utterance. How dare he, it said, how dare he mention Mrs. Viveash in her presence?

She answered quietly: "There will hardly be time, I think. Mrs. Viveash is going to-day."

Straker turned on her now, and his look expressed a sort of alien and repugnant admiration. He wondered how far she had gone, how much she had told, by what intimations she had prevailed with Fanny to get Mrs. Viveash out of the house. Mrs. Viveash, to be sure, had only been invited for the week-end, from the Friday to the Tuesday, but it had been understood that, if her husband prolonged his business in Liverpool, she was to stay till his return. Viveash was still in Liverpool—that had been known at Amberley yesterday—and Mrs. Viveash had not been asked to stay. It had been quite simple. Mrs. Viveash, not having been asked to stay, would be obliged to go.

"And is Furnival going, too?" he asked.

"I believe not," said Philippa.

An hour later Mrs. Viveash joined them in the avenue where he waited for Miss Tarrant, who had proposed that he should walk with her to the village.

In the clear and cruel light of the morning Mrs. Viveash showed him a blanched face and eyes that had seen with miserable lucidity the end of illusion, the end of passion, and now saw other things and were afraid.

"You know I'm going?" she said.

Straker said that he was sorry to hear it; by which he meant that he was sorry for Mrs. Viveash.

She began to talk to him of trifles, small occurrences at Amberley, of the affair of Mr. Higginson and Miss Probyn, and then, as by a natural transition, of Miss Tarrant.

"Do you like Miss Tarrant?" she asked suddenly, point-blank.

Straker jibbed. "Well, really—I—I haven't thought about it."

He hadn't. He knew how he stood with her, how he felt about her; but whether it amounted to liking or not liking he had not yet inquired. But that instant he perceived that he did not like her, and he lied.

"Of course I like her. Why shouldn't I?"

"Because"—she was very slow about it—"somehow I should have said that you were not that sort."

Her light on him came halting, obscured, shivering with all the vibrations of her voice; but he could see through it, down to the sources of her thinking, to something secret, luminous, and profound—her light on Philippa.

She was instantly aware of what she had let him see.

"Oh," she cried, "that was horrid of me. It was feline."

"It was a little," he admitted.

"It's because I know she doesn't like me."

"Why not say at once it's because you don't like her?"

Her eyes, full, lucid, charged with meaning, flashed to him. She leaped at the chance he offered her to be sincere.

"I don't," she said. "How can I?"

She talked again of trifles, to destroy all cohesion between that utterance and her next.

"I say, I want you to do something for me. I want you to look after Furny."

"To look after him?"

"To stand by him, if — if he has a bad time."

He promised her. And then Miss Tarrant claimed him. She was in her mood of yesterday; but the charm no longer worked on him; he did not find her adorable that morning.

After a longish round they were overtaken by Brocklebank in his motor-car. He and Furnival were returning from the station after seeing Mrs. Viveash off (Furny had had the decency to see her off). Brocklebank gave a joyous shout and pulled up two yards in front of them.

As they stood beside the car Straker noticed that Furnival's face had a queer, mottled look, and that the muscles of his jaw were set in an immobility of which he could hardly have believed him capable. He was actually trying to look as if he didn't see Miss Tarrant. And Miss Tarrant was looking straight at him.

Brocklebank wanted to know if Miss Tarrant cared for a run across the Hog's Back before luncheon.

Miss Tarrant did care — if Mr. Straker did.

Furnival had got down from his seat beside Brocklebank and had opened the door of the car, ignoring Straker. He had managed in his descent to preserve his attitude of distance, so much so that Straker was amazed to see him enter the car after Miss Tarrant and take his, Straker's, place beside her. He accomplished this maneuver in silence, and with an air so withdrawn, so obscurely predestined, that he seemed innocent of all offense. It was as if he had acted from some malign compulsion of which he was unaware.

Now Brocklebank in his motor was an earnest and a silent man. Straker, left to himself, caught fragments of conversation in the rear. Miss Tarrant began it.

"Why did you give up your seat?"

"You see why," said Furnival.

Straker could see him saying it, flushed and fervent. Then Furnival went one better, and overdid it.

"There's nothing I wouldn't give up for a chance like this."

Straker heard Philippa laughing softly. He knew she meant him to hear her, he knew she was saying to him, "Could anything be more absurd than the creature that I've got in here?"

There was a pause, and then Furnival broke out again:

"I've seen Mrs. Viveash off."

"That," said Miss Tarrant reprovingly, "was the least you could do."

Furnival made that little fierce, inarticulate sound of his before he spoke. "I hope you're satisfied. I hope I've done enough to please you."

"Oh, quite enough. I shouldn't attempt to do anything more if I were you."

After that there was silence, in which Straker felt that Furnival was raging.

VII

Fanny Brocklebank came to him the next morning in the library, where he had hidden himself. She was agitated.

"Put that book down," she said. "I want to talk to you."

Straker obeyed.

"Jimmy – I'm fond of Philippa. I am, really."

"Well – what's up?"

"Philippa's making a fool of herself and she doesn't know it."

"Trust Philippa!"

"To know it?"

"To make a fool of anybody on earth — except herself."

"This is different. It's Larry Furnival."

"It is. And did you ever see such a spectacle of folly?"

"He doesn't understand her. That's where the folly comes in."

"He's not alone in it."

But Fanny was past the consolations of his cynicism. Her face, not formed for gravity, was grave.

"He's got an idea in his head. An awful one. I'm convinced he thinks she isn't proper."

"Oh, I say!"

"Well, really — considering that he doesn't know her — I can't altogether blame him. I told her so straight out."

"What did she say?"

"She said how funny it will be when he finds out how proper she is."

"So it will, won't it?"

Fanny considered the point.

"It's not half as funny as she thinks it. And, funniness and all, she didn't like it."

"You can hardly expect her to," said Straker.

"Of course," said Fanny, musing, "there's a sort of innocence about him, or else he couldn't think it."

Straker admitted that, as far as Philippa went, that might be said of him.

"That's why I hate somehow to see him made a fool of. It doesn't seem fair play, you know. It's taking advantage of his innocence."

Straker had to laugh, for really, Furny's innocence!

"He always was," Fanny meditated aloud, "a fool about women."

"Oh, well, then," said Straker cheerfully. "She can't make him — —"

"She can. She does. She draws out all the folly in him. I'm fond of Philippa — —"

That meant that Fanny was blaming Philippa as much as she could blame anybody. Immorality she understood, and could excuse; for immorality there was always some provocation; what she couldn't stand was the unfairness of Philippa's proceeding, the inequality in the game.

"I'm very fond of her, but—she's bad for him, Jimmy. She's worse, far worse, than Nora, poor dear."

"I shouldn't worry about him if I were you."

"I do worry. You see, you can't help liking him. There's something about Furny—I don't know what it is, unless it's the turn of his nose — —"

"Do you think Philippa likes him? Do you think she's at all taken with the turn of his nose?"

"If she only would be! Not that he means to marry her. That's the one point where he's firm. That's where he's awful. Why, oh, why did I ever ask them? I thought he was safe with Nora."

"Did you?"

"Something must be done," she cried, "to stop it."

"Who's to do it?"

"You or I. Or Will. Anybody!"

"Look here, Fanny, let's get it quite clear. What are you worrying about? Are you saving Philippa from Furnival, or Furnival from Philippa?"

"Philippa," Fanny moaned, "doesn't want saving. She can take care of herself."

"I see. You are fond of Philippa, but your sympathies are with Furny?"

"Well he can feel, and Philippa — —"

She left it there for him, as her way was.

"Precisely. Then why worry about Philippa?"

"Because it's really awful, and it's in my house that it'll happen."

"How long are they staying?"

"Lord knows how long."

"Poor Fanny. You can't get them to go, can you?"

"I've thought of things. I've told Will he must have an illness."

"And will he?"

"Not he. He says, as I asked them, I ought to have the illness. But if I did she'd stay and nurse me. Besides, if we ousted the whole lot tomorrow, they'll meet again. He'll see to that; and so will Philippa."

There was a long pause.

"I want you to do it. I want you to tell her."

"Good Lord, what am I to tell her?"

"Tell her it isn't nice; tell her it isn't worth while; tell her Furny isn't fair game; tell her anything you can think of that'll stop her."

"I don't see myself — —"

"I do. She won't listen to anybody but you."

"Why me?"

"She respects you."

"I doubt it. Why should she?"

"Because you've never made yourself a spectacle of folly. You've never told her you're in love with her."

"But I'm not," said poor Straker.

"She doesn't know that. And if she did she'd respect you all the more."

"Dear Fanny, I'd do a great deal for you, but I can't do that. I can't, really. It wouldn't be a bit of good."

"You could speak," Fanny said, "to Furny."

"I couldn't."

"Why not?" she cried, in desperation.

"Because, if I did, I should have to assume things — things that you cannot decently assume. I can't speak to him. Not, that is, unless he speaks to me."

VIII

He did speak to him that very night.

It was after ten o'clock, and Straker, who ought to have been in the drawing-room playing bridge, or in the billiard-room playing billiards, or in the smoking-room talking to Brocklebank — Straker, who ought to have known better, had sneaked into the library to have a look at a brief he'd just got. He ought to have known better, for he knew, everybody knew, that after ten o'clock the library at Amberley was set apart as a refuge for any two persons who desired uninterrupted communion with each other. He himself, in the library at Amberley — but that was more than two years ago, so far before Philippa's time that he did not associate her with the library at Amberley. He only knew that Furnival had spent a good deal of time in it with Nora Viveash, and poor Nora was gone. It was poor Nora's departure, in fact, that made him feel that the library was now open to him.

Now the library at Amberley was fitted, as a library should be, with a silent door, a door with an inaudible latch and pneumatic hinges. It shut itself behind Straker with a soft sigh.

The long room was dim and apparently deserted. Drawn blinds obscured the lucid summer night behind the three windows opposite the door. One small electric globe hung lit under its opaline veil in the corner by the end window on the right.

Straker at the doorway turned on the full blaze of the great ring that hung above the central table where he meant to work. It revealed, seated on the lounge in the inner, the unilluminated corner on the right, Miss Tarrant and Laurence Furnival.

To his intense relief, Straker perceived that the whole length of the lounge was between the two. Miss Tarrant at her end was sitting bolt upright with her scarf gathered close about her; she was looking under her eyelids and down her beautiful nose at Furnival, who at his end was all huddled among the cushions as if she had flung him there. Their attitudes suggested that their interview had ended in distance and disaster. The effect was so marked that Straker seized it in an instant.

He was about to withdraw as noiselessly as he had entered, but Miss Tarrant (not Furnival; Furnival had not so much as raised his head) — Miss Tarrant had seen him and signed to him to stay.

"You needn't go," she said. "I'm going."

She rose and passed her companion without looking at him, in a sort of averted and offended majesty, and came slowly down the room. Straker waited by the door to open it for her.

On the threshold she turned to him and murmured: "Don't go away. Go in and talk to him — about — about anything."

It struck him as extraordinary that she should say this to him, that she should ask him to go in and see what she had done to the man.

The door swung on her with its soft sigh, shutting him in with Furnival. He hesitated a moment by the door.

"Come in if you want to," said Furnival. "I'm going, too."

He had risen, a little unsteadily. As he advanced, Straker saw that his face bore traces of violent emotion. His tie was a little crooked and his hair pushed from the forehead that had been hidden by his hands. His moustache no longer curled crisply upward; it hung limp over his troubled

mouth. Furnival looked as if he had been drinking. But Furnival did not drink. Straker saw that he meant in his madness to follow Philippa.

He turned down the lights that beat on him.

"Don't," said Furnival. "I'm going all right."

Straker held the door to. "I wouldn't," he said, "if I were you. Not yet."

Furnival made the queer throat sound that came from him when words failed him.

Straker put his hand on the young man's shoulder. He remembered how Mrs. Viveash had asked him to look after Furny, to stand by him if he had a bad time. She had foreseen, in the fierce clairvoyance of her passion, that he was going to have one. And, by Heaven! it had come.

Furnival struggled for utterance. "All right," he said thickly.

He wasn't going after her. He had been trying to get away from Straker; but Straker had been too much for him. Besides, he had understood Straker's delicacy in turning down the lights, and he didn't want to show himself just yet to the others.

They strolled together amicably toward the lounge and sat there.

Straker had intended to say, "What's up?" but other words were given him.

"What's Philippa been up to?"

Furnival pulled himself together. "Nothing," he replied. "It was me."

"What did you do?"

Furnival was silent.

"Did you propose to her, or what?"

"I made," said Furnival, "a sort of p-proposal."

"That she should count the world well lost — was that it?"

"Well, she knew I wasn't going to marry anybody, and I knew she wasn't going to marry me. Now was she?"

"No. She most distinctly wasn't."

"Very well, then — how was I to know? I could have sworn — —"

He hid his face in his hands again.

"The fact is, I made the devil of a mistake."

"Yes," said Straker. "I saw you making it."

Furnival's face emerged angry.

"Then why on earth didn't you tell me? I asked you. Why couldn't you tell me what she was like?"

"You don't tell," said Straker.

Furnival groaned. "I can't make it out now. It's not as if she hadn't got a t-t-temperament."

"But she hasn't. That was the mistake you made."

"You'd have made it yourself," said Furnival.

"I have. She's taken me in. She looks as if she had temperament—she behaves as if she had — oceans. And she hasn't, not a scrap."

"Then what does she do it for? What does she do it for, Straker?"

"I don't know what she does it for. She doesn't know herself. There's a sort of innocence about her."

"I suppose," said Furnival pensively, "it's innocence."

"Whatever it is, it's the quality of her defect. She can't let us alone. It amuses her to see us squirm. But she doesn't know, my dear fellow, what it feels like; because, you see, she doesn't feel. She couldn't tell, of course, the lengths you'd go to."

Straker was thinking how horrible it must have been for Philippa. Then he reflected that it must have been pretty horrible for Furny, too—so unexpected. At that point he remembered that for Philippa it had not been altogether unexpected; Fanny had warned her of this very thing.

"How — did she — take it?" he inquired tentatively.

"My dear fellow, she sat there — where you are now — and lammed into me. She made me feel as if I were a cad and a beast and a ruffian — as if I wanted k-kick-kicking. She said she wouldn't have seen that I existed if it hadn't been for Fanny Brocklebank — I was her friend's guest — and when I tried to defend myself she turned and talked to me about things, Straker, till I blushed. I'm b-blushing now."

He was.

"And, of course, after that, I've got to go."

"Was that all?" said Straker.

"No, it wasn't. I can't tell you the other things she said."

For a moment Furny's eyes took on a marvelous solemnity, as if they were holding for a moment some sort of holy, supersensuous vision.

Then suddenly they grew reminiscent.

"How could I tell, Straker, how could I possibly tell?"

And Straker, remembering the dance that Philippa had led him, and her appearance, and the things, the uncommonly queer things she had done to him with her eyes, wondered how Furny could have told, how he could have avoided drawing the inferences, the uncommonly queer inferences, he drew. He'd have drawn them himself if he had not known Philippa so well.

"What I want to know," said Furnival, "is what she did it for?"

He rose, straightening himself.

"Anyhow, I've got to go."

"Did she say so?"

"No, she didn't. She said it wasn't necessary. That was innocent, Straker, if you like."

"Oh, jolly innocent," said Straker.

"But I'm going all the same. I'm going before breakfast, by the seven-fifty train."

And he went. Straker saw him off.

IX

That was far and away the most disconcerting thing that had happened at Amberley within Straker's recollection.

It must have been very disagreeable for Philippa.

When, five days ago, he had wondered if he would ever live to see Philippa disconcerted, he had not contemplated anything like this. Neither, he was inclined to think, had Philippa in the beginning. She could have had no idea what she was letting herself in for. That she had let herself in was, to Straker's mind, the awful part of it.

As he walked home from the station he called up all his cleverness, all his tact and delicacy, to hide his knowledge of it from Philippa. He tried to make himself forget it, lest by a word or a look she should gather that he knew. He did not want to see her disconcerted.

The short cut to Amberley from the station leads through a side gate into the turning at the bottom of the east walk. Straker, as he rounded the turning, saw Miss Tarrant not five yards off, coming down the walk.

He was not ready for her, and his first instinct, if he could have yielded to it, would have been to fly. That was his delicacy.

He met her with a remark on the beauty of the morning. That was his tact.

He tried to look as if he hadn't been to see Furnival off at the station, as if the beauty of the morning sufficiently accounted for his appearance at that early hour. The hour, indeed, was so disgustingly early that he would have half an hour to put through with Philippa before breakfast.

But Miss Tarrant ignored the beauty of the morning.

"What have you done," she said, "with Mr. Furnival?"

It was Straker who was disconcerted now.

"What have I done with him?"

"Yes. Where is he?"

Straker's tact was at a disadvantage, but his delicacy instantly suggested that if Miss Tarrant was not disconcerted it was because she didn't know he knew. That made it all right.

"He's in the seven-fifty train."

A light leaped in her eyes; the light of defiance and pursuit, the light of the hunter's lust frustrated and of the hunter's ire.

"You must get him back again," she said.

"I can't," said Straker. "He's gone on business." (He still used tact with her.)

"He had to go."

"He hadn't," said she. "That's all rubbish."

Her tone trod his scruples down and trampled on them, and Straker felt that tact and delicacy required of him no more. She had given herself away at last; she had let herself in for the whole calamity of his knowledge, and he didn't know how she proposed to get out of it this time. And he wasn't going to help her. Not he!

They faced each other as they stood there in the narrow walk, and his knowledge challenged her dumbly for a moment. Then he spoke.

"Look here, what do you want him for? Why can't you let the poor chap alone?"

"What do you suppose I want him for?"

"I've no business to suppose anything. I don't know. But I'm not going to get him back for you."

Something flitted across her face and shifted the wide gaze of her eyes. Straker went on without remorse.

"You know perfectly well the state he's in, and you know how he got into it."

"Yes. And I know," she said, "what you think of me."

"It's more than I do," said Straker.

She smiled subtly, mysteriously, tolerantly, as it were.

"What did you do it for, Philippa?"

Her smile grew more subtle, more tolerant, more mysterious; it measured him and found him wanting.

"If I told you," she said, "I don't think you'd understand. But I'll try and make you."

She turned with him and they walked slowly toward the house.

"You saw," she said, "where he was going before I came? I got him out of that, didn't I?"

He was silent, absorbed in contemplating the amazing fabric of her thought.

"Does it very much matter how I did it?"

"Yes," said Straker, "if you ask me, I should say it did. The last state of him, to my mind, was decidedly worse than the first."

"What do you suppose I did to him?"

"If you want the frankness of a brother, there's no doubt you — led him on."

"I led him on — to heights he'd never have contemplated without me."

Straker tried to eliminate all expression from his face.

"What do you suppose I did to him last night?"

"I can only suppose you led him further, since he went further."

By this time Straker's tact and delicacy were all gone.

"Yes," said Miss Tarrant, "he went pretty far. But, on the whole, it's just as well he did, seeing what's come of it."

"What has come of it?"

"Well, I think he realizes that he has a soul. That's something."

"I didn't know it was his soul you were concerned with."

"He didn't, either. Did he tell you what I said to him?"

"He told me you gave him a dressing down. But there was something that he wouldn't tell. What did you say to him?"

"I said I supposed, after all, he had a soul, and I asked him what he meant to do about it."

"What does he?"

"That's what I want him back for," she said, "to see. Whatever he does with it, practically I've saved it."

She turned to him, lucid and triumphant.

"Could any other woman have done it? Do you see Mary Probyn doing it?"

"Not that way."

"It was the only way. You must," she said, "have temperament."

The word took Straker's breath away.

"You didn't like the way I did it. I can't help that. I had to use the means at my disposal. If I hadn't led him on how could I have got hold of him? If I hadn't led him further how could I have got him on an inch?"

"So that," said Straker quietly, "is what you did it for?"

"You've seen him," she answered. "You don't seriously suppose I could have done it for anything else! What possible use had I for that young man?"

He remembered that that was what she had said about Mr. Higginson. But he confessed that, for a lady in a disconcerting situation, she had shown genius in extricating herself.

Fanny's house party broke up and scattered the next day. A week later Straker and Will Brocklebank saw Furnival in the Park. He was driving a motor beyond his means in the society of a lady whom he certainly could not afford.

"Good God!" said Brocklebank. "That's Philippa."

By which he meant, not that Furnival's lady in the least resembled Philippa, but that she showed the heights to which Philippa had led him on.

X

Brocklebank agreed with Straker that they had got to get him out of that.

It was difficult, because the thing had come upon Furnival like a madness. He would have had more chance if he had been a man with a talent or an absorbing occupation, a politician, an editor, a journalist; if he had even been, Brocklebank lamented, on the London Borough Council it might have made him less dependent on the sympathy of ruinous ladies. But the Home Office provided no competitive distraction.

What was worse, it kept him on the scene of his temptation.

If it hadn't been for the Home Office he might have gone abroad with the Brocklebanks; they had wanted him to go. Straker did what he could for him. He gave him five days' yachting in August, and he tried to get him away for week-ends in September; but Furnival wouldn't go. Then Straker went away for his own holiday, and when he came back he had lost sight of Furnival. So had the Home Office.

For three months Furnival went under. Then one day he emerged. The Higginsons (Mary Probyn and her husband) ran up against him in Piccadilly, or rather, he ran up against them, and their forms interposed an effective barrier to flight. He was looking so wretchedly ill that their hearts

warmed to him, and they asked him to dine with them that evening, or the next, or — well, the next after that. He refused steadily, but Mary managed to worm his address out of him and sent it on to Fanny Brocklebank that night.

Then the Brocklebanks, with prodigious forbearance and persistence, went to work on him. Once they succeeded in getting well hold of him they wouldn't let him go, and between them, very gradually, they got him straight. He hadn't, Fanny discovered, been so very awful; he had flung away all that he had on one expensive woman and he had lost his job. Brocklebank found him another in an insurance office where Fanny's brother was a director. Then Fanny settled down to the really serious business of settling Furnival. She was always asking him down to Amberley when the place was quiet, by which she meant when Philippa Tarrant wasn't there. She was always asking nice girls down to meet him. She worked at it hard for a whole year, and then she said that if it didn't come off that summer she would have to give it up.

The obstacle to her scheme for Furny's settlement was his imperishable repugnance to the legal tie. It had become, Fanny declared, a regular obsession. All this she confided to Straker as she lunched with him one day in his perfectly appointed club in Dover Street. Furny was coming down to Amberley, she said, in July; and she added, "It would do you good, Jimmy, to come, too."

She was gazing at him with a look that he had come to know, having known Fanny for fifteen years. A tender, rather dreamy look it was, but distinctly speculative. It was directed to the silver streaks in Straker's hair on a line with his eyeglasses, and he knew that Fanny was making a calculation and saying to herself that it must be quite fifteen years or more.

Straker was getting on.

A week at Amberley would do him all the good in the world. She rather hoped — though she couldn't altogether promise him — that a certain lady in

whom he was interested (he needn't try to look as if he wasn't) would be there.

"Not Philippa?" he asked wearily.

"No, Jimmy, not Philippa. You know whom I mean."

He did. He went down to Amberley in July, arriving early in a golden and benignant afternoon. It was precisely two years since he had been there with Philippa. It was very quiet this year, so quiet that he had an hour alone with Fanny on the terrace before tea. Brocklebank had taken the others off somewhere in his motor.

She broke it to him that the lady in whom he was interested wasn't there. Straker smiled. He knew she wouldn't be. The others, Fanny explained, were Laurence Furnival and his Idea.

"His Idea?"

"His Idea, Jimmy, of everything that's lovable."

There was a luminous pause in which Fanny let it sink into him.

"Then it's come off, has it?"

"I don't know, but I think it's coming."

"Dear Mrs. Brockles, how did you manage it?"

"I didn't. That's the beauty of it. He managed it himself. He asked me to have her down."

She let him take that in, too, in all its immense significance.

"Who is she?"

"Little Molly Milner—a niece of Nora Viveash's. He met her there last winter."

Their eyes met, full of remembrance.

"If anybody managed it, it was Nora. Jimmy, do you know, that woman's a perfect dear."

"I know you always said so."

"He says so. He says she behaved like an angel, like a saint, about it. When you think how she cared! I suppose she saw it was the way to save him."

Straker was silent. He saw Nora Viveash as he had seen her on the terrace two years ago, on the day of Philippa's arrival; and as she had come to him afterward and asked him to stand by Furnival in his bad hour.

"What is it like, Furny's Idea?" he asked presently.

"It's rather like Nora, only different. It's her niece, you know."

"If it's Nora's niece, it must be very young."

"It is. It's absurdly young. But, oh, so determined!"

"Has she by any chance got Nora's temperament?"

"She's got her own temperament," said Fanny.

Straker meditated on that.

"How does it take him?" he inquired.

"It takes him beautifully. It makes him very quiet, and a little sad. That's why I think it's coming."

Fanny also meditated.

"Yes. It's coming. There's only one thing, Jimmy. Philippa's coming, too. She's coming to-day, by that four-something train."

"My dear Fanny, how you do mix 'em!"

It was his tribute to her enduring quality.

"I asked her before I knew Laurence Furnival was coming."

"She knew?"

"I—I think so."

They looked at each other. Then Fanny spoke.

"Jimmy," she said, "do you think you could make love to Philippa? Just, just," she entreated (when, indeed, had she not appealed to him to save her from the consequences of her indiscretions?), "until Furny goes?"

Straker's diplomatic reply was cut short by the appearance of Laurence Furnival and Molly Milner, Nora's niece. They came down the long terrace with the sun upon them. She was all in white, with here and there a touch of delicate green. She was very young; and, yes, she was very like Mrs. Viveash, with all the difference of her youth and of her soul.

Furnival was almost pathetically pleased to see Straker there; and Miss Milner, flushed but serene in the moment of introduction, said that she had heard of Mr. Straker very often from—she hesitated, and Straker saw what Fanny had meant when she said that the young girl had a temperament of her own—from Mr. Furnival. Her charming smile implied that she was aware that Straker counted, and aware of all that he had done for Furnival.

As he watched her he began to see how different she was from Nora Viveash. She was grave and extraordinarily quiet, Furnival's young girl. He measured the difference by the power she had of making Furnival—as Straker put it—different from himself. She had made him grave and quiet, too. Not that he had by any means lost his engaging spontaneity; only the spontaneous, the ungovernable thing about him was the divine shyness and the wonder which he was utterly unable to conceal.

It was at its height, it had spread its own silence all around it, when, in that stillness which was her hour, her moment, Philippa appeared.

She came down the terrace, golden for her as it had been two years ago; she came slowly, more slowly than ever, with a touch of exaggeration in her rhythm, in her delay, in the poise of her head, and in all her gestures; the shade too much that Straker had malignly prophesied for her. But with it all she was more beautiful, and, he could see, more dangerous, than ever.

She had greeted the three of them, Fanny, Brocklebank, and Straker, with that increase, that excess of manner; and then she saw Furnival standing very straight in front of her, holding out his hand.

"Mr. Furnival — but — how nice!"

Furnival had sat down again, rather abruptly, beside Molly Milner, and Fanny, visibly perturbed, was murmuring the young girl's name.

Something passed over Miss Tarrant's face like the withdrawing of a veil. She was not prepared for Molly Milner. She had not expected to find anything like that at Amberley. It was not what she supposed that Furnival had come for. But, whatever he had come for, that, the unexpected, was what Furnival was there for now. It was disconcerting.

Philippa, in fact, was disconcerted.

All this Straker took in; he took in also, in a flash, the look that passed between Miss Tarrant and Miss Milner. Philippa's look was wonderful, a smile flung down from her heights into the old dusty lists of sex to challenge that young Innocence. Miss Milner's look was even more wonderful than Philippa's; grave and abstracted, it left Philippa's smile lying where she had flung it; she wasn't going, it said, to take that up.

And yet a duel went on between them, a duel conducted with proper propriety on either side. It lasted about half an hour. Philippa's manner said plainly to Miss Milner: "My child, you have got hold of something that isn't good for you, something that doesn't belong to you, something that you are not old enough or clever enough to keep, something that you will not be permitted to keep. You had better drop it." Miss Milner's manner said still more plainly to Philippa: "I don't know what you're driving at, but you don't suppose I take you seriously, do you?" It said nothing at all about Laurence Furnival. That was where Miss Milner's manner scored.

In short, it was a very pretty duel, and it ended in Miss Milner's refusing to accompany Furnival to the Amberley woods and in Philippa's carrying him off bodily (Straker noted that she scored a point there, or seemed to score).

As they went Miss Milner was seen to smile, subtly, for all her innocence. She lent herself with great sweetness to Brocklebank's desire to show her his prize roses.

Straker was left alone with Fanny.

Fanny was extremely agitated by the sight of Furnival's capture. "Jimmy," she said, "haven't I been good to you? Haven't I been an angel? Haven't I done every mortal thing I could for you?"

He admitted that she had.

"Well, then, now you've got to do something for me. You've got to look after Philippa. Don't let her get at him."

"No fear."

But Fanny insisted that he had seen Philippa carrying Furnival off under Molly Milner's innocent nose, and that her manner of appropriating him, too, vividly recalled the evening of her arrival two years ago, when he would remember what had happened to poor Nora's nose.

"She took him from Nora."

"My dear Fanny, that was an act of the highest moral — —"

"Don't talk to me about your highest moral anything. I know what it was."

"Besides, she didn't take him from Nora," she went on, ignoring her previous line of argument. "He took himself. He was getting tired of her."

"Well," said Straker, "he isn't tired of Miss Milner."

"She's taken him off there," said Fanny. She nodded gloomily toward the Amberley woods.

Straker smiled. He was looking westward over the shining fields where he had once walked with Philippa. Already they were returning. Furnival had not allowed himself to be taken very far. As they approached Straker saw that Philippa was pouring herself out at Furnival and that Furnival was not

absorbing any of it; he was absorbed in his Idea. His Idea had made him absolutely impervious to Philippa. All this Straker saw.

He made himself very attentive to Miss Tarrant that evening, and after dinner, at her request, he walked with her on the terrace. Over the low wall they could see Furnival in the rose garden with Miss Milner. They saw him give her a rose, which the young girl pinned in the bosom of her gown.

"Aren't they wonderful?" said Philippa. "Did you ever see anything under heaven so young?"

"She is older than he is," said Straker.

"Do you remember when he wanted to give me one and I wouldn't take it?"

"I have not forgotten."

The lovers wandered on down the rose garden and Philippa looked after them. Then she turned to Straker.

"I've had a long talk with him. I've told him that he must settle down and that he couldn't do a better thing for himself than — —"

She paused.

"Well," said Straker, "it looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Philippa. "It looks like it."

They talked of other things.

"I am going," she said presently, "to ask Miss Milner to stay with me."

Straker didn't respond. He was thinking deeply. Her face was so mysterious, so ominous, that yet again he wondered what she might be up to. He confessed to himself that this time he didn't know. But he made her promise to go on the river with him the next day. They were to start at eleven-thirty.

At eleven Fanny came to him in the library.

"She's gone," said Fanny. "She's left a little note for you. She said you'd forgive her, you'd understand."

"Do you?" said Straker.

"She said she was going to be straight and see this thing through."

"What thing?"

"Furny's thing. What else do you suppose she's thinking of? She said she'd only got to lift her little finger and he'd come back to her; she said there ought to be fair play. Do you see? She's gone away – to save him."

"Good Lord!" said Straker.

But he saw.

XI

It was nearly twelve months before he heard again from Miss Tarrant. Then one day she wrote and asked him to come and have tea with her at her flat in Lexham Gardens.

He went. His entrance coincided with the departure of Laurence Furnival and a lady whom Philippa introduced to him as Mrs. Laurence, whom, she said, he would remember under another name.

Furnival's wife was younger than ever and more like Nora Viveash and more different. When the door closed on them Philippa turned to him with her radiance (the least bit overdone).

"I made that marriage," she said, and staggered him.

"Surely," he said, "it was made in heaven."

"If this room is heaven. It was made here, six months ago."

She faced him with all his memories. With all his memories and her own she faced him radiantly.

"You know now," she said, "why I did it. It was worth while, wasn't it?"

His voice struggled with his memories and stuck. It stuck in his throat.

Before he left he begged her congratulations on a little affair of his own; a rather unhappy affair which had ended happily the week before last. He

did not tell her that, if it hadn't been for the things dear Fanny Brocklebank had done for him, the way she had mixed herself up with his unhappy little affair, it might have ended happily a year ago.

"But," said Philippa, "how beautiful!"

He never saw Miss Tarrant again. Their correspondence ceased after his marriage, and he gathered that she had no longer any use for him.

APPEARANCES

I

All afternoon since three o'clock he had sat cooling his heels in a corner of the hotel veranda. And all afternoon he had been a spectacle of interest to the beautiful cosmopolitan creature who watched him from her seat under the palm tree in the corresponding corner.

She had two men with her, and when she was not occupied with one or both of them she turned her splendid eyes, gaily or solemnly, on Oscar Thesiger. And every time she turned them Thesiger in his corner darkened and flushed and bit his moustache and twirled it, while his eyes answered hers as he believed they meant him to answer. Oscar Thesiger was not a cosmopolitan himself for nothing.

And all the time while he looked at her he was thinking, thinking very miserably, of little Vera Walters.

She had refused him yesterday evening without giving any reason.

Her cruelty (if it wasn't cruelty he'd like to know what it was) remained unexplained, incomprehensible to Oscar Thesiger.

For, if she didn't mean to marry him, why on earth had they asked him to go abroad with them? Why had they dragged him about with them for five weeks, up and down the Riviera? Why was he there now, cooling his heels in the veranda of the Hôtel Méditerranée, Cannes? That was where the cruelty, the infernal cruelty came in.

And her reasons—if she had only given him her reasons. It was all he asked for. But of course she hadn't any.

What possible reason could she have? It wasn't as if he'd been a bad lot like her French brother-in-law, Paul de Vignolles (good Lord, the things he knew about de Vignolles!). He was, as men go, a decent sort. He had always known where to draw the line (de Vignolles didn't). And he wasn't ugly, like de Vignolles. On the contrary, he was, as men go, distinctly good

looking; he knew he was; the glances of the beautiful and hypothetical stranger assured him of it, and he had looked in the glass not half an hour ago to reassure himself. Solid he was, and well built, and he had decorative points that pleased: a fresh color, eyes that flashed blue round a throbbing black, a crisp tawny curl in his short moustache and shorter hair. He was well off; there wasn't a thing she wanted that he couldn't give her. And he was the admired and appreciated friend of her admired and appreciated sister, Agatha de Vignolles.

And for poor little Vera, as far as he could see, the alternatives to marrying him were dismal. It was either marrying a Frenchman, since Agatha had married one, or living forever with that admired and appreciated woman, looking after the little girls, Ninon and Odette. She had been looking after them ever since he had first met her and fallen, with some violence, in love with her.

It was a bit late now to go back on all that. It had been an understood thing. Vera herself had understood it, and she—well, she had lent herself to it very sweetly, shyly, and beautifully, as Vera would. If she hadn't he wouldn't have had a word to say against her decision.

It wasn't as if she had been a cold and selfish woman like her sister. She wasn't cold; and, as for selfish, he had seen her with Agatha and the little girls. It was through the little girls that he had made love to her, that being the surest and shortest way. He had worked it through Ninon and Odette; he had carried them on his back by turns that very afternoon, in the heat of the sun, all the way, that terrible winding way, up the Californie Hill to the Observatory at the top, where they had sat drinking coffee and eating brioches, he and Vera and Ninon and Odette. What on earth did she suppose he did it for?

But she hadn't supposed anything; she had simply understood, and had been adorable to him all afternoon. Not that she had said much (Vera didn't say things); but her eyes, her eyes had given her away; they had been as soft for him as they had been for Ninon and Odette.

Why, oh why, hadn't he done it, then?

He couldn't, because of those two infernal, bilingual little monkeys. They were clinging to her skirts all the way down the hill.

They were all going to Nice the next day; and that evening the de Vignolles had gone down to the Casino and Vera hadn't gone. It would have been all right if the children had not been allowed to sit up to see the conjuror conjuring in the lounge. But they had sat up; and that had brought it to ten o'clock before he had Vera for a minute to himself.

He may have chosen his moment badly (it wasn't easy to choose it well, living, as the de Vignolles did, in public), and perhaps, if they hadn't had that little difference of opinion, he and she — — It was in the evening that they had had it, between the conjuring tricks and the children's chatter, in the public, the intolerably public lounge, and it was only a difference of opinion, opinion concerning the beauty of the beautiful and hypothetical lady who was looking at him then, who had never ceased to look at him and Vera and the children when any of them were about.

