

MAY SINCLAIR

*Tales Told by Simpson*

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# TALES TOLD BY SIMPSON

BY  
MAY SINCLAIR



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"KHAKE"

12

## "KHAKE"

THIS is the tale that Roland Simpson told about that queer girl he was engaged to, Frances Archdale.

I can't remember when she first met Miles Dickinson, but it must have been the same year that I did, somewhere in the late 'nineties. And it was at Chelsea when we were all living with profound economy in the dear old Vale, or near it.

He certainly was not an intimate friend of hers. I don't know that you could have called him a friend at all. You couldn't even say that she knew him very well. That's the queer part of it. Their acquaintance stopped short of friendship because—well, because of the absurdities we saw in him. We saw nothing else. You couldn't take him seriously without being absurd yourself. It's inconceivable the ass he was.

He got in among us because of his absurd respect for what he called our achievements; and he stayed because we simply couldn't have afforded to let him go. He amused us too much, and we (I like to think), may have sometimes amused *him*. I have by me now a sketch that Frances made of him. *That* was an achievement, if you like.

He was the sort of ass that's always going in for things, poring over text-books. I can see him now, sitting at that table over there with his hands in his hair, beating his brains for rhymes to "lover" (it was we, I'm afraid, who fired him). He took quite meekly any that we gave him except "plover," which he rejected, I remember, on the ground that it had been used before, and was far-fetched any way. He

had lights sometimes that amazed us. Then he was always inventing things. At odd moments he had conceived (for us, if you please) a fountain-pen which simply couldn't run dry (he called it the Perennial); also (for whom heaven knows!) a projectile to be used in time of war. It was, if I remember, to go up like a rocket and come down like a parachute, when it was estimated to destroy fifteen men, standing in close formation, and *then* to explode "laterally, my dear Simpson, laterally!" A terrific engine. When we told him that the Perennial was mightier than the Parachute, he would look at us and reply darkly: "Possibly. Possibly—in time of peace."

But don't run away with the idea that there was any sort of insanity about him. It was our fantastic handling of him that stimulated him to his most prodigious flights. In the bank that employed him he was as sane as a churchwarden, and competent—from nine in the morning till four in the afternoon, or later, an inimitably competent little banker's clerk. He had a splendid head for business and for figures—totted them up with his little darting forefinger at lightning speed.

We called him the Weasel because of the way he entrenched himself in his bank, and because of his bright-eyed alacrity in leaving it. Those of us who banked at the Metropolitan and Provincial used to visit him there and "draw" him, when we drew our slender cheques, a process he resented profoundly. We'd no business, he said, to come rotting him in business hours. How would we like it if he—and we retorted that we hadn't any business hours. Frances used to say that was what made it so mean of us, when the poor thing couldn't retaliate. But out of business hours there was nothing that he wouldn't stand from us, nothing that he wouldn't take, from rhymes to nicknames. We gave him lots. But far and away the best we found for him was "Khaki." When I say "we," I mean Frances. It was a nice name, and I think he liked it. It had, especially in her mouth, a diminutive, endearing sound. Whether he liked

it or not, we adopted it with rapture, and it suited him better than any of his names, even the Perennial or the Parachute.

For he *was* khaki: his face, his little wisp of a moustache, his scrub of hair, with the front of it leaping up at you in a queer ungovernable tuft over his forehead; his very eyes were a sort of shade of khaki, and, I believe, if you'd stripped him, you'd have found him all khaki underneath.

That was when the Boer War broke out (a chance, we said, for Khaki's parachute). We never called him anything else, because of the way he went on about it. Not about the parachute (he'd abandoned that idea long ago), but about the war, the war. It had regularly got on his nerves, poor chap. He cut out all the maps the papers published and stuck them about his rooms with wafers. You'd find him there surrounded by maps, and with the last one spread out on the table before him, making imaginary plans of the campaign. You'd see him with his little forefinger crawling along the veld and pouncing now and then as if he'd really got the enemy that time, while he explained that if So-and-So had only done what you saw *him* doing just now there wouldn't have been that last "regrettable incident." He had a theory about every battle, and every skirmish; and every British disaster as it came along made him more cock-sure. And as the regrettable incidents multiplied he was presently explaining to us that if this, that, and the other had been done (which couldn't, of course, at the moment have *been* done), the whole thing would have been over in a month or two. The Tommies, he declared, knew more about it than the Generals.

The fun of the thing was that before the war broke out he was always talking about enlisting or volunteering, but when his opportunity stared him in the face, as you may say, we heard no more of it. He was one of those fellows who are always doing magnificent things in their heads, marvellous things on paper. And why on earth, when he could treat himself that way to all the sublime taste and vision

of glory, why should he have done anything else? *We* saw to it that he rose to rapid promotion. From Mr. Thomas Atkins he became Sergeant, Lieutenant, Captain, Colonel Dickinson, D.S.O. But it was after Colenso that he flourished among us as Major-General Sir Miles Dickinson, K.C.B.

After Spion Kop he began to lie low a bit. By that time people *were* beginning to volunteer right and left of him. They had volunteered out of his own bank, and it wasn't very safe for him to talk about it. He used to look at us in those days in a kind of deprecating way, as if he thought we expected him to go.

Why, bless you, it was the last thing you did expect of Khaki. He wasn't the kind that go. You'd only got to mention the evening paper to see how he funked it.

He had got a rise that year, and he wasn't going to stir from the Metropolitan or from the villa at Brixton where he lived, Heaven knows how. We hardly ever went to see him there. It was surprising how little, after all, we knew about him. We had to eke it out with extraordinary speculations as to his home-life—the Life, as we used to say, at Brixton. We wrote him and we drew him in every conceivable attitude and in every conceivable relation; we did it all, or what was printable of it, for Frances Archdale, to her infinite amusement.

It was comparatively late that we found out that the Life at Brixton was complicated, not to say hampered, by the existence of an invalid mother in a bedroom upstairs. He told us nothing, but we inferred complications from the falling off in the number and duration of his visits and from his increasing inability to come and dine.

Then the mother died, quite suddenly, and he appeared again among us. We'd got so into the habit of thinking him funny that when he told us that the old lady had passed away—"quite peacefully, Simpson, quite peacefully"—I'm not sure that we didn't think it humorous of him in a subtle way. Frances, however, I'm bound to say, refused to go



with us this time as far as that. It was going, she said, a bit too far.

But though she did occasionally urge decency upon us, Frances was worse than any of us. Within the limits of the printable, she went farther.

What? You think that showed——? Not a bit of it. She wasn't in love with him—then. Or, if you ask me how I know, I can only tell you I had the best reason in the world for knowing. We'd been engaged for the last six months. Underneath? No; not even underneath. She was the straightest woman I ever knew, and the sincerest. It wasn't in her to hide or disguise a feeling. It wasn't in her to make fun—like that—of anybody she cared about, or even moderately liked. And if you'd only seen him! You couldn't have been afraid of Khaki as a possible rival. You couldn't have considered him as in the running at all.

And don't imagine for a moment that he cared for *her*. That would have made him absurder than he was. It spoils it—what's coming (*she* said so)—if you think of either of them as caring—then.

I don't think he knew the feeling. Women didn't seem to appeal to him in any way. There were some of us who doubted if he had ever—— But we needn't go into that. I only mentioned it for the rumness of it.

After Ladysmith another young clerk from the Metropolitan volunteered for South Africa. It was Khaki who told us of his going. He put it to us, was there anything else the boy could do? To be sure, he had a mother living, but he wasn't the only son. There were, he said, two others. That ought to have given us the clue, but it didn't. When he had left us Frances asked me: Did I think for a moment he'd go too? I said: "Not he. He's gone already, twenty times, in fancy. The Weasel must by this time be fed up with South Africa."

"What do you think will become of him?" she said then. "What do you think he'll really do?"

We were always planning fantastic careers, outrageous his-

stories for him. This time I was tired of him and serious, so I said: "He won't do anything. He'll just go on weaseling."

We'd made a verb out of him to "weasel." It meant to be fatuous, to be ineffectual, to be, in a sudden, darting, almost furtive, fashion, preposterous and absurd. Khaki would go on behaving according to his nature, go on for ever being the mild ass he was.

A fortnight after, I met Frances on the Embankment and she turned and walked to the Vale with me.

"Have you seen Khaki?" she asked me.

I hadn't.

I didn't know, then, he was going out, after all?

We looked at each other and smiled indecorously. It didn't seem credible. But it was true. He had enlisted in the Imperial Yeomanry. The bank, she said, had given him his outfit and his horse. Did I think he'd be able to stick on it?

I didn't.

He was to sail, I learnt, in less than a week.

I and another fellow went down to Southampton to see Khaki off.

We chaffed him up to the last minute, to his immense delight. We simply had to, because if we hadn't we couldn't have borne it. Besides, it was the first time we'd seen him *in* it; and flesh and blood couldn't resist him. He was all one colour now; his face was only a paler and his eyes a brighter shade of it. The cock of his hat didn't suit him, and it let that tuft of hair escape. His uniform, made in a hurry, fitted vilely; the jacket was too loose and long, and the breeches much too baggy before they went in too tight. And his putties—they looked as if they'd been wound round his legs by a ladies' ambulance class. He said he hadn't got the hang of them yet, and there weren't any calves to keep them up. He was horribly pale going on board; he suggested ashes and green clay—the foreshadowing of awful things. The man who was with me declared afterwards that Khaki must have been made drunk and been put up to go, and that

in his heart, poor chap, he funk'd it. What was the use, he said, of sending fellows like that out? What they wanted was men.

I didn't think anything of Khaki's colour, because I happened to know that he was a bad sailor, so abominably bad that it was doubtful if there would be much left of Khaki when they landed him. Why, the very sight of the ship was more than he could stand. When they were casting off and he was trying to wave to us from her side, she gave a heave, and the last we saw of Khaki doesn't bear thinking about.

In fact, he didn't bear thinking about at all. And by degrees, because he was so painful to us, we left off thinking about him.

But at first we thought a lot. We kept on saying to each other that he'd be all right because of his protective colouring. *In khaki*, with his tuft of hair sticking out, he would be indistinguishable from any bit of veld with scrub on it. All but his eyes, which would continue to dart and shine in the sun, and would make him a mark—we reflected dolefully, till Frances hit on the idea that Khaki's eyes would simply be taken for little lizards, little darting lizards in the grass.

We speculated freely as to why he went. It was just possible, after all, we thought, that some girl had chucked him. But it wasn't likely. As Frances said, he couldn't *be* chucked, if nobody had ever taken him up. Nobody ever had, as far as we knew. And he wasn't the sentimental sort, the sort that cherishes a grudge against things in general because the women don't seem to care about him. Of course, they may have cared; there may have been rows of them who'd have given their eyes for him, absurd as he was, for anything I know. My point is that he wasn't giving *his* eyes, that he wasn't absurd in that way; and that if any woman was at the bottom of it, it wasn't Frances. I tell you, the queer part of it was that she hardly knew him.

In moments of remorse we fancied that it was we, by continually chaffing him, who had made him go.

But it wasn't we. I see now what it was. I think I should have seen it even if Frances—I mean her extraordinary behaviour afterwards—hadn't made me see.

It was she who heard before any of us, who found the account of him, I should say; the small picturesque bit in a special correspondent's paragraph. It was long after Lady-smith and Mafeking, when news began to leak through into the papers. Not that this leaked. It rushed, it leaped at us; at Frances first, then me.

I had found her in her room with the paper in her hands. She gave it me without a word. I remember noticing that she didn't seem what you would call shocked, nor yet upset or excited. Her teeth were locked tight, but her eyes glowed at me. There was a sort of exaltation about her.

We stood looking at each other, just knowing then, a little more vividly, a little more poignantly than anybody else—because, you see, *we* had known him—what everybody knows now, how Corporal Miles Dickinson, of the 99th Battalion of Imperial Yeomanry, had volunteered to carry despatches somewhere or other, because he knew the way. In fact, he knew two ways, the shorter and less obvious leading close beside the Boer camp. Of course, the details didn't get through then; we heard afterwards how he found his way, the shorter way—he, Khaki, found it; how he delivered his despatches and returned, with other despatches, by the other way, the safe and obvious one, under orders, damned, no doubt, for a fool, and with two other men to look after him and see that he didn't make a fool of himself a second time. And how on the safe way, among the scrub, three Boers began potting them at close range; how the other men who were looking after Khaki rode off—without the despatches; and how little Khaki dismounted—damning *them*, you bet, for worse than fools—put a match to his dangerous papers and destroyed them; and then, at his ripe leisure, fired, and was fired at; and fell, shot through the eyes.

When she saw my face as I came to it she broke down.

Our communion in the next few weeks, as soon as we

could bear to talk about him, had Miles Dickinson for its sole and sacred object. Miles Dickinson—the terrible thing was that we didn't, that we couldn't, call him Khaki any more. That showed, I said, how irrevocably we had lost him. But Frances maintained—I remember now, with some slight flaming—that it didn't show anything of the sort; it showed how we had found him; how greatly, how immeasurably we had gained.

We made it out between us, she and I, bit by bit, till we knew—we were certain—what he had gone out for. She, I ought to say, made out considerably more than I did. And she rejected more. She wouldn't allow, she seemed to have some invincible and mysterious repugnance to allowing, that there might have been a woman in it.

"You won't admit," I said (I was a little amused at the tone she took about it), "you won't admit, then, that he could have been in love?"

I shall never forget the look, the light, with which she answered me.

"He was in love, *all the time*," she said. "He was in love with honour. He was in love with danger."

"All the time? Then why didn't he go out at once, in the beginning, when the others went?"

"Don't you see? He couldn't. It was different for him. He couldn't leave his old mother. He had, you know, to keep her." She made it out amazingly. "He'd have gone into the army when he was a boy, if his people could have afforded to send him. But they couldn't. They were horribly poor. And afterwards there were other things—debts, I suppose—and the expenses of her illness."

(I wondered how on earth she had made out all that. And I was to wonder more and more, as she went on more brilliantly.)

Then—didn't I see it?—when he'd wound up his poor little affairs, he went. He darted out, bright-eyed, to the splendour he saw shining; he rushed into the arms of the thing he was in love with.

I asked her once (being a little disturbed by her enthusiasm): "Frances, would you have been glad if he had been in love with *you*?"

I remember her look of still amazement and her still reply. "Oh no, Roly; that would have spoiled it all."

Her light, as I found out afterwards, was not all intuitive. She had gone, as on a pilgrimage, to the house at Brixton, and got most of it out of his servant. He had left the house to the old woman, as a provision for her in case of his death. She was, Frances said, letting rooms in it—all the rooms except his. Frances must have made love to Khaki's servant, for one day—she was always going there—she came back with an old photo of Khaki's in a leather frame and a bundle of those plans of the campaign that he was always making. She showed them to some General she had contrived to meet, and he told her that Khaki's plans were all right; wonderfully right, considering.

But that (I'm forgetting) was long afterwards. The General's opinion of Khaki had nothing to do with Frances' state of mind, her extraordinary behaviour. It was as if, having made Khaki out better than anybody, she was independent of other people's judgments. She was, as I said, exalted.

But the thing was getting on her nerves, I could see that. I supposed that at first she had, after all, been stunned by the horror of it—happening to a man we knew—and that she was only beginning to realise it now.

But it wasn't that a bit. It was that she had begun to go back, to remember, to think of him as Khaki.

I tried to stop her talking about him, but I couldn't. Sometimes she'd sit brooding without saying a word, and sometimes nothing but talking would appease her. Once, after a silence which I must say I found oppressive, she would burst out unexpectedly with something like this:

"Do you remember how bright his eyes were?"

I did.

And after a bit she'd begin again. "Roland, I'd give any-

thing if Khaki could come back to us; if we could show him——"

I had an awful time with her. It was in the spring that the thing had happened. Just before it happened we had settled that we were to be married some time in the autumn. In the summer she began to get ill. She hadn't the energy to go about and do things, and I was horribly uneasy. She was regularly wearing herself out with it, torturing herself and me with her remorse, with her memory, the daily poignant memory of the way, as she said, we had treated him, the things we had said and thought of him. It was worse for her than for us; she had gone farther—her fancy had been more cruelly, more fiendishly fertile. (She had burnt all the sketches and caricatures she had made of him—master-pieces! All except one or two which she had done in some sudden fit of gravity. *They* were not quite so good.)

I was very gentle with her. I conceded everything but that. We had been beasts, I said; and she, always, like an angel, had stood up for him.

At that she gave a little cry of anguish. "If I had only known, Roly! If I had only known!"

That was her burden now—"If we had only known!"

"What good would it have done?" I said once. "Our knowing?"

"None," she agreed, "when you think of the difference between him and *us*."

She began to make us feel it. There wasn't one of us that was fit to speak to him, to look at him, to black his boots.

How could we have expected to see what was in him? She took the high tone with us that there was he, and here we were—a set of clever little persons living by our wits, "far" (she put it a bit hysterically, I thought), "far from life and death." What could we know? How could we have seen it?

But she—she had always seen it. She had actually made herself believe *that*—made herself believe that she had seen

all the time what was in Khaki. I've told you that she hardly knew him. She seemed to be making out now that she had known him considerably better than she had.

I told her once, when she was going on about him, that she hadn't really known him, and that she certainly hadn't by any means always seen. On the contrary, she *had* been worse than any of us—the very worst.

I was rather brutal about it, for I felt that the obsession was bad for her, and I wanted to bring her sane sense of humour into play. I didn't realise in the least *then* (God forgive me!) how she was taking it, or I couldn't have said what I finally did say, that her feeling was exaggerated, and that she couldn't go on more than she was doing if she were in love with him.

The look she turned on me then was of surprise and grief, almost of supplication, as if she implored me to spare her. I gathered afterwards that what she wanted to be spared was not the knowledge of herself, of what was in her, but the knowledge of what was in me, the depths of stupidity that I could sink to.

My stupidity was, as it happened, abysmal. I thought she was merely cherishing, a little too sentimentally, his memory. I thought I could measure myself advantageously against that. How could I tell what she was capable of? How could I tell what he was to her? How could I measure the immortality he had in her?

After that she drew into herself and left off talking about him. Mind you, she didn't talk to everybody, to the others. She told me once she could only talk to *me* because—well, because I cared for her. And, oddly enough, after I'd stopped her talking she began to get happier; and I thought it was all right—for me, I mean—until I found out that she was thinking about him half the time. How did I know it? I knew it by the look she had, as if she caught, from some height that faced the sun, shining, flashing signals of little Khaki's soul. She gave me to understand that it was all right—all right for her.



Then suddenly, without a word of warning, without my being in the least prepared for it, she chucked me.

I asked her, among other things, if she did it because she was in love with anyone else. Her answer was that she was not in love at all. Then she corrected herself. "Not, at least, with anything you could understand."

I *didn't* understand it at the time, and I don't think I altogether understand it now. I don't mind confessing that I pressed her hard, several times, to reconsider her decision, but she remained firm. She was very sorry, she said, but she couldn't marry me; she couldn't marry anybody.

And in the end, under provocation, more came out. She couldn't bear, she said, to live with the memories we should have between us—she and I.

That settled me. I don't think I could have borne what she would have made *me* live with.

No. I tell you it was not his memory that she worshipped, that she was in love with. It wasn't anything as cheap as that. You want to know what it *was*? How do *I* know? The whole trouble was that I didn't.

Well, yes, I suppose it was a sort of immortality—it was Khaki's little soul. She saw it flashing to her—heliographing.

She hasn't married. I don't suppose she ever will. Nobody, I imagine, would be good enough for her—after him.



PORTRAIT OF MY UNCLE



## PORTRAIT OF MY UNCLE

YES, it looks like a commission; that's why I keep it stuck up there; but it is not a commission; it's a portrait of my uncle, Colonel Simpson—Simpson of Chitral.

No, he did not. Does he look as if he'd sit for anybody for five minutes? Does *it* look as if he'd sat? You do not get portraiture like that out of sittings, or out of any possible series of sittings; because, in the first place, you do not get the candour, the *naïveté*, the self-revelation. Of course I *might* have made an Academy thing of him, painted him in scarlet and crimson, with his decorations, or in khaki in a solar topee, if I'd wanted Simpson of Chitral. But I did not want him. Simpson of Chitral was only part of my uncle. And this—this is all my uncle.

Like the portraits of Strindberg, did you say? But he *was* like them. He *was* Strindberg. He had the same scored and crumpled face, the same twisted, tormented eyebrows, the same irritable, irascible scowl and glare. He had every bit of Strindberg's face except its genius and its great, square, bulging forehead. My uncle's forehead was rather like a lion's or a tiger's—straight and a little receding. But the torment's the thing, and the torment's there.

He was worth painting as an instance of conjugal fidelity carried to excess, carried beyond the bounds of reason. This is a composite portrait—it's my uncle *and* my aunt. You could not separate their two faces. They could not separate them themselves. It was not that they'd lived so long together that they grew like each other. Simply it was because they behaved like each other to each other. They said the same things to each other; they irritated each other; they tore at each other's nerves—the same nerves—in the same way.

They devastated each other's faces with the same remarkable results.

I've no clear recollection of my uncle's face before my aunt got to work on it. But there's a family tradition of Uncle Roly as a pink and chubby subaltern, and his regimental nickname was "The Cherub." He must have been home on his first leave somewhere in the later 'eighties. I remember him because of the model steam-engine he gave me. He always gave you interesting and expensive presents, and I never knew him tip you less than a sovereign. He was chubby even then, and absolutely crumpled, so it could not have been India altogether. I think he'd been engaged to her for ages, for he married her as soon as he got his captaincy and took her out with him.

Then for a time we lost track of him. India seems to have swallowed them up. They were two years in a lonely up-country station in Bengal where the heat was awful. The other men had left their wives up in the hills or sent them home. So he never saw any European woman except my aunt. Fancy that—through the hot season, and for two blessed years!

Their first child was born there. The heat seems to have had no effect whatever on my aunt. She was out five—six years. She simply would not come home, and he—that's the odd thing—did not want her to. I've told you conjugal fidelity was a perfect vice with him. It was *her* vice too. After Bengal it was Bombay—Poona—and another baby. She was told that they'd lose both their children if they did not send them home. And she shilly-shallied. She did not want to send them with strangers, and she did not want to go with them herself. Her place, she said, was at her husband's side. She shilly-shallied into another hot season, and the children died.

That, you see, was where the vice came in.

It was not till the death of the babies that they began to feel the devilishness of the climate. Then it went, suddenly, for my uncle's liver, while my aunt was down with dysentery.

I got all this from old Lumby, who was my uncle's subaltern. He says she must have taken to nagging him long before—perhaps in their honeymoon—to be so expert at it, but that it was not till my uncle's nerves gave way that he nagged back. You gathered that she was fairly decent in public; but what goes on in a bungalow leaks out sooner or later into cantonments. Then came Chitral. Lumby says he does not know what would have happened to my uncle if it had not come. It saved him.

As long as there was trouble on the frontier he was all right. He would have sent her home *then*; but she would not go. She said if there was to be fighting her place was more than ever at his side, or within reasonable distance of his side. Their one chance was to separate, and they would not take it. And when it was all over and he was Simpson of Chitral, she nagged him out of the Service. He might have been anything, after Chitral, but my aunt insisted on his retiring. She would not leave him another year in India alone, and another year would have killed her. As it was, he thought she was dying, and he flung up his career and brought her back to England.

They used to come up to London for the season, and when it was over he went to Harrogate to recover from it, and on to Scotland for the shooting, staying in people's houses. They were quite glad to have him—after all, he was Simpson of Chitral—and just at first he really had some social success. But not for long; because, wherever he went, my aunt went with him. He would not have gone without her; that would have been against all his ideas of faithfulness and common decency. I can see him lugging her about with him on all his visits and nagging at her as he did it. They'd quarrel about any mortal thing—the cab-fares, and the trains, and the hours of their arrival and departure, and the time it took to catch them, and about the porters' tips. Lumby said they were simply awful to travel with.

And then people got shy of asking them. He could have got on all right by himself—to his friends he was always

"Good old Roly," and to outsiders he was Simpson of Chitral; but wherever they went *she* was only Mrs. Simpson, the woman who had nagged him out of the Service and wrecked a brilliant career. Other women did not care about her, and when he had rubbed it into them that they could not have him without her they were not so particularly keen on *him*. He was shelved anyhow when he left the Service. Besides, people used to hear them quarrelling in their bedroom.

So gradually they dropped out of things. I don't think either of them minded. She was afraid of Society—of what he might do if he fairly got into it; and he, poor beggar, may have been afraid of himself.

And yet, no—I don't think he really *was* afraid. Fidelity seems to have come easy to him, and the changes in my aunt's face were so gradual; it's quite possible he did not notice them.

They left London and went to live in Cheltenham, and then in Bath. They nagged each other out of all these places in succession. And then they nagged each other into taking quite a large house at Tunbridge Wells. My people made me go and stay with them there. The old boy had a sort of searching affection for me because they'd called me after him.

I found them quarrelling in the kitchen-garden.

He wanted strawberry-beds and, I think, asparagus; and she wanted a herbaceous border with delphiniums in it. I remember her saying to me: "Your uncle does not care about anything he can't eat. If he could eat delphiniums he'd plant them fast enough." And *he* said she'd got the whole place to grow her delphiniums in, and he would not have 'em in his kitchen-garden.

I can see it all—I can feel the hot sun baking the beds; I can smell the hot peaches ripening—I can hear my uncle's voice and my aunt's voice rising in a crescendo of irritation; I can see their poor middle-aged faces twitching and getting more and more heated, and the little twists and lines of annoyance and resentment showing through the heat like a



pattern. They must have been going at it hammer and tongs before I arrived, for my uncle was looking quite tired and crumpled then; and they kept it up a long time after, for I remember the garden was cool again before they'd done.

They quarrelled all the time I stayed with them. They quarrelled about whether I had enough to eat or not, and about what room I was to have, and about the time I was to be called in the morning, and about the places I was to be taken to see. In the evenings we went to the Pantiles to hear the band play, and they quarrelled about whether we were to sit or to walk up and down. Every evening, except Sunday, they went to the Pantiles to hear the band play; and every evening they quarrelled about whether they should sit or walk up and down. On Sunday they seemed to call a truce; anyhow, they agreed that I was to go to church, which was the one thing I did not want to do. But when it was all over, after evening service, they quarrelled worse than ever because of the restraint they had put on themselves all day.

The odd thing was that they were neither of them naturally cantankerous, and they never quarrelled, or even disagreed, with other people. It was marvellous to watch the automatic rapidity with which my aunt's face untied itself to expand to you; and my uncle could be positively suave. The phenomenon of irritability seemed to be related solely to the tie that bound them. It increased with the tightening of the tie.

Finally they nagged each other out of the house at Tunbridge Wells and into a flat in Talbot Road, Bayswater.

It was about this time that my aunt's cousin and trustee mislaid my uncle's private income. She had nagged him into the arrangements that had made it possible. And (odder still), now that he really had a grievance, he never uttered a single word of reproach or even of annoyance. He simply sold the Tunbridge Wells house, cut down expenses, and declined on Bayswater and his pension. (The cousin could not touch the house and furniture, or the pension.) And that's how I came to know him—really know him.

Lumby used to go and see them fairly often; but I'm afraid I did not, at least, not as often as I might have done. It was brutal of me, because I'd every reason to believe that their only happy moments were when either Lumby or I were with them. Their lives could not have been worth living when they were shut up alone together in that awful little flat. They were desperate, I mean spiritually desperate, now; and you felt that they snatched at you as they'd have snatched at any straw; and I was afraid, mortally afraid, of being sucked under. Still, I went. (I was interested in their faces.)

The first time, I remember, they made me stay to dinner, and my uncle flew into a passion because the servant had not put any chillies or any green gherkins in the curry. He said my aunt ought never to have engaged her; she might have seen by the woman's face that she couldn't make a curry. My aunt said he'd better go into the kitchen and make it himself if he was so particular; and he said he'd be driven to it and that the cat could make a better curry. They were always quarrelling about curry, and yet my uncle *would* have it. That's nothing in itself; I've never seen the Anglo-Indian yet that was not sensitive about curry. Still, I sometimes think he had it on purpose. As for the servant, I'm quite sure my aunt engaged her as an *agent provocateur*.

Then—I don't know which of them began it—but they took to playing chess in the evenings, to while away the frightful hours. And that was horrible. You'd come upon them there, in the little stuffy, shabby sitting-room, cramped together over the chess-board, my aunt's hand, poised with her pawn, hovering, shifting, and hovering again, and her poor old head shaking in a perfect palsy of indecision, while my uncle sat, horribly close, and glared at her in torment and in hatred, till he could not bear it any longer, and he'd shout at her: "Put that pawn down, for God's sake, you—*you*——!" (He was always trembling on the verge of some terrific epithet that he could never bring himself

actually to use.) "Your bishop can take my queen in two moves. Do you think I'm going to sit up all night?"

And they quarrelled everlastingly about the flat. My aunt had chosen Bayswater, and he was responsible for the flat itself (it being the only one he could afford). *He* would call upon heaven to explain to him why she had brought him to that God-forsaken place. *She* would declare that nobody but an inhabitant of Bedlam would have expected her to live in a miserable hole like that, where there was not room to turn round. And he would roar: "Who *wants* to turn round?" and point out that my aunt was not a dancing Dervish, and that there'd be room enough in the flat if she did not fill it with the sound of her voice.

There was no refuge for him there (he could not even escape on to another floor), so he used to take sanctuary in my studio. He called it taking a constitutional. It was after I'd moved up from the Vale into Edwardes Square, and he'd walk all the way from Bayswater across Kensington Gardens. I think his ingenuity was pretty severely taxed in concealing these visits from my aunt; all his genuine excuses—his important appointments, his club, his tailor—had gone from him with his income. In these latter years I see him wearing, with a great air of distinction, the same shabby suit all the time. He'd come in and collapse on to the divan and talk to me. He seemed to find relief in this communion. I've known him pour out his soul—all that was left of it. The revelations were stupendous!

Not, mind you, that he ever said a word against my aunt. He never mentioned her except to say that she would wonder where he was and that he must be getting back to her. He simply sat there, saying what a fool he'd been and what a mess he'd made of his life, and how he wished to God (he was always wishing to God) he'd never left the Service. That, he said, was where he'd made his Great Mistake. But you saw—however much he wrapped it up you saw—that they'd come, both of them, to the end of their tether. Their only chance was for one of them to die.

It was as if he knew it.

After a while they gave up playing chess. They were getting older and they could not stand the nervous strain of it. They took to playing patience, by themselves, in separate corners. Even that was not very successful, because, in that room, wherever they sat they were always opposite each other, and if either of them moved, or sneezed, or anything, it put the other out.

But it did not last long. I strolled in one evening and found my uncle doing nothing, just sitting in his place opposite my aunt and shading his eyes with one hand. He said the light bothered him.

I asked him why he was not playing patience, and he let out—in a whisper, so that my aunt should not hear him—that he could not see the cards. His eyes were bothering him. He was worried about his eyes.

But he wouldn't go and see an oculist. He'd always hated doctors, and he owned to a fear, a positive craven fear, of oculists. I suppose he was afraid of what they might tell him. Then suddenly one day his sight went altogether. He could not see a thing, not even large objects like the sideboard or my aunt. I took him then, in a taxi, to an oculist, to several oculists.

They all said the same thing. It was quite clear that my uncle could not see. And yet, on examination, they could find nothing the matter with his eyes. The optic nerve—the whole apparatus of seeing—was intact. There was no reason why he should not see except that he did not. And they could not cure him. The fault, we could only suppose, was in my uncle's brain. There he was, stone blind, poor devil, and none of them could cure him. But I dare not take him to an alienist, he'd never have consented to *that*. Then Lumby got hold of him.

What comes next—the really remarkable part—was told me by Filson, the man who used to own that place that Lumby was secretary of—the Home for Nervous Diseases, in

Gordon Square. Lumby sent us to Filson—Filson had set up as a psychotherapist. He'd studied in Vienna and Berlin, and all sorts of places, and he went in strong for what he called psycho-analysis.

Filson started in to experiment on my poor old uncle's psyche. He was awfully excited about what we'd told him. He said he'd try psycho-analysing him first, using the word-association test, so as to get, he said, at his "complexes." But he told us *that* was not a bit of good. He could not get the old gentleman to "collaborate." He would not play the game. (It's a sort of game, you know; the other chap reels off a whole list of words and you answer each one, slick, with the first thing that comes into your head. He says "Knife!" and you say "Fork!" or ought to, if there's nothing the matter with you. If you hesitate you're lost! Filson says he fired off two hundred words at my uncle, and he would not answer any one of them. Simply would not. He was so desperately afraid of giving himself away. He simply sat there, mum, staring at Filson and not seeing him—with a perfect picture of Filson engraved on his retina all the time—and thinking.

So Filson *had* to hypnotise him.

He put him on a couch in an empty room with a dark blue light in it. He says he got him off most beautifully. And when he was once off he answered all the test-words like a lamb. Filson seems to have known by instinct what would draw him, for presently he tried him with "Face." He asked my uncle what that word suggested to him, and my uncle said: "Take it away. Take it away. I don't want to see it again. Take it away."

Filson said: "Whose face is it? Your father's face? Or your mother's face? Or your wife's face?"

And my uncle said: "Wife's face. Take it away."

Filson explained it all scientifically on some theory of the Subconscious. It seems that Freud, or Jung, or Morton Prince, or one of those johnnies, had a case exactly like my

uncle's. He said my uncle could not see, and did not see, because he did not *want* to see. His blindness was the expression of a strong subconscious wish never to see his wife again, a wish which, of course, his conscious self had very properly suppressed. On the one side it was a laudable effort at self-preservation on the part of my uncle's psyche; on the other side, of course, it was just a morbid obsession and could be easily removed.

He removed it. Doctors do these things.