Thesiger couldn't get Vera to say that the lady was beautiful, and the little that she did say implied that you couldn't be beautiful if you looked like that. She was not beautiful (Thesiger had admitted it) in Vera's way, and on the whole he was glad to think that Vera didn't look like that; but there was, he had contended, a beauty absolute and above opinion, and the lady had it. That was all. Perhaps, now he came to think of it, he ought not to have drawn Vera's attention to her; for he knew what Vera had thought of her by the things she hadn't said, and, what was worse, he knew what Paul de Vignolles thought by the things he had said, things implying that, if the lady were honest, appearances were against her. Of her and of her honesty Thesiger didn't feel very sure himself. He found himself continually looking at her to make sure. He had been looking at her then, across the little table in the lounge where she and her two men sat drinking coffee and liqueurs. She kept thrusting her face between the two as she talked; she had a rose in her bronze hair, which made him dubious; and when their

eyes met, as they were always meeting (how could he help it?), his doubt leaped in him and fastened on her face. Her face had held him for a moment so with all his doubt, and he had stared at her and flamed in a curious excitement born of Vera's presence and of hers, while he smiled to himself furtively under the moustache he bit.

And then he had seen Vera looking at him.

For a moment she had looked at him, with wide, grave eyes that stayed wide until she turned her head away suddenly.

And the lady, who was the cause of it all, had got up and removed herself, softly and, for her, inconspicuously, taking her two men with her out into the garden and the night.

Of course he had understood Vera. He had seen that it was jealousy, feminine jealousy. And that was why, in the drawing-room afterward, he had hurried up with his proposal, to make it all straight.

And she had refused him without giving any reasons. She had gone off to Nice by the one-forty-four train with the de Vignolles, Paul and Agatha and Ninon and Odette; she had left him in the great, gay, exotic hotel above the palm trees, above the rose and ivory town, above the sea; left him alone with the loveliness that made him mad and miserable; left him cooling his heels on the veranda, under the gaze, the distinctly interested gaze, of the beautiful and hypothetical stranger.

II

How beautiful she was he realized after a dinner which figured in his memory as one of those dinners which he had not enjoyed, though as a matter of fact he had enjoyed it or the mere distraction of it. By way of distraction he had taken the table next to hers, facing her where she sat between her two men.

She was an American; that fact had at first made his doubt itself a little dubious. And she was probably from the South (they were different there). Hence her softness, her full tone, her richness and her glow. Hence her

exotic strain that went so well with the false tropics of the scene. But whether she were a provincial or an urban, or, as she seemed, a cosmopolitan splendor, Thesiger was not cosmopolitan enough to tell. She might have been the supreme flower of her astounding country. She might have been, for all he knew, unique.

She was tall, and her body, large and massive, achieved the grace of slenderness from the sheer perfection of its lines. Her attire, within the bounds of its subservience to Paris, was certainly unique. It was wonderful the amount of decoration she could carry without being the worse for it. Her head alone, over and above its bronze hair, coil on coil and curl on curl, sustained several large tortoise-shell pins, a gold lace fillet, and a rose over each ear. It was no more to her than a bit of black ribbon to a young girl. Old rose and young rose mingled delicately in the silks and gauzes of her gown; here and there a topaz flashed rose from her bodice and from the dusk of her bared neck. There was a fine dusk in her whiteness and in the rose of her face, and in the purplish streaks under her eyes, and deeper dusks about the roots of her hair. And gold sprang out of her darkness there; gold and bronze and copper gleamed and glowed and flamed on every coil and curl. Her eyes held the light gloriously; they were of a luminous, tawny brown, wide apart, and slightly round, with a sudden fineness at the corners. The lids had thick black lashes, so short that when they drooped they had the effect of narrowing her eyes without darkening them. Her nose, small and straight, was a shade too broadly rounded at the tip, but that defect gave a sort of softness to her splendor. Of her mouth Thesiger could not judge; he hadn't seen it at rest; and when she talked her white teeth flashed at him and disturbed him.

As he looked at her, disturbed, and he hoped, disturbing, he thought of little Vera Walters, of her slender virginal body, of her small virginal face, smooth, firm, and slightly pointed like a bud, of her gray eyes, clear as water, and of the pale gold and fawn of her hair. He thought of her tenderness and of her cruelty. He caught himself frowning at it over the

mousse de volaille he was eating; and just then he thought that the other woman who was looking at him smiled. Most certainly she gazed.

The gaze was condoned and allowed by the two men who followed it.

She was superb; but the men, the men were awful. To begin with, they were American, altogether too American for Thesiger. One, whom the lady addressed with some ceremony as Mr. Tarbuck, was the big, full type, florid, rough-hewn, civilized by the cut of his clothes and the excessive cleanness of his shaving. From the first he had oppressed and offended Thesiger by his large and intolerably genial presence. The other, whom she familiarly and caressingly called Binky, was small and lean and yellow; he had a young face with old, nervous lines in it, the twitching, tortured lines of the victim of premature high pressure, effete in one generation. The small man drank, most distinctly and disagreeably he drank. He might have been the wreck of saloon bars, or of the frequent convivial cocktail, or of savage, solitary drinking.

The lady seemed to be traveling under Tarbuck's awful wing, while the outrageous Binky wandered conspicuously and somewhat mysteriously under hers. She was attentive to the small man and peeled his peaches for him, while the large man, smiling largely and with irrepressible affection, peeled hers. The large man (flagrantly opulent) had ordered peaches. He supposed they'd be the one thing that durned hotel hadn't got.

Thesiger conceived a violent hatred for him and for the small man, too. He always had hated the male of the American species. He looked on him as a disagreeable and alien creature; at his best a creature of predatory instincts who appropriated and monopolized all those things of power and beauty that belonged, properly speaking, to his betters; at his worst a defiler of the sacred wells, a murderer and mutilator of the language, of his, Oscar Thesiger's, language.

The two were murdering it now, the large man with a terrible slow assurance in the operation; the small man, as it were, worrying it between his teeth, disposing of it in little savage snaps and jerks and nasal snarlings.

He would stop eating to do it. That was when his beautiful and hypothetical companion left him to himself.

For the lady had a curiously soothing and subduing effect on the small man. Sometimes, when his snarls were too obtrusive, she would put out her hand, her small, perfect hand, and touch his sleeve, and he would cease snarling and begin to peck feebly at the things before him, or at the things before her, as the case might be. Thesiger actually saw her transferring the entrée she had just tasted from her own plate to his; he heard her coaxing and cajoling him, calling on him by his offensive name of Binky. "Eat, little Binky! Little Binky, eat!"

There seemed to be some rule in a game they had, by which, if she first touched or tasted anything, Binky could not honorably refuse it.

It was clear that she had a hold on the small man. Thesiger had noticed that when she cancelled his orders for drinks he made no resistance, while he bitterly resented Mr. Tarbuck's efforts at control. She would then inquire gaily of Mr. Tarbuck whether he was in command of this expedition or was she?

To-night, her fine eyes being considerably occupied with Thesiger, the small man asserted his independence and was served, surreptitiously as it were, with a brimming whisky and soda.

He had got his hand on it when the lady shot out a sudden arm across the table, and with a staggering dexterity and impudence possessed herself of his glass. Over the rim of it she kept her eyes on him, narrowed eyes, darting mockery of Binky under half-closed lids; and, with her head tilted back, she drank; she drank daintily, about an inch down, and then she gave the glass to the large man, and he, as if honor and chivalry compelled him also, emptied it.

"Did you that time, Binky," she murmured.

Thesiger heard her. She was looking at him, obviously to see how his fastidiousness had taken it. She leaned forward, her elbows on the table,

and her head, propped on her hands, tilted slightly backward, and she gazed at him under her lowered eyelids with her narrowed, darting eyes. Then suddenly she lowered her chin and opened her eyes, and he met them full.

Her gaze, which had first fascinated, now excited him; very curiously it excited him, seeing that he was thinking about Vera Walters all the time. So unabashed it was, and so alluring, it sent such challenge and encouragement to the adventurous blood, that under it the passion that Vera would have none of detached itself from Vera with a fierce revulsion, and was drawn and driven, driven and drawn toward that luminous and invincible gaze. And Thesiger began to say to himself that the world was all before him, although for him Vera had walked out of it; that he was a man of the world; and that he didn't care.

It seemed to him that the beautiful American smiled again at him. Then she got up, and swept down the dining-hall, swinging her rosy draperies. The two men followed her, and Thesiger was left alone in that vast place, seated at his table, and staring into a half-empty wineglass, to the embarrassment of the waiter who hovered by his chair.

After all, she left him an ultimate scruple; he could not altogether trust his doubt.

III

It was a fine night, and the lounge was almost deserted. Thesiger, searching it for some one he could speak to, counted four old ladies and their middle-aged companions, three young governesses and their charges only less young, and one old gentleman, fixed by an extreme corpulence in his armchair, asleep over *Le Figaro*, while one ponderous hand retained upon his knee *Le Petit Journal*. Nowhere any sign of the transatlantic mystery and her companions. It occurred to Thesiger that it might interest him to know her name (he hadn't heard it), and even the number of her room.

He strolled to the racks on each side of the great staircase where the visitors' names were posted, and after a prolonged investigation he came upon the three: Miss Roma Lennox, Mr. Frank Bingham-Booker, and Mr. Theobald G. Tarbuck, of New York City, U. S. A. Their respective numbers were 74, 75, and 80. What was odd, the opulent Tarbuck (number 80) occupied a small room looking over the garage at the back, while 74, Mr. Frank Bingham-Booker, who was visibly impecunious, and 75, Miss Roma Lennox, luxuriated. — Thesiger shook his head over the social complication and gave it up.

The lounge was no place for him. He went out, down the Californie Hill and along the Avenue des Palmiers, with some idea of turning eventually into the Casino. He was extraordinarily uplifted. He thought that he was feeling the enchantment of the lucid night above the sea, the magic of the white city of the hills, feeling the very madness of the tropics in the illusion that she made with her palm trees and their velvet shadows on the white pavement.

He had come to the little Place before the Casino, set with plane trees. Under the electric globes the naked stems, the branches, naked to the tip, showed white with a livid, supernatural, a devilish and iniquitous whiteness. The scene was further illuminated, devilishly, iniquitously, as it were, through the doors and windows of the Casino, of the restaurants, of the brasseries, of the omnipresent and omnipotent American Bar. If there were really any magic there, any devilry, any iniquity, it joined hands with the iniquity and devilry in Oscar Thesiger's soul, and led them forth desirous of adventure. And walking slowly and superbly, under the white plane trees, the adventure came.

As the light fell on her superb and slow approach, he saw that it was Roma Lennox; Roma Lennox walking, oh Lord! by herself, like that, after ten at night, in Cannes, on the pavement of the Place. She was coming toward him, making straight for him, setting herself unavoidably in his path. He had been prepared for many things, but he had not been prepared for that,

for the publicity, the fragrance of it. And yet he was not conscious of any wonder; rather he had a sense of the expectedness, the foregone-ness of the event, and a savage joy in the certainty she gave him, in his sudden absolution from the ultimate scruple, the release from that irritating, inhibiting doubt of his doubt.

He raised his hat and inquired urbanely whether he might be permitted to walk with her a little way.

She had stopped and was regarding him with singular directness.

"Why, certainly," she said.

They walked the little way permitted, and then, at her suggestion, they sat together under the plane trees on one of the chairs in a fairly solitary corner of the Place.

He saw now that she had changed her gown and that, over some obscurer thing, she wore a long, dull purple coat with wide hanging sleeves; her head was bound and wound, half-Eastern fashion, in a purple veil, hiding her hair. In her dark garb, with all her colors hidden, her brilliance extinguished, she was more wonderful than ever, more than ever in keeping with the illusion of the tropics.

His hands trembled and his pulses beat as he found himself thus plunged into the heart of the adventure. He might have been put off by the sheer rapidity and facility of the thing, but for her serious and somber air that seemed to open up depths, obscurities.

She sat very still, her profile slightly averted, and with one raised hand she held her drifting veil close about her chin. They sat thus in silence a moment, for her mystery embarrassed him. Then (slowly and superbly) over her still averted shoulder she half turned her head toward him.

"Well," she said, "haven't you anything to say for yourself? It's up to you."

Then, nervously, he began to say things, to pay her the barefaced, far from subtle, compliments that had served him once or twice before on similar

occasions (if any occasion could be called similar). Addressed to her, they seemed somehow inadequate. He said that, of course, inadequate he knew they were.

"I'm glad you think so," said Miss Lennox.

"I—I said I knew it."

"Oh—the things you know!"

"And the things you know." He grew fervid. "Don't pretend you don't know them. Don't pretend you don't know how a man feels when he looks at you."

"And why should I pretend?"

She had turned round now with her whole body and faced him squarely.

"Why should you? Why should you?"

Lashed, driven as he judged she meant him to be by her composure, his passion shook him and ran over, from the tips of his fingers stroking the flung sleeve of her coat, from the tip of his tongue uttering the provoked, inevitable things—things that came from him hushed for the crowd, but, for her, hurried, vehement, unveiled.

She listened without saying one word; she listened without looking at him, looking, rather, straight in front of her, and tilting her head a little backward before the approach of his inflamed, impetuous face.

He stopped, and she bent forward slightly and held him with the full gaze of her serious eyes.

"What—do you think—you're doing?" she asked slowly.

He said he supposed that she could see.

"I can see a good deal. I see you think you're saying these things to me because you've found me here at this peculiar time, in this peculiar place, and because I haven't any man around."

"No, no. That wasn't it, I—I assure you."

A terrible misgiving seized him.

"Why did you do it?" she asked sweetly.

"I—upon my word, I don't know why."

For it seemed to him now that he really hadn't known.

"I'll tell you why," said Roma Lennox. "You did it because you were just crazy with caring for another woman—a nice, sweet girl who won't have anything to say to you. And you've been saying to yourself you're durned if she cares, and you're durned if you care. And all the time you feel so bad about it that you must go and do something wicked right away. And taking off your hat to me was your idea of just about the razzlingest, dazzlingest, plumb wickedest thing you could figure out to do."

He rose, and took off his hat to her again.

"If I did," he said, "I beg your pardon. Fact is, I—I—I thought you were somebody else."

"I know it," said she, and paused. "Was it a very strong likeness that misled you?"

"No. No likeness at all. It's all right," he added hurriedly. "I'm going—I—I can't think how I made the mistake."

He looked at the scene, at the nocturnal prowlers and promenaders, at the solitary veiled and seated figure, and he smiled. In all his agony he smiled.

"And yet," he said, "somebody else will be making it if I leave you here. Somebody who won't go. I'll go if you like, but— —"

"Sit down," she said; "sit down right here. You're not going till you and I have had a straight talk. Don't you worry about your mistake. I meant you to come up and speak to me."

That staggered him.

"Good Lord! What on earth for?"

"Because I knew that if I didn't you'd go up and speak to somebody else. Somebody who wouldn't let you go."

She was more staggering than he could have thought her.

"But, dear lady, why — —?"

"Why? It's quite simple. You see, I saw you and her together, and I took an interest — I always do take an interest. So I watched you; and then — well — I saw what you thought of me for watching. At first I was just wild. And then, afterward, I said to myself I didn't know but what I'd just as soon you did think it, and then we'd have it out, and we'd see what we could make of it between us."

"Make of it?" he breathed.

"Well — I suppose you'll have to make something of it, won't you?"

"Between us?" He smiled faintly.

"Between us. I suppose if I've made you feel like that I've got to help you."

"To help me?"

"To help anyone who wants it. — You don't mind if I keep on looking at the Casino instead of looking at you? I can talk just the same. — And then, you see, it was because of me she left you — by the one-forty-four train."

"Because of you?"

"Because of the way you looked at me last night. She saw you."

He remembered.

"She saw that you thought I wasn't straight; and she saw that that was what interested you."

"Ah," he cried. "I was a cad. Why don't you tell me so? Why don't you pitch into me?"

"Because I fancy you've got about enough to bear. You see, I saw it all, and I was so sorry — so sorry."

She left it there a moment for him to take it in, her beautiful, astounding sorrow.

"And I just wanted to start right in and help you."

He murmured something incoherent, something that made her smile.

"Oh, it wasn't for the sake of your fine eyes, Mr. I-don't-know-your-name. It was because of her. I could see her saying to her dear little self, 'That woman isn't straight. He isn't straight, either. He won't do.' That's the sort of man she thought you were."

"But it wasn't as if she didn't know me, as if she didn't care. She did care."

"She did, indeed."

"Then why," he persisted, "why did she leave me?"

"Don't you understand?" (Her voice went all thick and tender in her throat.) "She was thinking of the children. You couldn't see her with those teeny, teeny things, and not know that's what she would think of."

"But," he wailed, "it wasn't as if they were her own children."

"Oh, how stupid you are! It was her own children she was thinking of."

IV

"So that was her reason," he said presently.

"Of course. Of course. It's the reason for the whole thing. It's the reason why, when a young man like you sees a young woman like me—I mean like the lady you thought I was—in an over-stimulating and tempestuous place like this, instead of taking off his silly hat to her, he should jam it well down over his silly ears and—quit!"

"You keep on saying 'what I thought you were.' I can't think how I could, or why I did."

"I know why," she replied serenely. "You fancied I had more decorations in my back hair than a respectable woman can well carry."

She meditated.

"I thought I could afford a rose or two. But it seems I couldn't."

"You? You can afford anything — anything. All the same — —"

"Well, if I can afford to sit with you, out here, at a quarter past ten, on this old heathenish piazza, I suppose I can."

"All the same — —" he insisted.

She meditated again.

"All the same, if it wasn't those roses, I can't think what it was."

"Dear lady, it wasn't the roses. You are so deadly innocent I think I ought to tell you what it was."

"Do," she said.

"It was, really, it was seeing you here, walking by yourself. It's so jolly late, you know."

She drew herself up. "An American woman can walk anywhere, at any time."

"Oh, yes, of course, of course. But for ordinary people, and in Latin countries, it's considered — well, a trifle singular."

She smiled.

"You puzzle me," he said. "Just now you seemed perfectly aware of it. And yet — —"

"And yet?" she raised her eyebrows.

"And yet, well — here you are, you know."

"Here I am, and here I've got to stay, it seems. Well — before that?"

"Before that?"

"Before this?" She tapped her foot, impatient at the slow movement of his thought. "Up there in the hotel?"

"Oh, in the hotel. I suppose it was seeing you with — —"

It was positively terrible, the look with which she faced him now. But his idea was that he had got to help her (hadn't she helped him?), and he was going through with it. It was permissible; it was even imperative, seeing the lengths, the depths, rather, of intimacy that they had gone to.

"Those two," he said. "They don't seem exactly your sort."

"You mean," said she, "they are not exactly yours."

She felt the shudder of his unspoken "Heaven forbid!"

"I suppose," she continued, "if a European man sees any woman alone in a hotel with two men whom he can't size up right away as her blood relations, he's apt to think things. Well, for all you know, Mr. Tarbuck might be my uncle and Mr. Bingham-Booker my half-brother."

"But they aren't."

"No. As far as blood goes, they aren't any more to me than Adam. You have me there."

There was a long pause which Thesiger, for the life of him, could not fill.

"Well," she reverted, "Mr. Whoever-you-are, I don't know that I owe you an explanation — —"

"You don't owe me anything."

"All the same I'm going to give you one, so that next time you'll think twice before you make any more of your venerable European mistakes. It isn't every woman who'd know how to turn them to your advantage. Perhaps you've seen what's wrong with Mr. Bingham-Booker?"

He intimated that it was not practicable not to see. "If I may say so, that makes it all the more unfitting — —"

"That's all you know about it, Mr. — —"

"Thesiger," he supplied.

"Mr. Thesiger. That boy had to be taken care of. He was killing himself with drink before we came away. He'd had a shock to his nerves, that's

what brought it on. He was ordered to Europe as his one chance. Somebody had to go with him, somebody he'd mind, and there wasn't anybody he did mind but me. I've known him since he was a little thing in knickerbockers, that high. So we fixed it that I was to go out and look after Binky, and Binky's mother—he's her only son—was coming out too, to look after me. We cared for appearances as much as you do. Well, the day before we sailed her married daughter was taken sick, in the inconsiderate way that married daughters have, and she couldn't go. And, do you know, there wasn't a woman that could take her place. They were afraid, every one of them, because they knew." She lowered her voice to utter it. "It makes him mad."

"My dear lady, it was a job for a trained nurse."

"Trained nurse? They couldn't afford one. And we didn't want a uniform hanging around and rubbing it into the poor boy and everybody else that he was an incurable dipsomaniac."

"But you—you?"

"It was my job. You don't suppose I was going back on them?"

She faced him with it, and as he looked at her he took the measure of her magnificence, her brilliant bravery.

"Going back on him? Poor Binky, he was so good and dear—except for that. You never saw anything so cute. Up to all sorts of monkey-shines and beautiful surprises. And then"—she smiled with a tender irony—"he gave us this surprise." From her face you could not have gathered how far from beautiful his last had been. "I was going to see that boy through if I had to go with him alone. I said to myself there are always people around who'll think things, whatever you do, but it doesn't matter what people who don't matter think. And then—Mr. Tarbuck wouldn't let me go alone. He said I'd have to have a man with me. A strong man. He'd known me—never mind how long—so it was all right. I don't know what I'd have done without Mr. Tarbuck."

She paused on him.

"That man, whom you don't think fit for me to have around, is — well — he's the finest man I've ever known or want to know. He does the dearest things."

She paused again, remembering them. And Thesiger, though her admiration of Tarbuck was obscurely hateful to him, owned that, fine as she was, she was at her finest as she praised him.

"Why," she went on, "just because Binky couldn't afford a good room he gave him his. He said the view of the sea would set him up better than anything, and the garage was all the view he wanted, because he's just crazy on motors. And he's been like that all through. Never thought of himself once."

"Oh, didn't he?" said Thesiger.

"Not once. Do you know, Mr. Tarbuck is a very big man. He runs one of the biggest businesses in the States; and at twenty-four hours' notice he left his big business to take care of itself, and came right away on this trip to take care of me."

"Is he taking care of you now?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well — if he can leave you — here — —?"

"Why, he's here somewhere, looking for Mr. Bingham-Booker. He's routing about in those queer saloons and places."

"And you?"

"I'm keeping my eye on the Casino. It's my fault he got away. You can't always tell when it's best to give him his head and when it isn't. I ought to have let him have that whiskey and soda. Do you see either of them?"

He looked round. "I think," he said, "I see Mr. Tarbuck."

She followed his gaze. Not five yards from them, planted on the pavement as if he grew there, was Mr. Tarbuck. His large back was turned to them with an expression at once ostentatious and discreet. Thesiger had the idea that it had been there for some considerable time, probably ever since his own appearance. Mr. Tarbuck's back said plainly that, though Mr. Tarbuck neither looked nor listened, that he would scorn the action, yet he was there, at his friend's service if she wanted him.

"I'm afraid," said Roma Lennox, "he hasn't found him."

"He doesn't seem to be looking."

(He didn't.)

"Oh, I fancy," said she, "he's just squinting round."

"Can I do anything?"

"Why, yes, you could sit here and watch the Casino while I go and speak to Mr. Tarbuck."

She went and spoke to him. Thesiger saw how affectionately the large man bent his head to her.

She returned to Thesiger, and Mr. Tarbuck (whom she had evidently released from sentry-go) stalked across the Place toward the American Bar.

"He is not in the Casino," she said.

"Have you tried the American Bar?"

"Of course; we've tried all of them."

"I say, I want to help you. Can't I?"

She shook her head.

"If I stayed on in the hotel, could I be of any use?"

"You're not going to stay."

"Why shouldn't I? I've nothing else to do."

"Oh, haven't you? What you have to do is to take that one-forty-four train to Nice, to-morrow afternoon."

"It's no good," he muttered gloomily. "I'm done for. You've made me see that plain enough."

"All I made you see was why she turned you down. And now that you do see — —"

"What difference does it make, my seeing it?"

"Why, all the difference. Do you think I'd have taken all this trouble if it wasn't for that — to have you go right away and make it up with her?"

"And with you — can I ever make it up?"

"Don't you worry."

She rose. "I suppose appearances were against me; but — —"

She held him for a moment with her eyes that measured him; then, as if she had done all that she wanted with him, she gave him back to himself, the finer for her handling.

"It wasn't for appearances you really cared."

THE WRACKHAM MEMOIRS

I

The publishers told you he behaved badly, did they? They didn't know the truth about the "Wrackham Memoirs."

You may well wonder how Grevill Burton got mixed up with them, how he ever could have known Charles Wrackham.

Well, he did know him, pretty intimately, too, but it was through Antigone, and because of Antigone, and for Antigone's adorable sake. We never called her anything but Antigone, though Angelette was the name that Wrackham, with that peculiar shortsightedness of his, had given to the splendid creature.

Why Antigone? You'll see why.

No, I don't mean that Wrackham murdered his father and married his mother; but he wouldn't have stuck at either if it could have helped him to his literary ambition. And every time he sat down to write a book he must have been disgusting to the immortal gods. And Antigone protected him.

She was the only living child he'd had, or, as Burton once savagely said, was ever likely to have. And I can tell you that if poor Wrackham's other works had been one half as fine as Antigone it would have been glory enough for Burton to have edited him. For he did edit him.

They met first, if you'll believe it, at Ford Lankester's funeral. I'd gone to Chenies early with young Furnival, who was "doing" the funeral for his paper, and with Burton, who knew the Lankesters, as I did, slightly. I'd had a horrible misgiving that I should see Wrackham there; and there he was, in the intense mourning of that black cloak and slouch hat he used to wear. The cloak was a fine thing as far as it went, and with a few more inches he really might have carried it off; but those few more inches were just what had been denied him. Still, you couldn't miss him or mistake him. He was exactly like his portraits in the papers; you know the haggard, bilious face that would have been handsome if he'd given it a chance; the dark,

straggling, and struggling beard, the tempestuous, disheveled look he had, and the immortal Attitude. He was standing in it under a yew tree looking down into Lankester's grave. It was a small white chamber about two feet square—enough for his ashes. The earth at the top of it was edged with branches of pine and laurel.

Furnival said afterward you could see what poor Wrackham was thinking of. He would have pine branches. Pine would be appropriate for the stormy Child of Nature that he was. And laurel—there would have to be lots of laurel. He was at the height of his great vogue, the brief popular fury for him that was absurd then and seems still more absurd to-day, now that we can measure him. He takes no room, no room at all, even in the popular imagination; less room than Lankester's ashes took—or his own, for that matter.

Yes, I know it's sad in all conscience. But Furnival seemed to think it funny then, for he called my attention to him. I mustn't miss him, he said.

Perhaps I might have thought it funny too if it hadn't been for Antigone. I was not prepared for Antigone. I hadn't realized her. She was there beside her father, not looking into the grave, but looking at him as if she knew what he was thinking and found it, as we find it now, pathetic. But unbearably pathetic.

Somehow there seemed nothing incongruous in her being there. No, I can't tell you what she was like to look at, except that she was like a great sacred, sacrificial figure; she might have come there to pray, or to offer something, or to pour out a libation. She was tall and grave, and gave the effect of something white and golden. In her black gown and against the yew trees she literally shone.

It was because of Antigone that I went up and spoke to him, and did it (I like to think I did it now) with reverence. He seemed, in spite of the reverence, to be a little dashed at seeing me there. His idea, evidently, was that if so obscure a person as I could be present, it diminished his splendor and significance.

He inquired (for hope was immortal in him) whether I was there for the papers? I said no, I wasn't there for anything. I had come down with Burton, because we — — But he interrupted me.

"What's he doing here?" he said. There was the funniest air of resentment and suspicion about him.

I reminded him that Burton's "Essay on Ford Lankester" had given him a certain claim. Besides, Mrs. Lankester had asked him. He was one of the few she had asked. I really couldn't tell him she had asked me.

His gloom was awful enough when he heard that Burton had been asked. You see, the fact glared, and even he must have felt it—that he, with his tremendous, his horrific vogue, had not achieved what Grevill Burton had by his young talent. He had never known Ford Lankester. Goodness knows I didn't mean to rub it into him; but there it was.

We had moved away from the edge of the grave (I think he didn't like to be seen standing there with me) and I begged him to introduce me to his daughter. He did so with an alacrity which I have since seen was anything but flattering to me, and left me with her while he made what you might call a dead set at Furnival. He had had his eye on him and on the other representatives of the press all the time he had been talking to me. Now he made straight for him; when Furnival edged off he followed; when Furnival dodged he doubled; he was so afraid that Furnival might miss him. As if Furnival could have missed him, as if in the face of Wrackham's vogue his paper would have let him miss him. It would have been as much as Furny's place on it was worth.

Of course that showed that Wrackham ought never to have been there; but there he was; and when you think of the unspeakable solemnity and poignancy of the occasion it really is rather awful that the one vivid impression I have left of it is of Charles Wrackham; Charles Wrackham under the yew tree; Charles Wrackham leaning up against a pillar (he remained standing during the whole of the service in the church) with his arm raised and his face hidden in his cloak. The attitude this time was

immense. Furnival (Furny was really dreadful) said it was "Brother mourning Brother." But I caught him—I caught him three times—just raising his near eyelid above his drooped arm and peeping at Furnival and the other pressmen to see that they weren't missing him.

It must have been then that Burton saw, though he says now he didn't. He won't own up to having seen him. We had hidden ourselves behind the mourners in the chancel and he swears that he didn't see anybody but Antigone, and that he only saw her because, in spite of her efforts to hide too, she stood out so; she was so tall, so white and golden. Her head was bowed with—well, with grief, I think, but also with what I've no doubt now was a sort of shame. I wondered: Did she share her father's illusion? Or had she seen through it? Did she see the awful absurdity of the draped figure at her side? Did she realize the gulf that separated him from the undying dead? Did she know that we couldn't have stood his being there but for our certainty that somewhere above us and yet with us, from his high seat among the Undying, Ford Lankester was looking on and enjoying more than we could enjoy—with a divine, immortal mirth—the rich, amazing comedy of him. Charles Wrackham there—at his funeral!

But it wasn't till it was all over that he came out really strong. We were sitting together in the parlor of the village inn, he and Antigone, and Grevill Burton and Furnival and I, with an hour on our hands before our train left. I had ordered tea on Antigone's account, for I saw that she was famished. They had come down from Devonshire that day. They had got up at five to catch the early train from Seaton Junction, and then they'd made a dash across London for the 12.30 from Marylebone; and somehow they'd either failed or forgotten to lunch. Antigone said she hadn't cared about it. Anyhow, there she was with us. We were all feeling that relief from nervous tension which comes after a funeral. Furnival had his stylo out and was jotting down a few impressions. Wrackham had edged up to him and was sitting, you may say, in Furny's pocket while he explained to us that his weak health would have prevented him from coming, but that

he had to come. He evidently thought that the funeral couldn't have taken place without him—not with any decency, you know. And then Antigone said a thing for which I loved her instantly.

"I oughtn't to have come," she said. "I felt all the time I oughtn't. I hadn't any right."

That drew him.

"You had your right," he said. "You are your father's daughter."

He brooded somberly.

"It was not," he said, "what I had expected—that meager following. Who were there? Not two—not three—and there should have been an army of us."

He squared himself and faced the invisible as if he led the van.

That and his attitude drew Burton down on to him.

"Was there ever an army," he asked dangerously, "of 'us'?"

Wrackham looked at Burton (it was the first time he'd taken the smallest notice of him) with distinct approval, as if the young man had suddenly shown more ability than he had given him credit for. But you don't suppose he'd seen the irony in him. Not he!

"You're right," he said. "Very right. All the same, there ought to have been more there besides Myself."

There was a perfectly horrible silence, and then Antigone's voice came through it, pure and fine and rather slow.

"There couldn't be. There couldn't really be anybody—there—at all. He stood alone."

And with her wonderful voice there went a look, a look of intelligence, as wonderful, as fine and pure. It went straight to Burton. It was humble, and yet there was a sort of splendid pride about it. And there was no revolt, mind you, no disloyalty in it; the beauty of the thing was that it didn't set

her father down; it left him where he was, as high as you please, as high as his vogue could lift him. Ford Lankester was beyond him only because he was beyond them all.

And yet we wondered how he'd take it.

He took it as if Antigone had been guilty of a social blunder; as if her behavior had been in some way painful and improper. That's to say he took no notice of it at all beyond shifting his seat a little so as to screen her. And then he spoke—exclusively to us.

"I came," he said, "partly because I felt that, for all Lankester's greatness, this—" (his gesture indicated us all sitting there in our mourning)—"this was the last of him. It's a question whether he'll ever mean much to the next generation. There's no doubt that he limited his public—wilfully. He alienated the many. And, say what you like, the judgment of posterity is not the judgment of the few." There was a faint murmur of dissent (from Furnival), but Wrackham's voice, which had gathered volume, rolled over it. "Not for the novelist. Not for the painter of contemporary life."

He would have kept it up interminably on those lines and on that scale, but that Antigone created a diversion (I think she did it on purpose to screen him) by getting up and going out softly into the porch of the inn.

Burton followed her there.

You forgive many things to Burton. I have had to forgive his cutting me out with Antigone. He says that they talked about nothing but Ford Lankester out there, and certainly as I joined them I heard Antigone saying again, "I oughtn't to have come. I only came because I adored him." I heard Burton say, "And you never knew him?" and Antigone, "No, how could I?"

And then I saw him give it back to her with his young radiance. "It's a pity. He would have adored you."

He always says it was Ford Lankester that did it.

The next thing Furnival's article came out. Charles Wrackham's name was in it all right, and poor Antigone's. I'm sure it made her sick to see it there. Furny had been very solemn and decorous in his article; but in private his profanity was awful. He said it only remained now for Charles Wrackham to die.

II

He didn't die. Not then, not all at once. He had an illness afterward that sent his circulation up to I don't know what, but he didn't die of it. He knew his business far too well to die then. We had five blessed years of him. Nor could we have done with less. Words can't describe the joy he was to us, nor what he would have been but for Antigone.

I ought to tell you that he recovered his spirits wonderfully on our way back from Chenies. He had mistaken our attentions to Antigone for interest in him, and he began to unbend, to unfold himself, to expand gloriously. It was as if he felt that the removal of Ford Lankester had left him room.

He proposed that Burton and I should make a pilgrimage some day to Wildweather Hall. He called it a pilgrimage—to the shrine, you understand.

Well, we made it. We used to make many pilgrimages, but Burton made more than I.

The Sacred Place, you remember, was down in East Devon. He'd built himself a modern Tudor mansion—if you know what that is—there and ruined the most glorious bit of the coast between Seaton and Sidmouth. It stood at the head of a combe looking to the sea. They'd used old stone for the enormous front of it, and really, if he'd stuck it anywhere else, it might have been rather fine. But it was much too large for the combe. Why, when all the lights were lit in it you could see it miles out to sea, twinkling away like the line of the Brighton Parade. It was one immense advertisement of Charles Wrackham, and must have saved his publishers thousands. His "grounds" went the whole length of the combe, and up the hill on the east

side of it where his cucumber frames blazed in the sun. And besides his cucumbers (anybody can have cucumbers) he had a yacht swinging in Portland Harbor (at least he had that year when he was at his height). And he had two motor-cars and a wood that he kept people out of, and a great chunk of beach. He couldn't keep them off that, and they'd come miles, from Torquay and Exeter, to snapshot him when he bathed.

The regular approach to him, for pilgrims, was extraordinarily impressive. And not only the "grounds," but the whole interior of the Tudor mansion, must have been planned with a view to that alone. It was all staircases and galleries and halls, black oak darkneses and sudden clear spaces and beautiful chintzy, silky rooms—lots of them, for Mrs. Wrackham—and books and busts and statues everywhere. And these were only his outer courts; inside them was his sanctuary, his library, and inside that, divided from it by curtains, was the Innermost, the shrine itself, and inside the shrine, veiled by his curtains, was Charles Wrackham.

As you came through, everything led up to him, as it were, by easy stages and gradations. He didn't burst on you cruelly and blind you. You waited a minute or two in the library, which was all what he called "silent presences and peace." The silent presences, you see, prepared you for him. And when, by gazing on the busts of Shakespeare and Cervantes, your mind was turned up to him, then you were let in. Over that Tudor mansion, and the whole place, you may say for miles along the coast, there brooded the shadow of Charles Wrackham's greatness. If we hadn't been quite so much oppressed by that we might have enjoyed the silent presences and the motor-cars and things, and the peace that was established there because of him. And we did enjoy Antigone and Mrs. Wrackham.

It's no use speculating what he would have been if he'd never written anything. You cannot detach him from his writings, nor would he have wished to be detached. I suppose he would still have been the innocent, dependent creature that he was: fond, very fond of himself, but fond also of his home and of his wife and daughter. It was his domesticity, described,

illustrated, exploited in a hundred papers, that helped to endear Charles Wrackham to his preposterous public. It was part of the immense advertisement. His wife's gowns, the sums he spent on her, the affection that he notoriously lavished on her, were part of it.

I'll own that at one time I had a great devotion to Mrs. Wrackham (circumstances have somewhat strained it since). She was a woman of an adorable plumpness, with the remains of a beauty which must have been pink and golden once. And she would have been absolutely simple but for the touch of assurance that was given her by her position as the publicly loved wife of a great man. Every full, round line of her face and figure declared (I don't like to say advertised) her function. She existed in and for Charles Wrackham. You saw that her prominent breast fairly offered itself as a pillow for his head. Her soft hands suggested the perpetual stroking and soothing of his literary vanity, her face the perpetual blowing of an angelic trumpet in his praise. Her entire person, incomparably soft, yet firm, was a buffer that interposed itself automatically between Wrackham and the bludgeonings of fate. As for her mind, I know nothing about it except that it was absolutely simple. She was a woman of one idea – two ideas, I should say, Charles Wrackham the Man, and Charles Wrackham the Great Novelist.