I ought to tell you that about the time of my uncle's blindness—that blessed illusion which Filson deprived him of—my aunt had a series of remarkable dreams. She kept on dreaming that she saw my uncle lying dead, laid out on the big double bed in the little room they slept in. "Laid out, Roly, not properly, but sometimes in his uniform, and sometimes in evening dress, as they do on the Continent. A most distressing dream, Roly."

There was no doubt about the distress. Each time she woke herself with crying.

She told these dreams to Lumby, and Lumby told them to Filson, and Filson said my aunt's dreams were the same thing as my uncle's blindness—the disguised expression of her subconscious wish that, as Filson put it, he "was not there." And when Lumby said: "But the distress, Filson, the distress!" Filson said that was where the disguise came in. My aunt's psyche was not going to let on, if it could help it, what was the matter with her, and when the subconscious let the cat out of the bag it covered it up. There was no end to the little hypocrisies of the psyche.

Lumby said he thought this was awfully far-fetched of Filson, and he told him so. Then Filson said that if you fetched it far *enough* you could trace the whole business back to unhappy love affairs of my aunt and uncle when they were two years old. He wished he could get hold of them both and psycho-analyse them. He'd *like* to have another try at my uncle.

I said I thought Filson had done quite enough mischief

as it was. He'd be stopping my aunt's dreams next. Her dreams were probably a comfort to her, poor soul.

Lumby was sincerely attached to my uncle, and he confided to me that he did not like those dreams. He said he was not superstitious, but they made him uneasy. Quite evidently he'd got it into his head that they were premonitory of my uncle's death.

So that neither Lumby nor I were prepared for the letter we got from him a day or two after, telling us that my aunt had had a severe stroke, nor for the wire that followed it, announcing her death. Somehow it had never occurred to any of us that my aunt could die.

My uncle wrote to thank me for the wreath I sent him. I noticed that his letter was rather remarkably free from pious and conventional expressions of bereavement. My mother, I know, was a little shocked by it. She said it *sounded* callous. The flowers might have been sent for the dinner-table—there was hardly any allusion to his loss. She was even more shocked when I told her I respected my uncle's honesty.

It did not prevent him from turning an awfully queer colour at the funeral. But he bore up well. Better, Lumby said, than he had expected. He shook hands with us when it was all over, looking us straight in the face, almost defiantly; he looked like Simpson of Chitral; then he squared his shoulders and walked out of the churchyard briskly—*too* briskly, my mother said.

I did not see him for about five weeks after. He was not at home the three times that I called. Then one evening he turned up at my studio. He looked sprucer and younger than he'd done for long enough. That *might* have been the effect of his black suit—the first new one he'd had for years. Also of his slenderness. He had thinned considerably and it improved him. His face was dragged a little with this shrinkage, but it was no longer tortured. I could have sworn that, at last, he realised that he was free.

He collapsed on the divan there, just as he used to do

when he'd found sanctuary. For a long time he said nothing. He told me to go on painting and take no notice of him. And then, after a bit, he began to talk to me.

He said he had not been able to come to see me before. To tell the truth, he had not felt up to it. He had not felt up to anything lately. Somehow he'd lost his grip of things—lost all care and interest.

I asked him—God forgive me—what was wrong with him. And he said one thing was not more wrong than another. It was just a general break-up of the whole machine. He did not think he could hold out much longer. He was done for.

I said all the encouraging things I could think of. It seemed to me that he was simply suffering from the shock of a too sudden liberation. He could not realise his blessedness. Of course I did not tell him so; but I did tell him that sixty was no sort of age to crumple up at; and that with the family constitution he had a long life still to look forward to.

He looked at me queerly.

"If I thought *that*," he said, "I'd—blow—my—brains out."

He looked up at me again—another look.

"The fact is, Roly, I can't get over your Aunt's death."

He did not get over it. He died on the same day of the month, exactly one year after, from some obscure heart-trouble brought on by fretting.



LENA WRACE



## LENA WRACE

SHE arranged herself there, on that divan, and I knew she'd come to tell me all about it. It was wonderful, how, at forty-seven, she could still give that effect of triumph and excess, of something rich and ruinous and beautiful spread out on the brocades. The attitude showed me that her affair with Norman Hippisley was prospering; otherwise she couldn't have afforded the extravagance of it.

"I know what you want," I said. "You want me to congratulate you."

"Yes. I do."

"I congratulate you on your courage."

"Oh, you don't like him," she said placably.

"No, I don't like him at all."

"He likes you," she said. "He thinks no end of your painting."

"I'm not denying he's a judge of painting. I'm not even denying he can paint a little himself."

"Better than you, Roly."

"If you allow for the singular, obscene ugliness of his imagination, yes."

"It's beautiful enough when he gets it into paint," she said. "He makes beauty—his own beauty."

"Oh, very much his own."

"Well, *you* just go on imitating other people's—God's or somebody's."

She continued with her air of perfect reasonableness. "I know he isn't good looking. Not half so good looking as you are. But I like him. I like his slender little body and his clever, faded face. There's quality about him, a distinction. And look at his eyes. *Your* mind doesn't come rushing and blazing out of your eyes, my dear."

"No. No. I'm afraid it doesn't rush. And for all the blaze——"

"Well, that's what I'm in love with, the rush, Roly, and the blaze. And I'm in love *for the first time*" (she underlined it) "with a man."

"Come," I said, "come!"

"Oh, I know. I know you're thinking of Lawson Young and Dicky Harper."

"I was."

"Well, but they don't count. I wasn't *in love* with Lawson. I was his career. If he hadn't been a Cabinet Minister; if he hadn't been so desperately gone on me; if he hadn't said it all depended on me——"

"Yes," I said. "I can see how it would go to your head."

"It didn't. It went to my heart." She was quite serious and solemn. "I held him in my hands, Roly. And he held England. I couldn't let him drop, could I? I had to think of England."

It was wonderful—Lena Wrace thinking that she thought of England.

I said: "Of course. But for your political foresight and your virtuous action we should never have had Tariff Reform."

"We should never have had anything," she said. "And look at him now. Look how he's crumpled up since he left me. It's pitiful."

"It is. I'm afraid Mrs. Withers doesn't care about Tariff Reform."

"Poor thing. No. Don't imagine I'm jealous of her, Roly. She hasn't got him. I mean she hasn't got what I had."

"All the same, he left you. And you weren't ecstatically happy with him the last year or two."

"I daresay I'd have done better to have married you, if that's what you mean."

It wasn't what I meant. But she'd always entertained the illusion that she could marry me any minute if she wanted to; and I hadn't the heart to take it from her since it seemed

to console her for the way, the really very infamous way, he had left her.

So I said: "Much better."

"It would have been so nice, so safe," she said. "But I never played for safety." Then she made one of her quick turns.

"Frances Archdale ought to marry you. Why doesn't she?"

"How should I know? Frances' reasons would be exquisite. I suppose I didn't appeal to her sense of fitness."

"Sense of fiddlesticks. She just hasn't got any temperament, that girl."

"Any temperament for me, you mean."

"I mean pure cussedness," said Lena.

"Perhaps. But, you see, if I were unfortunate enough she probably *would* marry me. If I lost my eyesight or a leg or an arm, if I couldn't sell any more pictures——"

"If you can understand Frances, you can understand me. That's how I felt about Dicky. I wasn't in love with him. I was sorry for him. I knew he'd go to pieces if I wasn't there to keep him together. Perhaps it's the maternal instinct."

"Perhaps," I said. Lena's reasons for her behaviour amused me; they were never exquisite, like Frances's, but she was anxious that you should think they were.

"So you see," she said, "they don't count, and Norry really *is* the first."

I reflected that he would be also, probably, the last. She had, no doubt, to make the most of him. But it was preposterous that she should waste so much good passion; preposterous that she should imagine for one moment she could keep the fellow. I had to warn her.

"Of course, if you care to take the risk of him——" I said. "He won't stick to you, Lena."

"Why shouldn't he?"

I couldn't tell her. I couldn't say: "Because you're thirteen years older than he is." That would have been cruel. And it would have been absurd, too, when she could so easily look not a year older than his desiccated thirty-four.

It only took a little success like this, her actual triumph in securing him.

So I said: "Because it isn't in him. He's a bounder and a rotter." Which was true.

"Not a bounder, Roly, dear. His father's Sir Gilbert Hippisley. Hippisleys of Leicestershire."

"A moral bounder, Lena. A slimy eel. Slips and wriggles out of things. You'll never hold him. You're not his first affair, you know."

"I don't care," she said, "as long as I'm his last."

I could only stand and stare at that; her monstrous assumption of his fidelity. Why, he couldn't even be faithful to one art. He wrote as well as he painted, and he acted as well as he wrote, and he was never really happy with a talent till he had debauched it.

"The others," she said, "don't bother me a bit. He's slipped and wriggled out of their clutches, if you like. . . . Yet there was something about all of them. Distinguished. That's it. He's so awfully fine and fastidious about the women he takes up with. It flatters you, makes you feel so sure of yourself. You know he wouldn't take up with *you* if you weren't fine and fastidious, too—one of his great ladies. . . . You think I'm a snob, Roly?"

"I think you don't mind coming *after* Lady Willersey."

"Well," she said, "if you *have* to come after somebody——"

"True." I asked her if she was giving me her reasons.

"Yes, if you want them. I don't. I'm content to love out of all reason."

And she did. She loved extravagantly, unintelligibly, out of all reason; yet irrefutably—to the end. There's a sort of reason in that, isn't there? She had the sad logic of her passions.

She got up and gathered herself together in her sombre, violent beauty and in its glittering sheath, her red fox skins, all her savage splendour, leaving a scent of crushed orris root in the warmth of her lair.

Well, she managed to hold him, tight, for a year, fairly intact. I can't for the life of me imagine how she could have cared for the fellow, with his face all dried and frayed with make-up. There was something lithe and sinuous about him that may, of course, have appealed to her. And I understand his infatuation. He was decadent, exhausted; and there would be moments when he found her primitive violence stimulating before it wore him out.

They kept up the ménage for two astounding years.

Well, not so very astounding, if you come to think of it. There was Lena's money, left her by old Weinberger, her maternal uncle. You've got to reckon with Lena's money. Not that she, poor soul, ever reckoned with it; she was absolutely free from that taint, and she couldn't conceive other people reckoning. Only, instinctively, she knew. She knew how to hold Hippisley. She knew there were things he couldn't resist, things like wines and motor-cars he could be faithful to. From the very beginning she built for permanence, for eternity. She took a house in Avenue Road, with a studio for Hippisley in the garden; she bought a motor-car and engaged an inestimable cook. Lena's dinners, in those years, were exquisite affairs, and she took care to ask the right people, people who would be useful to Hippisley; dealers whom old Weinberger had known, and journalists, and editors, and publishers. And all his friends and her own; even friends' friends. Her hospitality was boundless and eccentric, and Hippisley liked that sort of thing. He thrived in a liberal air, an air of gorgeous spending, though he sported a supercilious smile at the *floritura*, the luscious excess of it. He had never had too much, poor devil, of his own. I've seen the little fellow swaggering about at her parties, with his sharp, frayed face, looking fine and fastidious, safeguarding himself with twinklings and gestures that gave the dear woman away. I've seen him, in goggles and a magnificent fur-lined coat, shouting to her chauffeur, giving counter-orders to her own, while she sat snuggling up in the corner of the car, smiling at his mastery.

It went on till poor Lena was forty-nine. Then, as she said, she began to "shake in her shoes." I told her it didn't matter so long as she didn't let him see her shaking. That depressed her, because she knew she couldn't hide it; there was nothing secret in her nature; she had always let "them" see. And they were bothering her—"the others"—more than "a bit." She was jealous of every one of them, of any woman he said more than five words to. Jealous of the models, first of all, before she found out that they didn't matter; he was so used to them. She would stick there, in his studio, while they sat, until one day he got furious and turned her out of it. But she'd seen enough to set her mind at rest. He was fine and fastidious, and the models were all "common."

"And their figures, Roly, you should have seen them when they were undressed. Of course, you *have* seen them. Well, there isn't—is there?"

And there wasn't. Hippisley had grown out of models just as he had grown out of cheap Burgundy. And he'd left the stage, because he was tired of it; so there was, mercifully, no danger from that quarter. What she dreaded was the moment when he'd "take" to writing again, for then he'd have to have a secretary. Also she was jealous of his writing, because it absorbed more of his attention than his painting, and exhausted him more, left her less of him.

And that year, their third year, he flung up his painting and was, as she expressed it, "at it" again. Worse than ever. And he wanted a secretary.

She took care to find him one. One who wouldn't be dangerous. "You should just see her, Roly." She brought her in to tea one day for me to look at and say whether she would "do."

I wasn't sure—what can you be sure of?—but I could see why Lena thought she would. She was a little unhealthy thing, dark and sallow and sulky, with thin lips that showed a lack of temperament, and she had just that touch of "commonness"—a stiffness and preciseness like a board-school teacher—which Lena relied on to put him off. She wore a



shabby brown skirt and a yellowish blouse. Her name was Ethel Reeves.

Lena had secured safety, she said, in the house. But what was the good of that, when outside it he was going about everywhere with Sybil Fermor?

She came and told me all about it, with a sort of hope that I'd say something either consoling or revealing, something that she could go on.

"*You* know him, Roly," she said.

I reminded her that she hadn't always given me that credit.

"*I* know how he spends his time," she said.

"How do you know?"

"Well, for one thing, Ethel tells me."

"How does she know?"

"She—she posts the letters."

"Does she read them?"

"She needn't. He's too transparent."

"Lena, do you use her to spy on him?" I said.

"Well," she retorted, "if he uses her——"

I asked her if it hadn't struck her that Sybil Fermor might be using him.

"Do you mean—as a paravent? Or"—she revised it—"a parachute?"

"For Bertie Granville," I elucidated. "A parachute, by all means."

She considered it. "It won't work," she said. "If it's her reputation she's thinking of, wouldn't Norry be worse?"

I said that was the beauty of him, if Letty Granville's attention was to be diverted.

"Oh, Roly," she said, "do you really think it's that?"

I said I did, and she powdered her nose and said I was a dear, and I'd bucked her up no end, and went away quite happy.

Letty Granville's divorce suit proved to her that I was right.

The next time I saw her she told me she'd been mistaken

about Sybil Fermor. It was Lady Hermione Nevin. Norry had been using Sybil as a "paravent" for *her*. I said she was wrong again. Didn't she know that Hermione was engaged to Billy Craven. They were head over ears in love with each other. I asked her what on earth had made her think of her? And she said Lady Hermione had paid him thirty guineas for a picture. That looked, she said, as if she was pretty far gone on him. (She tended to disparage Hippisley's talents. Jealousy again.)

I said it looked as if he had the iciest reasons for cultivating Lady Hermione. And again she told me I was a dear. "You don't know, Roly, what a comfort you are to me."

Then Barbara Vining turned up out of nowhere, and from the first minute Lena gave herself up for lost.

"I'm done for," she said. "I'd fight her if it was any good fighting. But what chance have I? At forty-nine against nineteen, and that face?"

The face was adorable, if you adore a child's face on a woman's body. Small and pink; a soft, innocent forehead, fawn-skin hair, a fawn's nose, a fawn's mouth, a fawn's eyes. You saw her at Lena's garden parties staring at Hippisley over the rim of her plate while she browsed on Lena's cakes and ices, or bounding about Lena's tennis-court with the sash ribbons flying from her little butt end.

Oh, yes, she had her there. As much as he wanted. And there would be Ethel Reeves, in a new blouse, looking on from a back seat, subtle and sullen, or handing around cups and plates without speaking to anybody, like a servant. I used to think she spied on them for Lena. They were always mouching about the garden together or sitting secretly in corners; Lena even had her to stay with them; let him take her for long drives in her car. She knew when she was beaten.

I said: "Why do you let him do it, Lena? Why don't you turn them both neck and crop out of the house?"

"Because I want him in it. I want him at any cost. And I want him to have what he wants, too, even if it's Barbara.

I want him to be happy. . . . I'm making a virtue of necessity. It can be done, Roly, if you give up beautifully."

I put it to her it wasn't giving up beautifully to fret herself into an unbecoming illness, to carry her disaster on her face. She would come to me looking more ruined than ruinous, haggard and ashy, her eyes all shrunk and hot with crying, and stand before the glass, looking at herself and dabbing on powder in an utter abandonment to misery.

"I know," she moaned. "As if losing him wasn't enough, I must go and lose my looks. I know crying's simply suicidal at my age, yet I keep on at it. I'm doing for myself. I'm digging my own grave, Roly. A little deeper every day."

Then she said suddenly: "Do you know, you're the only man in London I could come to looking like this."

I said: "Isn't that a bit unkind of you? It sounds as though you thought I didn't matter."

She broke down on that. "Can't you see it's because I know I don't any more. Nobody cares whether my nose is red or not. But you're not a brute. You don't let me feel I don't matter. I know I never did matter to you, Roly, but the effect's soothing, all the same. . . . Ethel says if she were me she wouldn't stand it. To have it going on under my nose. Ethel is so high-minded. I suppose it's easy to be high-minded if you've always looked like that. And if you've never *had* anybody. She doesn't know what it is. I tell you, I'd rather have Norry there with Barbara than not have him at all."