She could separate them only so far as to marvel at his humanity because of his divinity, how he could stoop, how he could condescend, how he could lay it all aside and be delightful as we saw him – "Like a boy, Mr. Simpson, like a boy!"

It was our second day, Sunday, and Wrackham had been asleep in his shrine all afternoon while she piloted us in the heat about the "grounds." I can see her now, dear plump lady, under her pink sunshade, saying all this with a luminous, enchanting smile. We were not to miss him; we were to look at him giving up his precious, his inconceivably precious time, laying himself out to amuse, to entertain us – "Just giving himself – giving himself all the time." And then, lest we might be uplifted, she informed us, still

with the luminous, enchanting smile, that Mr. Wrackham was like that to "everybody, Mr. Simpson; everybody!"

She confided a great many things to us that afternoon. For instance, that she was greatly troubled by what she called "the ill-natured attacks on Mr. Wrackham in the papers," the "things" that "They" said about him (it was thus vaguely that she referred to some of our younger and profaner critics). She was very sweet and amiable and charitable about it. I believe she prayed for them. She was quite sure, dear lady, that "They" wouldn't do it if "They" knew how sensitive he was, how much it hurt him. And of course it didn't really hurt him. He was above it all.

I remember I began that Sunday by cracking up Burton to her, just to see how she would take it, and perhaps for another reason. Antigone had carried him off to the strawberry-bed, where I gathered from their sounds of happy laughter that they were feeding each other with the biggest ones. For the moment, though not, I think, afterward, Antigone's mother was blind and deaf to what was going on in the strawberry-bed. I spoke to her of Burton and his work, of the essay on Ford Lankester, of the brilliant novel he had just published, his first; and I even went so far as to speak of the praise it had received; but I couldn't interest her in Burton. I believe she always, up to the very last, owed Burton a grudge on account of his novels; not so much because he had so presumptuously written them as because he had been praised for writing them. I don't blame her, neither did he, for this feeling. It was inseparable from the piety with which she regarded Charles Wrackham as a great figure in literature, a sacred and solitary figure.

I don't know how I got her off him and on to Antigone. I may have asked her point-blank to what extent Antigone was her father's daughter. The luminous and expansive lady under the sunshade was a little less luminous and expansive when we came to Angelette, as she called her; but I gathered then, and later, that Antigone was a dedicated child, a child set apart and consecrated to the service of her father. It was not, of course, to be expected

that she should inherit any of his genius; Mrs. Wrackham seemed to think it sufficiently wonderful that she should have developed the intelligence that fitted her to be his secretary. I was not to suppose it was because he couldn't afford a secretary (the lady laughed as she said this; for you see how absurd it was, the idea of Charles Wrackham not being able to afford anything). It was because they both felt that Antigone ought not to be, as she put it, "overshadowed" by him; he wished that she should be associated, intimately associated, with his work; that the child should have her little part in his glory. It was not only her share of life which he took and so to speak put in the bank for her, but an investment for Antigone in the big business of his immortality. There she was, there she always would be, associated with Charles Wrackham and his work.

She sighed under the sunshade. "That child," she said, "can do more for him, Mr. Simpson, than I can."

I could see that, though the poor lady didn't know it, she suffered a subtle sorrow and temptation. If she hadn't been so amiable, if she hadn't been so good, she would have been jealous of Antigone.

She assured us that only his wife and daughter knew what he really was.

We wondered, did Antigone know? She made no sign of distance or dissent, but somehow she didn't seem to belong to him. There was something remote and irrelevant about her; she didn't fit into the advertisement. And in her remoteness and irrelevance she remained inscrutable. She gave no clue to what she really thought of him. When "They" went for him she soothed him. She spread her warm angel's wing, and wrapped him from the howling blast. But, as far as we could make out, she never committed herself to an opinion. All her consolations went to the tune of "They say. What say they? Let them say." Which might have applied to anybody. We couldn't tell whether, like her mother, she believed implicitly or whether she saw through him.

She certainly saw beyond him, or she couldn't have said the things she did—you remember?—at Ford Lankester's funeral. But she had been

overwrought then, and that clear note had been wrung from her by the poignancy of the situation. She never gave us anything like that again.

And she was devoted to him — devoted with passion. There couldn't be any sort of doubt about it.

Sometimes I wondered even then if it wasn't almost entirely a passion of pity. For she must have known. Burton always declared she knew. At least in the beginning he did; afterwards he was not clear about it any more than I was then. He said that her knowledge, her vision, of him was complete and that her pity for him was unbearable. He said that she would have given anything to have seen him as her mother saw him and as he saw himself, and that all her devotion to him, to it, his terrible work, was to make up to him for not seeing, for seeing as she saw. It was consecration, if you like; but it was expiation too, the sacrifice for the sin of an unfilial clarity.

And the tenderness she put into it!

Wrackham never knew how it protected him. It regularly spoilt our pleasure in him. We couldn't—when we thought of Antigone—get the good out of him we might have done. We had to be tender to him, too. I think Antigone liked us for our tenderness. Certainly she liked Burton — oh, from the very first.

III

They had known each other about six months when he proposed to her, and she wouldn't have him. He went on proposing at ridiculously short intervals, but it wasn't a bit of good. Wrackham wouldn't give his consent, and it seemed Antigone wouldn't marry anybody without it. He said Burton was too poor, and Antigone too young; but the real reason was that Burton's proposal came as a shock to his vanity. I told you how coolly he had appropriated the young man's ardent and irrepressible devotion; he had looked on him as a disciple, a passionate pilgrim to his shrine; and the truth, the disillusionment, was more than he could stand. He'd never had a

disciple or a pilgrim of Burton's quality. He could ignore and disparage Burton's brilliance when it suited his own purpose, and when it suited his own purpose he thrust Burton and his brilliance down your throat. Thus he never said a word about Burton's novels except that he once went out of his way to tell me that he hadn't read them (I believe he was afraid to). Antigone must have noticed that, and she must have understood the meaning of it. I know she never spoke to him about anything that Burton did. She must have felt he couldn't bear it. Anyhow, he wasn't going to recognize Burton's existence as a novelist; it was as if he thought his silence could extinguish him. But he knew all about Burton's critical work; there was his splendid "Essay on Ford Lankester"; he couldn't ignore or disparage that, and he didn't want to. He had had his eye on him from the first as a young man, an exceptionally brilliant young man who might be useful to him.

And so, though he wouldn't let the brilliant young man marry his daughter, he wasn't going to lose sight of him; and Burton continued his passionate pilgrimages to Wildweather Hall.

I didn't see Wrackham for a long time, but I heard of him; I heard all I wanted, for Burton was by no means so tender to him as he used to be. And I heard of poor Antigone. I gathered that she wasn't happy, that she was losing some of her splendor and vitality. In all Burton's pictures of her you could see her droop.

This went on for nearly three years, and by that time Burton, as you know, had made a name for himself that couldn't be ignored. He was also making a modest, a rather painfully modest income. And one evening he burst into my rooms and told me it was all right. Antigone had come round. Wrackham hadn't, but that didn't matter. Antigone had said she didn't care. They might have to wait a bit, but that didn't matter either. The great thing was that she had accepted him, that she had had the courage to oppose her father. You see, they scored because, as long as Wrackham had his eye on Burton, he didn't forbid him the house.

I went down with him soon after that by Wrackham's invitation. I'm not sure that he hadn't his eye on me; he had his eye on everybody in those days when, you know, his vogue, his tremendous vogue, was just perceptibly on the decline.

I found him changed, rather pitiably changed, and in low spirits. "They" — the terrible, profane young men — had been "going for him" again, as he called it.

Of course when they really went for him he was all right. He could get over it by saying that they did it out of sheer malevolence, that they were jealous of his success, that a writer cannot be great without making enemies, and that perhaps he wouldn't have known how great he was if he hadn't made any. But they didn't give him much opportunity. They were too clever for that. They knew exactly how to flick him on the raw. It wasn't by the things they said so much as by the things they deliberately didn't say; and they could get at him any time, easily, by praising other people.

Of course none of it did any violence to the supreme illusion. He was happy. I think he liked writing his dreadful books. (There must have been something soothing in the act with its level, facile fluency.) I know he enjoyed bringing them out. He gloated over the announcements. He drew a voluptuous pleasure from his proofs. He lived from one day of publication to the other; there wasn't a detail of the whole dreary business that he would have missed. It all nourished the illusion. I don't suppose he ever had a shadow of misgiving as to his power. What he worried about was his prestige. He couldn't help being aware that, with all he had, there was still something that he hadn't. He knew, he must have known, that he was not read, not recognized by the people who admired Ford Lankester. He felt their silence and their coldness strike through the warm comfort of his vogue. We, Burton and I, must have made him a bit uneasy. I never in my life saw anybody so alert and so suspicious, so miserably alive to the qualifying shade, the furtive turn, the disastrous reservation.

But no, never a misgiving about Himself. Only, I think, moments of a dreadful insight when he heard behind him the creeping of the tide of oblivion, and it frightened him. He was sensitive to every little fluctuation in his vogue. He had the fear of its vanishing before his eyes. And there he was, shut up among all his splendor with his fear; and it was his wife's work and Antigone's to keep it from him, to stand between him and that vision. He was like a child when his terror was on him; he would go to anybody for comfort. I believe, if Antigone and his wife hadn't been there, he'd have confided in his chauffeur.

He confided now in us, walking dejectedly with us in his "grounds."

"They'd destroy me," he said, "if they could. How they can take pleasure in it, Simpson! It's incredible, incomprehensible."

We said it was, but it wasn't in the least. We knew the pleasure, the indestructible pleasure, he gave us; we knew the irresistible temptation that he offered. As for destroying him, we knew that they wouldn't have destroyed him for the world. He was their one bright opportunity. What would they have done without their Wrackham?

He kept on at it. He said there had been moments this last year when, absurd as it might seem, he had wondered whether after all he hadn't failed. That was the worst of an incessant persecution; it hypnotized you into disbelief, not as to your power (he rubbed that in), but as to your success, the permanence of the impression you had made. I remember trying to console him, telling him that he was all right. He'd got his public, his enormous public.

There were consolations we might have offered him. We might have told him that he had succeeded; we might have told him that, if he wanted a monument, he'd only got to look around him. After all, he'd made a business of it that enabled him to build a Tudor mansion with bathrooms everywhere and keep two motor-cars. We could have reminded him that there wasn't one of the things he'd got with it — no, not one bathroom — that he would have sacrificed, that he was capable of sacrificing; that he'd

warmed himself jolly well all over and all the time before the fire of life, and that his cucumbers alone must have been a joy to him. And of course we might have told him that he couldn't have it both ways; that you cannot have bathrooms and motor-cars and cucumber-frames (not to the extent he had them) and the incorruptible and stainless glory. But that wouldn't have consoled him; for he wanted it both ways. Fellows like Wrackham always do. He wasn't really happy, as a really great man might have been, with his cucumbers and things.

He kept on saying it was easy enough to destroy a Great Name. Did they know, did anybody know, what it cost to build one?

I said to myself that possibly Antigone might know. All I said to him was, "Look here, we're agreed they can't do anything. When a man has once captured and charmed the great Heart of the Public, he's safe—in his lifetime, anyway."

Then he burst out. "His lifetime? Do you suppose he cares about his lifetime? It's the life beyond life—the life beyond life."

It was in fact, d'you see, the "Life and Letters." He was thinking about it then.

He went on. "They have it all their own way. He can't retort; he can't explain; he can't justify himself. It's only when he's dead they'll let him speak."

"Well, I mean to. That'll show 'em," he said; "that'll show 'em."

"He's thinking of it, Simpson; he's thinking of it," Burton said to me that evening.

He smiled. He didn't know what his thinking of it was going to mean—for him.

IV

He had been thinking of it for some considerable time. That pilgrimage was my last – it'll be two years ago this autumn – and it was in the spring of last year he died.

He was happy in his death. It saved him from the thing he dreaded above everything, certainty of the ultimate extinction. It has not come yet. We are feeling still the long reverberation of his vogue. We miss him still in the gleam, the jest gone forever from the papers. There is no doubt but that his death staved off the ultimate extinction. It revived the public interest in him. It jogged the feeble pulse of his once vast circulation. It brought the familiar portrait back again into the papers, between the long, long columns. And there was more laurel and a larger crowd at Brookwood than on the day when we first met him in the churchyard at Chenies.

And then we said there had been stuff in him. We talked (in the papers) of his "output." He had been, after all, a prodigious, a gigantic worker. He appealed to our profoundest national instincts, to our British admiration of sound business, of the self-made, successful man. He might not have done anything for posterity, but he had provided magnificently for his child and widow.

So we appraised him. Then on the top of it all the crash came, the tremendous crash that left his child and widow almost penniless. He hadn't provided for them at all. He had provided for nothing but his own advertisement. He had been living, not only beyond his income, but beyond, miles beyond, his capital, beyond even the perennial power that was the source of it. And he had been afraid, poor fellow! to retrench, to reduce by one cucumber-frame the items of the huge advertisement; why, it would have been as good as putting up the shop windows – his publishers would instantly have paid him less.

His widow explained tearfully how it all was, and how wise and foreseeing he had been; what a thoroughly sound man of business. And really we thought the dear lady wouldn't be left so very badly off. We calculated that

Burton would marry Antigone, and that the simple, self-denying woman could live in modest comfort on the mere proceeds of the inevitable sale. Then we heard that the Tudor mansion, the "Grounds," the very cucumber-frames, were sunk in a mortgage; and the sale of his "effects," the motor-cars and furniture, the books and the busts, paid his creditors in full, but it left a bare pittance for his child and widow.

They had come up to town in that exalted state with which courageous women face adversity. In her excitement Antigone tried hard to break off her engagement to Grevill Burton. She was going to do typewriting, she was going to be somebody's secretary, she was going to do a thousand things; but she was not going to hang herself like a horrid millstone round his neck and sink him. She had got it into her head, poor girl, that Wrackham had killed himself, ruined himself by his efforts to provide for his child and widow. They had been the millstones round his neck. She even talked openly now about the "pot-boilers" they had compelled Papa to write; by which she gave us to understand that he had been made for better things. It would have broken your heart to hear her.

Her mother, ravaged and reddened by grief, met us day after day (we were doing all we could for her) with her indestructible, luminous smile. She could be tearful still on provocation, through the smile, but there was something about her curiously casual and calm, something that hinted almost complacently at a little mystery somewhere, as if she had up her sleeve resources that we were not allowing for. But we caught the gist of it, that we, affectionate and well-meaning, but thoroughly unbusiness-like young men, were not to worry. Her evident conviction was that he had foreseen, he had provided for them.

"Lord only knows," I said to Burton, "what the dear soul imagines will turn up."

Then one day she sent for me; for me, mind you, not Burton. There was something that she and her daughter, desired to consult me about. I went off at once to the dreadful little lodgings in the Fulham Road where they

had taken refuge. I found Antigone looking, if anything, more golden and more splendid, more divinely remote and irrelevant against the dingy background. Her mother was sitting very upright at the head and she at the side of the table that almost filled the room. They called me to the chair set for me facing Antigone. Throughout the interview I was exposed, miserably, to the clear candor of her gaze.

Her mother, with the simplicity which was her charming quality, came straight to the point. It seemed that Wrackham had thought better of us, of Burton and me, than he had ever let us know. He had named us his literary executors. Of course, his widow expounded, with the option of refusal. Her smile took for granted that we would not refuse.

What did I say? Well, I said that I couldn't speak for Burton, but for my own part I—I said I was honored (for Antigone was looking at me with those eyes) and of course I shouldn't think of refusing, and I didn't imagine Burton would either. You see I'd no idea what it meant. I supposed we were only in for the last piteous turning out of the dead man's drawers, the sorting and sifting of the rubbish heap. We were to decide what was worthy of him and what was not.

There couldn't, I supposed, be much of it. He had been hard pressed. He had always published up to the extreme limit of his production.

I had forgotten all about the "Life and Letters." They had been only a fantastic possibility, a thing our profane imagination played with; and under the serious, chastening influences of his death it had ceased to play.

And now they were telling me that this thing was a fact. The letters were, at any rate. They had raked them all in, to the last postcard (he hadn't written any to us), and there only remained the Life. It wasn't a perfectly accomplished fact; it would need editing, filling out, and completing from where he had left it off. He had not named his editor, his biographer, in writing—at least, they could find no note of it among his papers—but he had expressed a wish, a wish that they felt they could not disregard. He had expressed it the night before he died to Antigone, who was with him.

"Did he not, dearest?"

I heard Antigone say, "Yes, Mamma." She was not looking at me then.

There was a perfectly awful silence. And then Antigone did look at me, and she smiled faintly.

"It isn't you," she said.

No, it was not I. I wasn't in it. It was Grevill Burton.

I ought to tell you it wasn't an open secret any longer that Burton was editing the "Life and Letters of Ford Lankester," with a Critical Introduction. The announcement had appeared in the papers a day or two before Wrackham's death. He had had his eye on Burton. He may have wavered between him and another, he may have doubted whether Burton was after all good enough; but that honor, falling to Burton at that moment, clinched it. There was prestige, there was the thing he wanted. Burton was his man.

There wouldn't, Mrs. Wrackham said, be so very much editing to do. He had worked hard in the years before his death. He had gathered in all the material, and there were considerable fragments—whole blocks of reminiscences, which could be left, which should be left as they stood (her manner implied that they were monuments). What they wanted, of course, was something more than editing. Anybody could have done that. There was the Life to be completed in the later years, the years in which Mr. Burton had known him more intimately than any of his friends. Above all, what was necessary, what had been made so necessary, was a Critical Introduction, the summing up, the giving of him to the world as he really was.

Did I think they had better approach Mr. Burton direct, or would I do that for them? Would I sound him on the subject?

I said cheerfully that I would sound him. If Burton couldn't undertake it (I had to prepare them for this possibility), no doubt we should find somebody who could.

But Antigone met this suggestion with a clear "No." It wasn't to be done at all unless Mr. Burton did it. And her mother gave a little cry. It was inconceivable that it should not be done. Mr. Burton must. He would. He would see the necessity, the importance of it.

Of course I saw it. And I saw that my position and Burton's was more desperate than I had imagined. I couldn't help but see the immense importance of the "Life and Letters." They were bound, even at this time of day, to "fetch" a considerable sum, and the dear lady might be pardoned if she were incidentally looking to them as a means of subsistence. They were evidently what she had had up her sleeve. Her delicacy left the financial side of the question almost untouched; but in our brief discussion of the details, from her little wistful tone in suggesting that if Mr. Burton could undertake it at once and get it done soon, if they could in fact launch it on the top of the returning tide—from the very way that she left me to finish her phrases for her I gathered that they regarded the "Life and Letters" as Wrackham's justification in more ways than one. They proved that he had not left them unprovided for.

Well, I sounded Burton. He stared at me aghast. I was relieved to find that he was not going to be sentimental about it. He refused flatly.

"I can't do him and Lankester," he said.

I saw his point. He would have to keep himself clean for him. I said of course he couldn't, but I didn't know how he was going to make it straight with Antigone.

"I shan't have to make it straight with Antigone," he said. "She'll see it. She always has seen."

V

That was just exactly what I doubted.

I was wrong. She always had seen. And it was because she saw and loathed herself for seeing that she insisted on Burton's doing this thing. It was part of her expiation, her devotion, her long sacrificial act. She was

dragging Burton into it partly, I believe, because he had seen too, more clearly, more profanely, more terribly than she.

Oh, and there was more in it than that. I got it all from Burton. He had been immensely plucky about it. He didn't leave it to me to get him out of it. He had gone to her himself, so certain was he that he could make it straight with her.

And he hadn't made it straight at all. It had been more awful, he said, than I could imagine. She hadn't seen his point. She had refused to see it, absolutely (I had been right there, anyhow).

He had said, in order to be decent, that he was too busy; he was pledged to Lankester and couldn't possibly do the two together. And she had seen all that. She said of course it was a pity that he couldn't do it now, while people were ready for her father, willing, she said, to listen; but if it couldn't be done at once, why, it couldn't. After all, they could afford to wait. He, she said superbly, could afford it. She ignored in her fine manner the material side of the "Life and Letters," its absolute importance to their poor finances, the fact that if he could afford to wait, they couldn't. I don't think that view of it ever entered into her head. The great thing, she said, was that it should be done.

And then he had to tell her that he couldn't do it. He couldn't do it at all. "That part of it, Simpson," he said, "was horrible. I felt as if I were butchering her — butchering a lamb."

But I gathered that he had been pretty firm so far, until she broke down and cried. For she did, poor bleeding lamb, all in a minute. She abandoned her superb attitude and her high ground and put it altogether on another footing. Her father hadn't been the happy, satisfied, facilely successful person he was supposed to be. People had been cruel to him; they had never understood; they didn't realize that his work didn't represent him. Of course she knew (she seems to have handled this part of it with a bold sincerity) what he, Burton, thought about it; but he did realize that. He knew it didn't do him anything like justice. He knew what lay behind it,

behind everything that he had written. It was wonderful, Burton said, how she did that, how she made the vague phrase open up a vast hinterland of intention, the unexplored and unexploited spirit of him. He knew, Burton knew, how he had felt about it, how he had felt about his fame. It hadn't been the thing he really wanted. He had never had that. And oh, she wanted him to have it. It was the only thing she wanted, the only thing she really cared about, the only thing she had ever asked of Burton.

He told me frankly that she didn't seem quite sane about it. He understood it, of course. She was broken up by the long strain of her devotion, by his death and by the crash afterward, by the unbearable pathos of him, of his futility, and of the menacing oblivion. You could see that Antigone had parted with her sense of values and distinctions, that she had lost her bearings; she was a creature that drifted blindly on a boundless sea of compassion. She saw her father die the ultimate death. She pleaded passionately with Burton to hold back the shadow; to light a lamp for him; to prolong, if it were only for a little while, his memory; to give him, out of his own young radiance and vitality, the life beyond life that he had desired.

Even then, so he says, he had held out, but more feebly. He said he thought somebody else ought to do it, somebody who knew her father better. And she said that nobody could do it, nobody did know him; there was nobody's name that would give the value to the thing that Burton's would. That was handsome of her, Burton said. And he seems to have taken refuge from this dangerous praise in a modesty that was absurd, and that he knew to be absurd in a man who had got Lankester's "Life" on his hands. And Antigone saw through it; she saw through it at once. But she didn't see it all; he hadn't the heart to let her see his real reason, that he couldn't do them both. He couldn't do Wrackham after Lankester, nor yet, for Lankester's sake, before. And he couldn't, for his own sake, do him at any time. It would make him too ridiculous.

And in the absence of his real reason he seems to have been singularly ineffective. He just sat there saying anything that came into his head except the one thing. He rather shirked this part of it; at any rate, he wasn't keen about telling me what he'd said, except that he'd tried to change the subject. I rather suspected him of the extreme error of making love to Antigone in order to keep her off it.

Finally she made a bargain with him. She said that if he did it she would marry him whenever he liked (she had considered their engagement broken off, though he hadn't). But (there Antigone was adamant) if he didn't, if he cared so little about pleasing her, she wouldn't marry him at all.

Then he said of course he did care; he would do anything to please her, and if she was going to take a mean advantage and to put it that way — —

And of course she interrupted him and said he didn't see her point; she wasn't putting it that way; she wasn't going to take any advantage, mean or otherwise; it was a question of a supreme, a sacred obligation. How could she marry a man who disregarded, who was capable of disregarding, her father's dying wish? And that she stuck to.

I can't tell you now whether she was merely testing him, or whether she was determined, in pure filial piety, to carry the thing through, and saw, knowing her hold on him, that this was the way and the only way, or whether she actually did believe that for him, too, the obligation was sacred and supreme. Anyhow she stuck to it. Poor Burton said he didn't think it was quite fair of her to work in that way, but that, rather than lose her, rather than lose Antigone, he had given in.

VI

He had taken the papers—the documents—home with him; and that he might know the worst, the whole awful extent of what he was in for, he began overhauling them at once.

I went to see him late one evening and found him at it. He had been all through them once, he said, and he was going through them again. I asked him what they were like. He said nothing.

"Worse than you thought?" I asked.

Far worse. Worse than anything I could imagine. It was inconceivable, he said, what they were like. I said I supposed they were like him. I gathered from his silence that it was inconceivable what he was. That Wrackham should have no conception of where he really stood was conceivable; we knew he was like that, heaps of people were, and you didn't think a bit the worse of them; you could present a quite respectable "Life" of them with "Letters" by simply suppressing a few salient details and softening the egoism all round. But what Burton supposed he was going to do with Wrackham, short of destroying him! You couldn't soften him, you couldn't tone him down; he wore thin in the process and vanished under your touch.

But oh, he was immense! The reminiscences were the best. Burton showed us some of them. This was one:

"It was the savage aspects of Nature that appealed to me. One of my earliest recollections is of a thunderstorm among the mountains. My nursery looked out upon the mountainside where the storm broke. My mother has told me that I cried till I made the nurse carry me to the window, and that I literally leaped in her arms for joy. I laughed at the lightning and clapped my hands at the thunder. The Genius of the Storm was my brother. I could not have been more than eleven months old."

And there was another bit that Burton said was even better.

"I have been a fighter all my life. I have had many enemies. What man who has ever done anything worth doing has not had them? But our accounts are separate, and I am willing to leave the ultimate reckoning to time." There were lots of things like that. Burton said it was like that cloak he

used to wear. It would have been so noble if only he had been a little bigger.

And there was an entry in his diary that I think beat everything he'd ever done. "May 3, 1905. Lankester died. Finished the last chapter of 'A Son of Thunder.' Ave Frater, atque vale."

I thought there was a fine audacity about it, but Burton said there wasn't. Audacity implied a consciousness of danger, and Wrackham had none. Burton was in despair.

"Come," I said, "there must be something in the Letters."

No, the Letters were all about himself, and there wasn't anything in him. You couldn't conceive the futility, the fatuity, the vanity—it was a disease with him.

"I couldn't have believed it, Simpson, if I hadn't seen him empty himself."

"But the hinterland?" I said. "How about the hinterland? That was what you were to have opened up."

"There wasn't any hinterland. He's opened himself up. You can see all there was of him. It's lamentable, Simpson, lamentable."

I said it seemed to me to be supremely funny. And he said I wouldn't think it funny if I were responsible for it.

"But you aren't," I said. "You must drop it. You can't be mixed up with that. The thing's absurd."

"Absurd? Absurdity isn't in it. It's infernal, Simpson, what this business will mean to me."

"Look here," I said. "This is all rot. You can't go on with it."

He groaned. "I must go on with it. If I don't — —"

"Antigone will hang herself?"

"No. She won't hang herself. She'll chuck me. That's how she has me, it's how I'm fixed. Can you conceive a beastlier position?"

I said I couldn't, and that if a girl of mine put me in it, by heaven, I'd chuck her.

He smiled. "You can't chuck Antigone," he said.

I said Antigone's attitude was what I didn't understand. It was inconceivable she didn't know what the things were like. "What do you suppose she really thinks of them?"

That was it. She had never committed herself to an opinion. "You know," he said, "she never did."

"But," I argued, "you told me yourself she said they'd represent him. And they do, don't they?"

"Represent him?" He grinned in his agony. "I should think they did."

"But," I persisted, because he seemed to me to be shirking the issue, "it was her idea, wasn't it? that they'd justify him, give him his chance to speak, to put himself straight with us?"

"She seems," he said meditatively, "to have taken that for granted."

"Taken it for granted? Skittles!" I said. "She must have seen they were impossible. I'm convinced, Burton, that she's seen it all along; she's merely testing you to see how you'd behave, how far you'd go for her. You needn't worry. You've gone far enough. She'll let you off."

"No," he said, "she's not testing me. I'd have seen through her if it had been that. It's deadly serious. It's a sacred madness with her. She'll never let me off. She'll never let herself off. I've told you a hundred times it's expiation. We can't get round that."

"She must be mad, indeed," I said, "not to see."

"See? See?" he cried. "It's my belief, Simpson, that she hasn't seen. She's been hiding her dear little head in the sand."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean," he said, "she hasn't looked. She's been afraid to."

"Hasn't looked?"

"Hasn't read the damned things. She doesn't know how they expose him."

"Then, my dear fellow," I said, "you've got to tell her."

"Tell her?" he cried. "If I told her she would go and hang herself. No. I'm not to tell her. I'm not to tell anybody. She's got an idea that he's pretty well exposed himself, and, don't you see, I'm to wrap him up."

"Wrap him up — —"

"Wrap him up, so that she can't see, so that nobody can see. That's what I'm here for — to edit him, Simpson, edit him out of all recognition. She hasn't put it to herself that way, but that's what she means. I'm to do my best for him. She's left it to me with boundless trust in my — my constructive imagination. Do you see?"

I did. There was no doubt that he had hit it.

"This thing" (he brought his fist down on it), "when I've finished with it, won't be Wrackham: it'll be all me."

"That's to say you'll be identified with him?"

"Identified — crucified — scarified with him. You don't suppose they'd spare me? I shall be every bit as — as impossible as he is."

"You can see all that, and yet you're going through with it?"

"I can see all that, and yet I'm going through with it."

"And they say," I remarked gently, "that the days of chivalry are dead."

"Oh, rot," he said. "It's simply that — she's worth it."

Well, he was at it for weeks. He says he never worked at anything as he worked at his Charles Wrackham. I don't know what he made of him, he wouldn't let me see. There was no need, he said, to anticipate damnation.

In the meantime, while it pended, publishers, with a dreadful eagerness, were approaching him from every side. For Wrackham (what was left of him) was still a valuable property, and Burton's name, known as it was,

had sent him up considerably, so that you can see what they might have done with him. There had been a lot of correspondence, owing to the incredible competition, for, as this was the last of him, there was nothing to be said against the open market; still, it was considered that his own publishers, if they "rose" properly, should have the first claim. The sum, if you'll believe me, of five thousand had been mentioned. It was indecently large, but Burton said he meant to screw them up to it. He didn't mind how high he screwed them; he wasn't going to touch a penny of it. That was his attitude. You see the poor fellow couldn't get it out of his head that he was doing something unclean.

It was in a fair way of being made public; but as yet, beyond an obscure paragraph in the Publishers' Circular, nothing had appeared about it in print. It remained an open secret.

Then Furnival got hold of it.

Whether it was simply his diabolic humor, or whether he had a subtler and profounder motive (he says himself he was entirely serious; he meant to make Burton drop it); anyhow, he put a paragraph in his paper, in several papers, announcing that Grevill Burton was engaged simultaneously on the "Life and Letters of Ford Lankester" and the "Personal Reminiscences" of Mr. Wrackham.

Furnival did nothing more than that. He left the juxtaposition to speak for itself, and his paragraph was to all appearances most innocent and decorous. But it revived the old irresistible comedy of Charles Wrackham; it let loose the young demons of the press. They were funnier about him than ever (as funny, that is, as decency allowed), having held themselves in so long over the obituary notices.

And Furnival (there I think his fine motive was apparent) took care to bring their ribald remarks under Burton's notice. Furny's idea evidently was to point out to Burton that his position was untenable, that it was not fitting that the same man should deal with Mr. Wrackham and with Ford

Lankester. He had to keep himself clean for him. If he didn't see it he must be made to see.

He did see it. It didn't need Furnival to make him. He came to me one evening and told me that it was impossible. He had given it up.

"Thank God," I said.

He smiled grimly. "God doesn't come into it," he said. "It's Lankester I've given up."

"You haven't!" I said.

He said he had.

He was very cool and calm about it, but I saw in his face the marks of secret agitation. He had given Lankester up, but not without a struggle. I didn't suppose he was wriggling out of the other thing, he said. He couldn't touch Lankester after Wrackham. It was impossible for the same man to do them both. It wouldn't be fair to Lankester or his widow. He had made himself unclean.

I assured him that he hadn't, that his motive purged him utterly, that the only people who really mattered were all in the secret; they knew that it was Antigone who had let him in for Wrackham; they wouldn't take him and his Wrackham seriously; and he might be sure that Ford Lankester would absolve him. It was high comedy after Lankester's own heart, and so on. But nothing I said could move him. He stuck to it that the people in the secret, the people I said mattered, didn't matter in the least, that his duty was to the big outside public for whom Lives were written, who knew no secrets and allowed for no motives; and when I urged on him, as a final consideration, that he'd be all right with them, they wouldn't understand the difference between Charles Wrackham and Ford Lankester, he cried out that that was what he meant. It was his business to make them understand. And how could they if he identified himself with Wrackham? It was almost as if he identified Lankester — —

Then I said that, if that was the way he looked at it, his duty was clear. He must give Wrackham up.

"Give up Antigone, you mean," he said.

He couldn't.

VII

Of course it was not to be thought of that he should give up his Lankester, and the first thing to be done was to muzzle Furnival's young men. I went to Furny the next day and told him plainly that his joke had gone too far, that he knew what Burton was and that it wasn't a bit of good trying to force his hand.

And then that evening I went on to Antigone.

She said I was just in time; and when I asked her "for what?" she said—to give them my advice about her father's "Memoirs."

I told her that was precisely what I'd come for; and she asked if Grevill had sent me.

I said no, he hadn't. I'd come for myself.

"Because," she said, "he's sent them back."

I stared at her. For one moment I thought that he had done the only sane thing he could do, that he had made my horrible task unnecessary.

She explained. "He wants Mamma and me to go over them again and see if there aren't some things we'd better leave out."

"Oh," I said, "is that all?"

I must have struck her as looking rather queer, for she said, "All? Why, whatever did you think it was?"

With a desperate courage I dashed into it there where I saw my opening.

"I thought he'd given it up."

"Given it up?"

Her dismay showed me what I had yet to go through. But I staved it off a bit. I tried half-measures.

"Well, yes," I said, "you see, he's frightfully driven with his Lankester book."

"But—we said—we wouldn't have him driven for the world. Papa can wait. He has waited."

I ignored it and the tragic implication.

"You see," I said, "Lankester's book's awfully important. It means no end to him. If he makes the fine thing of it we think he will, it'll place him. What's more, it'll place Lankester. He's still—as far as the big outside public is concerned—waiting to be placed."

"He mustn't wait," she said. "It's all right. Grevill knows. We told him he was to do Lankester first."

I groaned. "It doesn't matter," I said, "which he does first."

"You mean he'll be driven anyway?"

It was so far from what I meant that I could only stare at her and at her frightful failure to perceive.

I went at it again, as I thought, with a directness that left nothing to her intelligence. I told her what I meant was that he couldn't do them both.

But she didn't see it. She just looked at me with her terrible innocence.

"You mean it's too much for him?"

And I tried to begin again with no, it wasn't exactly that—but she went on over me.

It wouldn't be too much for him if he didn't go at it so hard. He was giving himself more to do than was necessary. He'd marked so many things for omission; and, of course, the more he left out of "Papa," the more he had to put in of his own.

"And he needn't," she said. "There's such a lot of Papa."

I knew. I scowled miserably at that. How was I going to tell her it was the whole trouble, that there was "such a lot of Papa"?

I said there was; but, on the other hand, he needed such a lot of editing.

She said that was just what they had to think about. Did he?

I remembered Burton's theory, and I put it to her point-blank. Had she read all of him?

She flushed slightly. No, she said, not all. But Mamma had.

"Then" (I skirmished), "you don't really know?"

She parried it with "Mamma knows."

And I thrust. "But," I said, "does your mother really understand?"

I saw her wince.

"Do you mean," she said, "there are things — things in it that had better be kept out?"

"No," I said, "there weren't any 'things' in it — —"

"There couldn't be," she said superbly. "Not things we'd want to hide."

I said there weren't. It wasn't "things" at all. I shut my eyes and went at it head downward.

It was, somehow, the whole thing.

"The whole thing?" she said, and I saw that I had hit her hard.

"The whole thing," I said.

She looked scared for a moment. Then she rallied.

"But it's the whole thing we want. He wanted it. I know he did. He wanted to be represented completely or not at all. As he stood. As he stood," she reiterated.

She had given me the word I wanted. I could do it gently now.

"That's it," I said. "These 'Memoirs' won't represent him."

Subtlety, diabolic or divine, was given me. I went at it like a man inspired.

"They won't do him justice. They'll do him harm."

"Harm?" She breathed it with an audible fright.

"Very great harm. They give a wrong impression, an impression of — of — —"

I left it to her. It sank in. She pondered it.

"You mean," she said at last, "the things he says about himself?"

"Precisely. The things he says about himself. I doubt if he really intended them all for publication."

"It's not the things he says about himself so much," she said. "We could leave some of them out. It's what Grevill might have said about him."

That was awful; but it helped me; it showed me where to plant the blow that would do for her, poor lamb.

"My dear child," I said (I was very gentle, now that I had come to it, to my butcher's work), "that's what I want you to realize. He'll — he'll say what he can, of course; but he can't say very much. There — there isn't really very much to say."

She took it in silence. She was too much hurt, I thought, to see. I softened it and at the same time made it luminous.

"I mean," I said, "for Grevill to say."

She saw.

"You mean," she said simply, "he isn't great enough?"

I amended it. "For Grevill."

"Grevill," she repeated. I shall never forget how she said it. It was as if her voice reached out and touched him tenderly.

"Lankester is more in his line," I said. "It's a question of temperament, of fitness."

She said she knew that.

"And," I said, "of proportion. If he says what you want him to say about your father, what can he say about Lankester?"

"But if he does Lankester first?"

"Then — if he says what you want him to say — he undoes everything he has done for Lankester. And," I added, "he's done for."

She hadn't seen that aspect of it, for she said: "Grevill is?"

I said he was, of course. I said we all felt that strongly; Grevill felt it himself. It would finish him.

Dear Antigone, I saw her take it. She pressed the sword into her heart. "If — if he did Papa? Is it — is it as bad as all that?"

I said we were afraid it was — for Grevill.

"And is he," she said, "afraid?"

"Not for himself," I said, and she asked me: "For whom, then?" And I said: "For Lankester." I told her that was what I'd meant when I said just now that he couldn't do them both. And, as a matter of fact, he wasn't going to do them both. He had given up one of them.

"Which?" she asked; and I said she might guess which.

But she said nothing. She sat there with her eyes fixed on me and her lips parted slightly. It struck me that she was waiting for me, in her dreadful silence, as if her life hung on what I should say.

"He has given up Lankester," I said.

I heard her breath go through her parted lips in a long sigh, and she looked away from me.

"He cared," she said, "as much as that."

"He cared for you as much," I said. I was a little doubtful as to what she meant. But I know now.

She asked me if I had come to tell her that.

I said I thought it was as well she should realize it. But I'd come to ask her — if she cared for him — to let him off. To — to — —

She stopped me with it as I fumbled.

"To give Papa up?"

I said, to give him up as far as Grevill was concerned.

She reminded me that it was to be Grevill or nobody.

Then, I said, it had much better be nobody. If she didn't want to do her father harm.

She did not answer. She was looking steadily at the fire burning in the grate. At last she spoke.

"Mamma," she said, "will never give him up."

I suggested that I had better speak to Mrs. Wrackham.

"No," she said. "Don't. She won't understand." She rose. "I am not going to leave it to Mamma."

She went to the fire and stirred it to a furious flame.

"Grevill will be here," she said, "in half an hour."

She walked across the room—I can see her going now—holding her beautiful head high. She locked the door (I was locked in with Antigone). She went to a writing-table where the "Memoirs" lay spread out in parts; she took them and gathered them into a pile. I was standing by the hearth and she came toward me; I can see her; she was splendid, carrying them in her arms sacrificially. And she laid them on the fire.

It took us half an hour to burn them. We did it in a sort of sacred silence.

When it was all over and I saw her stand there, staring at a bit of Wrackham's handwriting that had resisted to the last the purifying flame, I tried to comfort her.

"Angelette," I said, "don't be unhappy. That was the kindest thing you could do—and the best thing, believe me—to your father's memory."

"I'm afraid," she said, "I wasn't thinking—altogether—of Papa."

I may add that her mother did not understand, and that—when we at last unlocked the door—we had a terrible scene. The dear lady has not yet forgiven Antigone; she detests her son-in-law; and I'm afraid she isn't very fond of me.

THE COSMOPOLITAN

PART I

INLAND

I

Unspeakable, unlikable, worse than all, unsketchable. A woman has no more formidable rival than her idea in the head of an imaginative young man, and Maurice Durant had been rash enough to fall in love with Miss Tancred before sight.

He was rash in everything. When the Colonel asked him down to Coton Manor for a fortnight, he accepted the invitation (with much pleasure) by return, and lay awake half the night with joyous anticipation. He was in the train steaming into the Midlands before he realized that he knew nothing of his host beyond a vague family tradition. He was his (Durant's) godfather; he was a retired Colonel of militia; he had given him (Durant) a hideous silver cup; but this was the first time he had given him an invitation. There was something more, too. Durant had spent the last seven years exploring every country but his own, and he was out of touch with family tradition; but now he thought of it he had—he certainly had—a distinct recollection of hearing his father say that of all his numerous acquaintance that fellow Tancred was quite the most intolerable bore.

He had been a little precipitate. Still, he said to himself, England was England, and if there was any fishing on the Colonel's land, or a decent mount in his stables, he thought he could pull through. Mrs. Tancred was dead; he did not certainly know that there was a Miss Tancred, but if there were he meant to flirt with her, and if the worst came to the worst he could always sketch her (the unsketchable!).

He had had plenty of time for anticipation during the slow journey on the branch line from the junction. The train crawled and burrowed into the wooded heart of the Midlands, passed a village, a hamlet, a few scattered houses, puffed and panted through endless lengths of arable and pasture

land, drew up exhausted at the little wayside station of Whithorn-in-Arden, and left him in that prosaic wilderness a prey to the intolerable bore.

As ill-luck would have it, he had arrived at Coton Manor three hours before dinner. At the first sight of his host he had made up his mind that the Colonel would have nothing to say that could possibly keep him going for more than three minutes, yet the Colonel had talked for two hours. Durant had been counting the buttons on the Colonel's waistcoat and the minutes on the drawing-room clock, and wondering when it would be dinnertime. Once or twice he had caught himself looking round the room for some sign or token of Miss Tancred. He believed in her with a blind, unquestioning belief, but beyond a work-basket, a grand piano, and some atrocious water-colors, he could discover no authentic traces of her presence. The room kept its own dull counsel. It was one of those curious provincial interiors that seem somehow to be soulless and sexless in their unfathomable reserve. It was more than comfortable, it was opulent, luxurious; but the divine touch was wanting. It made Durant wonder whether there really was a Miss Tancred, much as you might doubt the existence of a God from the lapses in his creation. Still, he believed in her because there was nothing else to believe in. He had gathered from the Colonel's conversation that there was no fishing on his land, and no animal in his stables but the respectable and passionless pair that brought him from the station.

Could it be that there was no Miss Tancred?

Durant, already veering toward scepticism, had been about to plunge into the depths of bottomless negation when the Colonel rose punctually at the stroke of seven.

"My daughter," he had said, "my daughter will be delighted to make your acquaintance."

And Durant had replied that he would be delighted to make Miss Tancred's.

There was nothing else to be delighted about. He had divined pretty clearly that Miss Tancred's society would be the only entertainment offered to him during his stay, and the most outrageous flirtation would be justifiable in the circumstances; he had seen himself driven to it in sheer desperation and self-defense; he had longed hopelessly, inexpressibly, for the return of the absconding deity; he had looked on Miss Tancred as his hope, his angel, his deliverer. That she had not been at home to receive him seemed a little odd, but on second thoughts he had been glad of it. He would have distrusted any advances on her part as arguing a certain poverty of personal resource. Presumably Miss Tancred could afford a little indifference, a touch of divine disdain. And if indeed she had used absence as an art to stimulate his devotion, she was to be congratulated on her success. His dream had been nourished on this ambrosial uncertainty.

Upstairs in his bedroom mere emotional belief in Miss Tancred had risen to rational conviction. The first aspect of the guest-chamber had inspired him with a joyous credulity. It wooed him with its large and welcoming light, its four walls were golden white and warm, and in all its details he had found unmistakable evidences of design. There was an overruling coquetry in the decorative effects, in the minute little arrangements for his comfort. A finer hand than any housemaid's must have heaped that blue china bowl with roses, laid out that writing-table, and chosen the books in the shelf beside the bed. A woman is known by her books as by her acquaintance, and he had judged of the mind of this maiden, turning over the pages with a thrill of sensuous curiosity. This charming Providence had fitted his mood to perfection with these little classics of the hour, by authors too graceful and urbane to bore a poor mortal with their immortality. Adorable Miss Tancred! He was in love with her before sight, at half-sight.

For at the sound of a punctual gong he had hurried out on to the stairs, a door had opened on some unseen landing, he had heard a woman's step on the flight below; he had listened, he had watched, and as he caught the turn of her head, the rustle and gleam of her gown, some divine and

cloudy color, silver or lavender or airy blue, he had been radiantly certain that his vision had passed before him. Down there somewhere it was making itself incarnate in the unknown. He felt already its reviving presence, the mysterious aura of its womanhood.

Hitherto his imagination had been guided by a profound sense of the justice that is in things. Destiny who had brought him to this deceitful place owed him compensation for the fraud, and an apology in person was really no more than his due. What if Miss Tancred were she, the supremely feminine, Destiny herself?

Under the echoing gallery the drawing-room had opened and closed upon her, and he had followed, his nerves tingling with the familiar prophetic thrill.

And this was Miss Tancred?

To begin with, he had never seen a woman more execrably dressed. No doubt it is the first duty of a woman's gown to clothe her, but apparently Miss Tancred's gown had a Puritan conscience, an almost morbid sense of its duty. It more than clothed her, it covered her up as if she had been a guilty secret; there was concealment and disguise in every crease of the awful garment. In its imperishable prudery it refused to define her by ever so innocent a curve; all its folds were implicated in a conspiracy against her sex. The effect, though striking, was obviously unstudied and inevitable, and he argued charitably that Miss Tancred was attired, not after her own mysterious and perverse fancy, but according to some still more mysterious and perverse doom. Happily she seemed unconscious of her appearance, and this unconsciousness had saved her.

For Miss Tancred was plain; and the irritating thing about her plainness was that it, at any rate, was not inevitable. She had had a hair's-breadth escape of being handsome in a somewhat original and eccentric way. And so her plainness was insistent; it would not let you alone, but forced you to look at it, worrying you with perpetual suggestions of the beauty it might have been. Her black hair grew low on the center of her forehead, whence

it rose describing a semicircle above each temple; she had a short and salient Roman nose, black eyes, and straight black brows laid like an accent on the jutting eyebones. Her mouth – there might have been hope for her in her mouth, but for its singular unreadiness to smile; there was no hope for her in her sallow skin, the dull droop of her eyelids, her whole insupportable air of secrecy and reserve. A woman has no business to look like that.

There could be no hope for any woman whom Maurice Durant had pronounced unsketchable. He was tolerant with the tolerance of a clever young modern painter, trained to look for beauty (and find it, too) in the most unlikely places. He could find no beauty in Miss Tancred. She was useless for his purposes. Those lips had never learned to flirt, to chatter, to sing, to do anything spontaneous and natural and pleasing.

He shook hands with her in a paralytic manner, battering his brains for a reply to her polite commonplaces. Inwardly he was furious. He felt that he had been duped, tricked, infamously cheated of his legitimate desire; and he hated the woman as if she, poor soul, had been personally responsible.

It had bored him to listen to the Colonel, and he was sure it would bore him still more to talk to Miss Tancred; but for ten minutes he did his best to sustain a miraculous flow of sparkling monologue. If Miss Tancred was going to bore him, at any rate it would not be by her conversation. Some plain women he had known who had overcome plainness by vivacity and charm. Not so Miss Tancred. Being plainer than most she was bound to make a more than ordinary effort, yet she had adopted the ways of a consummately pretty woman who knows that nothing further is required of her. Did she think that he would go on forever battering his brains to create conversation out of nothing, when she clearly intimated that it was not worth her while to help him? Never in his life had he met a woman who inspired him with such invincible repugnance. He found himself talking to her at random like a man in a dream, and so indifferent to her opinion that he was not in the least distressed at his own imbecility; and

Miss Tancred, like a lady in a dream, seemed to find his attitude entirely natural; perhaps she had read a similar antagonism in the faces of other men. (As it happened, repugnance was an emotion that Durant had frequently felt before, and certain emphatic lines about his nose and mouth had apparently been drawn there on purpose to express it.) Anyhow, Miss Tancred made no attempt to engage his attention, but turned her dull eyes to the Colonel, as if appealing to him to take the burden of Durant's entertainment on his own shoulders.

This the Colonel was perfectly prepared to do. It was evidently an understood thing that Miss Tancred should sit there, in that depressing attitude, while her father monopolized their guest. Durant hastily classified his host and hostess as the bore active and the bore passive. If Miss Tancred had ever had any interest or property in life she seemed to have made it over to the Colonel, together with a considerable portion of her youth. The Colonel wore his sixty years well out of sight, like an undergarment; you even felt that there might be something slightly indecorous in the suggestion that he wore them at all. He was alive to the finger-tips, alive in every feature of his aristocratic little face. He seemed at first rather uncertain how to take Durant, and looked him up and down as if in search of a convenient button-hole; he smiled innocently on the young man (Durant soon learned to know and dread that smile); nothing could have been more delicate and tentative than his approach. He had been silent for the last few minutes, lying low behind a number of the Nineteenth Century, for if he were a bore he had the dangerous power of masking his deadly qualities in an unreal absorption. At the signal that followed Durant's last desperate remark the Colonel's tongue leaped as from an ambush.

His first conversational maneuver was a feint. He inquired, with a certain affected indifference, what sort of weather Durant had met with on the journey down, and what sort he had left behind him in London; and then he seemed inclined to let the weather drop. But before Durant could get a

word in edgeways he had taken it up again and was handling it like a master. Now he was playing with it, hovering round it lightly, with a tantalizing approach and flight; now he had gripped it tight, there was no more wandering from the point than may be seen in the vacillations of a well-behaved barometer; the slender topic seemed to grow under his touch, to take on the proportions of his own enormous egotism; he spoke of last autumn and the next parish as if he were dealing with immensities of time and space. And now the Colonel was merged and lost in his theme; he was whirled along with the stream of things, with moons and meteors, winds and tides, never for an instant compromising his character as a well-behaved barometer.

Never for an instant forgetting that he was a Tancred, with a pedigree dating from the days of feudalism. And after all he looked such a gentle little fellow that Durant could almost have forgiven him. He was so beautifully finished off. You could only say of him that he was fastidious, he had the prejudices of his class. He scorned to make conversation a sordid traffic in ideas. At any rate, Durant felt himself released from all obligation to contribute his share.

He had given it up, and was wondering how on earth they were to get through the evening. Various dreadful possibilities occurred to him; music (Miss Tancred and Beethoven on the grand piano); family prayers; cards; in some places they sat up half the night playing whist, a game that bored him to extinction. Thank heaven, as there were but three of them, it would not be whist. Meanwhile it was past eight and no dinner bell.

As if in answer to his thoughts the Colonel turned sharply to his daughter.

"Frida, are you sure that you wrote to Mrs. Fazakerly?"

"Quite sure."

"And are you equally certain that she is coming?"

"Quite certain. Unless she has been taken ill."

"What did you say? Taken ill? Taken ill?"

"I did not say she was taken ill, papa; I said nothing but illness would keep her from coming."

"Ah, a very different thing." He turned to Durant, blushing and bristling in his stiff collar as if the important distinction had been a subtlety of his own. He curled himself up in his chair, and Durant caught him smiling to himself, a contemplative, almost voluptuous smile; was it at the prospect of another victim?

Who the devil, he wondered, is Mrs. Fazakerly?

II

Mrs. Fazakerly did not keep him wondering long. Already she was tripping into the room with a gleeful and inquisitive assurance. A small person, with a round colorless face and snub features finished off with a certain piquant ugliness. Her eyes seemed to be screwed up by a habit of laughter, and the same cheerful tendency probably accounted for the twisting of her eyebrows. Mrs. Fazakerly must have been forty and a widow. She was dressed with distinction in the half-mourning of a very black silk gown and a very white neck and shoulders. She greeted Miss Tancred affectionately, glanced at Durant with marked approval, and swept the Colonel an exaggerated curtsy, playfully implying that she had met him before that day. It struck Durant that nature had meant Mrs. Fazakerly to be vulgar, and that it spoke well for Mrs. Fazakerly that so far she had frustrated the designs of nature. He rather thought he was going to like Mrs. Fazakerly; she looked as if she would not bore him.

If Mrs. Fazakerly was going to like Durant, as yet her glance merely indicated that she liked the look of him. Durant, as it happened, was almost as plain for a man as Miss Tancred was for a woman; but he was interesting, and he looked it; he was distinguished, and he looked that, too; he was an artist, and he did not look it at all; he cultivated no eccentricities of manner, he indulged in no dreamy fantasies of dress. Other people besides Mrs. Fazakerly had approved of Maurice Durant.

Unfortunately the Colonel's instant monopoly of the lady had the effect of throwing Durant and his hostess on each other's mercy during dinner, a circumstance that seemed greatly to entertain Mrs. Fazakerly. Probably a deep acquaintance with Coton Manor made her feel a delightful incongruity in Durant's appearance there, since, as her gaze so frankly intimated, she found him interesting. He was roused from a fit of more than usual abstraction to find her little gray eyes twinkling at him across the soup. Mrs. Fazakerly, for purposes of humorous observation, used a pince-nez, which invariably leaped from the bridge of her nose in her subsequent excitement. It was leaping now.

"Mr. Durant, Miss Tancred is trying to say something to you."

He turned with a dim, belated courtesy as his hostess repeated for the third time her innocent query, "I hope you like your room?"

He murmured some assent, laying stress on his appreciation of the flowers and the books.

"You must thank Mrs. Fazakerly for those; it was she who put them there."

"Indeed? That was very pretty of Mrs. Fazakerly."

"Mrs. Fazakerly is always doing pretty things. I can't say that I am."

In Miss Tancred's eyes there was none of the expectancy that betrays the fisher of compliments. If she had followed that gentle craft she must have abandoned it long ago; no fish had ever risen to wriggling worm, to phantom minnow or to May-fly, to Miss Tancred's groveling or flirting or flight; no breath of flattery could ever have bubbled in men's eyes—those icy waters where she, poor lady, saw her own face. Durant would have been highly amused if she had angled; as it was, he was disgusted with her. It is the height of bad taste for any woman to run herself down, and the more sincere the depreciation the worse the offense, as implying a certain disregard for your valuable opinion. Apparently it had struck Mrs. Fazakerly in this light, for she shook her head reproachfully at Miss Tancred.

"If Mr. Durant had been staying with me, I should have packed him into the bachelor's bedroom with his Bible and his Shakespeare."

Miss Tancred, accused of graciousness, explained herself away. "I put you on the south side because you've just come from the Mediterranean; I thought you would like the sun."

Why could he not say that it was pretty of Miss Tancred?

The Colonel had pricked up his ears at the illuminating word.

"What sort of weather did you have when you were in Italy?"

It was the first time that he had shown the faintest interest in Durant's travels. He seemed to regard him as a rather limited young man who had come to Coton Manor to get his mind let out an inch or two.

Durant replied that as far as he could remember it was fine when he arrived in Rome two years ago, and it was fine when he left Florence the other day.

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, I don't call that weather. I like a variable barometer. I cannot stand monotony." As he spoke he looked at his daughter. In a less perfect gentleman there would have been significance in the look. As it was, it remained unconscious.

"The Colonel," Mrs. Fazakerly explained, "is studying the meteorology of Wickshire."

It seemed that Mrs. Fazakerly was studying the Colonel, that it was her business to expound and defend him. She had implied, if it were only by the motion of an eyelid, that all they had heard hitherto was by way of prologue; that the Colonel had not yet put forth his full powers. Her effervescent remark was, as it were, the breaking of the champagne bottle, the signal that launched him.

Meteorology apart, the Colonel, like more than one great philosopher, held that science was but another name for ignorance.

"But with meteorology," he maintained, "you are safe. You've got down to the bed-rock of fact, and it's observation all along the line. I've got fifteen little memorandum books packed with observations. Taken by myself. It's the only way to keep clear of fads and theories. Look at the nonsense that's talked in other departments, about microbes, for instance. Fiddlesticks! A microbe's an abstraction, a fad. But take a man like myself, take a man of even ordinary intelligence, who has faced the facts, don't tell me that he hasn't a better working knowledge of the subject than a fellow who calls himself a bacteriologist, or some other absurd name."

Durant remarked meekly that he didn't know, he was sure. But the Colonel remained implacable; his shirt-front dilated with his wrath; it was wonderful how so gentle a voice as the Colonel's contrived to convey so much passion. Meanwhile Miss Tancred sat absorbed in her dinner and let the storm pass over her head. Perhaps she was used to it.

"Fiddlesticks! If you don't know, you ought to know; you should make it your business to know. If I've got cholera I want to be told what'll cure me. I don't care a hang whether I'm killed by a comma bacillus or — —"

"A full-stop bacillus," suggested Mrs. Fazakerly.

"The full-stop bacillus for choice — put you sooner out of your agony."

"For shame, Mr. Durant; you encourage him."

"I, Mrs. Fazakerly?"

"Yes, you. It was you who brought the Nineteenth Century into the house, wasn't it? Depend upon it, he's been reading something that he's disagreed with, or that's disagreed with him."

Durant remembered. There were things about bacteriology in that Nineteenth Century, and about hypnotism; the Colonel had apparently seized on them as on fuel for a perishing fire.

Heedless of the frivolous interruption, the little gentleman was working himself into a second intellectual fury.

"Take hypnotism again — there's another abstraction for you — —"

Here Mrs. Fazakerly threw up her hands. "My dear Colonel, de grâce! If it's an abstraction, why get into a passion about it? Life isn't long enough. You're worrying your brain into fiddlesticks — fiddlestrings I mean, of course. This child doesn't look after you. You ought to have something tied over your head to keep it down; it's like a Jack-in-the-box, a candle blazing away at both ends, a sword wearing out its what's-his-name; it's wearing out your friends, too. We can't live at intellectual high pressure, if you can."

The Colonel softened visibly under the delicious flattery of her appeal; he smiled at her and at Durant; he came down from his heights and made a concession to the popular taste. "Well, then, take influenza — —"

"We'd very much rather not take it, if it's all the same to you."

"Take what?"

"Why, the influenza — the bacilli, or whatever they are. Or do the bacilli take you?"

"My dear lady, you don't know what you're talking about. The bacilli theory is — is — is a silly theory."

And Durant actually smiled; for his own brain was softening under the debilitating influence. He would not be surprised at anything he might do himself; he might even sink into that sickly state in which people see puns in everything and everything in puns; it would be the effect of the place.

"Well, it made you very ill last winter, that's all I know."

The wrinkles stopped dancing over the Colonel's face; his shirt-front sank; he was touched with an infinite tenderness and pity for himself.

"Yes. But I had a fit of the real thing. It left me without a particle of muscle — legs mere thread-papers, and no brain — —"

"Cherry-tart, Mr. Durant?"

The voice was Miss Tancred's. It was keen, incisive; it cut the Colonel's sentence like a knife. But if she had meant to kill it the unfilial attempt was foiled.

"No brain at all, Durant." He held up a forefinger, demonstrating on the empty air. "That, mind you, is the test, the mark of true influenza—the utter, absolute collapse of brain power."

"Imbecillity, in short."

Having emitted this feeble spark, Durant's intellect went out altogether. Trusting to his face not to betray him, he inquired gravely if it was long since the Colonel's last attack of influenza.

But he had trusted rather too much to his face. A painful flush spread over it when he found Miss Tancred looking at him with a lucid, penetrating gaze. She had recognized his guilt; it was impossible to tell whether she had measured the provocation.

He, at any rate, had discovered the secret of her silence; it was not stupidity, it was shame. The spectacle of the Colonel's conversational debauches had weaned her forever from the desire of speech. For the rest of the meal he, too, sat silent, building a cairn of cherry-stones at the side of his plate; an appropriate memorial of a young man bored to death at a dinner-table.

III

"Well now," said the Colonel, rousing himself from a brief nirvana of digestion, "I hope that you will not be dull." He said it with the confidence of a man who has just laid before you a pretty convincing sample of his social powers.

Durant started; he was alone with the Colonel and the wine, and had just made the discovery that when the Colonel's face was at rest he was very like an owl.

"To-morrow we'll go exploring together. I should like to take you over my little property."

As a matter of fact, the property was considerable; but Durant noticed that its owner applied the endearing diminutive to every object that appealed specially to his egotism. It was a peculiarity of the Colonel that he was ready to melt with affection over the things that belonged to himself, and was roused almost to ferocity by whatever interested other people.

"I dare say it will be good for you to see some fresh faces and to be put—in touch—in touch with fresh ideas."

You would have said that Durant had been sitting for seven years with his feet on the fender while the Colonel roamed the world.

Durant agreed. He was being hypnotized by the hooked nose and the round hazel eyes with their radiating wrinkles. He had been five hours in Coton Manor, it felt like five years, and the evening had only just begun.

His host stared at him, fidgeted nervously for five minutes, plunged into nirvana again, emerged, and with a shamefaced smile suggested that the ladies would be getting impatient. In the drawing-room his nervousness increased; he went on like a person distracted with an intolerable desire; he sat down and got up again; he pirouetted; he played with ornaments; he wandered uneasily about the room, opening and shutting windows, setting pictures straight, and lighting candles; he was a most uncomfortable little Colonel of militia. And with every movement he revolved nearer and nearer to a certain table. The table stood in the background; Durant recognized it as the kind that opens and discloses the magic circle, the green land of whist. The table had a sweet and sinful fascination for the Colonel.

Durant had just pulled himself together, and determined that he could bear it if they didn't play some infernal game, if they didn't play whist. And now it seemed that whist was what they played, that whist of course was what Mrs. Fazakerly was there for. The Colonel looked from the table to

the group, from the group to the table; there was calculation in his eye, an almost sensual anticipation. He seemed to be saying to himself, "One, two, three, four; the perfect number." Durant affected abstraction, and turning to the window gazed out into the dim green landscape. His host's eye followed him; it marked him down as the fourth; it hovered round him, dubious, vacillating, troubled. The Colonel had still some torturing remnants of a conscience; he had read the deep repugnance on the young man's face, and hesitated to sacrifice a guest on his first night. He turned helplessly to Mrs. Fazakerly, who put an end to his struggle.

She touched Durant lightly on the shoulder. "Come," she murmured gently, like a fate that pitied while she compelled. "Come. He wants his little game."

It was as if she had said, "My poor dear sacrificial lamb, he wants his little holocaust. There is no help for it. Let me show you the way to the altar."

"Frida!" It was the Colonel who spoke.

Miss Tancred spread open the table with the air of a high priestess, hieratic and resigned. The Colonel approached it, a lighted candle in each hand. For one moment of time the egotist seemed to be rapt beyond himself; he was serving the great god Whist. Cards were the Colonel's passion; he loved them with delight that was madness, madness that was delight. Cards for cards' sake, the pure passion, the high, immaculate abstraction; no gambling, mind you; no playing for penny points; no pandering to a morbid appetite for excitement. With cards in his hand the Colonel was transformed. He might be wedded to matter of fact, which is the grossest form of materialism; but at the green table he appeared as a devotee of the transcendent, the science of sciences, Whist.

Durant curled his long legs under the table and prepared for a miserable evening, while the Colonel's face beamed on him from between two candles.

"Durant," he said, "you are an acquisition. If it wasn't for you we should have to play with a dummy."

Durant replied mournfully that he was not great at the game, but he thought he was about as good as a dummy.

"Don't you be too sure of that," said Mrs. Fazakerly. "There's a great deal to be said for the dummy. He isn't frivolous, he never revokes, he never loses his little temper, and he plays the game."

"Yes, I think he can show you some very pretty science, Durant." The Colonel's mustache and eyebrows and all the wrinkles on his face were agitated, but he made no sound. The owl was pluming all his little feathers, was fluttering with mysterious mirth. Oh! he took the lady's humor, he could enter into the thing, he could keep the ball going.

"You see," Mrs. Fazakerly explained, "he has an intelligence behind him."

"A dummy inspired by Colonel Tancred would be terrible to encounter," said Durant.

Miss Tancred lifted her eyes from the cards she was shuffling. Again he felt her gaze resting upon him for a moment, the same comprehensive, disconcerting gaze. This time it had something pathetic and appealing in it, as if she implored him to take no further notice of her father's fatuity.

"Confound the old fellow," he said to himself; "why does he make me say these things?"

When they began Durant saw a faint hope of release in his own stupidity, his obvious unfitness for the game. By a studied carelessness, an artful exaggeration of his deficiencies, he courted humiliation, ejection in favor of the dummy. But, as it happened, either his evil destiny had endowed him with her own detestable skill, or else his stupidity was supreme. Trying with might and main to lose, he kept on winning with horrible persistency. He was on the winning side; he was made one with the terrible Miss Tancred; and for the first half hour he found a certain painful interest in watching that impenetrable creature.

Miss Tancred played the game; she played, now with the rhythm and precision of a calculating machine, now with the blind impetus and swoop of some undeviating natural force. It was not will, it was not intelligence; it was something beyond and above them both, infinitely more detached, more monotonous and cold; something independent even of her desire. Durant could see that she had as little love for the game as he had. She played because she always had played, by habit, a second nature that had ousted the first. Her skill was so unerring that for Durant it robbed the game of its last lingering attraction, the divine element of chance. One tinge of consciousness, one touch of fire, and it would have been sheer devilry. As it was he could have been sorry for her, though in her infinite apathy she seemed to be placed beyond his pity and her own. With no movement save in her delicate sallow fingers, she sat there like an incarnate Ennui, the terrible genius of the house.

The Colonel, though losing rapidly, was in high good humor. He displayed a chivalrous forbearance with the weakness of Mrs. Fazakerly, who committed every folly and indiscretion possible to a partner. He bowed when he dealt to her; he bowed when she dealt to him; he bowed when she revoked.

"To err is human," said the Colonel.

"To forgive, divine," said Mrs. Fazakerly, smiling at Durant, as much as to say, "You observe his appropriation of the supreme rôle?"

And indeed the Colonel bore himself with some consciousness of his metaphysical dignity. He was pleased with everybody, pleased with Durant, pleased with Mrs. Fazakerly, most particularly pleased with Colonel Tancred, late of the Wickshire militia.

And as the game wore on Durant realized the full horror of his position. The gallant Colonel was not going to leave that table till he had won, and he could never win. He frowned on Durant's proposal to change partners; he would accept no easy victory. They were in for a night of it. Durant was in torment, but he sat on, fascinated by the abominable beauty of his own

play; he sat with every nerve on edge, listening to the intolerable tick of time.

Ten o'clock. He thought it had been midnight. He passed his hand over his face, as if to feel if it were stiffening in its expression of agony.

And all the time Mrs. Fazakerly kept on raising and dropping her eyeglass. Now and then she gave him a look that plumbed the sources of his suffering. It seemed to recommend her own courageous attitude, to say, "My dear young man, we are being bored to death; you know it, and I know it. But for Goodness' sake, let us die with pleasant faces, since we can but die."

And Durant felt that she was right. He fell into her mood, and passed from it into a sort of delirium. There could be no end to it; his partner's pitiless hands would never have done shuffling the cards. Black and red, red and black, they danced before him; they assumed extravagant attitudes; they became the symbols of tremendous mysteries. His head seemed to grow lighter; he was visited with fantastic impulses like the caprices of an intoxicated person. To turn on the Colonel and ask him what he meant by inflicting this torture on an innocent man, whose only crime had been to trust him too well; to shake the inscrutable Miss Tancred by the hand and tell her that he knew all — all, and that she had his sympathy; to fall on Mrs. Fazakerly's neck and cry like a child, he felt that he was capable of any or all of these things. As it was, his behavior must have been sufficiently ridiculous, since it amused Mrs. Fazakerly so much. The two had reached that topsy-turvy height of anguish that is only expressible by laughter. Theirs had a ring of insanity in it; it sounded monstrous and immoral, like the mirth of victims under the shadow of condign extinction. As for his play, he knew it was the play of a madman. And yet he still won; with Miss Tancred for his partner it was impossible to lose. She sat there unmoved by his wildest aberrations. Once, to be sure, she remarked with a shade of irritation in her voice (by some queer freak of nature her voice was

unusually sweet), "Oh, there! We've got that trick again!" Like him, she would have preferred to lose, just to break the maddening monotony of it.

He pitied her. Once, in a lucid interval, he actually heard himself paying her a compliment, much as he would have paid a debt of honor. "Miss Tancred, how magnificently you play!" She answering, "I ought to. I've been doing nothing else since I was ten years old." It was simply horrible. The woman was thirty if she was a day.

Half past eleven. Midnight gathering in the garden outside. The room was reflected on the window-pane from the solid darkness behind it—the candles, the green table, the players—a fantastic, illusive scene, shimmering on the ground of night as on some sinister reality. Mrs. Fazakerly was dashing down her cards at random, and even the Colonel shuffled uneasily in his seat. At twelve he observed that none of them "seemed very happy in whist"; he proposed loo, a game in which, each person playing for his own hand, he could not be compromised by the ruinous folly of his partner.

At loo Miss Tancred, also untrammelled, rose to dizzying heights of play. She hovered over the green table, motionless like an eagle victory. Then she swooped, invincible. One against three she laid about her, slashed, confounded, and defeated the enemy with terrific slaughter. As Durant stammered, idiotic in his desperation, it was "a regular Water-loo."

The Colonel kept it going. He laughed, "Ha-ha! What do you say to a whiskey-and-water-loo? My head's as clear as daylight. I think I could stand another little game if we had some whiskey and water."

A movement of Mrs. Fazakerly's arm swept the pack on to the floor. "Frida," she cried, "take your father and put a mustard plaster on the back of his neck."

Miss Tancred rose. She just raised the black accent of her eyebrows as she surveyed the disenchanted table, the awful disorder of the cards. She looked at Durant and Mrs. Fazakerly with a passionless, interrogatory

stare. Then suddenly she seemed to catch the infection of their dreadful mirth. It wrung from her a deeper note. She too laughed, and her laughter was the very voice of Ennui, a cry of bitterness, of unfathomable pain. It rang harsh upon her silence and was not nice to hear.

This unlooked-for outburst had the happy effect of bringing the evening to an end. It seemed to be part of the program that the Colonel should go home with Mrs. Fazakerly to take care of her, and that Miss Tancred should go with them both to take care of the Colonel. They had not far to walk; only through the park and across the road to a little house opposite the lodge gates.

While they were looking for their hats Durant was left for a moment alone with Mrs. Fazakerly. She sank into a seat beside him, unstrung, exhausted; she seemed to be verging on that state of nervous collapse which disposes to untimely confidence.

"I like whist," said Mrs. Fazakerly; "but it must be an awful game to play if you don't like it."

He followed her gaze. It was fixed on Miss Tancred's retreating figure.

"Why on earth does she play if she doesn't like it?"

Mrs. Fazakerly turned on him, suddenly serious.

"She plays because the Colonel likes it—because she is the best girl in the world, Mr. Durant."

He stood reprovèd.

IV

Three days passed; they brought nothing new; each was a repetition of the other; each merged itself in whist. No relief came from the outside world; the outside world must have found out long ago that it was not worth while driving many miles to call on the Tancreds.

Three days at Coton Manor would have been trying to anyone; to Durant they were intolerable. For limbs that had roamed the world to be tucked up

under the Colonel's whist table, for a mind equally vigorous and vagrant to be tied to the apron-strings of the Colonel's intellect, was really a refinement of torture. Thrice Durant had tried to find an exit into the surrounding landscape, and thrice the Colonel had been too quick for him. He hovered perpetually round him; he watched his goings-out and his comings-in; there was no escaping his devilish ingenuity. While Durant was looking for a stick or a hat, he would secure him softly by the arm and lead him out for a stroll. He would say, "My dear Durant, the women are all very well in their way, but it is a luxury to have another man to talk to." He talked to Durant, leaning toward him lover-like, with the awful passion of the bore for his victim.

These strolls extended over several miles, without taking them beyond the bounds of Coton Manor. Durant began to disbelieve in the existence of a world beyond. Coton Manor had swallowed up the county; it seemed to have opened its gates and swallowed him up, too.

He told himself that he had done nothing to deserve his doom. He was not more selfish or more exacting than other men; he was not sensual; he had not made mere physical pleasure his being's end and aim. He had been content with a somewhat negative ideal, the mere avoidance of boredom. He never struggled or argued with it, but whenever and wherever he met it he had simply packed his portmanteau and gone away. This repugnance of his had entailed endless traveling, but Durant was a born traveler. Hitherto his life had been free from any care beyond the trouble of avoiding trouble. But he had been lax in this matter of Coton Manor; he had had reason enough to suppose that the visit would bring him face to face with the thing he feared, and he had rushed into the adventure with open arms. And now, this horror that he had eluded so successfully for seven years he was to know more intimately than his own soul; he was to sound all the depths beyond depths of boredom. He had stayed in dull places before, but their dulness struck him now as naïf and entertaining by comparison. Other people lapsed helplessly into dulness; at Coton Manor

they cultivated it; they kept it up. What was worse, they took it for granted in other people. It never seemed to occur to Miss Tancred or the Colonel that Maurice Durant could be interesting, that he had done anything worth mentioning. Not that he was sensitive to their opinion, it was simply that this attitude of theirs appealed unpleasantly to his imagination, giving it a cold foretaste of extinction. It was as if his flaming intellectual youth, with all its achievements, had been dropped into the dark, where such things are forgotten. At Coton Manor his claim to distinction rested on the fact that he was the Colonel's godson. The Colonel had appropriated, absorbed him, swallowed him up.

The fact that Durant was lapped in material comfort only intensified his spiritual pangs. The Tancreds were rich, and their wealth was not of to-day or yesterday; they had the dim golden tone, the deep opulence of centuries. And they were generous, they gave him of their best; so that, besides being bored, he had the additional discomfort of feeling himself a bit of a brute. As he lay awake night after night in his luxurious bed he wondered how he ever got there, what on earth had induced him to accept their invitation. He cursed his infernal rashness, his ungovernable optimism; he had spent half his life in jumping at conclusions and at things, and the other half in jumping away from them, however difficult the backward leap. He had jumped at the Colonel's invitation.