I thought and said that would just about suit Hippisley's book. He'd rather be there than anywhere else, since he had to be somewhere. To be sure, she irritated him with her perpetual clinging, and wore him out. I've seen him wince at the sound of her voice in the room. He'd say things to her; not often, but just enough to see how far he could go. He was afraid of going too far. He wasn't prepared to give up the comfort of Lena's house, the opulence and peace. There wasn't one of Lena's wines he could have turned his

back on. After all, when she worried him he could keep himself locked up in the studio away from her.

There was Ethel Reeves; but Lena didn't worry about his being locked up with *her*. She was very kind to Hippisley's secretary. Since she wasn't dangerous, she liked to see her there, well housed, eating rich food and getting stronger and stronger every day.

I must say my heart bled for Lena when I thought of young Barbara. It was still bleeding when one afternoon she walked in with her old triumphant look; she wore her hat with an *air crâne*, and the powder on her face was even and intact, like the first pure fall of snow. She looked ten years younger, and I judged that Hippisley's affair with Barbara was at an end.

Well—it had never had a beginning; nor the ghost of a beginning. It had never happened at all. She had come to tell me that; that there was nothing in it—nothing but her jealousy; the miserable, damnable jealousy that had made her think things. She said it would be a lesson to her to trust him in the future not to go falling in love. For, she argued, if he hadn't done it this time with Barbara, he'd never do it.

I asked her how she knew he hadn't this time, when appearances all pointed that way. And she said that Barbara had come and told her. Somebody, it seemed, had been telling Barbara it was known that she'd taken Hippisley from Lena, and that Lena was crying herself into a nervous breakdown. And the child had gone straight to Lena and told her it was a beastly lie. She hadn't taken Hippisley. She liked ragging with him and all that, and being seen about with him at parties, because he was a celebrity, and it made the other women, the women he wouldn't talk to, furious. But as for taking him, why, she wouldn't take him from anybody as a gift. She didn't want him, a scrubby old thing like that! She didn't *like* that dragged look about his mouth, and the way the skin wrinkled on his eyelids. There was a

sincerity about Barbara that would have blasted Hippisley if he'd known.

Besides, she wouldn't have hurt Lena for the world. She wouldn't have spoken to Norry if she'd dreamed that Lena minded. But Lena had seemed so remarkably not to mind. When she came to that part of it she cried.

Lena said that was all very well, and it didn't matter whether Barbara was in love with Norry or not; but how did she know Norry wasn't in love with *her*? And Barbara replied amazingly that of course she knew. They'd been alone together.

When I remarked that it was precisely *that*, Lena said no. That was nothing in itself; but it would prove one way or another; and it seemed that when Norry found himself alone with Barbara, he used to yawn.

After that Lena settled down to a period of felicity. She'd come to me, excited and exulting, bringing her poor little happiness with her like a new toy. She'd sit there looking at it, turning it over and over, and holding it up to me to show how beautiful it was.

She pointed out to me that I had been wrong and she right about him, from the beginning. She knew him.

"And to think what a fool, what a damned silly fool, I was, with my jealousy. When all those years there was never anybody but me. Do you remember Sybil Fermor, and Lady Hermione—and Barbara? To think I should have so clean forgotten what he was like. . . . Don't you think, Roly, there must be something in me, after all, to have kept him all these years?"

I said there must indeed have been, to have inspired so remarkable a passion. For Hippisley was making love to her all over again. Their happy relations were proclaimed, not only by her own engaging frankness, but still more by the marvellous renaissance of her beauty. She had given up her habit of jealousy, as she had given up eating sweets, because both were murderous to her complexion. Not that

Hippisley gave her any cause. He had ceased to cultivate the society of young and pretty ladies, and devoted himself with almost ostentatious fidelity to Lena. Their affair had become irreproachable with time; it had the permanence of a successful marriage without the unflattering element of legal obligation. And he had kept his secretary. Lena had left off being afraid either that Ethel would leave or that Hippisley would put some dangerous woman in her place.

There was no change in Ethel, except that she looked rather more subtle and less sullen. Lena ignored her subtlety as she had ignored her sulks. She had no more use for her as a confidante and spy, and Ethel lived in a back den off Hippisley's study with her Remington, and displayed a convenient apathy in allowing herself to be ignored.

"Really," Lena would say, in the unusual moments when she thought of her, "if it wasn't for the clicking, you wouldn't know she was there."

And as a secretary she maintained, up to the last, an admirable efficiency.

Up to the last.

It was Hippisley's death that ended it. You know how it happened—suddenly, of heart failure, in Paris. He'd gone there with Furnival to get material for that book they were doing together. Lena was literally "prostrated" with the shock; and Ethel Reeves had to go over to Paris to bring back his papers and his body.

It was the day after the funeral that it all came out. Lena and Ethel were sitting up together over the papers and the letters, turning out his bureau. I suppose that, in the grand immunity his death conferred on her, poor Lena had become provokingly possessive. I can hear her saying to Ethel that there had never been anybody but her, all those years. Praising his faithfulness; holding out her dead happiness, and apologising to Ethel for talking about it when Ethel didn't understand, never having had any.

She must have said something like that, to bring it on herself, just then, of all moments.

And I can see Ethel Reeves, sitting at his table, stolidly sorting out his papers, wishing that Lena would go away and leave her to her work. And her sullen eyes firing out questions, asking her what she wanted, what she had to do with Norman Hippisley's papers, what she was there for, fussing about, when it was all over.

What she wanted—what she had come for—was her letters. They were locked up in his bureau in the secret drawer.

She told me what had happened then. Ethel lifted her sullen, subtle eyes and said: "You think he kept them?"

She said she knew he'd kept them. They were in that drawer.

And Ethel said: "Well, then, he didn't. They aren't. He burnt them. *We* burnt them. . . . We could, at least, get rid of *them!*"

Then she threw it at her. She had been Hippisley's mistress for three years.

When Lena asked for proofs of the incredible assertion she had her letters to show.

Oh, it was her moment. She must have been looking out for it, saving up for it, all those years; gloating over her exquisite secret, her return for all the slighting and ignoring. That was what had made her poisonous, the fact that Lena hadn't reckoned with her, hadn't thought her dangerous, hadn't been afraid to leave Hippisley with her, the rich, arrogant contempt in her assumption that Ethel would "do," and her comfortable confidences. It had made her amorous and malignant. It stimulated her to the attempt.

I think she must have hated Lena more vehemently than she loved Hippisley. She couldn't, *then*, have had much reliance on her power to capture; but her hatred was a perpetual suggestion. Supposing—supposing she were to try and take him?

Then she had tried.

I daresay she hadn't much difficulty. Hippisley wasn't quite so fine and fastidious as Lena thought him. I've no

doubt he liked Ethel's unwholesomeness, just as he had liked the touch of morbidity in Lena.

And the spying? That had been all part of the game; his and Ethel's. *They* played for safety, if you like. They had *had* to throw Lena off the scent. They used Sybil Fermor and Lady Hermione and Barbara Vining one after the other as their "paravents." Finally they had used Lena. That was their cleverest stroke. It brought them a permanent security. For, you see, Hippisley wasn't going to give up his free quarters, his studio, the dinners and the motor-car, if he could help it—not for Ethel. And Ethel knew it. They insured her, too.

Can't you see her, letting herself go in an ecstasy of revenge, winding up with an hysterical youp? "You? You thought it was you? It was me—*me*—ME. . . . You thought what we meant you to think."

Lena still comes and talks to me. To hear her you would suppose that Lawson Young and Dicky Harper never existed, that her passion for Norman Hippisley was the unique, solitary manifestation of her soul. It certainly burnt with the intensest flame. It certainly consumed her. What's left of her's all shrivelled, warped, as she writhed in her fire.

Yesterday she said to me: "Roly, I'm *glad* he's dead. Safe from her clutches."

She'll cling for a little while to this last illusion: that he had been reluctant; but I doubt if she really believes it now.

For, you see, Ethel flourishes. In passion, you know, nothing succeeds like success; and her affair with Norman Hippisley advertised her, so that very soon it ranked as the first of a series of successes. She goes about dressed in stained glass Futurist muslins, and contrives provocative effects out of a tilted nose, and sulky eyes, and sallowness set off by a black velvet band on her forehead, and a black scarf of hair dragged tight from a raking backward peak.

I saw her the other night sketching a frivolous gesture——



THE COLLECTOR



## THE COLLECTOR

I HAVE known many collectors of celebrities, but none of them have been a patch on Mrs. Folyat-Raikes.

She was an old friend of my mother's; that was how I came to know her. I may have made it a little too apparent that it was filial piety that brought me to Cadogan Gardens, for she put me in my place at once by assuring me that I should always be welcome there for my dear mother's sake. If I had any illusions as to my footing, she destroyed them by the little air of mournful affection that explained my obscure presence, and condoned it. That was one of the ways by which she maintained her unspeakable prestige.

Yet I happened to know that she had inquired into my activities sufficiently to assure herself that I might ultimately have value. She was an infallible appraiser of values; she had the instinct of the auction-room, and I do not think that in a lifetime of collecting she had ever wasted as much as one "At Home" card.

She had been at the game for years when I first met her, so I can't tell you much about her beginnings, except that she was a daughter of Lord Braintree, and the widow of a man who had distinguished himself in the diplomatic service, which may have helped her.

Her success began in the early 'eighties, when, going straight, with her flair, for the rarest, she secured Ford Lankester. He never could resist a woman if she was young, well born, and handsome, and when the daughter of Lord Braintree held out the laurels, he stooped his head and played very prettily at being crowned. After that, collecting became easy. She had only to write on her card, "To meet Mr. Ford Lankester," and she filled her big drawing-room in Cadogan

Gardens. At one time she was said to have the finest collection in London. Only ten years ago everybody who was somebody was sure to be seen in it; not to be seen argued that you were nobody. Thus you were fairly terrorised into being seen. Even now, when most celebrities are smaller and the few big ones are getting shy, by dint of playing off one against the other she continues to collect.

But she is not so young as she was, nor yet so handsome, and other hostesses are in the business; she knows that one or two of the younger men—Grevill Burton, for instance—will not be seen inside her house, and she is getting nervous.

That is why her last adventure, the hunting of Watt Gunn, became the violent, disastrous, yet exciting spectacle it was.

In the beginning she had no trouble in getting hold of him; it was far easier than her first triumph, the capture of Ford Lankester. As you know, Watt Gunn's greatness dropped on him suddenly, after he had been toiling for eight years in obscurity. Nobody, he said, was more surprised at it than himself. For eight years he had been writing things every bit as good as *The New Aspasia* without getting himself discovered. He was the son of a little draper at Surbiton, and had worked for eight years as his father's cashier. He used to say mournfully that he supposed his "grand mistake" was not going in for journalism. It wasn't his grand mistake; it was his grand distinction, his superhuman luck. It kept him turning out one masterpiece after another, all fresh, with the dew on them, at an age when the talent of most novelists begins to turn grey. It kept him pure from any ulterior motive. Above all, it kept him from the clutches of the collector.

But it had this disadvantage, that when he did emerge, he emerged in a state of utter innocence, as naked of sophistication as when he was born. He had no suspicion of the dangers that lurked for him in Mrs. Folyat-Raikes' drawing-room. He didn't know that there were two kinds of celebrities, those who were too small to be asked there, and those who were too big to go. There was nobody to tell him that he was

much too big. He went because he understood that he would meet the sort of people he had wanted all his life to meet.

He met first of all Furnival and me. It was touching how from the very first, and afterwards in his extremity, he clung to us. Positively, it was as if then, before he had lost his crystalline simplicity, he had had some premonition of disaster, and felt subconsciously that we might save him. But it went, that pure and savage sense of his, in his first year.

I can see him now, sitting beside Mrs. Folyat-Raikes at the head of her beautiful mahogany table, always impeccably dressed, bright eyed, and a little flushed. I can see his hair—he had never trained it—which rose irrepressibly in a crest or comb from back to front along the top of his head, and his innocent moustache, which drooped as if it deprecated the behaviour of his hair. I can see his shy, untutored courtliness, his jerky aplomb, his little humorous, interrogative air, which seemed to say: "I'm carrying it off pretty well for a chap that isn't used to it—my greatness, eh?" I seem to hear his guileless intonations: I follow, fascinated, the noble, reckless rush of his aitches as they fell through space; I taste the strange and piercing flavour of the accents that were his.

It seemed to me horrible, inconceivable, that he liked being there. And yet there can be no doubt that he did like it just at first. It gave him the things that he had missed, the opportunities. It satisfied his everlasting curiosity as to contemporary manners and the social scene. And just at first it didn't hurt him. He continued to produce, with a humour and a freshness unimpaired, those inimitable annals of his class.

In his second year Watt Gunn had made his way everywhere. He didn't push. He was so frightfully celebrated that he had no need to. He was pushed. The mass bore down on him. Competition had set in. All the collectors in the western and south-western districts contended with Mrs. Folyat-Raikes for the possession of Watt Gunn. But she held her own, for he was grateful to her. You saw her

sweep by, haggard with pursuit, but trailing Watt Gunn on the edge of her sagging, voluminous, Victorian gowns.

It was pitiful to watch the gradual sophistication of the naïf creature, his polishing and hardening under the social impact, and the blunting of his profound and primal instincts. They clipped his wings among them, and the wings of his wild aitches. Very soon he lost his shyness and his tingling cockney flavour.

Presently his work began to suffer. It was becoming more brilliant, more astoundingly intellectual, but the dewiness and the divine simplicity were going.

We, Grevill Burton, Furnival and I, told him so.

He knew it, and he knew the cause of it, but he defended himself. When we said: "For God's sake, keep out of it!" he said he couldn't.

"I want," he said, "to get the hang of the thing. If I'm going to draw the upper classes, I must see what they're like. I can't invent 'em. Who could?"

And when Furny told him for his good that he was a snob at bottom, he merely said: "Of course I am. Who isn't?"

And there was some truth in it. I do not think that, except at the very last, he was ever able to forget that Mrs. Folyat-Raikes was a daughter of Lord Braintree.

But he had his moments of terrible lucidity. What was the matter with him, he would say, was simply his damned celebrity. He couldn't get rid of it. If only, he moaned, he could curl up and creep back into obscurity again. But he couldn't. It was, he said, as if a rose should shut and be a bud again.

And so the rose went on expanding till it began to fade, and its leaves fell one by one on Mrs. Folyat-Raikes' drawing-room floor.

His publishers saw nothing wrong with the novel he brought out in his third year. It sold all right; but he was thoroughly frightened. As if it had been the first symptom of a retributive malady, that novel sobered him. You see, he

was not a snob at bottom, only at the top. At bottom he was a very serious artist, and he had realised his appalling danger.

And then the great fight began. It lasted two years, and was made hideous by an element of personal virulence on both sides, secret, but profound. Secret, that is, at first. At first Mrs. Folyat-Raikes was merely unscrupulous, and Watt Gunn merely evasive. He lied, but with no hope of really deceiving her. He would refuse three invitations running on the plea that he was out of town. He wasn't, and she knew it, and he knew that she knew it, and that she would forgive him anything. Then, because he was a kind little chap at heart and hated to hurt people, he would dine with her twice running to make up. And their mutual fear and hostility would smoulder. Then her clutches would tighten, and he would break loose again madly. His excuses became disgraceful, preposterous, fantastic. A child could have seen through them.

So I wasn't in the least surprised when he came to me one day and told me that he'd got appendicitis. He was going into a nursing-home, he said, on the fourteenth.

"You mean," I said, "that Mrs. Raikes has a dinner-party on the fifteenth to which you are invited."

He said he meant that he was going.

He said it in that rather hoarse, rather squeaky voice of his that carried conviction. There was about him a morbid exaltation and excitement. I was to tell everybody that he was going.

And he went. I called to see him three days after. His nursing-home—I'm not going to tell you exactly where it was, but it was in a beautiful green square, with lots of trees in it. I found him established in a lofty room on the first floor. He was sitting up in bed by the window, flushed and bright-eyed, looking at the trees, simply looking at them.

I couldn't at first detach him from his contemplation of the square garden. He said he liked it; it was "so jolly bosky." "And, oh, Simpson, the peace, the blessed peace of it!" He had his fountain-pen and writing-pad in bed with

him, but he hadn't written a line. He said he was too happy.

I inquired about his appendicitis. He shook his head gravely, and said that an operation was not considered necessary at present; but that he would have to stay in the nursing-home for five or six weeks to make sure.

"Five or six weeks, Simpson; longer, perhaps. In fact, I don't know when I shall be out."

I told him he'd be bored to death, and that he couldn't stand it. But he said no; he was happier in that nursing-home than he had been for years. They didn't treat him a bit like a celebrity, and all he wanted was to lie there and have his hair brushed.

He lay there three weeks, and I suppose he had his hair brushed, for it lay flatter, which gave him a look of extraordinary well-being and peace. And at the end of three weeks he came to me in my studio by night. Grevill Burton and Furnival were there, and he simply threw himself on our mercy. He said he was still supposed to be in the nursing-home. Yes, I was right. He hadn't been able to stand it. It was all very well at first. He'd liked having his hair brushed—the little nurse who brushed it was distinctly pretty—but he'd got tired of it in a week. He'd squared the sister and the nurses and the doctor—squared 'em all round, and if anybody inquired for him at the home, they'd hear that Mr. Watt Gunn's condition was about the same, and that he was not allowed to see anybody. If Furny liked to put a paragraph in that rag of his about his condition being the same, he might.

Thus, with a delicious, childlike joy in his own ingenuity, he spun the first threads of the tangle that afterwards immeshed him.

He went down into the country to write a book. Nobody but Burton and I (we couldn't trust Furny) knew where he was. Officially, he was in the nursing-home. Mrs. Folyat-Raikes called there every day, and brought back the bulletin, and published it all round. He'd reckoned on that.



Well, he kept it up for weeks, months. Burton and I went down to see him in September. We found him chuckling over the success of his plot. He admitted it had been a bit expensive. His three weeks in the home, at fifteen guineas a week, had come to forty-five pounds. With doctors and one thing and another the game had cost him over seventy. But it was, he said, money well invested. It would mean hundreds and thousands of pounds in his pocket—a hundred pounds, he'd calculated, for every week he was supposed to be still there. He'd finished his book, and if he could keep it up only a few months longer, he thought he could easily do another. He was so fit, he said, he could do 'em on his head.

It struck me there was something ominous in his elation. For the thing presently began to leak out. I swear it wasn't through me or Burton or even Furny; but, you see, the entire staff of the nursing-home was in the secret, and the nurses may have talked to patients; you don't have Watt Gunn in a nursing-home for nothing. Anyhow, I was rung up one day by Mrs. Folyat-Raikes. I heard her uncanny telephone-voice saying: "Do you know what has become of Mr. Watt Gunn?" I answered as coolly as I could that I didn't.

And then the voice squeaked in my ear: "I hear he's broken down completely and gone away, leaving no address."

I called a taxi then and there, and went round to Cadogan Gardens. I found the poor lady wilder and more haggard than ever. You may imagine what it meant to her.

She dropped her voice to tell me that her information was authentic. Mr. Watt Gunn was not in the nursing-home. He never had been in a nursing-home at all. She had not written to him because she understood that letters were not allowed in the institution.

That was where Watt Gunn's ingenuity had landed him. The story was all over London in three days. She was bound to spread it to account for his non-appearance at her parties. You couldn't stop it. It had got into the papers. And though Watt Gunn's publisher, in view of his forthcoming novel,

published emphatic contradictions, nobody believed them. And when the book, his masterpiece, came out, the effect on his royalties was lamentable. In America it simply ruined him.

He tried desperately to recover, to live it down. He had some scheme of going on a lecturing tour in the States; but his agents made inquiries, and advised him not to. A lecturing tour in the States, they said, at the present juncture would prove a miserable fiasco, even if he could effect a landing. He, the darling of the American public, whose triumph on "the other side" had been a gorgeous fairy-tale, saw himself returned on his country's hands as an insane alien.

His American publisher, terrified by these rumours, came over himself for the sole purpose of seeing what was the matter with Watt Gunn, and despite all that Burton, Furnival and I could tell him, he was not altogether reassured. He went about too much. Besides, by this time Watt Gunn had got so nervy over it all that his behaviour lent itself to suspicion.

Then the poor little chap persuaded himself that his only chance was to be seen again at Mrs. Folyat-Raikes'. For the next three months he was seen there and everywhere. Furny published a funny account of the whole thing, and Watt Gunn was ultimately reinstated. And the struggle and the agony began all over again.

It was sharper because of the peace that he had known. I can't tell you all Mrs. Folyat-Raikes' ruses, and Watt Gunn's revolts and flights, his dastardly and pitiable shifts. He had, I believe, a matrimonial project which he abandoned as too drastic, besides being probably ineffectual. And then he did a really clever thing. It served him for a whole season.

I ought to tell you that Mrs. Folyat-Raikes was the most straight-laced hostess of her generation. Nobody was admitted to her house who had once figured in a scandal. And Watt Gunn had never figured, had never desired to figure; he couldn't, he used to say, be bored. Really, he had pre-

served the virtues and traditions of his class, besides being constitutionally timid in seductive presences. Then, suddenly and conspicuously, in the beginning of the season, he figured. He appeared—you may remember it—as co-respondent in a rather bad divorce case. There were three other co-respondents, but they had been kept out of it in the interests of Watt Gunn. I don't know how he had worked it; anyhow, the little chap appeared, wearing his borrowed purple with an air of reckless magnificence in sin. I can see him now, solemn and flushed with the weight and importance of it, stalking slowly up the staircase of the Old Marlborough Club, trailing that gorgeous iniquity. He had the look of a man who has completely vindicated himself.

He spoke of it in the smoke-room—we were dining with him—and he said it had been an awful bore, but he didn't grudge the time and trouble. He had been a benefactor to two miserable people who wanted to get rid of each other, he had saved three happy homes from a devastating scandal—the three other co-respondents were married men—and incidentally he had saved himself.

He had, but not for long. His next book had a furious success on the strength of the divorce suit. He was ten times more celebrated and ten times more valuable. Somebody told Mrs. Folyat-Raikes that it had been a put-up job, and that Watt Gunn had been made use of. She found extenuating circumstances. She said to Furnival and me: "We must save him from those dreadful people." She meant that she must.

And then Watt Gunn turned nasty. He refused every invitation, not taxing his invention in the least, and sometimes employing a secretary. Mrs. Folyat-Raikes was reduced to hunting him in other people's houses and at public dinners. She was to be seen rushing through vast reception-rooms when they were emptying, haggard in her excitement, trailing her Victorian skirts and shawls and laces. Or you found her wedged in the packing crowd, lifting her eternal lorgnon. And she would seize you as you passed, and cry: "They tell

me Mr. Watt Gunn is here. I'm looking for Mr. Watt Gunn."

He had become dangerous to hunt. He stuck at nothing. Poor hunted thing, he showed his origin by brutal "noes," irritable snarlings, and turnings of his little round back. But he had managed to write and publish *Revolution*. He had escaped her clutches for a whole year.

At last she tracked him down at the Abadam's. He was there because I'd brought him. I'd found old Abadam worth cultivating. I had a one-man show on that week, and he'd bought three of my things the year before. Besides, they'd engaged some Russian dancers, and we couldn't resist that.

Furnival and Grevill Burton came with us, and when we caught sight of Mrs. Folyat-Raikes, we closed round Watt Gunn. He isn't tall, but she was bound to spot him in the crowd, his hair was so funny.

I don't think he saw her all at once. It was in the big reception-room upstairs, after the dancers had gone, when people were trickling down to supper. There was a long, clear space between her and Watt Gunn, and she was bearing down on us.

Furny got hold of his left arm, and by exerting a gentle pressure we hoped to get him decorously away. But that startled him—he was fearfully jumpy—and he looked round. She was then within five yards of him.

You never saw more frantic terror on any human face. I don't know exactly what he did; but he broke loose from Furnival somehow—I think he ducked—and then he bolted. We saw him going clean through people, and making for a door there was on his right.

Furnival and I took Mrs. Folyat-Raikes down to supper by way of covering his retreat. There was only one other thing to do, and that was to sacrifice Grevill Burton—to throw him to her. This, I can see now, was what we ought to have done—it was the only thing that would have taken her mind off Watt Gunn—but at the time it seemed too hard on Burton.

So Furny and I took her down to supper. We'd got the same plan in our heads, quite a good one. We were to land her well inside the dining-room. Furny was to hold her in play while I foraged for iced coffee and fruit salad and *pâté de foie gras*. The idea was to keep her feeding long enough to give Watt Gunn a chance.

Well, it didn't come off. In the first place, the room was crammed, and we couldn't get her far enough in. Then, after she'd sent me for iced coffee, she changed her mind and wanted champagne cup, and told Furny to go and get it. Like a fool, he went; and before we could get back to her, if you'll believe me, she'd slipped out.

What must have happened next we heard from Watt Gunn.

I ought to tell you that she had this advantage over him, that she knew the house, and he didn't. It's in Great Cumberland Place, and Abadam had pulled half of it down, and built it up again over the back garden. There were galleries in it, and bedroom suites, and twisty corridors, and little staircases where you least expected them. The door Watt Gunn had disappeared through led into the library, and the library led into the Italian room, and the Italian room into the Japanese room, and the Japanese room into Mrs. Abadam's boudoir.

Mrs. Folyat-Raikés's first movement was comparatively simple. It was to go back up the big front staircase, and, avoiding the reception-room, enter the library where Watt Gunn was, through the door that gave upon the landing.

Watt Gunn was all alone in the library. He had found a comfortable arm-chair under the electric ring, and he was reading. He had his back to the door Mrs. Folyat-Raikés went in by, but he says he felt it in his spine that she was there. That door was near and at right angles to the door of the reception-room, so that he had only one way of escape—the door into the Italian room. He took it.

He says that the rest of his flight through Abadam's house was like an abominable dream. He was convinced that Mrs.

Folyat-Raikés was following him. He closed every door behind him, and he felt her following him. He went slap through the Italian room, at a hard gallop, into the Japanese room. The Japanese room was difficult to negotiate because of the screens that were about. He saw Buddhas smiling, and frightful gods and samurais grinning at him as he dashed into Mrs. Abadam's boudoir. He had had the presence of mind to switch the electric light off behind him as he went; but there was no light in the boudoir. He went tumbling over things; he trod on a cat, and upset a table and a cage with Mrs. Abadam's parrot in it. He says he thought that he heard a screen go down in the Japanese room as he left it, and that frightened him.

At the far end of the boudoir there was a little door. It was ajar, and a light showed in the opening. He rushed through, slamming the door behind him, and found himself on a narrow landing at the foot of a little spiral staircase. On his left, another little staircase went twisting away to the floor below. Watt Gunn didn't know it, but these were the almost secret stairs leading to Mrs. Abadam's private apartments. He said he thought they were the back stairs.

We asked him later on whether at any moment of his flight, after he had broken loose from us, he had seen Mrs. Folyat-Raikés pursuing him. And he said no, not exactly; not, that was to say, with his eyes. He saw her with his spine. He says that, as far as he could describe his sensations, long, wriggling, fibrous threads—feelers, he called them—went streaming out backward from each one of his vertebræ, and that by means of them he knew that she was after him. He says that when he slammed the door of the boudoir, these feels recoiled, and lashed him up the spiral staircase. He came out, at the corner of a long corridor, into what he took to be the servants' quarters, where, if anywhere, he would be safe.

There was a door at each end of the corridor. The nearer one was open, disclosing a housemaid's cupboard; but the passage through it was obstructed by the housemaid. The

corridor gave him a clear course for sprinting, so he made at top speed for the farther door.

It took him straight into Mrs. Abadam's bathroom.

His first thought was wonder at the marvellous luck that had landed him just there, in the most secret, the most absolutely safe position in the whole house, where, without incurring grave suspicion, he could lock himself in.

There were three doors, the one he'd come by, one leading into Abadam's dressing-room, and one into Mrs. Abadam's bedroom. He locked them all, the outer door first, then the bedroom door, then, to make himself, as he put it, impregnable, the inner door of the dressing-room. Beyond it was Abadam's bedroom.

He says he never saw anything like that bathroom, neither could he have imagined it. It was worth the whole adventure just to have seen it once. He could have spent hours in it, going round and looking at things. It was all white tiles, while porcelain, and silver fittings. There was a great porcelain bath in one corner, and a shower-bath in another, with white-silk mackintosh curtains all around it; and a recess all filled up with sprays—rose sprays, and needle sprays that you could direct on to any part of you you chose. There was a couch where you could lie and be massaged; oh, and an immense linen-cupboard let into the wall, with hot-water pipes running up and down it.

There wasn't a detail of that bathroom that he missed, and he seems to have made considerable explorations in Abadam's dressing-room, too.

But just at first he kept pretty quiet. He lay on the couch, and gave himself up to the great white peace and purity of it all. He hadn't any idea in his head, or any plan. It was only when the maid came to get Mrs. Abadam's bath ready, and began trying all the doors, that he acted, and then it was by an ungovernable impulse.

It was the sight of the beautiful white porcelain bath that made him do it, and possibly the feeling that he had got to account for being there. Anyhow, before he really

knew what he was about, he'd turned on the hot water, undressed, and got into the bath.

It might have been better, he said afterwards, if he'd got into the linen-cupboard and kept quiet; but the rushing of the hot water covered him, and made him feel so safe. More than all, he wanted to wash those infernal feelers off his spine.

So he splashed about; and when he was tired of splashing he just lay and soaked, turning on the water hot and hot. And when he was tired of the big bath, he tried the shower-bath, just to see what it was like.

It was what the shower-bath did to him that put his idea into his head.

You see, he'd got to get out of the house somehow, and he didn't quite know how. He supposed it would have to be through one of the bedrooms, down the big front staircase, through the great hall where everybody would be collected, and he didn't want to be recognised.

Remember, he had the range of Abadam's dressing-room.

He couldn't have been up more than five-and-twenty minutes when Abadam came to me in the supper-room and took me aside mysteriously. When I saw his face, I knew it was all up with my picture-show. He was followed by a young footman. He said:

"It was you who brought that fellow, Watt Gunn, here, wasn't it?"

I said it was, and that Mrs. Abadam—but he cut me short. He said:

"He's been having supper."

I stared, because that was precisely what he hadn't had, poor chap!

"He's *been having supper*, and he's got into my wife's bathroom and he won't come out."

We sneaked out of the dining-room, Abadam and Furnival and I. The young footman led us up the back stairs and through a door—the door by the housemaid's cupboard where



Watt Gunn had seen the housemaid standing, and so into the corridor.

We found a small crowd gathered before the bathroom door. There was Mrs. Abadam's maid, with a nightgown and a loose wrapper over her arm, and a pair of gorgeous slippers in her hand. She was trying to look indignant and superior. There were the upper housemaid, the under housemaid, and Abadam's valet. The girls were sniggering and giggling, while the valet endeavoured to parley respectfully with Watt Gunn through the bathroom door. And you could hear Watt Gunn's voice, all irascible and squeaky, coming through the door:

"'Ang it all, I can't come until you tell me——"

Abadam said: "What's that he says?"

The valet put his ear to the door.

"He says he can't come out, sir. He says he wants to know if Mrs.—Mrs.—what's the name, sir?—Mrs. Folyat-Raikes is still here, sir. He seems to have got her on his mind, sir!"

"Tell him he can't see Mrs. Raikes. He isn't in a fit state."

You could hear Watt Gunn still squeaking frantically and the valet parleying and interpreting.

"He says he doesn't want to see her, sir. And—what's that, sir? Oh, he doesn't want her to see him, sir."

Abadam said he was glad he was sober enough for that. We couldn't hear what Watt Gunn said, but we heard the valet.

"I'm sure I can't tell you, sir. He won't open the door for me, sir."

Then Abadam turned savagely on me.

"Here, see what you can do, Simpson. You brought him in, and it's up to you to get him out."

I wriggled through to the door.

"It's all right, old chap," I said. "You can come out now." I could just hear his small, thin voice saying:

"That you, Simpson? Is *she* there?"

I said:

"Of course she isn't. Can't you see where you are? You're in Mrs. Abadam's bathroom."

He said:

"I know that. If you'll swear it's all right, I'll open the door."

I did swear, and he opened the door, and we all saw him.

That's to say, we saw a figure. You couldn't have known it was Watt Gunn. His hair was parted in the middle, and lay flat down, all sleeked by the shower-bath and by some odorous oil that he'd found in Abadam's dressing-room. He'd got hold of the wax that Abadam uses, and he'd twisted up the ends of his little moustache till it looked as ferocious as the German Emperor's. And he was wearing Abadam's dressing-gown, blue brocade with cerise collar and cuffs. I daresay it wasn't a bit too big for Abadam—he's the tall kind, all legs and arms, over and above his nose—but it had swallowed up Watt Gunn at one mouthful, all but his sleek little head and the terrifying, upturned moustache, and it trailed on the floor behind him.

I don't suppose he knew what he looked like, but from the expression of Abadam's face as he gazed at him I conceived a faint hope for my show.

The servants, being well-trained, had fled at the first sight of him; all except the valet, who was officially entitled to remain.

Watt Gunn still stood in the bathroom door and glared at us over his moustache.

He said, when we'd quite done laughing, perhaps we'd tell him how he was to get out of that confounded place without being seen. We told him first of all to get into his own clothes; but when he'd got into them, he still insisted that he didn't want to be seen. His mind was running on Mrs. Folyat-Raikés.

Abadam said it would be very unpleasant for everybody if he *was* seen; and we said of course he mustn't be. Abadam, with the idea he had and his fear of unpleasantness, played beautifully into our hands.