To tell the truth, he would have jumped at anybody's at the time.

When he came back from his travels he had found himself a stranger in his own country. In every place he touched he had left new friends most agreeably disconsolate at his departure; he supposed (rashly again) that the old ones would be overjoyed at his return. As it happened, his reception in England was not cold exactly, but temperate, like the climate, and Durant had found both a little trying after the fervors and ardors of the South. The poor fellow had spent his first week at home in hansoms, rushing passionately from one end of London to the other, looking up his various acquaintances. He was disappointed, not to say disgusted, with the result.

(Maurice Durant was always disgusted when other people failed to come up to his expectations.) His best friends were out of town, his second best were only too much in it. Many of them had abjured art and taken to stiff collars and conventions. He called on these at their offices. They were all diabolically busy in the morning and insufferably polite in the afternoon; they had flung him a nod or a smile or a "Glad to see you back again, old fellow," and turned from him with a preoccupied air. He remembered them as they were seven years ago, when they were all Bohemians together. They had no manners, good or bad, in those days, those young men; they called you by strange names; they posed you in peculiar attitudes and made abominable caricatures of your noble profile; but they would lend or borrow a five-pound note with equal readiness; they would give you a supper and a shake-down at any time of the night or morning. Now it seemed they thought twice about asking you to dinner, if indeed they thought about it at all. So Durant had been pleasantly surprised at his godfather's genial letter. Why, bless his little heart, the old boy had actually pressed him to stay for a fortnight.

Well, how was he to get through that fortnight? He decided that he would not get through it at all. He kept himself awake devising schemes for his liberation; he would find some business to take him up to town to-morrow; or, if he could not find it, he would invent it; he would send himself a telegram. And then, against his will, his mind began running on Miss Tancred. As he had been possessed by the ideal, so now he was haunted by the reality; it had a horrible fascination for him. He wondered if Miss Tancred had ever been young; he wondered if Miss Tancred had ever made a joke; he wondered if Miss Tancred had ever been in love. This third idea was so incongruous, so impossible, that at last he found himself dallying with it for the mere extravagant humor of the thing.

If he had only been able to make himself agreeable to Miss Tancred—for Miss Tancred, if she had the will, had certainly the power to help him. The unhappy young man had made a careful inspection of the stables to see if

there was a lingering chance for him there. The sleek bays that brought him from the station—impossible; the Colonel's cob, a creature too safe to be exciting; and—yes, there was Miss Tancred's mare. The sight of the fiery little beast dancing in her stall had affected him with an uncontrollable desire to ride her. The groom, not without sympathy, had interpreted his longing glances.

"There's a-many casts sheep's eyes at that there mare, sir; but it 'ud be as much as my place is worth, sir, to let you or any other gentleman get atop of her. Nobody lays a 'and on that annymal but Miss Tancred. Miss Tancred's orders, sir."

He might have known it. Miss Tancred was good for nothing, not even for the loan of a mount.

Miss Tancred seemed aware that nothing was expected from her, and kept conscientiously out of his way. He saw nothing of her from breakfast till dinnertime and the evening, when she appeared as his official partner in the game of whist. What became of her in the meanwhile he did not know; he could only vaguely conjecture. She seemed to vanish, to lose herself in the vast workings of Coton Manor, or in that vaster entity, the Colonel.

By the fourth day Durant's irritable mood had changed to resignation. If he could not altogether adopt Mrs. Fazakerly's attitude and smile pleasantly into the jaws of dulness, he consented to be bored to death with a certain melancholy grace.

He had made a dash for freedom; he had actually started first thing in the morning with his sketching block and easel, and was congratulating himself on his benignant chance, when, as he sneaked round a corner of the house, the Colonel stepped out upon him from a side window. There was one hope for him. Rain had fallen over night, and the little gentleman was as yet in his slippers; he was feeling the damp gravel like a fastidious cat.

"Ah-ha!" said he, in the tone of joyful encounter. "And what do you propose to do with yourself this morning?"

Durant looked at his host with a sad reproachful gaze from which all bitterness had departed. He had felt inclined to reply that he proposed to commit suicide; as it was, he only said he thought of trying to sketch something.

The Colonel seemed a little offended at the proposal; it certainly implied that Durant had more confidence in his own resources than in those of the house.

"So that's your fad, is it? I think we can do better for you than that."

And as Durant had calculated he skipped back into the house, and before he could return with his boots on, Durant, by another miracle of chance or his own cunning, had contrived his escape.

He made his way up a slight slope, whence he could see far over the landscape. What he had as yet seen was not inspiring, the heavy full-blown charm of the Midlands in July, lonely, without any of the poetry of loneliness. As he looked about him he realized again that he was in the heart of the country, the great, slow, passionless heart whose pulses are interminable hours. If you love Nature as Durant loved her, for her sex with its divine caprices, its madness and its mystery, you will be disappointed with Wickshire. In Wickshire Mother Nature is no dubious Aphrodite; she is indissolubly married to man, and behaves like an ordinary British matron, comely and correct. Durant saw in the immediate foreground a paddock dotted with young firs, each in a ring fence, beyond the paddock a field of buttercups shining with a polished gleam, beyond the buttercups a horizon of trees. Before him to the southeast, soaring above the roofs of Whithorn-in-Arden, a church spire pointed the way to heaven; beyond that, traveling low above the railway cutting, a thin line of smoke indicated the way into the world. Behind him were more trees; the green crescent of the woods with the white front of Coton Manor shining in their arms like a heavy, foolish face. He had no patience with the landscape, with this Nature trimmed and tamed, these shaven meadows and clean-cut hedges and little rectangular plantations. It was a typical

English landscape, a landscape most unnecessarily draped, where the bosom of the hills was always covered, and the very elms were muffled to their feet. A landscape destitute of passion and sensual charm, a landscape like Miss Tancred.

Miss Tancred. He no longer felt any wild resentment against that poor girl; he had learned to judge her leniently. If you live with bores you inevitably become a bore; at the same time, he admitted that she was doing her best not to bore him. Meanwhile he transferred his hatred to her surroundings.

This young man had no philosophy beyond the general impression that the universe was under infinite obligations to be good to him, a belief that had found itself rather rudely shaken. He chose his view and pitched his easel and relieved himself by one deep, metaphysical, soul-satisfying curse at the devilry of things. Then he set to work, and with the instinct of a born painter he tried to find possibilities in the despised landscape. Before long he had discovered mystery in the woods that lifted their heavy rounded contours to the sky, gathered and massed and piled on one another like clouds; deep mystery in their green, green drenched with liquid and aerial gray, pierced by thick black veins and hollowed into caverns of darkness and blue dusk. And, though he knew that he was tying himself to the place by taking it seriously, in an hour's time he was absorbed and happy.

He was startled by a voice behind him. "Do you think that it's so very beautiful?"

He turned round. Miss Tancred stood looking over his shoulders, not at him nor at his sketch, but at the distant prospect.

"It's — nice and open," he answered absently.

"Open? Wait till you've lived in it. To me it's like living with all the doors shut."

"Too many woods, perhaps. And yet there's always a charm about a wooded country; it's English."

"Yes, and, like everything English, it's much too serious, too conventional, too" — she paused for her epithet — "too disgustingly rich."

He was more startled than ever; she had put his own feeling about it into words.

"And then it's so painfully proper and respectable. Look at those ridiculous trees in their petticoats. English to a degree."

"Ah! — if you've been abroad — —"

"I haven't been abroad."

"Proud insular boast!"

"I wasn't boasting. I was stating a fact."

"Well, you've some cause to boast. Not to have been abroad is distinction nowadays."

"If it comes to that I've never been out of this county, except to London now and then. You wouldn't think it."

He smiled, for it happened to be precisely what he had thought. It explained her somehow; he recognized in Miss Tancred the incurable provincial. To be sure, her sentiments were somewhat at variance with her character, an inconsistency not unusual in woman. All he said was, "It is a little extraordinary." He was wondering when she was going to go. She did not go.

"I'm glad you've discovered something to do here. It must be so deadly dull."

He found relief in ambiguity. "I am never dull"; adding irrelevantly, "it's a glorious view."

She brightened visibly. "If you like I can show you a better one than this. It's not so very far;" — she hesitated — "we might go to-morrow, perhaps; though it wouldn't be very amusing, I'm afraid."

Again he felt a touch of compunction. She had so clearly grasped the situation; she was so evidently sorry for him, so conscientious, even if mistaken, in her efforts to make amends, that he found her positively pathetic. He answered humbly that he would be delighted if she would be so good.

Then, conscientiously again, she left him. He watched her tall figure departing with energetic strides, and he decided that Miss Tancred was not so bad out of doors, but that she needed a large background.

The next morning he had the grace to remind her of her promise. They started at a rapid pace. Durant left the paraphernalia of his art behind him by way of intimating delicately that the hour was hers. Miss Tancred was evidently prepared for vigorous walking. She was dressed suitably and inoffensively in brown holland. She took him up a long, gradually rising hill to where a group of firs stood on an isolated mound.

Here Miss Tancred paused, with tilted profile, sniffing the ambient air. "This," she said, "is the highest point in the county; there is always a fresh breeze here; to-day you can smell the sea."

"Impossible; we must be right in the very center of England, about a hundred miles from the nearest coast."

"You can hear it, then. Shut your eyes and listen."

He obeyed. The wind moved and the firs gave out their voice. He opened his eyes and glanced at Miss Tancred. She was leaning up against a fir; her eyes looked straight past him into the distance; the wind had loosened the hair about her forehead; her lips were parted, her eyes shone; there was an eagerness in her face he had not yet seen there. It was as if a dead woman had been suddenly made alive before him. She was gazing and listening.

"If you've never been out of Wickshire, where have you heard the sea?"

She answered curtly, "I don't know where I've heard it"; then added, as if by way of apology for her manner, "Do you like it?"

"Immensely."

"Then you must come up whenever you want to. You can always be alone here."

She spoke as if she were giving him the freedom of her private sanctuary.

"Have you any sketches of those places you've been to abroad?"

"Sketches? Any amount."

"Have you brought them with you?"

He blushed. He had brought many sketches in the hope of showing them to a wealthy godfather and an admiring god-sister.

"Some — a few."

"I wish you'd show them to me."

"I shall be delighted." He blushed again, this time for pleasure. With the desire to bestow a little of it, he asked rashly, "Do you sketch, Miss Tancred? I saw some water-colors — —"

"They were my mother's. I do nothing."

"Oh, I see." (They were going home now.) "I was wondering what on earth you found to do here."

"I? A great many things. Business chiefly. My father is secretary to the Primrose League. I write all his letters for him."

"That's one way of being secretary to the Primrose League."

"The usual way, I think. Secretaries generally have under-secretaries, haven't they? My father dictates."

Durant smiled. He could see him doing it. "What else does Colonel Tancred do?"

"He does no end of things. All the business of the estate; and he speaks, at meetings, everywhere. He has lectured — —"

It was pathetic, her eagerness to vindicate his intellect, to record his achievements, to convince Durant that she was proud of him, not to let him see.

For the rest of the way she was silent, the light died out of her eyes with every turning, and by the time they had reached Coton Manor Miss Tancred was herself again.

At whist that evening nobody was pleased. The Colonel looked sulky and offended, possibly at Durant's disaffection; Durant was moodier than ever, and even Mrs. Fazakerly seemed depressed. Miss Tancred remained imperturbable and indifferent, she won every trick without turning a hair, but when it was all over she left the table abruptly. She was visibly distressed. Mrs. Fazakerly gazed after her with an affectionate stare. She turned to Durant.

"For goodness' sake," she whispered, "say something nice to her."

For the life of him Durant could think of nothing nice to say, beyond congratulating her on her success in the accursed game.

Mrs. Fazakerly chimed in, "With or without a partner Miss Tancred wins!"

"I always win. So, I imagine, does Mr. Durant."

"And why should I always win?"

"You? You win because you care nothing about the game."

V

If you had told Durant that the end of his first week would find him sitting under the firs in lonely conversation with Miss Tancred, he would have smiled at you incredulously. Yet so it was. Her fear of him, if fear it had been, and not indifference, was wearing away. She seemed anxious to make friends with him if possible in a less painfully conscientious manner, and he, on his side, was beginning to tolerate her. In fact, he went so far as to own that, if it had not been for that ridiculous idea of his, he would have tolerated her from the first. It was not her fault if he had been fool enough

to fall in love with her before sight or at half-sight. She had disappointed him (hence his natural disgust); but the thing had happened many times before in his experience. After all, he had had no grounds for his passionate belief in Miss Tancred beyond the argument from defect, the vague feeling that Destiny owed him amends for her intolerable shortcomings. But Durant's mind was too sane and versatile to be long concerned with passion yet unborn. He was not one of those pitiable sentimentalists who imagine that every petticoat, or at any rate every well-cut skirt, conceals a probable ideal. Some women of his acquaintance had defined, not to say denounced, him as a consummate and dangerous flirt, but these were not the most discerning of their sex. Durant described himself more correctly as a sympathetic, though dispassionate, observer of womankind. In other words, he was not a vulgar flirt; he flirted with understanding.

An understanding without flirtation was springing up between him and Miss Tancred. In this God-forsaken place they were comrades in boredom and isolation. She had said nothing, but in some impalpable yet intimate way he knew that she, too, was bored, that the Colonel bored her. The knowledge lay between them unnamed, untouched by either of them; they passed it by, she in her shame and he in his delicacy, with eyes averted from it and from each other. It was as if the horror had crept out through some invisible, intangible doorway of confession; unseen, unapproached, it remained their secret and the source of their mutual pity. Meanwhile she no longer avoided him; on the contrary, she showed an unmistakable liking for his society. She would come while he was sketching and sit beside him for five minutes, fifteen minutes, half an hour, remaining silent, or merely exchanging a few frank words with him before she went her way. In these matters she was gifted with an unerring tact; without a hint on Durant's part she seemed to know to a nicety how far her presence was agreeable or otherwise.

This time he had gone up the hill after dinner, and had found her sitting in the accustomed place. They had been alone that evening, for the Colonel

was dining intimately with Mrs. Fazakerly. That lady, with a refined friendliness that did her credit, had refrained from including Miss Tancred and Durant in the invitation, thereby insuring them one evening's immunity from whist. Durant could make no better use of his freedom than by spending it alone out of doors; it seemed that Miss Tancred had done the same with hers.

She was sitting there on the edge of the mound, clasping her knees and gazing into the distance. He apologized for his intrusion, and she waked from her abstraction with a dreamy air, making a visible effort to take him in and realize him. But, though she said simply that she was glad he had come, the effect of his coming was to plunge her into deeper abstraction. They sat for some time without speaking. Miss Tancred had a prodigious faculty for silence, and Durant let her have her way, being indeed indifferent to Miss Tancred's way.

At last she spoke.

"It's odd how some people take Nature," said she; "for instance, Mrs. Fazakerly says she loves it because it's so soothing. She might just as well say she liked listening to an orchestra because it sends her to sleep. She can't love it for its own sake."

"You'll think me horribly rude, but I doubt if any woman can. That is the one thing a woman is incapable of—a pure passion for Nature, a really disinterested love of life. It's an essentially masculine sentiment."

"I don't at all agree with you."

"Don't you? To begin with, it argues more vitality than most women have got. They take to it as a substitute for other things; and to be content with it would mean that they had exhausted, outlived the other things."

"What other things?"

She was studying every line of his young, repugnant face, and Durant was a little embarrassed by her steady gaze.

"Other interests, other feelings—whatever it is that women do care for most."

"I don't know anything about women."

Her remark might have borne various interpretations, either that she knew nothing about herself, that she despised her own sex too much to include herself in it, or that she had tacitly adopted Durant's attitude, which seemed to leave her altogether outside of the discussion. He talked to her unconsciously, without any desire to please, as if he assumed that she expected as little from him as he from her. She never reminded him that she was a woman. It would have been absurd if she had insisted on it, and whatever she was Miss Tancred was not absurd.

She went on calmly, "So I can't say what they care for most; can you?"

"You know my opinion. I wanted yours."

"Mine isn't worth much. But I should say that in these things no two women were alike. You talk as if they were all made of the same stuff."

"So they are inside—in their souls, I mean."

"There's more unlikeness in their souls, I imagine, than there ever is in their bodies; and you wouldn't say an ugly woman was quite the same as a pretty one, would you?"

"Yes; in the obvious sense that they are both women. I admit that there may be an ugliness that cancels sex, to say nothing of a beauty that transcends it; but in either case the woman is unique."

"And if the woman, why not her soul?"

"Because—because—because there is a certain psychical quality that is eternal and unchangeable; because the soul is the seat of the cosmic difference we call sex. In man or woman that is the one unalterable fact—the last reality."

He spoke coldly, brutally almost, as if he, like herself, was blind to the pathos of her ignored and rejected womanhood.

She seemed to be thinking that last point over.

"Yes," she said, "I'm glad you came. I believe you can help me."

"I shall be delighted if I can."

"What do you think of Mrs. Fazakerly?"

Durant was a little taken aback by the suddenness of the question.

"What should I think?"

"I — I hardly know."

She knitted her black brows till they almost touched, and propped her chin with her hand, as if she were oppressed with the weight of her own thoughts. It struck him that her provincial mind entertained an unreasonable suspicion of the consummate little widow, a woman's jealousy of the superior creature compact of sex; and a sense of justice made him inclined to defend Mrs. Fazakerly. Besides, he liked Mrs. Fazakerly; she, at any rate, was not a bore.

"She's a very amusing woman, and I should say she was an uncommonly good sort, too."

To his surprise her face brightened. "Should you? Should you say that she had a good heart?"

"Really, Miss Tancred, I can't see into Mrs. Fazakerly's heart, but I wouldn't mind betting — —"

"That she's good? And affectionate? And straight?"

"Straight as a die."

"And honest?"

"Oh, Lord, yes." He wondered whatever primitive meaning she attached to the word.

"Well, if you think that — —"

"Mind you, my opinion may be utterly worthless."

"No, no. It's just the very sort of opinion I want."

"Why should it be?"

"Because it's the opinion of a man of the world. Mrs. Fazakerly's a woman of the world, so I thought you'd understand her. I don't."

"I've known her exactly a week, and you?"

"Two years. But then I don't observe character, and you do. And yet I have an intuition."

"Then by all means trust your intuition."

"That's it—I daren't. The truth is, I'm afraid of myself—my motives."

"Your motives are not yourself."

"Aren't they? If it wasn't for them I should be certain. I see she's a dear little woman, and I know that I like her."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, go on liking her; it's the best thing you can do."

"Isn't it rather horrid to like a person just because they may be of use to you?"

"Not in the least. You were pleased to say I might be of use to you, and I'm sure I hope you like me."

"Yes, I like you; but I think I like you for yourself. I'm afraid of liking Mrs. Fazakerly from the wrong motive."

"You can't like her from the wrong motive. You can't have a motive at all, if it comes to that. You might have a motive for killing her, or for cultivating her acquaintance, but not for liking her. You either like a person or not, and there's an end of it."

"If your motives are not yourself, what are they?"

"Lord only knows. Forces, tendencies, that determine your actions, which are the very smallest part of you. What you call intuitions, your feelings—hate (I should say you were a good hater), and love— —" (her eyes, which had been fixed on his, dropped suddenly), "don't wait for motives. They're

the only spontaneous things about you, the only realities you know." (And of these he had said just now that the last reality was sex. It was his point of view, a point from which it appeared that for him Miss Tancred had no existence.) "Of course there may be some transcendental sense in which they're not realities at all; but as far as we are concerned they're not only real, but positively self-existent."

As he thus discoursed, Durant blinked critically at the sky, while his pencil described an airy curve on the infinite blue, symbolizing the grace, the fluency, and the vastness of his thought.

"They, if you like, are you. It's very odd that you don't seem to trust them more."

She had turned from him till her face was a thin outline against the sky. She had a fine head, and carried it well, too; and at the moment the twilight dealt tenderly with her dress and face; it purified the tragic pallor of her forehead and all but defined that vague, haunting suggestion of a possible charm. Durant had it a moment ago — there — then. Ah! now he had lost it.

"I daren't trust my feelings. I can't. There are too many of them. They won't work the same way. They're all fighting against each other."

"Then let them fight it out, and let the strongest win."

"If I only knew which was the strongest."

"You'll know some day. In the long run, you see, the strongest is bound to win."

"Not necessarily. There might be a number of little ones that all together would be stronger still."

"Oh, kill off the little beggars one at a time — go for them, throttle them, wring their necks, jump on them; and if they wriggle, stamp!"

"You can't jump on your own shadow. You can't stamp on them if they're you."

He groaned. Miss Tancred was getting too subtle; it was like sitting in the desert and playing at metaphysics with the Sphinx. He had had about enough of it. He rose, stretching his long limbs, and the action suggested the hideous tension of his intellect.

"You must let yourself go, Miss Tancred—let yourself go!" And he laughed at his own vision of Miss Tancred; Miss Tancred insurgent, Miss Tancred flamboyant, Miss Tancred voluptuous, volatile, victorious!

And then a thought struck him.

He turned and saw Miss Tancred still sitting motionless, nursing her knees; her pure inflexible profile glimmered against the dusk.

VI

Durant had an idea, or rather two ideas, one purely comic, the other comic or tragic, according to the way you took it. He first of all discovered that the Colonel was laying siege to the heart of Mrs. Fazakerly, and at the same time conducting his campaign with an admirable discretion. There never was a little Colonel of militia so anxious to avoid committing himself. Not that the event could be considered doubtful for a moment. Measuring all risks, it was in the highest degree incredible that he would be called upon to suffer the indignity of repulse.

There was nothing extraordinary in that. To be sure, on the first face and blush of it, Durant had wondered how on earth Mrs. Fazakerly could tolerate the Colonel; but, when he came to think of it, there was no reason why she should not go a great deal farther than that. The Colonel's dullness would not depress her, she having such an eternal spring of gaiety in herself. She might even find it "soothing," like the neighboring landscape. And as she loved her laughter, it was not improbable that she loved its cause. Then she had the inestimable advantage of knowing the worst of him; her intelligent little eyes had seen him as he was; she could lay a soft finger on all his weak spots. There was this to be said for the Colonel, that he was all on the surface; there was nothing, positively nothing, behind

him. Besides, Mrs. Fazakerly was not exacting. She had not lived forty years in the world without knowing the world, and no doubt she knew it too well to ask very much from it. Then the fact remained that the Colonel was an immaculate gentleman, immaculately dressed, and he was not the only item in the program. Coton Manor would be thrown in, and there were other agreeable accessories. Mrs. Fazakerly's tastes were all of the expensive sort, and her ambition aimed at something vaster than the mere adornment of her own person. In her household she displayed a talent, not to say a genius, for luxurious order. But a little dinner at the cottage opposite the lodge gates had convinced Durant that this elegance of hers was of a fragile and perishable sort. The peculiar genius of Mrs. Fazakerly clamored for material and for boundless scope. It could not do itself justice under two thousand a year at the very least. As things stood its exuberance was hampered both as to actual space (her drawing-room was only eighteen feet by twelve) and as to the more glorious possibilities that depend on income. At Coton Manor she would have a large field and a free hand. Heaven only knew what Mrs. Fazakerly's mind was made up of; but quite evidently it was made up.

So far so good; but there was less certainty as to the Colonel's attitude. As yet nothing was to be seen, so to speak, but his attitudes, which indeed were extremely entertaining. The little gentleman was balancing himself very deftly on the edge of matrimony, and Durant watched with a fearful interest the rash advance and circumspect retreat, the oscillating hair's-breadth pause, the perilous swerve, and desperate contortion of recovery.

Durant felt for him; he had so much to lose. Under Miss Tancred the working of his household was already brought to such exquisite perfection that any change must be for the worse. He had found out what became of Miss Tancred in her mysterious disappearances. As far as he could see the business of the estate was entirely superintended by the lady. He came across her in earnest conversation with the gardener; he met her striding across the fields with the farm-bailiff; he had seen her once on her black

mare inspecting some buildings on the farthest limit of the property, the obsequious builder taking notes of her directions. She was obviously a capable woman, a woman of affairs. He presumed that these matters, with her household and secretarial work, filled up her days; he knew too well that whist accounted for her evenings. He did not know if there was any margin, any dim intellectual region, out of time, out of space, where Miss Tancred's soul was permitted to disport itself in freedom; she seemed to exist merely in order to supply certain deficiencies in the Colonel's nature. Mrs. Fazakerly had once remarked that Frida was "her father's right hand." It would have been truer to have said that she was right hand and left hand, and legs and brain to the student of meteorology. There had evidently been some tacit division of labor, by which she did all the thinking and all the work while he did the talking. Thus, to continue Durant's line of argument, the Colonel's comfort was secured to him without an effort on his part (otherwise it would not have been comfort); and when all was said and done Mrs. Fazakerly was a most indifferent player of whist.

Then there was the Colonel's age. Durant knew a man who had taught himself the 'cello at fifty-five. But the Colonel was not that sort of adventurous dilettante. Neither was Mrs. Fazakerly exactly like a violoncello, she was more like a piano; while Miss Tancred, from the Colonel's point of view, was like a hurdy-gurdy. Not a difficult instrument the hurdy-gurdy; you have only to keep on turning a handle to make it go. To be sure, you can get rather more out of a piano; but pianos are passionate things, ungovernable and slippery to the touch. The Colonel was fond of the humbler instrument that gave him the sense of accomplishment without the effort, the joys of the maestro without his labor and his pain.

He was in a double dilemma. If he had to choose between Miss Tancred and Mrs. Fazakerly his choice would never be made. On the other hand, if he decided for both, his comfort would be more insecure than ever. There

would be jealousy to a dead certainty; in all mixed households that was where the shoe pinched. To pursue that vulgar figure, the Colonel's daughter was like a pair of old and easy shoes made by a good maker, a maker on whom he could rely; a wife would be like new boots ordered rashly from an unknown firm. They would be his best pair, no doubt, but your best pair is generally the tightest. He had some trying years before him; and well, a man does not put on new boots for a long uphill scramble.

So the Colonel's breast was torn with internecine warfare, desire battling with habit, and habit with desire. No wonder if in that awful struggle the fate of one insignificant individual counted for nothing. Frida Tancred never had counted.

Durant admitted that his imagination was apt to work in somewhat violent colors, and that there might be a point of view from which the Colonel would tone down into a very harmless and even pathetic figure; for Mrs. Fazakerly he had no terrors. But there was the girl. It was hard to say exactly what he had done to her. Apparently he had taken her soul while it was young and squeezable, and had crushed it till it fitted into all his little habits; he had silenced her heart with commonplaces, and dulled her intellect with his incomprehensible fatuity. And through it all he had been the most innocent little gentleman alive. Oh, yes, he was pathetic enough in his way. He himself was only an instrument in the hands of irrepressible Nature who couples wild soul with tame, hot blood with cold blood, genius with folly, and makes her sport of their unhappy offspring. And Nature was playing a glorious game with Frida Tancred now.

That was Durant's second idea; the thought that had struck him so unpleasantly after his last interview with her. To put it coarsely, he had a suspicion, a fear, that Miss Tancred was beginning to fall in love with him. He might have known that it would happen. It was just the sort of damnable irony most likely to pursue that unfortunate woman. There could be no mistake about it; he knew it; he knew it by many subtle and infallible signs. Somewhere he had heard or read that no nice man ever

knows these things. That was all nonsense; or, if it had any meaning at all, it could only mean that no nice man ever shows that he knows. The fact remained that if he had loved her he would not have known.

For the disagreeable circumstance itself he called Heaven to witness that he had not been to blame. He had been ready to do his part, to fall down and worship the unknown Miss Tancred, the Miss Tancred of his vision. The hour had been ripe, the situation also, and the mood; the woman alone had failed him. Heaven knew he had done nothing to make her care for him. True, he had given her a certain amount of his society; since she found a pleasure in it he would have been a brute to deny her that poor diversion, that miserable consolation for the tedium of her existence. Perhaps he had tried too much to be sympathetic; but who again would not have tried? He had given her nothing to go upon. What had he ever given her beyond some infinitesimal portion of his valuable time, at the most some luminous hour of insight, or perhaps a little superfluous piece of good advice that was of no possible use to himself? For these things she had given herself – given herself away. How ludicrously pathetic some women are! You do them some kindness on an afternoon when you have nothing better to do and they reward you with the devotion of eternity; for they have no sense of proportion. The awkward thing is that it lays you under an eternal obligation to do something or other for them, you don't know exactly what; an intolerable position for a nice man.

So Durant's first feelings were surprise, annoyance, and a certain shame. Then he began to feel a little flattered, being perfectly sure that Frida Tancred was not the woman to give herself away to any ordinary man. He was the first, the only one, the one in a thousand, who had broken down her implacable reserve. He ended by feeling positively proud of his power to draw out the soul of a creature so reticent and passionless and strange.

His time was not yet up, and the question was: Ought he to go or stay? He would have found or invented some pretext, and left long ago, but that in him the love of pleasure brought with it an equal fear of giving pain. It

would give pain to the Colonel (who, after all, had received him kindly) if he went before his time. By the art of graceful evasion Durant had escaped many such an old gentleman as the Colonel; but when it came to doing the really disagreeable and ungraceful thing it seemed that his courage failed him.

There was no doubt in Miss Tancred's mind on the delicate point. She was even capable of making a sacrifice to keep him.

He met her one morning riding on her black mare. Miss Tancred looked well on horseback; the habit, the stiff collar, the hard hat, were positively becoming, perhaps because they left no room for decorative caprice. She drew up, and Durant ran his hand lovingly over the warm shining neck and shoulders of the mare. Miss Tancred's eyes followed the movements of his hand, then they traveled up his tall figure and down again.

"Your legs are rather long," said she, "and you're heavier than I am; but you can ride her if you like."

"I shouldn't think of it," said Durant, magnificently mendacious. He had been very early enlightened as to his chances with the mare; but the temptation to ride her had never died in him.

"Unless you ride," she continued, "there is nothing for you to do here. Then you'll be bored to death; and then, I suppose, you'll go?"

"And bury myself? And then?"

"You won't be buried long. You'll rise again fast enough, somewhere else."

"And what if I do go and do all these things?"

"Well, I don't want you to go – and do them."

She moved on, and he walked beside her, his hand on the mare's mane.

"I can't think why you've stopped so long. Every morning since you came I've been expecting you to go. I thought you'd say your father was dying, or that your partner was ill, and you had urgent business in town. It's what they all do. Do you know, we've asked no end of people down, and they

never stay more than three days. They always get letters or telegrams, or something. No, I'm wrong; one man stopped a week. He sprained his ankle the first day, and left before he was fit to travel."

(Durant laughed. She really amused him, this ingénue of thirty, with the face of a Sphinx and the conversation of a child.)

"And they never come again. There's something about the place they can not stand."

They were walking leisurely together in full sight of Coton Manor. She gazed at it anxiously.

"Does it — does it look so very awful?"

"Well — architecturally speaking — no, of course it doesn't."

"Ah, you're getting used to it. Do you know you'll have been here a fortnight next Monday?"

About the corners of her mouth and eyes there played a dawning humor.

"Come, that sounds as if you did want me to go."

"No it doesn't. How could it? If you don't believe me, here's the proof — you can ride Polly every day if you'll stop another week."

Another week! Most decidedly she had a sense of the monstrous humor of the thing. If she could see it that way she was saved. He had not the heart to kill that happy mood by a coarse refusal; it would have been like grinding his heel on some delicate, struggling thing just lifting its head into life.

Besides, she had really touched him. His legs, as Miss Tancred had observed, were a little long, otherwise Durant had the soul and the physique of a tamer of horses. The sight of Polly filled him with desire that was agony and rapture; he saw himself controlling the splendid animal; he could feel her under him, bounding, quivering, pulsating, he himself made one with every movement of her nervous, passionate body. It was too

much. Beside that large, full-blooded pleasure, his scruples showed colorless and light as air.

That happened on a Friday. He had only two clear days more. He found himself seriously considering the desirability of staying over Monday.

VII

As ill-luck would have it Saturday was a wet day, and Durant, instead of riding the mare, was wandering aimlessly about the house. He had finished all the books in his bedroom and was badly in want of more. He knocked up against Frida Tancred in a dark passage, apologized, and confided in her. As usual she was sorry for him.

"I'm afraid we haven't many books; but you'll find some of mine in here." She opened a door as she spoke, and passed on.

Durant found himself in a room which he had not yet investigated. It was somewhat bare as to furniture; it struck strange to his senses as if he had stumbled into another world; in some occult way it preserved a tradition of travel and adventure. The bookcase he came to inspect was flanked by a small cabinet of coins and curios – Italian, Grecian, Egyptian, and Japanese; the walls were hung with bad landscapes interspersed with maps.

One of these, an uncolored map of Europe, attracted his attention. It was drawn by hand in Indian ink, a red line and accompanying arrow heads followed the coast and strung together such inland places as were marked upon the blank. The line started from Southampton and reached the Mediterranean by the Bay of Biscay; it shot inland to the great cities of Italy, returning always to the sea. It skirted Greece, wound in and out of the Ionian islands, touched at Constantinople, ringed the Bosphorus and the Black Sea, wheeled to Moscow and St. Petersburg, and then swept wildly up the north of Russia to Archangel and the Arctic Ocean; thence it followed the Scandinavian coast-line, darted to Iceland, and dipped southward again to Britain by way of the Hebrides. Off Queenstown the arrowheads pointed west, winged for the Atlantic. He found the same red

line again on a blank map of Asia heading for India by China and Japan. An adventurous, erratic line, whose stages were now the capitals of the world, and now some unknown halting-place in the immeasurable waste. And what on earth did it mean? Was it the record of an actual journey, or some yet untraveled visionary route?

But it was not these things alone that gave the room its fantastic and alien air. What dominated the place was the portrait of a woman, a woman who had Frida's queer accented eyebrows and Frida's eyes, with some more fiery and penetrating quality of her own, something more inimitably fine and foreign. The portrait (which struck Durant as decidedly clever) was signed by some unknown Russian artist, and he recognized it as that of Frida's mother, the lady of the landscapes. He wondered if it was the demon of ennui that had driven poor Mrs. Tancred to the practice of her terrible art, if she had had a spite against Coton Manor, which she vented by covering its walls with bad pictures.

He turned to the bookcase. Frida's library offered him an amazing choice of polyglot fiction. It contained nearly all Balzac and the elder Dumas, Tolstoi and Turgenieff, Bjørnsen and Ibsen, besides a great deal of miscellaneous literature, chiefly Russian and Norwegian. Here and there he came across some odd volumes of modern Greek. A whole shelf was devoted to books of travel; grammars and dictionaries made up the rest. Miss Tancred's taste in books was a little outlandish, but it was singularly virile and robust. He had been prepared to suspect her of a morbid pedantry, having known more than one lady in her desperate case who found consolation in the dead languages. But Miss Tancred betrayed no ghoulish appetites; if she had a weakness for tongues, she had also the good taste to prefer them living.

Durant was so much absorbed in these observations that he did not hear her come into the room.

"Have you found anything you can read?" she asked.

"I've found a great deal that I can't read. You do go in strong for languages."

"That's nothing; my mother was a Russian, and Russians know every language better than their own. I don't know more than seven besides mine. And I can only read and write them. They will never be any use to me."

"How can you tell what may be of use to you? Even Mrs. Fazakerly, or I?" Durant was anxious to give a playful turn to that remarkable discussion they once had; he thus hoped to set the tone for all future conversations with Miss Tancred. "I admit that you can't live on languages, they are not exactly safety-valves for the emotions; nobody can swear in more than three of them at a time. I think music's better. Instead of playing whist you ought to play Chopin."

"It's better to play whist well than Chopin badly."

"Better to rule in Hades than fool in the other place, you think? Miss Tancred, you are as proud as Lucifer."

"I don't see that any good is got by murdering the masters."

"It saves some women from worse crimes, I believe. Why didn't you take to sketching, then? That only kills time."

Miss Tancred was splendid in her scorn. "Kill time with painting bad pictures? I'd rather time killed me."

Ah, that was what he liked about her. She had not revenged herself on Nature by making hideous caricatures of Nature's face; she did not draw in milk-and-water colors, and she did not strum. She had none of the exasperating talents, the ludicrous ambitions of the amateur; she was altogether innocent of intellectual vanity.

"That reminds me," said she, "that I've seen nothing of those wonderful sketches you said you'd show me."

He had clean forgotten the things. Well, he could hardly do better than exhibit them; it would keep her quiet, and save him from perilous personalities.

At first he thought the exhibition was going to give her more pain than pleasure. He sat beside her, and she took the sketches from him gingerly, one by one, and looked at them without a word. A visible nervousness possessed her; her pulses clamored, she seemed to struggle with her own unsteady breathing. Once, when in the transfer of a drawing her hand brushed against his, she drew it back again as if it had dashed against a flame. Durant had noticed once or twice before that she avoided his touch.

Suddenly she awoke out of the agony of her consciousness. One picture had held her longer than the rest.

"It's beautiful – beautiful," she murmured.

"I'm glad you like it," said Durant, pleased at her first sign of admiration.