And so we got him away, down the back stairs, through the basement, and out up the area steps, wearing the butler's light covert-coat over his own dress-suit.

Burton declares that he saw Mrs. Folyat-Raikes in the distance, sweeping through the reception-room and crying: "I'm looking for Mr. Watt Gunn. Has anybody seen Mr. Watt Gunn?"

And the Abadams go about saying that Watt Gunn drinks. They say he has it in bouts, and that he retires periodically to a home for inebriates somewhere near Leith Hill.

But even that hasn't done him any good. He is more celebrated than ever.



THE FREWIN AFFAIR



## THE FREWIN AFFAIR

IT wouldn't have mattered if they'd been ordinary people. I doubt whether it could have even happened. Ordinary people would have been aware of the risks they ran and taken ordinary precautions. They would at least have been aware that they were human.

The awful thing was its happening to the Frewins. They were superior persons, and it was their superiority that made the affair so scandalous and so funny. The superiority of Purefoy Frewin to other women, and of Alexander Frewin to other men—that and their utter lack of any sense of humour.

Not that I blame either of them any more than I blame Margot Cautley. But I do blame the other Frewins—Kitty and Sir Bartle. They knew what Margot was, and they must have known what would happen if they asked her down. They certainly knew that Hatch Green, since Sir Bartle allowed his brother to turn it into a Colony of Superior Persons, is a place of unspeakable boredom, and that Margot is always dangerous when she's bored.

Of course, Kitty excused herself afterwards by saying that was precisely why they'd asked me too. I was there, she said, to see that Margot wasn't bored, and if I'd done my duty the thing couldn't have happened; but Sir Bartle, I must say, never attempted to shuffle the responsibility on to me. He said that Kitty never ought to have asked Margot down—though, indeed, who would have supposed that Alexander——? He added that she would not be asked again. As a superior person himself he didn't approve of his wife's friend.

Margot had said that she wouldn't go if I didn't. So I went. It was worth while, for wherever Margot goes she motors. She called for me (looking most reprehensibly pretty) and drove me down herself in her four-seater. She had not brought her chauffeur.

I ought to say (it's important) that Margot is an accomplished driver and motor mechanic. Also that she is one of those women who are improving by motoring. A slight dishevelment becomes her.

On the way to Hatch Green she confided to me that she didn't know what we'd do when we got there. She said she supposed we'd have to flirt with each other. Of course, there was Kitty—Kitty was a darling. But, she asked me, what can you do with Bartle? I refused to be drawn on the subject of our host, and she said pensively she believed there was a brother.

I said I knew there was, and she became more pensive than ever. She hadn't seen Alexander Frewin—nor Purefoy.

Hatch Green (the Colony, not the village) was built by Alexander to demonstrate that perfection is possible, on earth, to man. It was all whitewashed walls and red-tiled roofs pitched at mountainous angles, and there was a handloom factory in a little wood, and an outer colony of model cottages on the Green.

Therefore I said to her as we passed through: "That's the brother. That's Alexander."

"Which?" she said. "Where?"

"This," I said. "Everywhere."

"You mean," she said, "it's like him."

I meant, and said so, that Hatch Green was the exact expression of Alexander's soul, and of the soul of Purefoy, his wife.

Margot looked dejected. She said: "I see more clearly than ever, Roly, that we shall have to rely upon ourselves." She added that it was a good thing she'd brought the car.

I reminded her that Sir Bartle had a car or cars.



She said: "Yes, but they are *his* cars. This is *my* car. We shall be independent——" Her voice was drowned by the grinding of the gear as she put on the brakes.

We had turned out of the village into the narrow lane that leads to the Colony and had found it blocked by an advancing waggon. For the next five minutes Margot's attention was engaged in backing the car into the high road again, round a nasty corner between a steep ditch and a projecting tree-trunk. I was enthralled by the spectacle of her competence.

That's what I want you to bear in mind—her competence.

She was good enough to say that she liked me because I sat tight in emergencies and didn't offer advice. I said I never offered advice in emergencies I couldn't deal with personally.

We arrived in perfect amity at Hatch Grange. It was like Alexander Frewin's other houses—frightfully self-conscious, all rough-cast and mountain slopes, red-tiled; its front and two exaggerated buttresses enclosed a little court; and it was all new—new as only the Frewins' latest fad could be.

And as Alexander wouldn't let them have any hall or passage-way, we walked straight through the front door into the Frewins' dining-room, where we found Kitty giving tea to her brother-in-law and his wife. Bartle, she said, was away at a political meeting.

And it was really Bartle's absence that began it all, for Kitty instantly fastened on me, which, as Margot said, you could hardly wonder at, seeing that the only alternative was Alexander. I mention it because in some sort it excuses Margot. She pleaded afterwards that Kitty had thrown her at his head, and that we must own it was a remarkably fine head.

It was, and his figure, six feet high in those great clumping boots of his, was a remarkably fine figure; and if you could have deflated him and let out some of his moral superiority, and pumped a little *joie de vivre* into him, he would have been superb—even now, when he was getting on for forty.

As it was, his head ought to have been struck off in profile, on a coin, to show the shape of it and the pride of the firm, thrust-out lips and chin. And then you'd have missed his jolly colouring, his red-brown cheeks, and brown-red hair, and his blue eyes blazing away at the top of him. Still, even physically he was a disappointment. He carried that head and that torso of his like a fighting man, but his legs were *doctrinaire*.

Then you remembered that all Alexander's fighting was to impose his own way of building, his own way of dressing (in jaeger and a special brand of hand-woven tweed), his own way of living, and his own way of looking at things, on other people.

He had been imposing them—all of them—on poor Kitty. Her modish prettiness offended him. It was out of keeping with the house he had built for them, and he was ruthless with people who didn't live up to his houses.

It was clear that he was going to dismiss Margot as a figure that didn't fit in either. She saw his intention, and she made for him—straight.

I don't see what else she could have done, especially when Purefoy ignored her. I don't mean that she refused to speak to her or look at her—only that she spoke and looked as if Margot wasn't there. For Purefoy she really wasn't. And Margot was used to being very much there for other women. Other women knew that whatever they did they couldn't ignore her, and that if they were wise they would reckon with her, and if they were wiser still they would placate her. For Margot could be merciful. She spared the lives of young girls (they adored her) and of small, pathetic women who clung to her. Innocence and happiness were safe with her; unhappiness, too. She was never really happy herself unless she was patching up something for somebody. The repairs Margot had executed would more than make up for any damage she may have ever done, though she was dangerous. You had only to walk humbly before her and acknowledge her competence. Alexander was not amusing, and if Purefoy

had paid her the tribute of one blink she would have let him alone. But all Margot's combative instincts were roused by Purefoy's conceited calm, by the preposterous assurance with which she wore her blue linen djibbah, and by the way she did her hair, in one simple plait above the sleek bands parted on her forehead; that and her almost visible intimation that neither Margot, nor her beauty, nor the clothes she had bought in Bond Street, had any manner of existence.

I remember seeing Purefoy ten years ago, before Alexander married her. She wore a white silk djibbah with trailing sleeves, and looked like an angel—a superior angel—and the hair that Margot objected to was like a gold crown on her head. Even then, at any range of visibility, Margot could have wiped her out. She's got that glowing, vivid, dark-pointed beauty that's simply annihilation to anything a shade lighter. And Purefoy's face had sharpened and her hair had thinned. She had had a delicate, virginal beauty, and it was going, and her complacency and superiority hadn't gone. They'd increased—I suppose because Alexander's superiority made him indifferent to frivolous women.

I tell you she didn't see—she was incapable of seeing—that beauty like Margot Cautley's is serious.

I don't think *he* saw it all at once; he was so wrapt up in himself and his own schemes.

I heard Margot (the minx!) complimenting him on the houses he had built, especially the house he had built for the Bartles. (What I lost of this dialogue she restored for me afterwards.) I heard her say it must make him very happy to look round and see what he had done. He said it didn't make him happy to see what other people did. What was the good of giving them perfect houses if they go and brutalise your interior? He said: "Where you're sitting there ought to be a clear space."

Margot said that was the sort of feeling she had about a great many people, and Alexander replied that in the contracts he was drawing up now he had provided against what he called the intrusion of base and bestial forms. How? It

was quite simple. By stipulating either that they submit their furniture for his approval——

Margot said, *And* their visiting lists?

Or that he should design it.

Margot said, Supposing they didn't like his furniture? And Alexander said, They ought to like it, and they must be made to like it. His brother Bartle was no good. *He* didn't care for anything but drainage. "Not, mind you, that my drainage isn't good; it is; in fact, it's perfect. But," Alexander said, "everything's got to be perfect. There's no earthly reason why it shouldn't be."

He was off. Margot said she let him have his head, just flicking him with an intelligent remark now and then to keep him going.

And Purefoy sat and watched them with that astounding complacency of hers. Every now and then her little cold, stiff smile allowed Margot a certain subsidiary existence as a possible convert or a client.

The next day—for the affair seems to have gone by leaps and bounds—the very next day we were asked to lunch at the Alexanders' and to see their house. Then, Purefoy said, we should see what Alec meant by perfection. It really wasn't fair to judge him by the Bartles' house, where he hadn't had a free hand.

The house—Alexander's house, where he had fairly let himself go—was like his other houses, only more so, more simple, and more, so to speak, righteous, and more intensely conscious of its simplicity and righteousness. We found that in the actual presence of his achievement Alexander didn't claim perfection, only absolute rightness. We were taken all over the place, from the larder to the loft, and shown the absolute rightness of exposed structure, the rightness of whitewashed walls, the rightness of grey oak for all woodwork and furniture, the rightness of brick hearths and open chimney-places, with lots of beaten copper about.

Alexander said, "Nothing is beautiful that is not for service."

The luncheon—well, the luncheon was a ritual, a religious demonstration. Every perfect meal, Alexander said, was a sacrament. We were initiated into the holiness of leadless glaze and a diet of milk and cereals and fruit. And the peculiarity, both of Purefoy and of Alexander, was that they said the same things and approved of the same things and thought the same things holy—semolina, for instance, and square boots—with this difference, that in Alexander was the passionate conviction that square boots and semolina were holy, and that he approved of square boots and semolina because they were holy, and in Purefoy was the serene conviction that they were holy because she approved of them.

All through that luncheon Margot made considerable running with her host. To be sure, she only got a word in edge-ways; but Alexander was distinctly unstiffening, and even he could hardly address the whole of his conversation to one woman without becoming aware of her. I heard him telling her that there could be no sanctity in family life unless our houses were temples, and that his idea was to regenerate society through the family by restoring the original structure and the original beauty of the home. I heard Bartle remarking that he'd do it quicker if he lowered his estimates; and then I heard Alexander, regardless of the interruption, suggesting to Margot that she should join the Colony, and that he should build her a house, and I marked the germ of gaiety and gallantry in his little bow over the macaroni. Never before, within human knowledge, had Alexander displayed the smallest tendency to gallantry, or gaiety either.

And through it all, at the head of the narrow oak board that was the table, Purefoy preserved the astounding spectacle of her indifference. It hadn't, mind you, the vulgarity of an affectation. It was too serene, too sincere, too profoundly and spiritually egoistic. It—it bordered on the Absolute. She may or may not have been sure of Alexander, but she was so sure of herself that she could not conceive his taking an interest in any other woman, which came to the same thing.

Otherwise, she wouldn't have risked appearing in a washed-out, crumpled djibbah, with her hair untidy. The impression wasn't so much of slovenliness as of sheer feminine insolence. Purefoy actually imagined that she could afford to dress like that for a juxtaposition with Margot Cautley. And it was awful to see how the house—Alexander's perfect house—went back on her, and how that tranquil, conceited face and the faded hair and the washed-out djibbah sank into all that grey oak and whitewash with a unity of effect un contemplated even in Alexander's loftiest dreams, while Margot's young, dark beauty burst and bloomed against it like a flower.

I remember nothing about her clothes except that a strong petunia entered into them, and that it couldn't have asked a better background than Alexander's righteously undecorated walls. His clear spaces were an empty stage where her solitary brilliance danced and sang.

I remember as we went home Margot said: "It's a pity there aren't any little Alexanders. *Why* aren't there?"

Kitty said, "Purefoy could tell you that their marriage is perfect as it is. They don't want children. They don't want anything or anybody but each other. Besides, if they had children, Alec would have to enlarge the house. And that would spoil it."

It struck me that from that moment the affair began to look serious. The next thing I noticed was Alexander's irritability; but that was days later, when Margot had taken to going for long, lonely walks with him. (I ought to tell you that Alexander disapproved of motoring and motorists. Nothing would induce him to enter a car if he could help it. He had a sanctimonious horror of machinery.) His temper went a good three days before his appetite. And when I heard Purefoy reminding him for the third time of those plans for the new lecture hall, because the builder had called twice again about them, I felt that it was time to interfere.

I said, "Margot, what are you trying to do? If you'll

take my advice you'll leave Frewin alone." She said she thought I never gave advice in emergencies I couldn't deal with personally.

I asked, Where was the emergency? She had found two innocent people absolutely happy in their innocence. Why not leave them so? She said I wouldn't understand if she told me, and I had got to trust her.

Bartle tried to reassure me. He said Margot was pretty obvious, but Alec wasn't taking any. I said I thought he'd end by taking a great deal more than was good for him, and Bartle intimated that as long as Purefoy didn't object, I needn't worry. Purefoy was reported to have said that Alec knew his way about. In fact, I may say that Purefoy remained serenely unconscious up to the very night of the picnic.

And I ask you, if they had thought it serious, would Kitty have made Margot stop on another week, just because Bartle asked me? If it hadn't been for that week, and for that last evening, and for the picnic, the scandalous incident might never have taken place.

I don't know who was actually responsible for the picnic. Purefoy declared that Alec wouldn't go if we motored. But he did go. He went, decorously enough, with his wife and Kitty and Bartle in Bartle's big car. And he returned in Margot's.

Yes, certainly they were returning when we passed them at the cross-roads, ten miles from Hatch Green.

And that they had meant to return was—as Kitty said—clearly proved by what she had heard them saying when they started. Most distinctly she had heard Alec say: "Are you sure you've got enough petrol?" It was when we were packing the baskets in Berkham Wood where we supped. And Margot said: "Yes. It's only twenty miles, and we've got enough for forty." So that, even granted that Margot made a mistake for once and took the wrong turning at the cross-roads and let herself—and Alexander—in for a thirty-mile round by Royston Common, *that* isn't more than forty

miles; and it was, to say the least of it, singular that when the search-parties set out at four o'clock in the morning—Bartle and I in his big car by the thirty-mile road round the Common, and Fletcher, Bartle's chauffeur, in the run-about on the high road—we should have found Margot's car broken down on the top of the Common, fifteen miles from Hatch Green.

Margot and Alexander were sitting inside it, drinking tea.

They explained that there was nothing else for them to do—no petrol or possibility of petrol within any distance that they cared to walk. Margot didn't like leaving the car, and Alexander didn't like leaving Margot. So they had simply settled down to the peaceful occupation of the Common. Alexander had fashioned for himself a hearth-place out of a heap of macadam and ensured a constant supply of hot water. He had established a heating system in the car itself by keeping an empty petrol-can filled with boiling water. Bartle wanted to know if they had had any plan for the future, and was told that if something didn't come along and tow them, Alexander was going to walk to Hatch Green or the nearest garage.

Bartle doesn't approve of women as motor mechanics, and I think he rather wanted to believe that Margot had forgotten to fill her tank before she started; so he did believe it without any difficulty, and all might have been well but for the vigilance of Bartle's chauffeur, Fletcher. (*He* had taken the high road, you remember.) Fletcher had found a two-gallon can of petrol, which he identified as belonging to Miss Cautley's car, hidden, and very successfully hidden, in the ditch by Berkham Wood.

That was where the scandal and the mystery came in. What I want to know, and what I suppose I never shall know, is, which of them hid that can? A two-gallon can chock-full of petrol doesn't retire of its own initiative into an impenetrable bower of heather and bracken. Neither is a chauffeur likely to discover it unless his search is already



inspired by some suspicion. All I can say is that Alexander, confronted with the can, declared that Fletcher must have put it there himself. Of course, Fletcher swore that he hadn't touched the can. He hadn't gone near Miss Cautley's car. She wouldn't let him go near it.

It was on the strength of Fletcher's find that I tackled Margot. I had dined with her at her club in Dover Street, after our run up to town, and we were in the smoke-room. We had our corner to ourselves there.

I said: "Margot, what were you up to last night?"

She said: "Kidnapping Alexander."

She explained that she hadn't meant it to last quite so long. She had arranged for a breakdown two miles from home, but Alexander made her go round by Royston Common. She thought it would be all right. He knew the country, and she didn't.

I said: "Yes, he knows the country; but—what on earth did you do it for?"

She waited till she had turned *all* the matches in the match-holder right side up with their pink heads in the air, then she told me.

"I did it for his good, and for Purefoy's good. She was too sure of him, and it isn't good for women like Purefoy to be too sure of anything. He was too sure of himself, and it isn't good for men like Alexander to be too sure of themselves.

"The minute I set eyes on them I saw what was the matter with them. With their hateful superiority they'd come to the end of everything. They'd climbed up to the tip-top of it all—and there they were, stuck. There was nothing more for them to do but to go on building more and more houses all equally perfect, and eating more and more macaroni, and wearing out more and more djibbahs and hand-woven trousers and square boots.

"I thought I'd never seen anything more awful than those two—sitting there, staring at each other, and not seeing anything—anything at all, not knowing anything about each

other, or caring, just taking everything for granted, like their own silly perfection. They thought they were united by it, but they weren't. They were stuck.

"And I said to myself I'd simply got to save them. I couldn't leave them like that. They were all right at bottom, poor dears. They only wanted shaking up out of that awful conceit that was at the bottom of it all. The thing was to go for Alexander. So I went for him. If I'd been selfish and left them alone, they'd have gone on being more and more indifferent to each other. But—after last night, Roly—they can't be indifferent any more.

"Alexander knows, now, he isn't perfect——"

I said: "And Purefoy knows it too."

She said: "No, Purefoy doesn't *quite* know it. What Purefoy knows is that she isn't the only woman in the world, and that she's got to buck up and look alive and make herself interesting. I thought at first that a flirtation—just an ordinary flirtation—with Alexander would do the trick. But no. They were *too* conceited. It had to be kidnapping."

I pointed out that it was a somewhat risky experiment, and that if it had been any other man but Alexander——

She said: "But it *was* Alexander. And, besides, Roly, it was *me*."

"Yes," she said, "Alexander's all right. In fact, when you once get him off perfection, he's a dear. He wouldn't come inside the car until the morning, and he kept on boiling water and making tea for me at intervals all night. My heart quite warmed to Alexander."

I said: "It's all very well, but what will Jack say when he hears of it?"

Jack's the man Margot is engaged to. They can't marry because he's too poor and she's too disgustingly rich.

"Jack? Oh, I shall bring him down and show him Alexander. When he's *seen* him he won't mind.

"I think," she said meditatively, "he'll marry me *this* time, if it's only to keep me out of mischief."

He did marry her without seeing Alexander.

I ran up against Margot the other day, and she gave me news of the Alexander Frewins. (I gathered that he had lost his doctrinairiness and had put on weight.)

She said: "He's building houses, all sorts of houses, all over the place, and he's making pots of money. And they've been in Italy and the South of France—oh, and in America. Fancy Purefoy in America! They've left Hatch Green, and Alexander says he's beginning to know something about architecture now, after living two years in the United States.

"Really, Roly, you may say I sent him there.

"They've given up being perfect, and they're ever so happy, and they may jolly well thank *me* for it. Purefoy's got a baby, and Alexander's got a motor-car——"

I said I could see her hand clearly in the motor-car, but she could hardly take credit for Purefoy's baby.

She said: "Really—I'm not so sure."



BETWEEN THE LINES



## BETWEEN THE LINES

### I

IT must be more than a year since that night I dined with Turner at his club, when we talked about happiness. We were pessimists; we didn't believe in it. We challenged each other to point out, amongst our numerous acquaintances, one entirely happy man. Turner instantly produced Lumby (you know the man I mean, Colonel Lumby—FitzJames Throgmorton Lumby). I said I supposed he merely meant a man who has always had everything he wanted.

"I mean," he replied, "a man who has never been aware of wanting anything he hasn't had. That," he said, "was the secret."

Turner does not consider himself a happy man, nor yet a successful one. He doesn't enjoy these evenings that he spends at his expensive and admirably-appointed club. Its perfection irritates him, accentuates by contrast the confusions and dislocations of his life. He dines there at what he calls a possible hour, and (so his wife says) at ruinous expense. But what is he to do? His wife (his second, mind you) dines, more expensively and ruinously than he, at seven-thirty, on sandwiches eaten in the taxi that conveys her to the platform or the committee room; his three daughters dine at six-thirty with the governess. Turner's life (he tells you this in confidence over the soup), owing to Mrs. Turner's multitudinous activities, Turner's life is completely disorganised. Over coffee and liqueurs he confesses that it is not her fault, but his. He has made a mess of his life. Later on in the evening you gather that there have been too many women in it.

That, he begged me to notice, was where Lumby had been so superlatively wise. There had been no women in *his*

life. None, that is, that you could lay your hands on. Turner defied you to name one lady who had been so much as mentioned in connection with old Fitz. He had lived triumphantly, inimitably immune. Turner wondered how the devil he had managed it.

I glanced across the room to the round table where the Colonel was giving one of his delightful little dinners. There was (there always was at the Colonel's little dinners) a preponderance of married ladies, ladies of his own lustre (he was in the later fifties). The other guests were the sons and daughters, apparently, of the married ladies, and they were all young. The Colonel never appeared, if he could help it, in the society of any unmarried woman who was not under twenty-five or over fifty—any woman who was, as he said, at all *possible*.

You could see how possible *he* was; how probable, and if it came to that, how inevitable he must have been to the women of his day, of all his days. You could see it, as he sat there, under the great ring of lights, with the fresh young faces opposite him; you could see it in *his* face with its immutable charm and distinction, still holding—valiantly—its own. And looking at him I remembered that I too had once wondered how he managed it, by what manœuvres, by what subterfuges, by what superb genius for evasion, he had preserved his marvellous immunity. He must have left behind him somewhere a pretty little pile of broken hearts. Women *must* have cared for him. If they had, he had never let anybody know. He was of a matchless chivalry, an incorruptible discretion.

No. I consider that I knew him fairly well; and up to the other day, that day on which I was really to know him, I would have sworn that he could never, by so much as a raised eyebrow, have given one of them away. What was more, he had some magic by which he had kept them from giving themselves away, poor dears. He had managed as well as all that.

And it wasn't only that; up to the day when I first *knew*



him, he had steered clear of women. What had struck me about Lumby was the extent to which he had been let off all round. He had retired before he was fifty. He had been let off the embarrassments and dangers of his duty to his King and his country. He had been let off the performance of his duty to his family and the race. His younger brother, conspicuously married, had performed it for him (and with such success that the son of the house is a replica of his splendid uncle). He had been let off the usual cruelties and indignities of middle age, and had escaped miraculously his own personal and private doom. Any other man of Lumby's build and complexion would have grown stout and florid after forty. Lumby hadn't. He had kept his figure, and the bloom of his youth (a little scattered) and his clean facial squareness (a little full).

Under his cropped moustache (a little grizzled) you could see the whole line, undestroyed, of his upper lip and its behaviour—mobile, urbane, slenderly epicurean. He had kept his fine eyes, eyes with a wide, thick grey iris. They were remarkable, Lumby's eyes, for the things they saw, and still more remarkable for the things they refused to see. It was these unseeing eyes, I fancy, that had helped the Colonel to his immunity. And with it all, he had at fifty-seven, if you please, an appearance of brilliant and indestructible health. At a little distance he might have passed for thirty-five, so marvellously had he been let off.

And lest he should have been disturbed by any sense of obligations unfulfilled, his secretaryship to the Braid Hospital for Nervous Diseases kept him in wholesome, benevolent activity. He had been let off even the pangs of conscience. Up to the other day I should have accepted Turner's reading of him. It was as a happy man that he had always struck me. His face, when you caught it unawares at the window of his club, or in a passing taxi, presented him as happy in every moment and aspect of his being. And there was nothing fatuous or complacent about his happiness. It wasn't that he was pleased with himself; he

was much more pleased with other people and the world and his place in it. You would have judged his state to be profound and permanent. And I believe that, up till the other day, it *was* profound and permanent. He seemed to have some tremendous secret. I had said so that night to Turner.

His secret, Turner informed me, his tremendous secret, was simply his lack (Turner impressed it on me with emotion as we parted), his "absolute and total lack of anything like imagination, Simpson."

Turner's opinion at that hour of the evening was apt to be too emotional to matter much; but I met a woman once, a woman moved only by the high white flame of moral disapproval, who agreed with Turner. I heard her declare with vivacity, against a dozen dissenting voices, that the Secretary to the Braid Hospital for Nervous Diseases hadn't a nerve in his composition; that, if you were made like that, you didn't feel anything and didn't suffer, so no wonder he was happy, but for *her* part she wouldn't thank you for happiness on those terms. As for imagination, he hadn't a spark of anything you could mistake for it; he had never in his life conceived an idea or cherished a fiction or an illusion. Not only had he never imagined anything about anybody, but nobody could ever imagine anything about him. That was why there weren't any stories.

And up till the other day I should have said the same thing. I should have said that was why.

## II

By the other day I mean some day in April, about six weeks ago. I know it was April by the look of the park as we passed through it, Lumby and I. The look of the park and the look on poor Lumby's face as he sat beside me in the taxi stuck together somehow in my memory. And that is how I date it.

Events had been incubating long before April. There had

been changes in the Braid Hospital where Lumby was secretary. They began, he said, in the autumn of last year when old Peters, the house-physician, left to take charge of a sanatorium in Cheshire. Peters had no sooner got his sanatorium than he married the admirable Miss Lascelles (who was matron at the Braid) and took her with him.

I think Lumby was sorry when she went. She was fifty and a matron, which placed her at once, from Lumby's peculiar point of view, among the women who were not possible. In any case, she was a little harmless, grey and drab thing, devoted to her profession. Lumby was safe in describing her as "a perfect dear." And besides, there had been Peters. And yet Miss Lascelles came into it somehow. She prepared the ground by creating in the Colonel's mind a sense of security, of unabridged immunity as regards matrons (otherwise his position would have been, as he said himself, untenable).

Lumby's position kept him in his office at the Braid from ten till four. I believe he had gone the length of having tea with Miss Lascelles; and I once found that discreet and austere sympathetic lady having tea with him in his chambers in Half Moon Street. I remember her now, in her stiff nurse's uniform, sitting bolt upright on Fitz's divan, looking odd among all his oriental glooms and splendours, and the Buddhas and Krishnas and things he had brought back with him from India. She was smiling a little superior, professional smile, and telling him how well he looked, a thing which for some reason Fitz never liked to be told. She wouldn't have been sitting there if he hadn't known that he (and she, too, for that matter) was safe.

And the new matron (I took an early opportunity of calling on him in his office to inquire), the new matron, Miss Manisty, was, if anything, safer, more professional, more—scientific (I observed that Fitz paused perceptibly for the defining word) than Miss Lascelles. Miss Lascelles was admirable and a perfect dear; but Miss Manisty was—well, slightly younger and decidedly more up to date. Miss Man-

isty had impressed the committee very favourably; she was working well with Filson, the new house-physician; and she had an influence, a wonderful influence, over the patients.

All this Fitz told me with the utmost gravity, as if I were interested in his old hospital. (To be sure, I had subscribed to it, to please Fitz.)

He went on to inform me that there was a question up before the committee now, a scheme of the new matron's, for converting the best of their free wards, on the first floor, looking south, next door to her own quarters, into four new private rooms for paying patients, patients who could be made to pay to any extent. The committee *had* set their faces against the multiplying of private wards at the expense (for really it amounted to that) of their poorer patients. It wasn't as if they could afford to build. Fitz agreed with the committee. But—Miss Manisty had extraordinary influence with the committee.

At that point he was interrupted by the telephone with a nurse at the other end of it. Of course I at once offered to go; but, with his face half hidden by the receiver, he yet managed to convey to me a signal, a desperate signal, that I was not to leave him. I heard him speak, very distinctly, into the telephone.

"Tell Miss Manisty that I'm very sorry, but I'm engaged at present. I'll see her—*here*—in the office—at five minutes to four."

It was then three-thirty.

He hung up the receiver with a sharp click and remarked to nobody in particular that he had seen her half an hour ago.

At five minutes to four he begged me not to go just yet, but to wait for him in the ante-room. He would be free, he said, at four.

In the ante-room I found the matron waiting too, if a person so dignified and so determined could be said to wait.

She looked at me and I looked at her. I saw an obviously firm and consummately rounded figure, and a face, a large

white face, rounded also and more or less firm. The features of this face struck me at the time as insignificant and flattish. It is probably from renewed encounters that I got my impression of her mouth as a visibly soft thing, pouting a little and a little peevish, a thing that would have been softer still if it had belonged to anything less determined than her face. The strings of her cap restrained the slightly mature redundancy of her throat and chin; its tilted band crowned and confined large quantities of tan-coloured hair. But her body triumphed over the stiff linens that it wore, and the straight shoulder-straps, and the belt that clipped it.

Her eyes slewed round and fixed me again on her way past me into the inner room. I heard through the door the urbane and imperturbable greeting, in Fitz's best secretarial manner, and I said to myself: "He's all right. He knows his way about."

I waited five minutes, ten, twenty minutes; then I left a message for the secretary and went home.

About three weeks later I got a letter from him begging me to come to tea in Half Moon Street on Sunday, at four-thirty. He would be immensely obliged, he said, if I could manage to be punctual for once.

I did manage it. At four-thirty I found him alone and wandering uneasily among his splendours and glooms and his Buddhas. As I approached him he paused before the little round, black, open-work Indian table set for tea. He was, I thought, almost pathetically glad to see me. He explained that he had asked me because he was expecting Miss Manisty (she wouldn't come till five), and he wanted somebody to meet her.

(This was his beautiful way of intimating that he had no desire to be alone with her. I glanced at the tea-cups, and wondered vaguely why there were only two.)

There wasn't anybody else, he said, he *could* ask. "And where," I said, "is Mrs. Vickers?" Mrs. Vickers was his devoted friend, who never failed him on a delicate occasion.

Fitz looked a bit confused. Mrs. Vick, he said, of course, was charming, but——

He wouldn't say it. Mrs. Vick was charming and she was devoted; she would have kept any of *his* little secrets, but she was quite capable of giving Miss Manisty away, particularly if she happened to take a dislike to her.

"Why not Nussy, then?" I asked. I knew that Nussy Vickers, who was not yet officially "out," had served him more than once at a desperate juncture.

Nussy, he said, was too young, and——

"And much too clever?" I supplied his meditative blank.

He said that what he meant was that neither Nussy nor her mamma would have anything in common with Miss Manisty.

And what had I? And what, I asked, if it came to that, had he?

We had both an interest, he supposed, in the Braid Hospital. I was a subscriber.

It was at this point that I suspected my Fitz of some disingenuousness. If he was going to work my subscription in that outrageous way, hang it all, I said, I'd withdraw it.

The secretary smiled. I might withdraw my subscription any time, if I liked, provided I didn't withdraw my support and presence at the moment.

At that I fairly tackled him. "Look here, Fitz," I said, "why did you ask that woman if you didn't want her?"

"Why did I ask her? Oh, well—you see—I——" He hesitated; he flushed before me.

"I see. You didn't ask her. She asked herself."

"My *dear* Simpson." His chivalry rose to repel my gross suggestion.

Then he began to explain—he who had never explained anything in all his beautiful, blameless life. The lady was, like himself, immensely interested in genealogy; and as it happened, curiously enough, her maternal grandmother was a Throgmorton. *His* grandmother on his father's side was,

as I was aware, Lady Adelaide Throgmorton, the beautiful Lady Adelaide of the *Throgmorton Memoirs*. He had noticed that Miss Manisty had a copy of the *Memoirs* in her sitting-room. I knew the book?

I did. What's more, I had read it and Fitz hadn't. I'd heard him say it wasn't much in his line. He meant Lady Adelaide's priceless letters. I knew them by heart. Anyhow, I knew the legend under the steel engraving portrait frontispiece (after the painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds) which states that the original is in the possession of Sir Frederick FitzJames Throgmorton Lumby, of Bromley, K.C.B., Fitz's father. Fitz has got it now, over the chimney-piece in the inner room.

It was in the portrait of Fitz's grandmother, I was to understand, and not in Fitz himself that Miss Manisty was interested, because of the remarkable likeness that existed between Lady Adelaide Throgmorton and Miss Manisty's mother, who was a Spong. Fitz had invited her, he couldn't well be off inviting her to see the portrait and the likeness. Didn't I see?

I saw perfectly. And it was in the moment of my intensest vision that Fitz's man, Pinking, entered and announced Miss Manisty.

She seemed a long time coming in. I wish I could describe the peculiar slow softness and assurance of her approach. I remember it, for, though she wore the same uniform as Miss Lascelles, the dark blue cloak, the little dark blue bonnet and the veil, she looked in it as Miss Lascelles never *could* have looked in her life. She had turned the familiar thing into a supreme, a unique personal decoration. And yet she was not a beautiful woman, far from it. She was only, I think, preposterously feminine.

I could see her little eyes shining there in the gloom and splendour of Fitz's oriental furniture. Then she saw that she was not alone with him, and her flushed, opening face suddenly shut itself up tight and looked peevish. Fitz had not prepared her for me. He introduced her, and I was

made aware that she recognised me as the objectionable person who had kept her waiting outside the secretary's office.