"Oh, I don't mean your picture – I mean the place."

"It's not a very good picture perhaps – –"

"I don't know whether it's good or bad; it seems to me rather bad, though I can't say what's wrong with it. It looks unfinished."

"It is unfinished, but that's not what's wrong with it. These are better – better painting."

His hand brushed hers in vain this time. She remained absorbed. "I don't care two straws about the painting; they may be masterpieces for all I know; it's that – that stretch of sand licked by the sea, and the grass trodden down by the wind – the agony and beauty and desolation of it – –"

"She laid it down unwillingly, and took the others from his hand.

"Oh, what's this?"

"A wall in Suza."

"I've never seen anything like that. The light seems to be moving — soaking into it and streaming out again. It looks as if it would burn if you touched it."

The artist in him laughed for pure pleasure. "It's all very well, you know, but they must be infernally good if they make you feel like that."

"They may be. Have you seen all these things, or have you done any of them out of your head?"

"Seen them, of course. I never paint 'out of my head'; I haven't enough imagination."

"Show me more places where you've been. Tell me about them. You might have done that before."

He obeyed, giving her his experience, his richest and his best; he drew for her scenes and things, not in their crude and temporary form, but as they lived for him and for his art, idealized, eternalized by the imagination that sees them as parts of the immortal whole; and yet vivid, individual, drenched with the peculiar color that made them equally and forever one with the soul of Maurice Durant. She hardly seemed to heed, hardly seemed to listen or to follow. She looked as if hearing were already absorbed in sight.

Durant put a small oil painting into her hand. He had kept his finest to the last. "If you're fond of the sea that may please you."

Mid-ocean, the slope and trough of a luminous sea; in the foreground one smooth, high-bosomed, unbroken wave, the light flung off from its crest like foam, to slide down its shoulder like oil on rounded glass. On the skyline the white peak of a sail; the whole a heaving waste of wind and water, light and air. It was a consummate bit of painting, as nobody knew better than Maurice Durant.

She looked at it as though she would never be tired of looking. A sudden impulse seized him, a blind instinct to give pleasure at any cost, to make amends for pain.

"If you honestly like it, I wish you'd keep it."

"Keep it? Keep it? Do you really mean it?"

"It would give me pleasure if you would."

"But isn't — might it not be valuable?"

It was valuable, as Durant reflected somewhat regretfully, but he answered well. "Valuable chiefly to me, I fancy. Which is all the more reason, if you like it — —"

"Like it? I should lo — —" She drew back her breath. "No; I think I'd better not. Thank you very much, all the same." She laid the canvas down with a gesture of renunciation.

"Now that's foolish. Why ever won't you?"

"I daren't. I daren't live with it. It would remind me of all the things I want to forget."

"What things?" He felt that the question was cruel, it was probing the very heart of pain. But his curiosity was too strong. The fountains of the deep were breaking up; he knew that he had only to give the word to witness an astounding transformation of the woman. He had given the word. Her face was changing; it had taken on the likeness of her foreign mother, intensified in its subtlety and fire.

"What things? The things I want to do and can't; the things I want to see — the things — —" She stopped. "Do you know, I don't even like to have those sketches of my mother's hanging about; they haunt me so intolerably, they tempt me to that degree that sometimes I can hardly bear to look at them."

He glanced at the drawings. He could hardly bear to look at them either. Poor wraiths and skeletons of landscapes, he would have thought them too fleshless and bloodless to touch even the ghost of longing.

She took up the picture she had just laid down. "But this — it's not painting, it's real; it's a piece torn out of the living world. It would bring it so horribly near me — don't you see?"

He thought he saw. He looked, and she lowered her eyelids. On to the slope of his wave there splashed a tear, salt to the salt.

She got up, turned away from him, and leaned against the window frame, staring out at the gravel walk, the lawn, the paddock, all the sedate, intolerable scene. Her breast heaved; she was shaken by a tumult of vision and desire.

"If only I could get away — get away from this!"

It was not she that cried out, but some other self, unacknowledged and unappeased, smothered and crushed and hidden out of sight.

Durant was moved by the revelation, and a little frightened, too.

"And why not get away?" he asked gently.

"Because I can't do anything like other people, by bits and halves. If I once go, I shall never come back — never. There's no use thinking about it. I've thought about it till I could have gone mad." She faced him bravely. "Mr. Durant, if you ever want a thing as badly as I want that, let me tell you that it will be simpler and easier to give it up altogether, for always, than to keep on looking at it and touching it and letting it go."

"Do you apply that principle to everything?"

"Nearly everything."

"H'm. Uncompromising. Yet I doubt if you are wise."

"Wise? Isn't it wiser to stand a little hunger than to go back to starvation after luxury?"

"Oh, of course; at that rate you can bring your soul down to a straw a day. But in the end, you know, it dies."

"If it comes to that, mine was dead ages ago, and buried quite decently, too. I think we won't dig it up again; by this time it might not look pretty."

At any other time she would have alienated his sympathy by that nasty speech; it was the sort of thing he hated women to say. But he forgave her because of her evident sincerity.

She dried her eyes and left him to his own reflections.

So this was Frida Tancred? And he had thought of her as the Colonel's daughter, a poor creature, subdued to the tyranny of habit. Habit indeed! She had never known even that comparative calm. It was not habit that had bound her to that dreadful old man, who was the father of her body, but with whom her soul recognized no kinship. Her life must have been an agony of self-renunciation, an eternal effort not to be.

He doubted her wisdom; but he was not sure that he did not admire her courage. That uncompromising attitude was more dignified than the hesitations of weaker natures. When women set out with the bold intention of living resolutely in the Whole, the Good, and the Beautiful, they sometimes find themselves brought up sharply midway at the threshold of the Good; and there they stand vacillating all the time, or at the most content themselves now and then with a terrified rush for the Beautiful and the Whole. They are fascinated by all three and faithful to none. Frida Tancred scorned their fatuous procedure. Balked of the best, she would never console herself with half-measures and the second best; as for all lesser values, there was something in her which would always mark her from Mrs. Fazakerly and her kind. With Frida it was either the whole or nothing; either four bare walls or the open road where there is no returning.

She would go no way where the Colonel could not follow.

Durant, on his way to bed that night, saw something that told him so much. Father and daughter stood with their backs to him at the end of the long corridor. The Colonel was putting out the lights. Frida had just nodded good night to him at her bedroom door, when she turned impetuously and flung her arms round the little gentleman. She pressed his head against her neck and held it there an instant, a passion of remorse and

tenderness in the belated caress. The Colonel was, as it were, taken off his feet; he was visibly embarrassed. Durant saw his eyes staring over her shoulder, in their profound stupidity helpless and uncomprehending.

VIII

It was Sunday afternoon, and they had been taking tea with Mrs. Fazakerly. This was the second time that Durant had had the opportunity of studying Mrs. Fazakerly at home, of filling in the little figure on its own appropriate background. The first thing that struck him was that the background was not appropriate, or rather that it was inadequate. Mrs. Fazakerly's drawing-room had an air of uneasy elegance, of appearances painfully supported on the thin edge of two hundred a year. It was furnished with a too conspicuous care; the most insignificant details were arranged so as to lead up to and set off her good things, which were few and far between. There was no rest in it for the eye that was perpetually seized and riveted on some bit of old silver, or Oriental drapery, some Chippendale cabinet or chair. Such things were the commonplaces of Coton Manor, and there they fell unobtrusively into their place. Here they were touched up and handled, posed out of all simplicity; they bore themselves accordingly with a shining consciousness of their own rarity; they made an unblushing bid for praise. In Mrs. Fazakerly's drawing-room the note of taste was forced.

The invitation had come as a sort of farewell attention to Durant. Its valedictory character was further emphasized by Mrs. Fazakerly's proposing to walk home with them, and finally falling into the rear with Durant.

As a turn in the drive brought them within sight of Coton Manor, Mrs. Fazakerly balanced her pince-nez on the bridge of her nose. It remained there, and he judged that Mrs. Fazakerly was in no mood for mirth.

"That house," said Mrs. Fazakerly, "annoys me."

"Why?"

"Because it hasn't had justice done to it."

"I should have thought that was a ground for pity rather than resentment."

Mrs. Fazakerly shrugged her shoulders ever so little. "That drawing-room – did you ever see anything like it? And such possibilities in it, too. I can't bear to think of all those beautiful things wasted, just for want of a little taste, a little arrangement – the right touch."

The widow's white fingers twitched. It was not vulgar cupidity; it was the passion of the born genius, of the lover of art for art's sake, who sees his opportunity given into the hands of an inferior. If only she had the ordering, the decoration of Coton Manor! Durant thought of the cottage at the gates, her cramped and humble sphere; it was not her fault so much as the defect of her instrument, that forcing of the note of taste; no wonder that she longed for the rich harmonies of Coton Manor under "the right touch," the touch of the master.

She continued, "But poor dear Miss Tancred, you know, she will have it left just as it was in Mrs. Tancred's time; she won't change a picture or a chair in it. That's Frida all over. She's made that house a monument to her mother's memory. And think what she might have made it."

"I'm thinking what she might have made of her life. She seems to be making that a monument to her father's memory."

"Ah! and the things she could have done with it."

Impossible to say whether Mrs. Fazakerly referred to Miss Tancred's house or her life. Durant smiled at her probable conception of Coton Manor, with its tragedy of splendid possibilities gone to waste; but Mrs. Fazakerly's idea cut both ways.

She sighed wearily.

"These drives were not made to be walked up. There's another mile and a half of it, and I'm half-dead already. I shall sit down."

She led the way to an elm tree fallen in the grass, examined it critically, sat down, and made a place for him at her side.

"So you're going to-morrow? Is that so?"

"It is — probably."

"It's a pity — just as you and Miss Tancred have made friends."

"The best of friends must part," said he lightly.

"Yes. Well, I'm glad you've managed to be nice to her, after all. She's come out in the most astonishing manner since you came. What have you been doing to her?"

"I've done nothing to her, I assure you."

"Ah, you mean you've not been making love to her."

"I don't mean anything of the sort."

Durant was angry. It was borne in upon him that Mrs. Fazakerly was vulgar, after all. She looked at him, and her pince-nez balanced itself on the bridge of her nose, then leapt its suicidal leap. She was amused with the ambiguity of his reply.

"That's all right. Heaven help the man who does make love to her, if he means it. That girl's a riddle to me. I used to think she cared a little for her father; but it's my belief that Frida Tancred cares for nobody, not even herself. She simply doesn't know what love is, and she doesn't want to know. Why am I saying these alarming things to you? I'm saying them because I'm old enough to be your mother, and because I like you. You're clever, and you've got a sense of humor, too, though I can't say it's been much use to you since you came here. But, with all your cleverness, you'll never understand Frida Tancred. She's not like other women, the sort you've flirted with so much. Don't tell me you haven't; for you have. She can't help it. Her mother was a queer fantastic creature, and Frida's just like her, only stronger, much stronger, and deeper, which makes it worse. I'm

sorry for her, because you see I'm very fond of her, and I think there's nothing—positively nothing—I wouldn't do to help her."

"It's an intolerable existence for her."

"Intolerable? Ah, my dear Mr. Durant, you're delightfully young; so is Frida, though you mightn't think it; and you young people are all so tragic. Frida's absurd about her father; she's always been going about with that face of hers, playing at being Antigone, and as the poor, dear Colonel is as blind as What's-his-name? he naturally doesn't see it. She's brought it all on herself. She looks on her father as her fate, and treats him accordingly—in the grand style—and it doesn't suit him. What a subject like the Colonel wants is a light touch. With me, for instance, he's a dear."

"Is he? I thought he rather bored you," said Durant maliciously.

"When did you think that? Oh, that first night when we all laughed so much, except poor Frida. I wasn't bored—not a bit; on the contrary, I was amused at the expression of your face, and at your atrocious manners and still more atrocious puns. Nothing ever bores me. It's only you young people who let yourselves be bored. Tragedy again. Too much tragedy for my taste."

Mrs. Fazakerly paused to let her communications sink in and take root. There was a deep hush on the landscape, as if in deference to her awful confidences. A deer stood knee-deep in the grass and gazed at them inquiringly. And as Mrs. Fazakerly stared unabashed into the face of Nature, Durant thought of Frida's remark, and wondered if she found it "soothing."

"Mind you, I don't mean to say that she's cold. On the contrary, I believe she's capable of a tremendous passion for something—I don't quite know what. It might be a person,"—she rose—"but let me tell you it's much more likely to be a thing."

They were talking quite innocently about art and literature when they appeared at the house.

Durant vainly tried to unravel the possible motives for her confidence. They were so many and so mixed. It was possible that she honestly suspected him of a dawning passion for Frida and that she meant to warn him of the hopelessness of such an attachment; apparently she understood her friend. Or the conversation may have been designed as an apology for her own future conduct. Durant knew that she would not refuse to marry Colonel Tancred if he made the offer; he knew, or thought he knew, her inmost opinion of that ridiculous person. She must be aware that her own dignity was considerably compromised by the situation; perhaps she hoped by rehabilitating the Colonel's behavior to justify her own. But why that insistence on the enigma of Frida Tancred's? Why this superfluous and elaborate cover for her own very simple meaning?

Unless, indeed, she was not quite so simple as she seemed. In courtship the Colonel had shown himself vacillating, to say the least of it. If Mrs. Fazakerly wanted to bring him to the point it was obviously her interest to get Miss Tancred out of her way. In other words, to throw her in Durant's way. His delicacy shrank from the baseness of this conjecture, but his reason, as well as his experience, suggested that the thing was not impossible. Mrs. Fazakerly had been studying him, and she was shrewd enough to see that the surest way to interest him in Miss Tancred was to set his intellect to work on her. She had doubtless observed his *fin de siècle* contempt for the obvious, his passion for the thing beyond his grasp, his worship of the far-fetched, the intangible, the obscure. Thus she thought to inflame his curiosity by hinting that Frida Tancred was incomprehensible, while she touched the very soul of desire by representing her as unattainable. All this was no doubt very clever of Mrs. Fazakerly; but it was not quite what he had expected of her.

His suspicions were confirmed by Frida's behavior. Ever since their last interview she had relapsed into something like her former reticence. Tonight, as if she had an inkling of the atrocious plot, she avoided him with a sort of terror.

IX

Durant's time was up, but the Colonel had pressed him to stay another week. He was affectionate; he was firm; he would take no refusal. He dwelt on the advantages of a prolonged visit. "A little change," said he, "does us all good. You young fellows are apt to get into a groove. But you seem brighter since you came. I think we've shaken you up a bit."

Indeed, at no time had there been room for any doubt as to the sincerity of his welcome. Though he was so determined to shake Durant up, to get him out of his groove, and give him fresh ideas, he betrayed a pitiable dependence on the young fellow. He endeavored to meet youth on its own ground; he made piteous experiments in the frivolous. More than once Durant had suspected that the poor gentleman had asked him down as a protection from the terrors of his own society. His intellectual resources were evidently giving out. The barometer was stationary; a fortnight's almost persistent sunshine had dried up the source of ideas. Having gutted the Nineteenth Century, his mind seemed to be impotently raging for fresh matter to destroy. He repeated himself eternally; the same phrases were always in his mouth. "A fad, a theory, a name for ignorance." "Don't tell me; it's an insult to my intelligence!" Durant could have been sorry for him if he had not been so infinitely sorry for himself.

On Monday morning Frida Tancred was herself again; not her old self, but the new one that Durant had learned to know and tolerate. She sought him out after breakfast and seconded the Colonel's invitation.

"If you could possibly stop, Mr. Durant, I wish you would. I'm asking a favor. My cousin, Georgie Chatterton, is coming down on Wednesday to stay. I don't know how long. I've never seen her before, and she's a young girl."

Frida's voice expressed a certain horror.

"Well, what of that?"

"If there's one thing on earth that I'm afraid of, it's a young girl. If you could only stay on just to amuse her a little, to help her through her first week! You see, it'll be so desperately dull for her if you don't."

He laughed; there was no other way of responding to the naïveté of the request.

"It doesn't really seem fair to ask her when she hasn't an idea—I can't think why father did it. Perhaps he didn't. It's odd, but I've noticed that, when anything like this happens, Mrs. Fazakerly is always at the bottom of it."

Another lurid light on Mrs. Fazakerly!

"Was Mrs. Fazakerly at the bottom of his asking me?"

She smiled. "To tell you the honest truth, she was. Not but what he is delighted to have you here. I don't know when I've seen him so happy, so interested in anyone. But, you see, he's fearfully conservative; he can't bear to take the first step in anything."

He saw. The Colonel might be as conservative as he pleased; but the old order was changing; Coton Manor was on the eve of a revolution. He saw it all clearly, that deep-laid plot of Mrs. Fazakerly's. He had been asked down at her suggestion to keep Frida Tancred out of the way for the moment, or, better still, forever. He had not risen to the occasion; his time was up, so Miss Chatterton was to be invited to take his place. Yet, when he came to think of it, so simple a scheme, the mere substitution of one cat's paw for another, hardly did justice to Mrs. Fazakerly's imagination. Was she still convinced of his dawning passion for Miss Tancred? Had she doubts as to Miss Tancred's willingness or power to return it? and had she suggested that he should be pressed to prolong his stay in the hope that the rival presence of the young girl would act as the spark that fires the mine, kindling Miss Tancred's emotions and revealing her to herself?

Meanwhile Miss Tancred's one idea was to make use of him, to hand over the young girl to him and be rid of her. Her former offer of the black mare on the condition that he stayed another week appeared now as a grim jest,

a cynical wager. This time she was in earnest. Whereas, if she had been in love with him — —

Weighing these matters in his sensitive brain, Durant conceived a violent hatred of Mrs. Fazakerly and her plot, together with a corresponding determination to stay on, if only to prove to that ingenious lady that she was hopelessly mistaken. Any hasty movement on his part would but confirm her in her absurd suspicions, while his actual flight would be the most flattering testimony to the profundity of her insight. He was not going to behave like the victim to a desperate infatuation for Miss Tancred. He would stay on, and Mrs. Fazakerly would see that nothing came of her psychological intrigue.

How far the Colonel was her accomplice he had no idea. The old fellow was a gentleman when all was said and done, and it was more than likely that he contented himself with a gentlemanly acquiescence. His dignity might possibly not refuse to draw a profit either way from the transaction. Durant could reckon on Miss Tancred, having returned to his original opinion of her. There was not enough womanhood in her for ordinary elemental jealousy; as for passion, he had decided that she was as innocent of understanding as she was incapable of inspiring it. A sentimental coxcomb might beat a precipitate retreat because he thought or fancied that his hostess was in love with him, and he would probably call his ridiculous conduct chivalry; it was more becoming in a gentleman to ignore the painful circumstance. For all these reasons he determined to stay.

His acceptance of their renewed invitation gave evident pleasure to the Colonel and Miss Tancred and very little annoyance to himself. He had grown used to Coton Manor as a prisoner grows used to his cell. He had, as he had feared, tied himself to the place by beginning serious work in it. He was too well pleased with his landscape studies of the neighborhood to leave them unfinished; and, as it happened, he had plenty of time to give to them, for the Colonel was pretty constantly engaged with Mrs. Fazakerly. (Here again he traced the delicate hand of that lady. She had seen that, if

any guest was to remain at Coton Manor, a limit must be put to the Colonel's opportunities for tormenting him.) Durant had ceased to long for distraction; he was sufficiently entertained by the situation itself.

X

If he had been on the lookout for distraction, he would have found it in Georgie Chatterton. At Miss Tancred's request he went with her to the station to meet the expected guest. It was evidently thought that his presence would break the shock of her arrival.

It proved an unnecessary precaution. The young girl presented a smiling face at the carriage window—the Tancred face, somewhat obscured by a mass of irrelevant detail, sandy hair, freckles, a sanguine complexion, and so on. She jumped out on to the platform with a joyous cry of "Fridah!" She embraced "Fridah" impetuously, and then kept her a moment at arm's length, examining her dubiously. "You don't seem a bit glad to see me," was her verdict. She smiled gaily at Durant, and held out a friendly hand. All the way up from the station she conversed with them in a light-hearted manner. Thus:—

"What do you people do down here?"

"Ask Mr. Durant; he'll tell you that we vegetate all day and play whist all night."

"Oh, do you? Well, you know, I shan't. My goodness, Frida! is that your house? Whatever is it like? A Unitarian chapel, or the Carlton Club, or, stop a bit—you don't bury people in it, do you?" Then, as it occurred to her that she might have hurt her cousin's feelings by her last suggestion, she added, "It's rather a jolly old mausoleum, though. I wonder what it's like inside."

If Miss Chatterton had any premonition of her own approaching death by boredom, and had seen in Coton Manor more than a mere passing resemblance to a tomb, she was neither awestruck nor downcast at the prospect of dissolution. She flung herself into the vault as she had flung herself onto the platform, all glowing with pleasurable anticipation. To

Durant there was something infinitely sad in the spectacle of this young creature precipitating herself into the unknown with such reckless and passionate curiosity. The whole long evening through he could discover no diminution of her mood, her gleeful determination to enjoy herself among the shades. She behaved to Colonel Tancred as if he had been a celebrity whose acquaintance she had long desired to make, a character replete with interest and romantic charm. She greeted Mrs. Fazakerly with a joyous lifting of the eyebrows, as much as to say, "What! another delightful person?"

And she was observant in her way, too. When Miss Tancred put a hand on her shoulder and said, "It will be horribly dull for you, Georgie; you'll have nothing to do but talk to Mr. Durant," she replied, "H'm! Mr. Durant looks as if he had been talked to all his life. I shall talk to you, Frida."

All through dinner she managed to preserve her spirits, her air of being among the most curious and interesting people. Durant wondered how on earth she kept it up. She seemed one of those fortunate beings whose vivacity is so overpowering that it can subdue even dullness to itself. She made the Colonel look strangely old; beside her Mrs. Fazakerly seemed suddenly to become dull and second-rate, to sink into the position of an attendant, a fatuous chorus, a giddy satellite. Her laughter swallowed up Mrs. Fazakerly's as a river in flood devours its tributaries; her spirits quenched Mrs. Fazakerly's as a blaze licks up a spasmodic flicker. It pleased Durant to look at her, the abandonment of her manners was in such flagrant contradiction with the Roman regularity of her Tancred face. Owing, perhaps, to some dash of the Tancred blood in her, she was neither pretty nor witty; yet she contrived to get her own way with everybody. Durant accounted for it by her sheer youth, the obstinacy of her will to live.

In twenty-four hours she had put a stop to Frida's disappearances, to Durant's sketching, and to the Colonel's intellectual conversation; and this she did by behaving so as to make these things impossible. In short, she had taken possession of her cousin and her black mare, of the Colonel and

his cigarettes, of Mrs. Fazakerly and her books, of everybody and everything except Durant. She was friendly with him, but somehow her friendliness was infinitely more unflattering than Miss Tancred's former apathy. It implied that he was all very well in his way, but that she had seen too many of his sort to be greatly excited about him; while in Frida Tancred, now, she had found something absolutely and uniquely new. She was not going to be put off with Durant; she fastened herself upon Frida, and refused to let her go; she did the thing she had said she would do — without absolutely ignoring her fellow-guest, she talked to Frida or at Frida or for Frida alone. And yet, strangely enough, by dint of much observation she had detected a subtle resemblance between them, and she proclaimed her discovery with her natural frankness.

It was the second evening of her stay, and the three were sitting out on the lawn together. She had been looking long and earnestly at her mysterious kinswoman.

"Frida, you really are a sort of cousin, aren't you?"

"So I've always been told."

"And Mr. Durant, is he a sort of cousin, too?"

"I never heard that."

"I'm afraid I have not the honor."

"That's odd. I thought he must be."

"Why?" asked Miss Tancred.

"Oh, because there's a likeness somewhere. Not in the face exactly, but — yes, there! Keep that expression on your face one minute, Mr. Durant; now don't you see it?"

"See what?"

"It — the likeness. He looks terribly reserved somehow — a sort of wild-horses-shan't-draw-it-out-of-me expression, and yet so fearfully restless; and that's just like you."

There was an embarrassed silence; and then Miss Chatterton again raised her cheerful voice.

"I say, Frida! you might tell me exactly what I'm in for. Are you two going to be horribly intellectual and clever and that sort of thing?"

"I'm not," said Miss Tancred.

"I'm not," echoed Durant.

"Thank Heaven! Because you both look as if you'd a tremendous lot in you. I wonder if you'll ever let it out."

"Not if we can help it," said Durant.

"There you are again! If you're not Frida's first cousin, you ought to be."

Durant smiled; he wondered whether the idea was more than the random frolicking of Miss Chatterton's brain. She was evidently a young woman of perception; but her perceptions had wings, and she threw them off from her in a manner altogether spontaneous, impersonal and free. It was nothing to her if they brushed against the truth sometimes in their irresponsible flight.

"You don't mind all these personal remarks, do you?"

"Not in the least," said Miss Tancred.

"For my part I rather like them," said Durant; but they both carefully avoided each other's eyes.

XI

Durant had a grievance against Miss Chatterton. He had been induced to lengthen his visit in order to entertain her, and Miss Chatterton refused to be entertained. His position at Coton Manor had thus become a humiliating sinecure. There was no earthly reason why he should stay any longer, and yet he stayed.

The fact was, that by this time he was really interested in other things beside the landscape. He had wondered how long Miss Chatterton would

keep it up. He watched her, as one haunted guest watches another, to know if she too has seen the specter of the house, observing her manner and her appetite at breakfast, the expression of her face at bedtime, her voice in saying good-morning and good-night. On the third day he thought he could detect a slight flagging; Miss Chatterton was a shade less buoyant, less talkative than before. By the evening she was positively serious, and he judged that the iron had entered into her soul. Her manner to her cousin had changed; it was more tentative, more tender, more maternal. She had begun to pity Frida, as he had pitied her.

The two were inseparable; they were always putting their heads together, always exchanging confidences. And it was not only confidences but characters that they exchanged. It was a positive fact that as Miss Chatterton flagged Miss Tancred revived, she seemed to be actually growing young while the young girl grew older. Not that Miss Tancred grew young without difficulty; the life she had led was against that. She looked like a woman recovering from a severe illness, she suffered relapse after relapse, she went about in a flush and fever of convalescence; it was a struggle for health under desperate conditions, the agony of a strong constitution still battling with the atmosphere that poisoned it, recovery simulating disease, disease counterfeiting recovery.

A wholesome process, no doubt, but decidedly unpleasant to watch. Durant, however, had very little opportunity for watching it, as he was now left completely to himself. Miss Tancred's manner intimated that she had done with him, — put him away in some dark cupboard of the soul, like a once desired and now dreaded stimulant, — that she was trusting to other and safer means for building up her strength. If Durant had ever longed for solitude, he had more than enough of it now, and he devoted the rest of his time to finishing the studies and sketches he had begun. He had made none of Miss Tancred.

One morning he had pitched his umbrella and his easel below a ridge on the far slope of the fir plantation. A thorn bush sheltered him from the wind and made him invisible from the terrace of grass above him.

He had emerged from a fit of more than usual absorption when he felt the stir of footsteps in the grass, and a voice rang out clear from the terrace.

"If it would only make papa happy. I want him to be happy."

Durant could not help but overhear, his senses being sharpened by the dread of hearing.

"My poor child" (it was the young girl who spoke), "you don't know what you want; but you want something more than that."

Durant rattled his color-box in desperation, but the women were too much absorbed to heed his warning, and Frida even raised her voice in answering:

"Yes, I'm afraid I do want something more. I know what you're thinking, Georgie. When women of my age go on like this it generally means that they're in love, or that they want to be married, or both."

Durant was considering the propriety of bursting out on them noisily from the cover of his umbrella, but before he could decide the point Miss Tancred had continued:

"I am not in love."

She spoke in the tone of one stating an extremely uninteresting fact.

"You are in love, Frida. You're in love with life, and life won't have anything to do with you; it's thrown you over, and a beastly shame, too! You're simply dying for love of it, my sweetheart."

Frida did not deny the accusation. They passed on, and in the silence Durant could hear their skirts as they brushed the thorn bush. He could only pray now that he might remain invisible.

He felt rather than saw that they turned their heads in passing.

"Do you think he heard?"

This time it was Miss Chatterton who raised her voice.

"It doesn't matter if he did. He's not a fool, whatever else he is."

Durant overlooked that flattering tribute to himself in his admiration of Miss Chatterton's masterly analysis and comprehension. She had, so to speak, taken Frida Tancred to pieces and put her together again in a phrase—"Dying for love of life." Beside her luminous intuition his own more logical method seemed clumsy and roundabout, a constructive process riddled by dangerous fallacies and undermined by monstrous assumptions. At the same time he persisted in returning to one of these, the most monstrous, perhaps, of all. In spite, perhaps because, of her flat denial, he pictured Frida not only as mysteriously in love with existence, but with a certain humble spectator of existence. According to the view he had once expounded to her the two passions were inseparable.

Before very long he received a new light on the subject. It was his last day, the two cousins were together somewhere, the Colonel was in bed with a bilious attack, and Durant was alone in the drawing-room.

He had not been alone long before Miss Chatterton appeared. She came into the room with an air of determination and sat down beside him. She went straight to her point, a very prickly one; there was no beating about the thorn bush with Miss Chatterton.

"Mr. Durant," said she, "I want to talk to you—for once. When you first came here what did you think of Miss Tancred?"

"I'm afraid I didn't think anything of Miss Tancred."

"Did you dislike her?"

"N-no. I only found her a little difficult to talk to."

"Oh. Well, that's not what I came to consult you about. I want you to help me. I am going to elope— —"

"You don't mean to say so— —"

"To elope with Miss Tancred — run away with her — take her out of this. It's the only way."

"The only way to what?"

"To save her. But I shall do nothing rash, nothing that would cause a scandal in the county. I shall simply take her up to town with me when I go back on Monday. My week isn't up; but — well — my temper is. So far it's all open and aboveboard — —"

"Yes — yes. And where do I come in?"

"Oh, you — if you wouldn't mind staying where you are and keeping the Colonel in play till we've got safe across the Channel — —"

"The Channel?"

"The Channel, my friend. Where else should we be safe?"

"That means that I've got to stick here till — —"

"Till Wednesday."

"Good heavens! Another week! Not if I know it."

"Yes; it's awful, I know; but not as bad as it might have been. You won't have to talk to Miss Tancred. By the way, she says you are the only man who ever tried to talk to her — to understand her. What a dreadful light on her past! Think what her life must have been."

"Not very amusing, I imagine."

"Amusing! Think of it. Thirty years in this hole, where you can't breathe, and without a soul to speak to except the Colonel. Not that the Colonel is a soul — he's much too dense."

"To be anything but a body?"

"And all the time she has loathed it — loathed it. You see, she's got cosmopolitan blood in her veins. Her mother — you know about her mother?"

"I know nothing about her except that she did a great many bad things—I mean pictures—for which I hope Heaven may forgive her."

"Don't be brutal. She's dead now and can't do any more. When she was alive she was a Russian or a Pole or something funny, and mad on traveling, always going from one place to another—a regular rolling stone; till one day she rolled up to the Colonel's feet, and then — —"

"Well?"

"He picked her up and put her in his pocket, and she never rolled any further. He packed her off to England and made her sit in this dreadful old family seat of his till she died of it. That's the sort of woman Miss Tancred's mother was, and Miss Tancred takes after her mother. She's a cosmopolitan, too."

"Rubbish! No woman can be a cosmopolitan." He said it in the same tone in which he had told Frida that no woman could have a pure passion for Nature. "And Miss Tancred, though nice, strikes me as peculiarly provincial. I shouldn't have thought — —"

"There are things in her you'd never have thought of. It's wonderful how she comes out when you know her."

"She certainly has come out wonderfully since you came on the scene." (The words he used had a familiar ring. It was exactly what Mrs. Fazakerly had said to him.)

"I? I've not had anything to do with it. It was you; she told me. It wasn't just that you understood her; you made her understand herself; you made her feel; you stirred up all the passion in her."

"I don't understand you," he said coldly.

"Well, I think if you can understand Miss Tancred you might understand me. Compared with Frida I'm simplicity itself."

"When did I do these things?"

"Why, when you told her to let herself go. When you showed her your sketches and talked to her about the places, and the sea, all the things you had seen; the things she had dreamed of and never seen."

The young girl spoke as if she was indignant with him for reveling in opportunities that were Frida's by right.

"But she shall see them. She shall go away from this, and be herself and nobody else in the world."

"It's too late — it's not as if she were young."

"Young? She's a good deal younger than I am, though she's thirty and I'm twenty-four — twenty-five next September. Frida's young because she's got the body of a woman, the mind of a man, and the soul of a baby. She'll begin where other women end, will Frida. Wait till she's been abroad with me, and you'll see how her soul will come on, in a more congenial climate."

"Where are you going?"

"We're going everywhere. Venice — Rome — Florence — the Mediterranean — the regular thing. And to all sorts of queer outlandish places besides — Scandinavia, the Hebrides, and Iceland; everywhere that you can go to by sea. The sea — — That's you again."

"The deuce it is! I doubt if I've done the kind thing, then. I seem to have roused passions which will never be satisfied. When she comes back — —"

Miss Chatterton's voice sank. "She never will come back."

"Never? How about the Colonel?"

Miss Chatterton smiled. "That's the beauty of it. It's the neatest, sweetest, completest little plot that ever was invented, and it's simplicity itself, like its inventor — that's me. I suppose you know all about Mrs. Fazakerly?"

"Well, not all. Who could know all about Mrs. Fazakerly?"

"You know enough, I daresay. By taking her away — I mean Frida — we force the Colonel's hand."

"You might explain."

"I never saw a man who wanted so many things explained. Don't you see that, as long as Frida stays at home, petting and pampering him and doing all his work for him, he'll never take the trouble to marry; but as soon as she goes away, and stays away — —"

"I see, I see; he marries. You force his hand — and heart."

"Exactly. And, if he marries, Frida stays away altogether. She's free."

"Yes; she's free. If she goes; but she'll never go."

"Won't she? She's going next Monday. It's all arranged. I've told her that she's in her father's way, that he wants to marry, and keeps single for her sake. And she believes it."

He walked up and down with his hands in his pockets, a prey to bewildering emotions.

"It's ingenious and delightful, your plot," said he. "But I can't say that I grasp all the minutiae, the practical details. For instance (it's a brutal question, but), who's going to provide the — the funds for this expedition to Scandinavia — or was it Abyssinia?"

"Funds? Oh, that's all right. She's got any amount of her own, though you wouldn't know it."

"I didn't know it." He champed his upper lip. He could not in the least account for the feeling, but he was bitterly, basely disappointed at this last revelation. Miss Tancred was independent. Up till now he could not bring himself to believe in her flight; he did not want to believe in it; it would have been a relief to him to know that the strange bird's wings were clipped.

"It was her mother's; what the poor lady traveled on, I suppose. Frida might have been enjoying it all the time, only, you see, there was the Colonel. That's why she wants him to marry Mrs. Fazakerly, though she'd rather die than own it."

"Why shouldn't she own it?"

"Because she can't trust her motives, trust herself. I never saw a woman fight so shy of herself."

"Then that's what she was thinking of when she said she was afraid of her own feelings."

"Oh! So she did say it, did she?"

"She said that or something very like it. You think that's what she must have meant?" He appealed to her humbly, as to one who had mastered the difficult subject of Frida Tancred.

"Why, whatever else could she have meant, stupid?"

There was an awkward silence, broken, or rather mended, by Miss Chatterton saying, as she stood with her hand on the door:

"Look here, you're not going to back out of it. You've promised to stand by and see us through with it, honor bright."

"I promised nothing of the sort, but I'll stand by all right."

"You may have a bad time. The Colonel will kick up an awful fuss; but remember, you're not in the least responsible. I'm the criminal."

It was as if she had said, "Don't exaggerate your importance. I, not you, am Miss Tancred's savior and deliverer."

He stiffened visibly. "I shall not quarrel with you for the rôle."

XII

Monday was the day of the great deliverance, the day that was fixed for Frida Tancred's flight. And, as if it meant to mark an era and a hegira and the beginning of revolution, it distinguished itself from other days by suitable signs and portents. It dawned through a brooding haze that threatened heat, then changed its mind, thickened and massed itself for storm. While he was dressing, Durant was made aware of the meteorological disturbance by an incessant tap-tap on the barometer as the

Colonel consulted his oracle in the hall. The official announcement was made at breakfast.

"There is a change in the glass," said the Colonel. "Mr. Durant brought the fine weather with him and Miss Chatterton is taking it away."

"I'm taking something else away beside the weather," said she.

But the spirit of prophecy was upon him.

"To judge by to-day's forecast, I think we shall see Frida back again before the fine weather."

Whereupon Durant smiled and Miss Chatterton laughed, which gave him an agreeable sense of being witty as well as prophetic.

By ten o'clock the hand of the barometer had crept far past "Change"; by noon it had swung violently to "Stormy, with much rain"; by lunchtime a constrained and awkward dialogue was broken by the rude voice of the thunder. The Colonel took out his watch, timed the thunder and lightning, and calculated the approaches of the storm. "Seven miles away from us at present," said he.

It hung so low that the growling and groaning seemed to come from the woods round Coton Manor; the landscape darkened to a metallic purplish green, then paled to the livid color of jade under a sallow sky. There was a swift succession of transformation scenes, when, between the bursts of thunder, the park, swathed in sheet lightning, shot up behind the windows, now blue, now amethyst, now rose, now green. Then the storm suddenly shifted its quarters and broke through a rampart of solid darkness piled high in the southwest.

"Fifteen seconds," said the Colonel, "between that flash and the thunder."

Among these phenomena the Colonel moved like a little gentleman enchanted; he darted to and fro, and in and out, as if the elements were his natural home; his hurried notes in the little memorandum book outsped

the lightning. For the last thirty years there had not been such weather in the meteorological history of Wickshire.

But the storm was only in its playful infancy; the forked lightning and the rain were yet to come. The last train up, timed to meet the express at the junction, left Whithorn-in-Arden at 3.10, and it was a good hour's drive to the station. As they toyed with the lightning on their plates Durant and Miss Chatterton looked at Frida. Fate, the weather, and the Colonel, a trinity of hostile powers, were arrayed against her, and the three were one.

At the stroke of two the Colonel remarked blandly, "There will be no driving to the station to-day, so I have countermanded the brougham."

They were dressed ready for the journey, and, as the Colonel spoke Frida got up, drew down her veil and put on her gloves.

"That was a pity," she said quietly, "seeing that we've got to go."

The Colonel was blander than ever; he waved his hand. "Go, by all means," said he, "but not in my brougham. There I put my foot down."

("Not there, not there, oh, gallant Colonel," said Durant to himself, "but where you have always put it, on Frida's lovely neck.")

She started, looked steadily at her father, then, to Durant's surprise, she shrugged her shoulders; not as an Englishwoman shrugs them, but in the graceful Continental manner. The movement suggested that the foreign strain in her was dominant at the moment; it further implied that she was shaking her neck free from the Colonel's foot. She walked to the window and looked out upon the storm. With the neck strained slightly forward, her nostrils quivering, her whole figure eager and lean and tense, she looked like some fine and nervous animal, say a deerhound ready to slip from the leash.

As she looked there was a sound as if heaven were ripped asunder, and the forked lightning hurled itself from that dark rampart in the southwest and went zig-zagging against the pane. "Only ten seconds," said the Colonel; "the storm is bursting right over our heads."

Frida too had consulted her watch; she turned suddenly, rang the bell, and gave orders to a trembling footman. "Tell Randall to put Polly in the dogcart. He must drive to the station at once."

The answer came back from the stables that Randall had shut himself into the loose box and covered himself with straw, "to keep the lightning off of him. He dursn't go near a steel bit, not if it was to save his life, m'm, and as for driving to the station — —"

It was too true; Randall, horse-breaker, groom and coachman, excellent, invaluable creature at all other times, was a brainless coward in a thunderstorm.

"If we don't go to-day, we can't go till to-morrow," said Georgie Chatterton, and she nodded at Durant to remind him that in that case his departure would be postponed till Thursday.

Frida too turned toward him. "If I don't go to-day, I shall never go."

He understood. She was afraid, afraid of what might come between her and her deliverance, afraid of her fate, afraid of the conscience that was her will, afraid of her own fear, of the terror that would come upon her when she realized the full meaning of her lust for life. To-morrow any or all of those things might turn her from the way; to-day she was strong; she held her life in her two hands. At any rate, she was not afraid of the weather. She would go straight to her end, through rain and lightning and thunderbolts and all the blue and yellow demons of the sky.

"Are you afraid, Georgie?"

"Of thunder and lightning?" asked Georgie pointedly. "No."

"All right, then. We've got forty-five minutes. I must put Polly into the cart myself. Five for that; forty to get to the station."

She strode off to the stables, followed by the footman and Durant. Among them they forced Polly into the trap, and led her dancing to the porch, where Miss Chatterton stood, prepared for all weathers.

"I say," cried she, "this is all very well; but who's going to drive Polly there and back again?"

"I am," said Durant calmly. He had caught a furtive flash from Frida's eyes that lighted upon, glanced off him and fell to the ground. The woman in her had appealed to his chivalry. At the same instant there was a swish, as if the skirts of heaven were trailing across the earth, and the rain came down. He hastily thrust Miss Tancred's arms into the sleeves of her mackintosh and wriggled into his own. The final speeches were short and to the point.

"Mr. Durant," said Miss Chatterton, "you are a hero."

"Frida," said the Colonel, "you are a fool." And for once Durant was inclined to agree with him. The more so as Miss Tancred took advantage of his engagement with his mackintosh to enthrone herself on the driver's high seat. She said good-bye to the Colonel, and gathered up the reins; Miss Chatterton climbed up beside her; Polly gave a frantic plunge and a dash forward; and the hero was obliged to enter the dogcart after the deft fashion of a footman, with a run and a flying leap into the back seat.

Miss Chatterton was unkind enough to laugh. "Well done!" said she. "Sit tight, and try to look as chivalrous as I'm sure you feel."

But it is hard to look or feel chivalrous sitting on a back seat in a wet mackintosh with a thunderstorm pouring down your neck and into your ears, and a woman, possessed by all the devils, driving furiously to an express train that she can never catch. In that lunatic escape from Coton Manor she had not looked back once; she left Durant to contemplate a certain absurd little figure that stood under an immense Doric portico, regarding the face of the sky.

The main thoroughfare of Whithorn-in-Arden was scored like the bed of a torrent, and fringed with an ochreish scum tossed up from the churning loam. The church clock struck three as they dashed through.

"You'll never do it," said Durant; "it's a good twenty minutes from here."

"In the brougham it is. Polly will do it in ten – with me driving her."

She did it in seven. Durant had pictured the two ladies scurrying along the platform, and himself, a dismal figure, aiding their unlovely efforts to board a departing train; as it was, the three minutes saved allowed Frida to achieve her flight with dignity.

For two out of those three minutes he stood outside their carriage window, beyond the shelter of the station roof, with the rain from the ornamental woodwork overflowing on to his innocent head. He was trying to smile.

"Heroic," murmured Miss Chatterton; and her eyebrows intimated that she saw pathos in his appearance. As for Frida, her good-by was so curt and cold that Durant, who had suffered many things in redeeming the discourtesy of his former attitude to her, was startled and not a little hurt. His plain, lean face, that seemed to have grown still plainer and leaner under the lashing of the rain, set again in its habitual expression of repugnance; hers paled suddenly to a lighter sallow than before; the hand she had given to him withdrew itself in terror from his touch. He drew himself up stiffly, raising a hat that was no hat but a gutter, and the train crawled out of the station.

He stood yet another minute staring at the naked rails, two shining parallel lines that seemed to touch and vanish, over the visible verge, into the gray fringe of the infinite where the rain washed out the world.

And then he saw nothing but Frida Tancred, sitting on the edge of the fir plantation and gazing into the distance; he heard his own voice saying to her, "Let yourself go, Miss Tancred; let yourself go!"

And she was gone.

XIII

All that Durant got out of Polly was the privilege of driving her home, through mud and rain, at a melancholy trot. True, he was in no hurry to get back; so he let her take her own pace, in pity for her trembling limbs and straining heart. Polly had done all she knew for her mistress in that frantic

dash for freedom and the express; and, when he thought of what Frida Tancred's life had been, he guessed that the little animal was used to carrying her through worse storms than this.

The storm was over now; it had driven the clouds into the north, where they hung huddled and piled in a vast amphitheater; other clouds, charged with light now instead of darkness, were still rolling up from the south, east and west, their wings closed till the sky was shut in like Whithorn-in-Arden, ringed with its clouds as Arden with its woods; above, beneath, there rose the same immense, impenetrable boundary, green on the earth and gray in heaven.

And Frida Tancred had escaped from these confines, would never come back to dwell in them again; she had said so, and he believed her. To be sure, she had shown weakness at the last, she had been driven to juggle with the conscience that would not let her go; had she not persuaded it that she was leaving the Colonel for the Colonel's good? But once gone, once there, away over the border and safe in the promised land, she would see clearly, she would realize her right to be happy in the glorious world.

Not that these things could have happened without Georgie Chatterton. He had nothing but admiration for that young woman; there had been daring in her conquest of Frida Tancred, there were ingenuity and determination in the final elopement. Was it possible that he was piqued at the insignificance of the part she had assigned to him? She had left him to settle up the sordid accounts while she ran away with the lady. He had got to say to Colonel Tancred, "Colonel Tancred, I am not your daughter's seducer and abductor; I am only a miserable accessory after the fact." In other words, Miss Chatterton had reminded him that he was too late.

Too late indeed, it seemed. Whether or not Miss Chatterton's faith in him had failed her at the last moment, but when he came down to dinner that evening he found that she had been beforehand with him; there was nothing left for him to do.

The Colonel looked up smiling from a telegram. "News from St. Pancras. Miss Chatterton is carrying my daughter off to the Continent."

"I'm delighted to hear it. It will do her all the good in the world."

"Yes, yes; I'm glad she should have the opportunity. I made a little tour on the Continent myself when I was a young man, and I've felt a brighter fellow for it ever since."

"Really?"

"Yes. One's apt to get into a groove staying at home so much. There's nothing like rubbing brains with foreigners. It stretches you out, clears you of all your narrow insular prejudices, brings you in touch"—Durant quivered; he knew it was coming—"in touch with fresh ideas. I don't know how you feel about it, but six months of it was enough to convince me that there's no place like England, and no people like English people, and no house like my own. As for Frida, a very little goes a long way with Frida; she'll be sick of it in six weeks, but she'll settle down all the better for the change."

"You think so?"

"I do. She may be a little unsettled at first. Her poor mother was just the same—restless, restless. But she settled down."

The Colonel made no further allusion to his daughter's absence. He was presently disturbed about another matter, bustling about the room, wondering, questioning, and exclaiming, "I have lost my little meteorological chronicle? Has anybody seen my little meteorological chronicle? Now, where did I have it last? I wonder if I could have left it with my other papers in Frida's room?"

But Frida's room, the room where she did all her father's writing, and her own reading and dreaming when she had time to read and dream, Frida's room was locked, and nobody could find the key. The Colonel, more than ever convinced that his meteorological chronicle was concealed in Frida's

room, ordered the door to be burst open. Durant lent a shoulder to the work and entered somewhat precipitately, followed by the Colonel.

The meteorological chronicle, the labor of years, was found where its author had left it, on his writing-table, together with his other papers, business letters, household accounts, Primrose League programs, all carefully sorted, dated, and docketed. Many of the letters had been answered; they lay, addressed in Frida's handwriting, ready for the post. She had left her work in such perfect order that a new secretary could have been fitted into her place without a hitch. The fact was eloquent of finality and the winding up of affairs; but certain other details were more eloquent still.

Order on the writing-table; in the rest of the room confusion and disarray, rifled bookcases and dismantled walls. Fresh squares of wall-paper outlined in cobwebs marked the places where the great maps had hung. The soul of the room was gone from it with the portrait of the late Mrs. Tancred; the watercolor drawings, sad work of her restless fingers, were no longer there. The furniture had been pushed aside to make room for the deed of desecration; the floor was littered with newspapers and straw; an empty packing-case lay on its side, abandoned, in a corner.

The Colonel opened round eyes of astonishment, but his mustache was still. He rang the bell and summoned the servants. Under severe cross-examination, Chaplin, the footman, gave evidence that three packing-cases had left Coton Manor for the station early in the morning before the bursting of the storm. Frida, too, had discerned the face of the sky, and — admirable strategist! — had secured her transports. The Colonel dismissed his witnesses, and appealed helplessly to Durant; indeed, the comprehension in the young man's face gave him an appearance of guilty complicity.

"What does it mean, Durant? what does it mean?"

Durant smiled, not without compassion. When a young woman arranges her accounts, and makes off with three packing-cases, containing her

library and her mother's portrait, the meaning obviously is that she is not coming back again in a hurry. He suggested that perhaps Miss Tancred proposed to make a lengthier stay on the Continent than had been surmised.

"The whole thing," said the Colonel, "is incomprehensible to me."

For the rest of the evening he remained visibly subdued by the presence of the incomprehensible; after coffee he pulled himself together and prepared to face it.

"There will be no whist this evening," he announced. "You will excuse me, Durant; I have an immensity of work on hand. Chaplin, put some whiskey and water in the study, and light the little lamp on my literary machine."

Tuesday morning's post brought explanation. Two letters lay on the breakfast table, both from a fresh hotel, the Hôtel Métropole, both addressed in Frida Tancred's handwriting, one to the Colonel and the other to Durant. Durant's ran thus:

"DEAR MR. DURANT:—You will explain everything to my father, won't you? I have done my best, but he will never see it; it is the sort of thing he never could see—my reasons for going away and staying away. They are hard to understand, but, as far as I have made them out myself, it seems that I went away for his sake; but I believe, in fact I know, that I shall stay away for my own. You will understand it; we thrashed it all out that Saturday afternoon—you remember?—and you understood then. And so I trust you.

"Always sincerely yours,

"FRIDA TANCRED.

"P.S.—Write and tell me how he takes it. I can see it—so clearly!—from his point of view. I hope he will not be unhappy.

"P.P.S.—We sail to-morrow."

He was still knitting his brows over the opening sentences when the Colonel flicked his own letter across the table.

"Read this, Durant, and tell me what you think of it."

Durant read:

"MY DEAR FATHER:— You will see from Georgie's telegram that we shall be leaving England to-morrow. I did not tell you this before because it would have meant so much explanation, and if we once began explaining things I don't think I should ever have gone at all. And I had to go. Believe me, I was convinced that in going I was doing the best thing for you. I thought you had been making sacrifices for my sake, and that you would be happier without me, though you would not say so. Whether I could have brought myself to leave you without the help of this conviction, and whether I have the conviction strongly still, I cannot say; it is hard to be perfectly honest, even with myself. But now that I have gone I simply can't come back again. Not yet. Perhaps never, till I have done the things I want to do.

"Of course you will be angry—it is so unexpected. But only think—you would not be angry, would you, if I married? You would have considered that perfectly legitimate. Yet it would have meant my leaving you for good. And what marriage and settling down in it is to other women, seeing the world and wandering about in it is to me—it's the thing I care for most. We do not talk about these things, so this is the first you have heard of it. Think—if I had been very much in love with anyone I would have said nothing about it till I was all but engaged to him. It's the same thing. And it will make less difference to you than my marriage would have made."

Here Frida's pen had come to a stop; with a sudden flight from the abstract to the concrete, she had begun a fresh argument on a fresh page.

"I only mean to use a third of my income. The other two thousand will still go to keeping up the property. I have left everything so that my work could be taken up by anybody to-morrow."

The Colonel's eyes had dogged Durant's down to the bottom of the sheet, when he made a nervous attempt to recapture the letter. It was too late; the swing of Frida's impassioned pleading had carried Durant over the page, and one terse sentence had printed itself instantaneously on his brain. He handed back the letter without a word.

The Colonel drew Durant's arm in his and led him out through the window on to the gravel drive. Up and down, up and down, they walked for the space of one hour, while the Colonel poured out his soul. He went bareheaded, he lifted up his face to the heavens, touched to a deeper anguish by the beauty of the young day.

"Lord, what a perfect morning! Look at this place she's left; look at it! I've nursed the little property for her; it was as much hers as if I was in my grave, Durant. She's lived in it for nearly thirty years, ever since she was no higher than that flower-pot, and she thinks nothing of leaving it. She thinks nothing of leaving me. And I've got more work to do than my brain's fit for; why I was in the very thick of my Primrose League correspondence, up to the neck in all manner of accounts; and she knew it, and chose this time. I've got to give a lecture next week in Whithorn parish-room, a lecture on 'Imperialism,' and I've my little chronicle on hand, too; but it's nothing to her. The whole thing's a mystery to me. I can't think what can have made her do it. She never was a girl that cared for gadding about, and for society and that. As for trying to make me believe that I should be no worse off if she married, the question has never risen, Durant. She hasn't married. She never even wanted to be married. She never would have been married."

"That makes it all the more natural that she should want to see something of the world instead."

"No, it's not natural. I could have understood her wanting to get married, that's natural enough; but what's a woman got to do with seeing the world? It's not as if she was my son, Durant."

Durant listened and wondered. As far as he could make out, the Colonel's attitude to his daughter was twofold. On the one hand, he seemed to

regard her as part of the little property, and as existing for the sake of the little property, from which point of view she had acquired a certain value in his eyes. On the other hand, he looked upon her as an inferior part of Himself, and as existing for the sake of Himself; it was a view old as the hills and the earth they were made of, being the paternal side of the simple primeval attitude of the man to the woman. And, seeing that the little property was a mere drop in the ocean of the Colonel's egoism, this view might be said to include the other as the greater includes the less. On either theory Frida Tancred was not supposed to have any rights, or, indeed, any substantial existence of her own; she was an attribute, an adjunct.

"Seeing the world—fiddlesticks! Don't tell me there isn't something else at the bottom of it—it's an insult to my intelligence."

As everything the Colonel did not understand was an insult to his intelligence, his intelligence must have had to put up with an extraordinary number of affronts.

He leaned heavily on the young man's arm. "It's shaken me. I shall never be the fellow I was. I can't understand it. Nobody could have done more for any girl than I've done for Frida; and she deserts me, Durant, deserts me in my old age with my strength failing."

Durant vainly tried to make himself worthy of Frida Tancred's trust, but he could add nothing to her reasoning, and she had kept her best argument to the last,— "It will make less difference to you than my marriage would have made."

"After all, sir, will it make so very much difference if—if your daughter does go away for a year or two?"

"I can't say. I can't tell you that till I've tried it, my boy. It's all too new to me, and I tell you I can't understand it."

He trailed off with a slow and stricken movement, like a lesser Lear, and reëntered the house by the window of Frida's room. The sight of the well-ordered writing-table subtilized for a moment his sense of her desertion.

"Look at that. She was my right hand, Maurice, and I can't realize that she's gone. It's the queerest sensation; I feel as if she was here and yet wasn't here."

Durant said he had heard that people felt like that after the amputation of their right hands. As for the wound, he hoped that time would heal it.

"Any soldier can tell you that old wounds will still bleed, Durant. I think that was the luncheon bell."

Lunch, over which the Colonel lingered lovingly and long, somewhat obscured the freshness of the tragedy, and made it a thing of the remoter past. An hour later he was playing with his little rain-gauge on the lawn. At afternoon teatime he appeared immaculately attired in the height of the fashion; brown boots, the palest of pale gray summer suitings, a white piqué waistcoat, the least little luminous hint of green in his silk necktie, and he seemed the spirit of youth incarnate.

At this figure Durant smiled with a pity that was only two-thirds contempt. He longed to ask him whether the old wound was bleeding badly. He was bound to believe that the Colonel had a heart under his immaculate waistcoat, with pulses and arteries the same as other people's, his own unconquerable conviction being that if you pricked the gentlemannikin he would bleed sawdust.

The Colonel had scarcely swallowed his tea when Durant saw him trotting off in the direction of the cottage; there was that about him which, considering his recent bereavement, suggested an almost indecent haste. He returned and sat down to dinner, flushed but uncommunicative. He seemed aware that it was Durant's last night, and it was after some weak attempts to give the meal a commemorative and farewell character, half-festal, half-funereal, that he sank into silence, and remained brooding over the ice pudding in his attitude of owl-like inscrutability. But during the privacy of dessert his mystic mood took flight; he hopped, as it were, onto a higher perch; he stretched the wing of victory and gazed at it admiringly;

there was an effect as of the preening of young plumage, the fluttering of innumerable feathers.

And, with champagne running in his veins like the sap of spring, he proclaimed his engagement to that charming lady, Mrs. Fazakerly.

Durant had no sooner congratulated him on the event than he remembered that he had left the postscript of Miss Tancred's letter unanswered. She had said, "Write and tell me how he takes it"; she had hoped that he would not be unhappy. So he wrote: "He took it uncommonly well" (that was not strictly true, but Durant was determined to set Frida Tancred's conscience at rest, even if he had to tamper a little with his own). "I should not say that he will be very unhappy. On the contrary, he has just assured me that he is the happiest man on earth. He is engaged to be married to Mrs. Fazakerly."

It was a masterly stroke on Mrs. Fazakerly's part, and it had followed so closely on the elopement (as closely, indeed, as consequence on cause) that Durant had to admit that he had grossly underrated the powers of this remarkable woman. He had been lost in admiration of Miss Chatterton's elaborate intrigue and bold independent action; but now he came to think of it, though Miss Chatterton's style was more showy, Mrs. Fazakerly had played by far the better game of the two. Durant, who had regarded himself as a trump card up Mrs. Fazakerly's sleeve, perceived with a pang that he had counted for nothing in the final move. Mrs. Fazakerly had not, as he idiotically supposed, been greatly concerned with Frida Tancred's attitude toward him. She had divined nothing, imagined nothing, she had been both simpler and subtler than he knew. She had desired the removal of Frida Tancred from her path, and at the right moment she had produced Georgie Chatterton. She had played her deliberately, staking everything on the move. Georgie's independence had been purely illusory. She had appeared at Mrs. Fazakerly's bidding, she had behaved as Mrs. Fazakerly had foreseen, she had removed Frida Tancred, and Durant had been nowhere. Mrs. Fazakerly's little gray eyes could read the characters of men and women at a glance, and as instantly inferred their fitness or unfitness

for her purpose. She might be a poor hand at the game of whist, but at the game of matrimony she was magnificent and supreme.

Frida had said, "We sail to-morrow"; therefore, Durant walked all the way to Whithorn-in-Arden to post his letter, so that it might reach her before she left London. And as he came back across the dewy path in the dim light, and Coton Manor raised its forehead from the embrace of the woods and opened the long line of its dull windows, he realized all that it had done for Frida. He understood the abnegation and the tragedy of her life. She had been sacrificed, not only to her father, but to her father's fetish, the property; Coton Manor had to be kept up at all costs, and the cost had been Frida's, it had been her mother's. The place had crushed and consumed her spirit, as it swallowed up two-thirds of her material inheritance; it had made the living woman as the dead. He remembered how the house had been called her mother's monument, and how it had become her own grave. Her soul had never lived there. And now that she was gone it was as empty as the tomb from which the soul has lifted the body at resurrection time.

And he, too, was set at liberty.

He left by the slow early train on Wednesday without waiting for the afternoon express, his object being not so much to reach town as to get away from Coton Manor. The Colonel accompanied him to the station; and, to his infinite surprise and embarrassment, he found Mrs. Fazakerly on the platform waiting to see him off.

He could think of nothing nice to say to her about her engagement, not even when she took possession of him with a hand on his arm, led him away to the far end of the platform, and gazed expectantly into his face.

"You don't congratulate me, Mr. Durant."

"On what?" he asked moodily.

"On having done a good deed."

"A good deed?"

"Didn't I tell you there was nothing I wouldn't do for Frida Tancred?"

Incomparable cunning! To set herself right in his eyes and her own, she was trying to persuade him that she had accepted the Colonel for his daughter's sake. A good deed! Well, whatever else she had done, and whatever her motives may have been, the deed remained; she had set Frida Tancred free. Nevertheless, he could not be pleasant.

"Self-sacrifice, no doubt, is a virtue," said he; "yet one draws the line — —"

"Does one?"

He felt a delicate pressure on his arm, the right touch, the light touch. "Mr. Durant, you are dense, and you are ungrateful."

"I don't see it."

"Don't you see what I have done for you?" There was a strange light behind the pince-nez as she smiled up into his face. "I have cleared the way."

"For Miss Tancred, you mean," said Durant; thereby proving that in her calculations as to his mean density Mrs. Fazakerly was not altogether wrong.

But Durant was always an imaginative man. And as he sped on the same journey over the same rails, his imagination followed Frida Tancred in her flight toward freedom and the unknown.

THE COSMOPOLITAN

PART II

OUTWARD BOUND

XIV

After seven weeks in England Maurice Durant began to look back with longing on the seven years he had spent away from it, and so turned his back on Dover and his face to the South of France. Those three weeks in Coton Manor had disgusted him with the country, another three weeks in London had more than satisfied his passion for town. It was there that he realized more keenly than anywhere else that he was a foreigner in England, and he went abroad in order to feel himself an Englishman again.

Restless as ever, he spent two years wandering the world, then shut himself up for three more in a little villa in the Apennines, and worked as he had never worked before, with the result that at the end of the five years, he found himself irresistibly drawn back to England again. Gradually – very gradually – England was waking to the fact that Maurice Durant was a clever painter; still more gradually it had dawned on Maurice that he was becoming famous. His name had traveled to London, as a name frequently does, via Paris and New York, and Fame had lured him to London by dint of taking it up and incessantly sounding it, not with a coarse and startling blast from her favorite instrument, the trumpet, but with a delicate crescendo, lyrically, subtly, insinuatingly, like a young siren performing on a well-modulated flute. The trumpet, no doubt, would have deafened or irritated him; but before he got sick of it the softer music was by no means disagreeable to his ear.

It seemed that he had scored a double success, being equally happy in his landscapes and his portraits. The critics were divided. One evening it would appear that, within the limits of his art, Maurice Durant was the subtlest, the finest exponent of modern womanhood; the next morning he would be told that he had rendered the beauty of the divine visible world

more imaginatively, more individually, than any living artist, but that as a portrait painter he had yet to find himself. These were the variations on the one familiar theme; for as to his modernity, which was obvious, they were all agreed. But at last he came across an account of himself which he acknowledged to be more or less consistent and correct. It was the final appreciation, the summing up of a judge who was said to be the only man in England who had a right to his opinion. And this was his opinion of Maurice Durant:

"He stands in a unique and interesting position. On his right hand, the hand he paints with, are the heights unattainable by any but the great artists; on his left, the dizzy verge of popularity. As a matter of fact, he is neither popular nor great. His just horror of vulgarity will save him from the abyss; his equal fear of committing himself, of letting himself go, the fear, shall I say, of failure, of the fantastic or ridiculous attitudes a man necessarily assumes in falling from a height, will keep him forever from the loftier way. It is not that his temperament is naturally timorous and cold; if he is afraid of anything, he is afraid of his own rashness, his own heat. There are about him delicacies and repugnances, a certain carefully cultivated restraint, and a half-critical, half-imaginative caution which, we submit, is incompatible with greatness in his art. But he has imagination."

A little more praise or a little more blame, and he would have suspected himself of genius; as it was, he was content to stand distinguished from the ruck of the popular and the respectable by virtue of that imagination which his critic had allowed to him. He was not a great painter, and he knew it; but he was a brilliantly clever one, and he knew that also, and in the fact and his intimate knowledge of it lay the secret of his success. He kept a cool head on his shoulders, and thus his position and the personal dignity depending on it were secure. He would never tumble from his height through the giddiness of vanity; and when the same high authority kept on assuring the world, on the word of a critic, that Maurice Durant was branded with the curse of cleverness, that he was the victim of his own

versatility, and that he had just missed greatness, Maurice merely remarked that he was glad to hear it, for he was sure that greatness would have bored him.

Whether it was the same ungovernable terror that restrained him from marrying, or whether he was the friend of too many women to be the lover of one, or whether he really was self-contained and self-sufficient, all this time he had remained single. His singleness had many advantages; it kept him free; it made it easy for him to get about from place to place and obtain an uninterrupted view of the world; it left an open way for his abrupt incalculable movements, his panic flights.

And as he had always fled from everything that disturbed and irritated him, so now, in the very middle of an English summer and a London season, he was flying from the sound of his own fame. Not far this time; only from the center to the verge, from Piccadilly pavement to the south coast. He had hired a small cutter for a month, and lived on board in much physical discomfort and intellectual peace. He hardly knew it by sight, that beautiful full face of his own country; but he was learning to know it as he sailed from the white cliffs to the red, from the red to the gray and black, the iron slopes and precipices of the Land's End.

He had just returned from a fortnight's cruise, and was wondering what he would do with the weeks that remained to him—whether he would explore the west coast of England or set sail for the Channel Islands—when he found himself, very lazy and very happy, lying at anchor in a certain white-walled harbor in the south of Cornwall. A neighboring regatta had carried off, the fleet of yachts that had their moorings there, and the harbor was dotted with fishing-boats, pilot-boats, ocean steamers, steam tugs, wherries, and such craft. The little Torch, rocking madly on miniature waves as she played with her chain, was almost alone in her lightness and frivolity. About an hour before midnight Durant woke in his berth, and felt this vivacity of hers increasing; larger waves lapped her and broke against her sides, but overhead, on deck, there was no sign of a wind. He got up,

climbed the companion ladder, and put his head out over the hatch. A schooner yacht had come in, and lay straining at her cable in the narrow channel between the Torch and a Portsmouth pilot. She had only just put into harbor, for her crew were still busy taking down her sails. As if it were her own movement alone that made her visible, she swayed there, dimly discerned, while she slipped her white canvas like a beauty disrobing in the dark, sail by sail, till she stood naked under a veil of dusk, and the light went up above her bows.

A restless thing that schooner yacht; her canvas was hardly lowered before it was up again. She had not long lain dreaming, passive to the will of the tide. At sunrise she awoke, and what with her own swinging and vibration, and the voices and trampling of her joyous, red-capped, blue-jerseyed crew, there was no sleep for anyone in her neighborhood after three o'clock. So Durant rolled out of his berth, dressed hastily, and went on deck, eager to see her in her beauty, robed for the morning and the wind. There she was, so near now that he could almost have tipped a rope-end down her skylight from the skylight of the Torch, every line of her exquisite body new-washed in gold and shivering under the touches of the dawn. She was awake, alive; the life that had still beaten through her dreams in the night, stirred by the drowsy fingering of the harbor tide, was throbbing and thrilling with many pulses as she shook out her streamers to the wind. And now her mainsail went slowly up, and she leapt and shuddered through all her being, passionate as though the will of the wind was her will.

Durant stared at her with undisguised admiration. She was a fair size for her kind, and from the sounds that came up through her cabin skylight he judged that she had a party on board. Standing on the deck of the Torch in his light flannels, Durant looked much too long for his own ridiculously tiny cutter. He was so deeply absorbed in spelling out the letters on the yacht's life-belts — Windward — that he was quite unaware that he himself was an object of considerable interest to a lady who had just come on deck.

Literally flying as he was from the sound of his own name, he was unprepared to hear it sung out in cheerful greeting.

"Mr. Durant!"

He started and blinked, unable to recognize the lady of the voice. Assuming that he had once known, and since forgotten her, he had raised his cap on the chance.

She was trying to say something to him now, but the noise of the struggling sail cut off her words. She turned, and seemed to be calling to somebody else. Another lady, whom the sail had hidden from his sight till now, came forward and leaned eagerly over the rail, steadying herself by the shrouds. This lady did not shout his name; but, as her eyes met his across the narrow channel, she smiled—a smile he could not place or recognize or understand; he could only raise his cap to it blindly as before.

She was smiling still, while the first lady laughed, if possible in a more bewildering manner than before. "Don't you know us?" She seemed to be whispering across the gulf.

He shook his head in desperation, whereupon the second lady gave orders to the men to stop hoisting the mainsail.

"If you are Mr. Durant, come on board!"

This time the voice was distinct in the silence that followed the hoisting of the sail. He knew that lady now.

And he knew the other also, though there was nothing but the turn of her head and the black accent over her eyes to remind him of Frida Tancred.

XV

"Well, is it all that you expected? Does the reality come up to the dream?"

"It does. I never knew a dream that tallied so exactly with the reality."

Frida was leaning back in a deck-chair, looking at Durant, who sat beside her on the schooner's rail.

For three days the Windward had sailed up and down the coast of Cornwall; for three days the little Torch, with all sails set, wheeled round her moorings or followed her flight. Durant had accepted Miss Tancred's invitation to join them in a week's cruise in English waters. He spent his mornings in his own yacht, his afternoons and evenings on board the schooner. The proposal had been a godsend to him in his state of indecision. After his aimless wanderings he was exhilarated by this eager challenge and pursuit, absurdly pitting the speed of his own small craft against the swiftness and strength of the larger vessel. But he enjoyed still more sitting on the rail of the Windward and talking to Frida. There was something infinitely soothing in the society of a woman who knew nothing and cared nothing about his fame. He was not the only guest. Besides Miss Chatterton there was Mr. Manby, a little middle-aged gentleman, who called himself an artist; Miss Manby, a little middle-aged woman, who seemed to be his sister; and two little girls with their hair down their backs, his daughters, Eileen and Ermyntrode Manby. Durant was a good deal alone with Frida, for a stiff breeze had kept the artist and his sister much below, and Georgie and the little girls hardly counted.

They were alone now.

Frida had smiled as she spoke, a smile of intelligence and reminiscence; and he was irresistibly reminded of the first and last occasion when he had discoursed to her about realities.

"And what are you going to do with it?" he asked.

"With what? With the reality or the dream?"

"With both, with life — now you've got it?"

"Why should I do anything with it? Unless you're talking of moral obligations, which would be very tiresome of you."

"I'm not thinking of moral obligations."

"What were you thinking of, then?"

"I was thinking — of you."

Frida lay back a little further on her cushion as if she were withdrawing herself somewhat from his scrutiny. She clasped her hands behind her head; her face was uptilted to the sky.

His eyes followed her gaze. Over their heads the wind had piled up a great palace of white clouds; under the rifted floors the blue sky ran shallow in a faint milky turquoise, while above, between, beyond those aerial roofs and pinnacles and domes it deepened to lapis lazuli, luminous, transparent, light behind color and color behind light. The green earth looked greener under the low-lying shafts of blue and silver; far off, on the sea, the shadows of the clouds lay like the stain of spilt red wine.

"Who was the great man?" she asked with apparent irrelevance, "who said that women were incapable of a disinterested passion for nature?"

He knitted his brows. Frida had proved a little disconcerting at times. He had had to begin all over again with her, aware that, though ostensibly renewing their old acquaintance, he was actually making a new one, to which faint recognitions and perishing reminiscences gave a bewildering, elusive charm. But Frida remembered many things that he had forgotten, and a certain directness and familiarity born of this superior memory of hers puzzled him and put him out. This time, however, he had a dreamy recollection.

"Fancy your remembering that!"

"I remember everything. At any rate, I remember quite enough to see that you're just the same; you haven't changed a little bit. Except that you don't look as you did the first night I met you."

"And how did I look then?"

She paused, carefully selecting her phrase. "You looked — as if — I'd given you a shock. You had expected something different. That dream did not tally with the reality."

"How on earth — —"

"How on earth did I know? You may not be aware of it, but you have a very expressive face."

"I was not aware of it."

Poor Durant. His face was expressive enough now in all conscience. She held out her hand and laid it on his sleeve, and he remembered how she used to shrink from his touch.

"My dear Mr. Durant, don't look like that; it makes my heart bleed. Of course I saw it. I saw everything. I saw your face looking over the banisters as I was going downstairs, when I've no doubt you thought you'd caught sight of a very pretty woman; and I saw it with a very different expression on it when you shook hands and found that the woman wasn't a bit pretty, after all. Of course it was a shock to you, and of course I understood. I knew so exactly how you felt, and I was so sincerely sorry for you."

"Sorry! I have a distinct recollection of being abominably rude to you that night, and unpleasant afterward. Can you, will you forgive me?"

"What? Five years after the offense? No. I forgave you at the time; I'm not going to do it all over again. What does it matter? It's all so long ago. The funny part of it was that I wasn't a bit annoyed with you, but I was furious with — whom do you think?"

"I haven't a notion if it wasn't with me."

"It was a she — the other lady, the woman I wasn't, the woman you thought I was, my ideal self. Needless to say, my feminine jealousy was such that I could have throttled her. I suppose I did pretty well do for her as it happened. There can be nothing deader than a dead idea."

"Don't be too sure. I have known them come to life again."

His gaze, that had fallen, and was resting on the hem of her blue serge gown, now traveled up the long, slender line of her limbs, past the dim curves of her body to the wonder of her face. How marvelously changed

she was! She was not only both younger and older than when he had left her five years ago, she was another woman. The heaviness had gone from her eyes and forehead, the bitter, determined, self-restraint from her mouth and chin; instead of self-restraint she had acquired that rarer virtue, self-possession. Her lips had softened, had blossomed into the sweet red flower that was part of Nature's original design. Her face had grown plastic to her feeling and her thought. She was ripened and freshened by sun and wind, by salt water and salt air; a certain nameless, intangible grace that he had caught once, twice, long ago, and seen no more, was now her abiding charm. The haggard, sallow-faced provincial, with her inscrutable manners and tumultuous heart, had developed into the finished cosmopolitan; she had about her the glory and bloom of the world. For once his artist's instinct had failed him; he had not discovered the promise of her physical beauty—but that he should have ignored the finer possibilities of her soul! If she had really known all that he had thought and felt about her then, had understood and had yet forgiven him, Frida was unlike any other woman in the world. He was not sure that this was not the secret of her charm—the marvelous dexterity of her sympathy, the swiftness with which she precipitated herself into his point of view. It had its drawbacks; it meant that she could see another man's and her own with equal clearness.

The sound of voices from a neighboring cabin, followed by the noise of unskillful footsteps stumbling up a companion ladder, warned them that they were not alone. Mr. Manby appeared on deck with great noise and circumstance, skating, struggling, clutching at impossible supports, being much hampered by a camp stool and a sketching block which he carried, and his own legs, which seemed hardly equal to carrying him. Durant had recognized in the little artist a familiar type. A small, nervous man, attired in the usual threadbare gray trousers, the usual seedy velveteen coat and slouch hat, with a great deal of grizzled hair tumbling in the usual disorder about his peaked and peevish face. Durant sprang forward and helped this pitiful figure to find its legs; not with purely benevolent intentions, he settled it and its belongings in a secure (and remote) position amidships.

"Glad to see you back again!" Frida sang out.

Mr. Manby screwed up his eyes, put his head very much on one side, and peered into the wild face of Nature with a pale, propitiatory smile.

"Yes, yes; I mustn't neglect my opportunities. Every minute of this weather is invaluable."

"It strikes me," said Frida, as Durant established himself beside her again, "that it's you artists whose devotion to Nature is—well—not altogether disinterested."

"Manby's affection seems to be pretty sincere; it stands the test of seasickness."

"Oh, Mr. Manby doesn't really care very much for nature or for art either."

"What does he try to paint pictures for, then?"

"He tries to paint them for a living, for himself and the little girls." And Frida looked tenderly at Mr. Manby as she spoke.

At that moment Durant hated Mr. Manby with a deadly hatred. He had gone so far as to find a malignant satisfaction in the thought that Mr. Manby's pictures were bad, when he remembered that Frida had a weakness for bad pictures. Art did not appeal to Frida. She talked about Paris and Florence and Rome without a word of the Louvre or the Uffizi Gallery or the Vatican. She didn't care a rap about Raphael or Rubens, but she hampered herself with Manbys.

"Is there a Mrs. Manby?" he asked gloomily.

"No. Mrs. Manby died last year."

"H'mph! Poor devil! Lucky for her, though."

Frida ignored the implication. "To go back to the point we were discussing. If you were honest you'd own that you only care for nature because you can make pictures out of it. Now I, on the contrary, have no ulterior motives; I don't want to make anything out of it."

"I wasn't talking about nature. I want to know what you are going to make of your life."

"There you are again. Why should I make anything of it? You talk as if life were so much raw material to be worked into something that it isn't. To my mind it's beautiful enough as it is. I should spoil it if I tried to make anything of it."

He looked at her and he understood. He was a man of talent, some said of genius, but in her there was something greater than that; it was the genius of temperament, an infinite capacity for taking pleasures. To her life was more than mere raw material, it came finished to her hands, because it had lived a long life in her soul. Her dream had tallied.

Beside that rich creative impulse, that divine imagination of hers, his own appeared as something imitative and secondhand, and his art essentially degraded. He was nothing better than a copyist, the plagiarist of nature.

He looked up to where Mr. Manby sat smiling over his sketching block, Mr. Manby, surrounded by his admiring family. Mr. Manby did not see them; he was wrapped in his dream, absorbed in his talent with all its innocent enormities. He at any rate had no misgivings. The little girls, Eileen and Ermyintrude, played about him; they played with blocks and life-buoys and cables, they jumped over coils of rope, they spun round to leeward till the wind wound their faces in their long hair, they ran for'ard, shrieking with happy laughter as they were caught by the showers of spray flung from the yacht's bows. Frida's eyes followed them, and Durant's eyes followed Frida's.

"They are seeing the world, too, it seems."

"Yes; they have caught the fever. But they are young, as you see; they have taken it in time. Some day they'll be tired of wandering, and they'll settle down in a house of their own, over here in England, and be dear little wives and mothers."

"Eileen and Ermyntrude—by the way, I never know which is Eileen and which is Ermyntrude. And you, will you never be tired of wandering?"

She looked at him with the lucid, penetrating gaze he knew so well. "Never. I took the fever when I was—not young, and it goes harder with you then. There's no hope for me; I shall never be cured."

She rose and joined the Manbys. The little girls ran to meet her, they clung to her skirts and danced round her; she put her arm round Ermyntrude, the younger, and Durant saw her winding her long fingers in and out of the golden hair, and looking down into the child's face, Madonna-like, with humid, tender, maternal eyes.

He thought of her as the mother of Manby's children, and he hated the little girls.

There was a voice at his elbow. "Isn't she splendid?" Miss Chatterton had seated herself in Frida's chair.

Her presence brought him instantaneous relief. He had been glad to meet Miss Chatterton again. Not that he would have known her, for time had not dealt very kindly with the young girl. Her face, from overmuch play of expression, showed a few little wrinkles already, her complexion had suffered the fate of sanguine complexions, it had not gone altogether, but it was going—fast, the color was beginning to run. But time had not subdued her extravagant spirits or touched her imperishable mirth. In spite of a lapse of five years she gave him a pleasant sense of continuity; she took him up exactly where she had put him down, on the platform of the little wayside station of Whithorn-in-Arden. Unlike Frida, Miss Chatterton had not developed. When she began to talk she had the air of merely continuing their last important conversation.

"Didn't I tell you how she'd come out if she got her chance?"

"You did."

"And wasn't I right?"

"You were."

"But you oughtn't to have needed telling, you ought to have seen it for yourself."

"Right again. I ought to have seen it for myself."

"He who will not when he may will live to fight another day; isn't that how it goes on?"

"Yes; I congratulate you on your work."

"It isn't my work, lord bless you! nor yours, either — there I was wrong."

"What is it, then?"

Miss Chatterton stared out over the sea and into the universal air. "Why, it's — it's everything! Of course you did something, so did I. But if it comes to that, the present Mrs. Tancred did more than either of us. We couldn't have married the Colonel."

"Then you think that was the reason why she — —"

"I do, indeed. She could have had no other. You see she was awfully fond of Frida. And, what's more, she was fond of you."

It was his turn to look out over the sea.

"What do you think? He has never forgiven her for going away, though it happened to be the very thing he wanted. How's that for inconsistency?"

"Has she seen the — the Colonel since?"

"She has. A strange, unaccountable longing to see the Colonel comes over her periodically, like a madness, and she rushes home from the ends of the earth. That's happened three times. It's the most erratic and incalculable thing about her. But going home doesn't answer."

"I should hardly have thought it would."

"Except that she's got the control of more money now. Tell you how it happened. The last time she went home she found the poor little Colonel making his little will. He asked her point-blank what she meant to do with

the property when he was in his little grave. He must have had an inkling. And Frida, who is honesty itself, said she didn't know, but she rather thought she would sell it and make for the unexplored. Then he was frightened, and made her make a solemn vow never to do anything of the kind. Somehow the property seems to have recovered itself, with all she put into it; anyhow, after that, it managed to disgorge another thousand a year. So Frida's more independent than ever."

Durant made an impatient movement that nearly sent him overboard to the bottom of the sea, where, indeed, he wished that Frida Tancred's thousands were lying. Georgie noticed the movement, and blushed for the first time in their acquaintance.

"Just look at those children," said she, "they simply adore Frida. It's odd, but she's got the most curious power of making people adore her. I don't know what she does to them, but waiters, policemen, porters, customhouse officers, they're all the same. The people in the hotels we stayed in adored her. So did the Arabs up the Nile and the Soudanese in the desert, so did the Kaffirs on the veldt and the coolies that carried her up the Himalayas – and she's no light weight, is Frida."

Georgie paused while her fancy followed Frida in delightful retrospect. Durant said nothing, he sat waiting for her to go on. She went on.

"Women, too – I've seen them hanging about drafty corridors for hours on the off chance of seeing her. There was a dreadful girl we knew in Paris, who used to grovel on her doormat and weep because she said Frida wouldn't speak to her. Frida loathed her, but she was awfully nice to her till one day when she tripped over her on the mat. Then she wasn't nice to her at all; she hauled her up by the belt, and told her to get up and go away and never make such a fool of herself again."

Georgie cast at Durant a look that said, "That's how our Frida deals with obstructives!"

"And where was all this remarkable fascination five years ago?"

"It was there all right enough, lying dormant, you know. I felt it. Mrs. Fazakerly felt it — that's why she married the Colonel. You felt it."

"I didn't."

"Excuse me, you did. That's why you stayed three weeks at Coton Manor when you needn't have stopped three days. As for Mr. Manby there, he simply worships the ground she treads on, as they say."

"The devil he does! What's he doing here?"

"As you see, he's painting pictures as hard as ever he can go. He paints them in order to live; but as he has to live in order to paint, Frida — well, between you and me, Frida keeps him and Eileen and Ermyntrode, the whole family, in short. But that's a detail. It isn't offered as any explanation of the charm. I don't believe that anybody ever realizes that Frida has money."

He could believe that. He had never realized it himself. Her enjoyment of life was so finished an art that it kept its machinery well out of sight.

"Frida," Georgie serenely continued, "has a weakness for landscape painters. The memory of her mother — no doubt."

"Don't they — don't they bore her?"

"No. It takes a great deal to bore Frida — naturally, after the Colonel. Besides, she doesn't give them the chance. Nobody ever gets what you may call a hold on Frida. There's so much more of her than they can grasp. And there are, at least, three sides of her by which she's unapproachable. One of them's her liberty. If you or I or the little Manby man were to take liberties with her liberty Frida would — —"

"What would Frida do?"

"She would drop us down, very gently, at the nearest port, and make for the Unexplored! And yet, I don't know. That's the lovely and fascinating thing about Frida — that you never do know."

XVI

The fortnight's cruise was at an end, the Torch had gone back to her owners, without Durant, who had contrived to stay on board the Windward till the latest possible moment. The yacht was lying-to, outside the same white-walled harbor where she had first found Durant. She wheeled aimlessly about with slackened sails, swaying, balancing, hovering like a bird on the wing, impervious and restless, waiting for the return of the boat that was to take Durant on shore. It had only just put off with the first load of guests—the Manbys—under Georgie Chatterton's escort. As Durant watched it diminishing and vanishing, he thought of how Georgie had described their hostess's method of dealing with exacting friends. She was dropping them, very gently, at the nearest port. Poor Manby! And it would be his own turn next. And yet Georgie had said, "You never know." He must and would know; at any rate, he would take his chance. Meanwhile, he had a whole hour before him to find out in, for the crew had commissions in the town. That hour was Frida's and his own.

The two weeks had gone he knew not how; and yet he had taken count of the procession of the days. Days of clouds, when, under a drenching mist, the land was sodden into the likeness of the sea, the sea stilled into a leaden image of the land; days of rain, when the wet decks shone like amber, and the sea's face was smoothed out and pitted by the showers; days of sun, when they went with every sail spread, over a warm, quivering sea, whose ripples bore the shivered reflections of the sky in so many blue flames that leaped and danced with the Windward in her course; days of wind, when the Channel was a race of tumultuous waves, green-hearted, silver-lipped, swelling and breaking and swelling, and flowering into foam, days when the yacht careened over with steep decks, laid between wind and water, flush with the foam, driven by the wind as by her soul; days when Durant and Frida, who delighted in rough weather, sat out together on deck alone. They knew every sound of that marvelous world, sounds of the calm, of water lapping against the yacht's side, the tender, half-audible caress of the

sea; sounds of the coming gale, more seen than heard, more felt than seen, the deep, long-drawn shudder of the sea when the wind's path is as the rain's path; and that sound, the song of her soul, the keen, high, exultant song that the wind sings, playing on her shrouds as on a many-stringed instrument. The boat, in her unrest, rolling, tossing, wheeling and flying, was herself so alive, so one with the moving wind and water, and withal so slight a shell for the humanity within her, that she had brought them, the man and the woman, nearer and nearer to the heart of being; they touched through her the deep elemental forces of the world. The sea had joined what the land had kept asunder. At this last hour of Durant's last day they were drifting rather than sailing past a sunken shore, a fringe of gray slate, battered by the tide and broken into thin layers, with edges keen as knives; above it, low woods of dwarf oaks stretched northward, gray and phantasmal as the shore, stunted and tortured into writhing, unearthly shapes by the violence of storms. For here and now the sea had its way; it had taken on reality; and earth was the phantom, the vanishing, the vague.

They had been pacing the deck together for some minutes, but at last they stood still, looking landward.

Durant sighed heavily and then he spoke.

"Frida, you know what I am going to say — —"

They turned and faced each other. In the man's eyes there was a cloud, in the woman's a light, a light of wonder and of terror.

She smiled bravely through her fear. "Yes, I know what you are going to say. But I don't know — —"

"What don't you know?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"You don't know what I mean?"

"I know you are going to say you love me, and you had better not. For I don't know what that means. The thing you call love was left out of my composition. Some women are born like that."

"I don't believe it. It's only your way of saying that you don't care for me."

"I like you. I always have liked you. I'll go farther – if I ever loved any man it would be you."

"The fact remains that it isn't?"

"It isn't, and it never will be. But you may be very certain that it will never be anyone else."

"Tell me one thing – was there ever a time when it might have been?"

"That isn't fair. I can't answer that question."

"You can. Think – was there ever a time, no matter how short, the fraction of a minute, when if I'd only had the sense, if I had only known – –"

"Are you sure you didn't know? I was afraid you did."

"Then you really mean it – that if I'd only asked you then – –"

"Thank Heaven, you did not!"

"Why are you thanking Heaven?"

"Because – because – I can't be sure, but I might – I might have taken you at your word."

"And why not?"

"I would have made a great mistake. The same mistake that you are making now."

"Mistake?"

"You mistook the idea for the reality once, if you remember – and now aren't you mistaking the reality for the idea?"

"Frida, you are too subtle; you are the most exasperating woman in the world – –"

"There, you see. That's the sort of thing we should always be saying to each other if I let you have your way. But supposing you did have it; if we were married we could not understand each other better than we do; so we should not be one bit better off. By this time we should have got beyond the phase we started with — —"

"But we should have had it — —"

"Yes; and found ourselves precisely where we are now."

"Where we were yesterday, you mean."

"Yes. We were good enough friends yesterday."

"And what are we to-day? Enemies?"

She smiled sadly. "It looks like it. At any rate, we seem to have some difficulty in understanding each other."

"Good God! how coolly you talk about it! Understanding! Do you never feel? Has it never even occurred to you that I can feel? Have you any notion what it is to be made of flesh and blood and nerves, and to have to stay here, squeezed up in this confounded boat, where I can't get away from you?"

"You can get away in three-quarters of an hour, and meanwhile, if you like, you can go below."

"If I did go below I should still feel you walking over my head. I should hear you breathe. And now to look at you and touch you, and know all the time that something sticks between us — —"

He stopped and looked before him. It was true that the sea had brought them together. Amid the dæmonic triumph and jubilation of the power that claimed them for its own they, the man and the woman, had been thrown on each other, they had looked into each other's eyes, spirit to spirit, the divine thing struggling blind and uncertain in nature's tangled mesh. But now, so near, on the verge of the intangible, the divine, it came over Durant that after all it was this their common nature, their flesh and

blood, that was the barrier; it merged them with the world on every side, but it hedged them in and hid them from each other.

"As you know, we're the best friends in the world; there's only one thing that sticks between us — the eternal difference in our points of view."

"I was perfectly right. Why couldn't I trust my first impressions? I thought you frigid and lucid and inhuman — —"

"Inhuman?"

"Well, not a bit like a woman."

"My dear Maurice, you are very like a man."

"There's something about you — —"

"Really? What is it, do you think?"

"Oh, nothing; a slight defect, that's all. It must be as you say, and as I always thought, that you are incapable of feeling or understanding feeling. I repeat, there's something about you — —"

"Ah, Maurice, if you want the truth, there's something about you. I always knew, I felt that it was in you, though I wouldn't own that it was there. Now I am sure. You've been doing your best to make me sure."

"What have I made you sure of?"

"Sure that you are incapable, not of loving perhaps, but of loving a certain kind of woman the way she wants to be loved. You can't help it. As I said before, it is the difference in the point of view. We should get no nearer if we talked till doomsday."

"My point of view, as you call it, has entirely changed."

"No. It is I who have changed. Your point of view is, and always will be, the same."

He tried hard to understand.

"Does it come to this — that if I had loved you then you would have loved me now?"

"You couldn't have loved me then. You were not that sort."

He understood her meaning and it maddened him. "It wasn't my fault. How the devil was I to see?"

"Exactly, how were you? There are some things which you can't see. You can see everything you can paint, and, as you are a very clever artist, I dare say you can paint most things you can see."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Everything. It's your way all through. You love me because what you see of me is changed. And yet all that time I was the same woman I am now. I am the same woman I was then."

"But I am not the same man!"

"The very same. You have not changed at all."

She meant that he was deficient in that spiritual imagination which was her special power; she meant that she had perceived the implicit baseness of his earlier attitude as a man to her as a woman, a woman who had had no power to touch his senses. It was, as she had said, the difference in their points of view; hers had condemned him forever to the sensual and the seen.

He stood ashamed before her.

Yet, as if she had divined his shame and measured the anguish of it and repented her, she laid her hand on his arm.

"Maurice, it isn't entirely so. I have been horribly unjust."

"Not you! You are justice incarnate. If I had loved you then — —"

"You couldn't have loved me then."

"So you have just told me."

"You had good cause. I was not and could not be then — whatever it is that you love now."

"But I might have seen — —"

"Seen? Seen? That's it. There was nothing to see."

Her eyes, in her pity for him, filled with tears, tears that in his anger he could not understand.

"Why are you always reminding me of what I was five years ago? I have changed. Can't a man change if you give him five years to do it in?"

"Perhaps. It's a long time."

"Time? It's an eternity. If I was a brute to you, do you suppose the consciousness of my brutality isn't a far worse punishment than anything I could have made you feel?"

She raised her eyebrows. "What? Have you been suffering all this time — this eternity?"

"Yes. That is, I'm suffering enough now."

"Then perhaps you have some idea of what you made me feel."

"Again?"

"It's the first time I've reproached you with it, even in my thoughts."

He looked at her with unbelieving eyes. And yet he knew that it was true. Her sweetness, her lucidity, had been proof against the supreme provocation. She had forgiven, if she had not forgotten, the insult that no woman remembers and forgives.

As his eyes wandered the hand that had lain so lightly on his arm gripped it to command his attention, and he trembled through all his being. But she no longer shrank from him; she kept her hold, she tightened it, insisting.

"Oh, Maurice! haven't I told you that I understood?"

He smiled. "Yes. Thank God I can always appeal to your understanding, if I can't get at your heart. Supposing I didn't care for you then? Supposing I was too stupid to see what you were? Is five years, though it may be eternity, so long a time to learn to know you in? You take a great deal of learning, Frida; you are very difficult. There's so much more of you than

any man can grasp. But you are the only woman I ever cared to know. I believe you have a thousand sides to you, and every one — every one I can see — appeals to me. There's no end to the interest. Whatever I see or don't see, I always find something more, and I never could be tired of looking."

She sighed and was silent.

"And you blame me because I couldn't see all this at once? Because it took me five years to love you? Remember, you were very cautious; you wouldn't let me see more than a bit at a time. But I love every bit of you — heart and soul, and body and brain; I love you as I never could love any other woman in the world — the world, Frida," he added, pointing the hackneyed phrase. "You are the world."

They had never stopped pacing the deck together, as they talked, turn after turn, alike and yet unlike in their eagerness and unrest. Now they stood still. Far off they could see the returning boat, a speck at the mouth of the harbor, and they knew that their time was short.

"Maurice," she said, "before you go I have a confession to make. I wasn't quite honest with you just now when I said I only liked you five years ago. I know very well that I loved you. The world has taught me so much."

The world! He frowned angrily as she said it. But through all his anger he admired the reckless nobility of soul that had urged her to that last admission, by way of softening the pangs and penalties she dealt to him. Would any other woman have confessed as much to the man who had once despised her, and now found himself in her power?

She went on. "I thought you might like to know it. I've gone far enough, perhaps; but I'll go farther still. I believe I would give the world to be able to love you now."

"Frida, if you can go as far as that — —"

"I can go no farther. No, Maurice, not one step."

"You can. I believe, even now, I could make you love me."

"No. You see, women in my position, my unfortunate position, want to be loved for themselves."

"I do love you for yourself. Do you doubt that, too?"

"I do not doubt it. I am quite sure of it. That's where it is. I know you love me for myself, and so many men have loved me—not for myself. Do you suppose that doesn't touch me? If anything could make me love you that would. And since it doesn't— —"

The inference was obvious.

"Is it because you can't give up your life?"

"It is—partly. And yet I might do that. I did it once."

"You did, indeed. I can't conceive how you, being you, lived the life you did— —"

"I owed it. It was the price of my freedom."

Her freedom! No wonder that she valued it, if she had paid that price!

She went on dreamily, as if speaking more to herself than him. "To have power over your life—to do what you like with it—take it up or throw it down, to fling it away if that seems the best thing to do. You're not fit to take up your life if you haven't the strength to put it down, too."

"Frida, if you were my wife you wouldn't have to put it down. I'm not asking you to give up the world for me; I'm not even asking you to give up one day of your life. Your life would be exactly what it is now—plus one thing. You'll say, 'What can I give you that you haven't got?' I can give you what you've never had. You don't know what a man's love is and can be; and you must own that without that knowledge your experience, even as experience, is not quite as complete as it might be."

The boat—the boat that was to take him to the shore—was getting nearer. It was his last chance. And while he staked everything on that chance, he thought of Frida as he had first seen her, as she sat tragically at the whist table at Coton Manor, dealing out the cards with deft and supple fingers.

Now she was dealing out his fate.

He remembered how she had said, "Mr. Durant wins because he doesn't care about the game." Because he cared—cared so supremely—was he going to lose?

There were so many things in Frida that he had not reckoned with. She was an extraordinary mixture of impulse and reserve, and she had astonished him more than once by her readiness to give herself away; but beyond a certain point—the point of view in fact—her self-possession was complete. Still, he left no argument untried, for there was no knowing—no knowing what undiscovered spring he might chance to touch in that rich and subtle nature.

Her self-possession was absolute. She parried his probe with a thrust.

"It is your own fault if my experience isn't complete. You should have told me these things five years ago. As you say, nobody else has instructed me since."

"I dare say they've done their best. Of course, other men have loved you —"

"They haven't— —"

"But I believe my love would be worth more to you than theirs, for the simple reason that I understand you too well to insist on it. I should always know how much and how little you wanted. For we are rather alike in some ways. I would leave you free."

"I know you would. I am sure. And I would—I would so gladly—but I can't! You see, Maurice, I have loved you."

"All the more reason— —"

"All the less. I knew what you thought and felt about me, and it made no difference; I loved you just the same, because I understood. Then I had to fight it. It was hard work, but I did it very thoroughly. It will never have to be done again. Do you see?"

Yes; he saw very plainly. If Frida could not love him there was nobody but himself to blame. He also saw the advantage she had given him. She had owned that she had loved him, and he had hardly realized the full force of the pluperfect. What had been might be again. She was a woman in whom the primordial passion, once awakened, is eternal.

He pressed his advantage home.

"And why had you to fight so hard?"

"Because the thing was stronger than myself, and I wouldn't be beaten. Because I hated myself for caring for you, as I hate myself now for not caring."

In her blind pity she laid her fingers on his trembling hand. She who used to drop his hand as if it had been flame, she should have known better than to touch him now.

He looked at her with hot hungry eyes. His brain in its feverish intensity took note of trifles — the tortuous pattern of the braid on her gown, the gold sleeve-links at her wrists, the specks of brine that glistened on her temples under the wind-woven strands of her black hair; it recorded these things and remembered them afterward. And all the time the boat came nearer, and the slow, steady stroke of the oars measured his hour by minutes, till the sweat, sprung from the labor and passion of his nerves, stood out in beads on his forehead.

He looked at her; and her beauty, the beauty born of her freedom and abounding life, the beauty he worshiped, was implacable; the divinity in it remained untouched by his desire.

"You needn't care," he said desperately. "I'm not asking you to care; I'm not asking you to give me your love, but only to take mine."

She smiled. "I'm not so dishonest as to borrow what I can't repay."

His voice was monotonous in its iteration. "I'm not talking about repayment; I'll risk that. I don't want you to borrow it. I want you to take it,

keep it, spend it any way you like, and — throw it away when you can't do anything more with it."

"And never return it? Ah, my friend! we can't do these things."

She dropped into the deck-chair, exhausted with the discussion. Her brow was heavy with thought; she was still racking her brains to find some argument that would appease him.

"I loved you — yes. And in my own way I love you now, if you could only be content with my way."

"Haven't you told me that your way is not my way?"

"Yes; and I've done worse than that. I've been talking to you as if you had made me suffer tortures, as if you had brought me all the pain of existence instead of all the pleasure. If you only knew! There's nothing I've been enjoying all these five years that I don't owe to you — to you and nobody else. You were very good to me even at the first; and afterward — well, I believe I love life as few women can love it, and it came to me through you. Do you think I can ever forget that? Forget what I owe you? You stood by me and showed me the way out; you stood by and opened the door of the world."

To stand by and open the door for her — it was all he was good for. In other words, she had made use of him. Well, had he not proposed to make use of her? After all, in what did his view of her differ from the Colonel's, which he abominated? All along, from the very first, it had been the old theory of the woman for the man. Frida for the Colonel's use, for his (Durant's) amusement, and now for his possession. Under all its disguises it was only an exalted form of the tyranny of sex. And Frida was making him see that there was another way of looking at it — that a woman, like nature, like life, may be an end in herself, to be loved for herself, not for what he could make out of her.

"I am a woman of the world, a worldly woman, if you like. I love the world better than anyone in it. And I'm a sort of pantheist, I suppose; I worship

the world. But you will always be a part of the world I love and worship; I could not keep you out of it if I would."

The exultation in her tone provoked his laughter. "Heaven bless you — that's only a nice way of saying that I'm done for."

'He is made one with Nature; there is heard His voice in all her music, from the moan Of thunder to the song of night's sweet bird.'

You have made a clean sweep of me and my personal immortality."

The splash of the oars sounded nearer. They could hear the voices of the crew; the boat, lightened of her first load, was returning with horrible rapidity, it came dancing toward them in its malignant glee; and they sat facing each other for the last time, tongue-tied.

They had paced the deck together again; one more turn for the last time.

Durant was silent. Her confession was still ringing in his ears; but it rang confusedly, it left his reason as unconvinced as his heart was unsatisfied.

She had loved him, and not in her way, as she called it, but in his. And that was a mystery. He felt that if he could account for it he would have grasped the clue, the key of the position. Whatever she might say, these things were more than subtleties of the pure reason, they were matters of the heart. He was still building a hope beyond the ruins of hope.

"Frida," he said at last, "you are a wonderful woman, so I can believe that you loved me. But, seeing what I was and what you knew about me, I wonder why?"

Louder and nearer they heard the stroke of the oars measuring the minutes. Frida's eyes were fixed on the boat as she answered.

"Why? Ah, Maurice, how many times have I asked myself that question? Why does any woman love any man? As far as I can see, in nine hundred cases out of a thousand woman is unhappy because she loves. In the thousandth case she loves because she is unhappy."

The boat had arrived. The oars knocked against the yacht's side with a light shock. Durant's hour was at an end.

Frida held out her hand. He hardly touched it, hardly raised his eyes to her as she said "Good-bye." But on the last step of the gangway he turned and looked at her — the woman in a thousand.

She was not unhappy.

XVII

Frida had played high and yet she had won the game of life; that dangerous game which most women playing single-handed are bound to lose. She had won, but whether by apathy or care, by skill or divine chance, he could not tell. As to himself he was very certain; when he might have won her he did not care to win, now that he had lost her he would always care. That was just his way.

Alone in the little hotel that looked over the harbor, left to the tyrannous company of his own thoughts, he made a desperate effort to understand her, to accept her point of view, to be, as she was, comprehensive and generous and just.

He believed every word she had ever said to him, for she was truth itself; he believed her when she said that she had loved him, that she loved him still. Of course she loved him; but how?

They say that passion in a pure woman is first lit at the light of the ideal, and burns downward from spirit to earth. But Frida's had shot up full-flamed from the dark, kindled at the hot heart of nature, thence it had taken to itself wings and flown to the ideal; and for its insatiable longing there was no ideal but the whole. Other women before Frida had loved the world too well; but for them the world meant nothing but their own part and place in it. For Frida it meant nothing short of the divine cosmos. Impossible to fix her part and place in it; the woman was so merged with the object of her desire. He, Maurice Durant, was as she had said a part of that world, but he was not the whole; he was not even the half, that half

which for most women is more than the whole. From the first he had been to her the symbol of a reality greater than himself; she loved not him, but the world in him. And thus her love, like his own art, had missed the touch of greatness. It was neither the joy nor the tragedy of her life, but its one illuminating episode; or, rather, it was the lyrical prologue to the grand drama of existence.

He did her justice. It was not that she was changeable or capricious, or that her love was weak; on the contrary, its very nature was to grow out of all bounds of sex and mood and circumstance. Its progress had been from Maurice Durant outward; from Maurice, as the innermost kernel and heart of the world, to the dim verge, the uttermost margin of the world; and that by a million radiating paths. It was not that she left Maurice behind her, for all those million paths led back to him, the man was the center of her universe; but then the center is infinitely small compared with the circumference. He saw himself diminished to a mathematical point in this cosmopolitan's cosmos. For Frida he had ceased to have any objective existence, he was an intellectual quantity, what the Colonel would have called an abstraction. There was nothing for him to do but to accept the transcendent position.

Thus, through all the tension of his soul, his intellect still struggled for comprehension.

Meanwhile, from his window looking over the white-walled harbor, he could see the Windward with all her sails spread, outward bound.

He watched her till there was nothing to be seen but her flying sails, till the sails were one white wing on a dim violet sea, till the white wing was a gray dot, indistinct on the margin of the world.

XVIII

He cared immensely. But not to come behind her in generosity and comprehension he owned that he had no right to complain because this remarkable woman loved the world better than one man, even if that man

happened to be himself; in fact, while his heart revolted against it, his pure intellect admired her attitude, for the world is a greater thing than any man in it.

Now and again letters reached him across seas and continents, letters with strange, outlandish postmarks, wonderful, graphic, triumphant letters, which showed him plainly, though unintentionally, that Frida Tancred was still on the winning side, that she could do without him. Across seas and continents he watched her career with a sad and cynical sympathy, as a man naturally watches a woman who triumphs where he has failed.

Meanwhile he lived on her letters, long and expansive, or short and to the point. They proved a stimulating diet; they had so much of her full-blooded personality in them. His own grew shorter and shorter and more and more to the point, till at last he wrote: "Delightful. Only tell me when you've had enough of it."

The answer to that came bounding, as it were, from the other side of the Atlantic. "Not yet. I shall never have enough of it. I've only been 'seeing the world,' only traveling from point to point along an infinite surface, and there's no satisfaction in that. I'm not tired – not tired, Maurice, remember. I don't want to stop. I want to strike down – deeper. It doesn't matter what point you take, so long as you strike down. Just at present I'm off for India."

Her postscript said: "If you ever hear of me doing queer things, remember they were all in the day's pleasure or the day's work."

He remembered – that Frida was only thirty-five; which was young for Frida. And he said to himself, "It is all very well now, but what will she be in another three years? I will give her another three years. By that time she will be tired of the world, or the world will be tired of her, which comes to the same thing, and her heart (for she has a heart) will find her out. With Frida you never know. I will wait and see."

He waited. The three years passed; he saw nothing and he had ceased to hear. He concluded that Frida still loved the world.

As if in a passionate resentment against the rival that had fascinated and won her, he had left off wandering and had buried himself in an obscure Cornish village, where he gave himself up to his work. He was not quite so successful as he had been; on the other hand, he cared less than ever about success. It was the end of the century, a century that had been forced by the contemplation of such realities as plague and famine, and war and rumors of war, to forego and forget the melancholy art of its decadence. And from other causes Durant had fallen into a state of extreme dissatisfaction with himself. Five years ago he had found himself, as they said; found himself out, he said, when at the age of thirty-three he condemned himself and his art as more decadent than the decadents. Frida Tancred had shown insight when she reproached him with his inability to see anything that he could not paint, or to paint anything that he could not see. She had shown him the vanity of the sensuous aspect, she had forced him to love the intangible, the unseen, till he had almost come to believe that it was all he loved. The woman lived for him in her divine form, as his imagination had first seen her, as an Idea, an eternal dream. It was as if he could see nothing and paint nothing else. And when a clever versatile artist of Durant's type flings himself away in a mad struggle to give form and color to the invisible it is not to be wondered at if the world is puzzled and fights shy of him.

Meanwhile the critic who had a right to his opinion said of him: "Now that he has thrown the reins on the back of his imagination it will carry him far. Ten years hence the world will realize that Maurice Durant is a great painter. But in those ten years he must work hard."

As if to show how little he cared he left off working hard and bestirred himself for news of Frida Tancred.

It came at last—from Poona of all places. Frida wrote in high spirits and at length. "I like writing to you," she said, "because I can say what I like,

because you always know—you've been there. Where? Oh, everywhere where I've been, except Whithorn-in-Arden. And, now I come to think of it, you were there, too—for a fortnight" ("three weeks—three long weeks—and for your sake, Frida!"). "No, I'm not 'coming home.' Why must I 'stop somewhere'? I can't stop, didn't I tell you? I can only strike down where it's deepest.

"It seems to be pretty deep here. If I could only understand these people—but what European can? They mean something we don't mean.... You should see my Munshi, a terrifically high-caste fellow with a diminutive figure and unfathomable eyes. I am trying to learn Sanscrit. He is trying to teach me. We sit opposite each other at a bamboo table with an immense Sanscrit dictionary between us. He smiles in his sleeve at my attempt to bridge the gulf between Europe and Asia with a Sanscrit dictionary. He is always smiling at me in his sleeve. I know it, and he knows that I know it, which endears me to him very much.

"My Munshi is a bottomless well of Western wisdom. He takes anything that Europe can give him—art, literature, science, metaphysics. He absorbs it all, and Heaven only knows what he is going to do with it, or it with him. He swallows it as a juggler swallows fire, and with about as much serious intention of assimilating it. That smile of his intimates that the things that matter to us do not matter to him; that nothing matters—neither will nor conscience, nor pain nor passion, nor man nor woman, nor life nor death. There's an attitude for you!

"That attitude is my Munshi, and my Munshi is Asia."

He smiled. He had seen Frida in many attitudes, Frida in love with nothing, Frida in love with a person, Frida in love with a thing. Here was Frida in love with an idea. It was just like her. She was seeing Asia from the Asiatic point of view.

"Meanwhile," she went on, "there's a greater gulf fixed between my Munshi and my 'rickshaw coolie than there is between me and my 'rickshaw coolie, or my Munshi and me."

He wondered if she meant to remind him that there was a still greater gulf between him and her.

"To-morrow I and two coolies are going up to Gujerat where the famine is. I inclose a snapshot of the party. My effacement by the coolie is merely a photographic freak—his grin is the broadest part of him, poor fellow. In the autumn I go down to Bombay. I am deep in bacteriology, which reminds me of father and the first time I met you, and your bad puns."

The snapshot was an unflattering likeness of Frida in a 'rickshaw. The foreground was filled by the figure of the grinning coolie. Behind him Frida's face showed dim and small and far-off; she was smiling with the sun in her eyes.

Such as it was he treasured it as his dearest possession. He had been painting pictures all his life, but he had none of Frida.

Silence again. "In the autumn," she had said, "I go down to Bombay." But the autumn passed and there was no news of her. Durant provided himself with an Indian outfit. He was going out to look for her; he was ready to go to the ends of the world to find her. "The day after to-morrow," he said, "I shall start for Bombay."

That night he dreamed of her; or, rather, not of her, but of a coolie who stood before the door of a wayside bungalow, and held in his hands shafts that were not the shafts of a 'rickshaw. And the coolie's face was all one broad grin.

Two days later—the day he was to have sailed for India—hurriedly skimming a column of the Times he came upon the news he was looking for.

"It is with much regret that we record the death from bubonic plague of Miss Frida Tancred. It was quite recently that this lady gave up a large part of her fortune to founding the Bacteriological Laboratory in Bombay, more recently still that she distinguished herself by her services to the famine-stricken population of Gujerat. Miss Tancred has added to the immense

debt our Indian Empire owes her by this final example of heroic self-sacrifice. It is said that she contracted plague while nursing one of her coolies, who has since recovered."

He bowed his head.

It was not grief he felt, but a savage exultant joy. The world could have no more of her. She was his, in some inviolable, irrevocable way. He knew. He understood her now, clearly and completely.

His joy deepened to a passionless spiritual content; as if in the fulness of his knowledge he had embraced the immortal part of her.

Why had he not understood her long ago? She had never changed. As he had first seen her, playing cards with her father in the drawing-room at Coton Manor, as he had last seen her, pacing the deck of the Windward, intoxicated with her freedom, as he saw her now, bending her head over the plague-poisoned body of the coolie, she was the same tender, resolute, passionate Frida, who ruined her life and glorified it, laid it down and took it up again at her will. And as he saw — would always see her, in this new light of her death, she was smiling, as if she defied him to see anything pathetic in it.

She had loved the world, the mystic maddening beauty of it, the divine darkness and glory of it. She had taken to her heart the rapture and the pain of it. She had stretched out her hands to the unexplored, to the unchanged and changing, the many-faced, incomprehensible, finite, infinite Whole.

And she had flung it all up; for what?

For a 'rickshaw coolie's life? — Or for something — yet — beyond?