Then another detail struck me. It wasn't much. It was simply that the Colonel called to the servant and told him to bring another cup—for Mr. Simpson. His intonation was unnaturally distinct. I could see that he wanted her to think that I'd dropped in unexpectedly, not that he had asked me. She was to have all the honours of the *tête-à-tête*, while he preserved his superb immunity. I know that Fitz was clever, but I'd never credited him with such devilish, tortuous subtlety as that. I even suspected a further implication. Pinking was not to know that he had asked Miss Manisty, for, you see, Pinking had evidently expected *me*.

She seated herself in a fine immovable attitude beside the great gold Buddha in the corner.

Fitz hung fire among his tea-cups and I turned the conversation on the Braid Hospital, since the Braid Hospital, and not maternal grandmothers, was what *I* had in common with Miss Manisty. I wanted to know what they were going to do about those private wards? Miss Manisty said that they were going to have them. And they were going to have a larger staff and more perfect appliances, and increased efficiency all round. Because the scheme—yes, it was *her* scheme—was going to pay. Had I (Fitz wanted to know this), as a subscriber, anything to say against it? As a subscriber I had nothing, but as a sympathiser with the poor of St. Pancras I had everything to say, and was told that the poor of St. Pancras would be the first to benefit by increased efficiency all round.

I then reminded poor Fitz of his last year's prospectus, in which he had stated with flamboyant confidence that as far as efficiency went, his hospital left nothing to be desired. What they had wanted was more space to meet the increasing influx. He had been trying to raise funds for a new free ward—last year.

Miss Manisty remarked that last year was not this year.



And Fitz said certainly it wasn't and, anyhow, to-day was Sunday. It was his way of letting me know that it wasn't nice of me to talk shop to Miss Manisty. That wasn't what she was there for.

Miss Manisty's smile intimated her entire ability to hold her own. Sunday, she said, was as good as any other day. She really wanted Mr.—Mr. Simpkins?—to understand what they were working for. They meant the hospital to be open to all classes and professions. They got some of their very best cases from mine; and Fitz said that was a nasty one for me. I inquired hilariously whether—really—they would take me, and was told that they took subscribers before anybody else.

"Not," I said, "before secretaries. I say, Fitz, *you'd* be taken first."

Fitz said: "*Would I?*" You could see that he shuddered at the bare idea.

Miss Manisty assured him sweetly that he would be the very first.

He began making furtive signs to me to let it drop. But it was he who had thrust on me this rôle of the interested subscriber, and I meant him to see how I could keep it up. I feigned an innocence which was not mine, which could not have been anybody's who had read Fitz's formidable prospectus. I asked Miss Manisty how you qualified for admission. She said I had only to become an epileptic or a paralytic, or to get some well-defined neurosis, simple or double neurasthenia, or neuritis. Neuritis would do me very well. Then there was brain fag. Didn't even *my* brain get tired *sometimes*? She wasn't sure that she couldn't detect in me the first symptoms of cerebral anæmia. She looked forward to having me under her care long before the Colonel, if I went on as I was doing now.

I perceived that I had become the victim of a grim professional humour. In fact, what I want you to notice particularly is that none of us were taking the hospital seriously except Fitz, who was visibly afraid of it.

She turned her shoulder on me to show that she had done with me, and began talking to the Colonel. Thus I was left at leisure to observe her; I even changed my seat in order to do it better. The first thing I noticed was something queer about her eyes. They were overhung, slantwise, and shaded by a certain thickness in the white flesh below the eyebrows. This made them look smaller than they were, but it increased, it levelled at you the positively fearful concentration of their gaze. And as I took in the queerness of her eyes and the width of her nostrils, and the lines of her jaw and chin, I wondered how I could ever have attributed insignificance to this woman's face. There was something about her, a power, a brooding emanation, which I felt and recognised as the source of the influence she had. Whatever end she may have used it for, it was not, I imagine, spiritual. It was a primeval, savage, animal thing, but subtle, if you like, and—to some people—irresistible.

From her conversation, exclusively addressed to Fitz, I gathered that Miss Manisty patronised the arts. She was asking Fitz if he'd been to the International Exhibition of Women Painters, and that reminded him—I've no doubt it was meant to remind him—that Miss Manisty had not yet seen what she had come to see.

Now I knew that he would have to take her into the inner room to see it. I knew that he expected me to follow him, that he counted on me, he trusted me to see him through. And I wouldn't. I said I must be off; I had stayed too long already; I had things to do.

We had all risen and the woman had her back to me, a back that would have ignored me if it could. As it couldn't it said all that only a back can say. I gathered from it that I was a fatuous interloper, an utterly irrelevant, misplaced, unpleasant outsider. That back provoked and challenged me to stay. And I wouldn't.

And poor Fitz looked at me. He was holding the curtain aside for her to pass in, and she had her back to me as I say. I can't tell you how he looked at me. It was an unforget-

table, indescribable look, and complex to the last degree. Amazement, incredulity that such treachery as mine could be, supplication and reproach and agony were all mixed up in it together.

And yet I left him. I walked out of the room and out of the house and left him in it, behind that curtain with Miss Manisty. I don't know why I did it. I think it was my beastly psychological curiosity. I wanted to see what would happen, and I knew that nothing *could* happen as long as I was there.

## III

Nothing did happen. Turner told me I was a silly ass for ever supposing that it would. He said I needn't worry about Lumby. Lumby was jolly well able to take care of himself. And where was my psychological intuition if I imagined that that was the first time old Fitz had found himself behind that curtain with an enterprising lady? And he didn't think that the matrons of hospitals were much in Fitz's line.

"There he is," said Turner. "Does he look as if anything was wrong?"

He didn't. He had young Tom and Nussy Vickers dining with him, and they were laughing, all three, at each other's jokes.

Yes; we felt that he was safe, untouched, untouchable, most miraculously let off. We chaffed him about the rudeness, the violence of his health. You could see it coming down Piccadilly in a north-easter, fighting with the wind and getting the better of it. He grinned at us, as we passed him, in a sort of savage ecstasy.

I hadn't seen him in his office for a long time. But one day (I think it must have been in March) I called. He started at once on his hospital and began trying to tell me about the new private wards. They'd got 'em, he said; four beautiful rooms on the matron's floor, looking south. I think

he'd have liked to show them to me; but I said I hadn't come to see the hospital, I'd come to see him, to see that he wasn't overdoing it, qualifying, I playfully suggested, for the honours of the place.

He leaned back in his chair and looked, not at me, but at the pen he kept twiddling in his fingers.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I'm rather afraid I am. I *have* been overdoing it."

I looked at him attentively. To the outward eye he presented nothing but his wonderful, his invincible health.

"I've got to go slow," he said, "and take care of myself."

I said: "Don't you?" (I knew he did. It was his little weakness to be fussy about his health. Health like his was such a rare and splendid thing that no wonder he took care of it.)

He said he didn't. He couldn't. It wasn't possible in—in the conditions.

I told him what he wanted was fresh air and exercise and a thorough change. He'd better come down with me to Bude for a week's golfing.

He shook his head. What he wanted was rest. He wanted to go to bed and stay there for a month.

"A bit tired, are you?" I said, and he told me that he was beastly tired. He couldn't do things without going to pieces. It was legs *and* head. "Do you know, Simpson," he said, "I believe I'm in for double neurasthenia."

Now I'd seen him do things; I'd seen him two days before, after three rounds of golf, and he hadn't turned a hair.

"Double fiddlesticks!" I said. "Who told you that?"

He didn't answer. The pen dropped from his twiddling fingers.

"Miss Manisty," I said, "I'll bet."

He looked at me. A scared look, as if I'd caught him somehow.

"She didn't say so," he said, "but I know she thinks it. And her diagnosis——"

"Her diagnosis? My dear fellow," I said, "diagnosing's not her job."

His head was bowed on his chest. Without raising it he tilted his eyes up at me. "She's clever at it, though," he said. "Filson says she's as good as he is."

"Filson says . . . Is *he* then . . .?"

He took my meaning and replied indignantly: Not he. And how did I suppose the work of a hospital could go on if the matron and the nurses and the doctors were always thinking about that sort of thing? It was all very well for a lazy painting fellow like me. (Fitz doesn't call what I do work, he calls it occupation.)

"Well, but," I said, "look at old Peters. *He* married the matron."

If he did, Fitz said, it was his own doing.

"You mean," I said, "if Filson marries Miss Manisty it won't be his."

(Heavens, I thought, he *has* given her away this time.)

That, most emphatically, was not what he had meant.

And of course it wasn't. In fact I doubt whether at this stage he had any meanings in him. It was a vast subconscious fear, a blind instinct of self-preservation that moved and cried in him. It had cried out to me.

"My dear fellow," I said, "you'd really better come down with me to Bude."

#### IV

I had a hurried scrawl from him the next day, saying that he thought I was right. He would come down. We took his room and settled the day and the train and everything. Then, just as I was starting, I got a wire.

*Many regrets. Bude impossible. Lumby.*

I hesitated a moment as to whether I should dash up to Half Moon Street and see what was the matter, or whether

I should catch my train. The weather was glorious, and I decided that I had better catch my train.

Turner wrote and told me what had happened. Lumby was going in for a rest cure in one of the four beautiful private rooms on the matron's floor, looking south. He would be there, Turner said, for a good three weeks.

I could see it all. Fitz hadn't got neurasthenia any more than I had, but he had been compelled to think he had it. He had been the victim of suggestion, if you like to call it that; *I* call it magic, the savage, animal magic that the woman had. But that wasn't all. She meant to have him. But—well, you know what he was, nobody had ever got him, and she could only work it through that little weakness of his about his health. That was where her devilish cleverness came in. Fitz had been dimly aware of it. He had felt the net about him. He had cried and he had struggled; he had almost torn his way out. But the thing had tightened suddenly, and he had got tangled in it and he was held fast.

As soon as I got back from Bude I tried to see him. I only saw Miss Manisty. When I asked what was the matter with him she said that nothing was the matter except that he was tired out. I needn't worry about him, he was being well looked after. I asked her how long he'd be being looked after, and she shut her little eyes and shrugged her shoulders and said she couldn't really say.

Weeks passed. Turner and I talked about organising a rescue party. But we didn't; we didn't do anything; there wasn't anything, you see, to be done. We couldn't get at him. By the rules of the infernal game the poor chap wasn't allowed to see anybody or to read letters or to write them.

Then—it was in April—actually a letter came. It was scribbled almost illegibly in pencil, on a smudged, torn bit of clinical chart. But I made out that I was to call for Fitz and take him away in a taxi that morning, at one-fifteen, sharp. "For God's sake," he said, "don't be a minute too soon or a minute too late."

Well, I hailed a taxi as early as twelve to allow for ob-

struction in the traffic. With matchless cunning I made my man approach Gordon Square (where the Braid Hospital is) from the north. I hurried him up; I slowed him down; I sat with my watch in my hand the whole time. I was in an agony lest I should be a minute too late, and I understood that it would be equally fatal if I were to arrive a minute too soon. I was terrified at the hooting of the taxi as it swung into the Square.

The Braid Hospital isn't all one house; it's three houses knocked into one on the north side. The doctor's and the matron's quarters are at the east end, the secretary's at the west, where he has his private door. The main entrance is in the middle. At the stroke of one-fifteen Fitz appeared at his own door. That's to say I could see a figure standing there on the doorstep, but if you ask me whether it was Fitz I may tell you that I had considerable difficulty in seeing that it was. He—he, Throgmorton Lumby—had no tie on and no waistcoat; his cuffs flapped open at his wrists; he wore, if you will believe me, bedroom slippers, and under his trousers' ends (daintily turned up as he had last worn them), there hung like a trimming, an edge, an inch-long hem of striped silk, pale blue and purple; wristbands of the same, securely, too securely fastened, appeared under his flapping cuffs, and I caught sight of a purple cord and tassel hanging out of him somewhere.

And, as if all this didn't show how swift and desperate his flight had been, he and his silk hat (he had that on) looked as if they had rolled together under the bed; and his coat, his otherwise perfect coat, was ripped down the back seam, proving that Fitz had only got into it by violence and under difficulty. For Fitz's figure was strangely altered. It had evidently sunk in and been filled out again preposterously with a redundance of soft, infirm tissue, the produce of his hospital.

If there had been a policeman about. . . . But by the mercy of Heaven there wasn't.

He was looking south, to the quarter from which he

naturally expected salvation to appear. Then the car hooted. I had the door open all ready for him, and he crept in.

The taxi fairly flew out of the Square, and leaped across Tottenham Court Road into a sheltering slum. My man, my admirable man, slowed up for orders in Great Titchfield Street. Would we say *now* where we wanted him to go?

"Forty-seven, Half Moon—" I was beginning when Fitz stopped me. "Better not," he said. "*Your rooms*—I think—Simpson." I noticed that he panted a little as he spoke. We dashed down Mortimer and Seymour Streets into Great Cumberland Place, and slid through the Marble Arch into the park.

Fitz lay back in the taxi and stared out at the trees and the green grass and the daffodils and things, and I stared at Fitz. It was in his face that the change and ruin in him was most evident. It had regularly gone to pieces. It was dragged and lean in some places and puffy in others. His nose was peaked, and there were bags under his eyes and furrows beside his nostrils and his chin. The flesh of his throat was all loose about his collar. And his moustache, that he used to wear cropped short and clean above his epicurean lip, hung over it in limp points and ragged ends. And his eyes—with his eyes he looked scared out of his life, as if he felt the net about him still.

As we passed Knightsbridge Barracks he sat up and looked out of the window for a second. Then he sank back and laid his hand on my knee.

"Good God," he gasped, "what should I have done if you'd been too late, Simpson, or too soon?"

"It doesn't bear thinking of," I said. "But why one-fifteen?"

"Because She's off duty then. She's at her luncheon, and I'm supposed to be resting after mine."

"But," I said, "how did you get off? How did you ever get that letter through?"

"Don't ask me. I tipped a wardmaid and I tipped the porter. I tipped 'em with gold. I was the secretary and



they thought it was all right. I had my hat all ready under the bed——”

“Under the bed?” I murmured.

“Where She couldn’t see it. I wasn’t two minutes dressing——” (*Dressing!* He called *that* dressing!) “But Heavens! If you’d kept me standing a second on that doorstep——”

“What would have happened?” I asked. I really hardly knew.

“They’d have sent Filson after me, and, by God, Simpson, I’d have knocked him down.”

I inquired whether Filson was also in the plot.

“Filson! He’s as innocent,” said Fitz, “as the lamb unborn. But I’d have knocked him down, all the same.”

It was pitiable to see him sitting there, the wreck he was, and to hear him talking about knocking people down.

I don’t know how I got him into my studio without undue observation, but once there he seemed to regard himself as safe from anything (it certainly was not the sort of place where you’d expect to find him). We had dealt already with the question of pursuit. He had made us get out at King’s Road and wire to Pinking that he was coming home that night. I suggested that the post office stamp would certainly betray him, supposing some woman in a nurse’s uniform turned up at his rooms to inquire for him. He replied that the stamp might betray him, but that neither Pinking nor Mrs. Bidwell would, to any woman, whatever uniform she wore.

The more I thought of it the more I wondered how he’d managed to get off. I asked him how, in a position of such disgusting danger, he dared trust himself to schemes so childish, so reckless, so innocent, so cunning. He said I needn’t criticise them, since anyhow he *had* got off. And I put it to him that he hadn’t got off, he’d been simply let off. (I’m inclined now to think that there wasn’t a maid or a nurse or a porter in the place who wouldn’t have connived at his escape.)

At that he groaned: "Been let off? Oh, have I? Have I?" And he told me that I didn't know the worst. I didn't know what had happened. I said I could see. He had gone into the Braid Hospital bursting with health, and look at him now!

He assured me that his appearance had nothing to do with the hospital (he seemed suddenly to remember that he was the secretary and a subscriber). The hospital was all right—perfect arrangements—he'd been getting on beautifully till last night.

Last evening, he meant. We'd have to go into all that later. That, he said, was where I came in. He wondered if I could let him lie down somewhere and have a nap (he hadn't had a wink of sleep last night). And if it would be possible for him to have a whisky and soda. He'd had to go off, unfortunately, without his milk.

He curled up on my bed; I brought him a whisky and soda, and he went off to sleep after it, like an infant. He slept all through the afternoon, and at six his man Pinking arrived with his clothes (I had wired to Pinking on my own). I can't tell you how Pinking accounted to himself for his master's extraordinary appearance; all he said to me was: "You and I, sir, can form no idea of what he 'ave been through."

I knew I was to know; we were going into all that; but what I could form no idea of was where I came in, where in Fitz's lamentable business I could conceivably appear. It was after dinner that he let me into it. I had taken him to a little restaurant I knew of. Sleep had done wonders for him; and that dinner did more. He dined prodigiously and with a sort of fearful joy. Delicious, enticing danger lurked for him in every dish. To some extent shades of the prison house hung about him still, for I heard him complain more than once about having had to go off without his milk. It came out that, though at that place he was eating practically all day long, he had never had what you might call one square meal.

Towards nine o'clock there came on him a curious high

excitement, a species of intoxication which I attributed to the unusual squareness of his first meal. But I was wrong. It was a thing entirely of the mind. He ate and drank in order to pull himself together. There was something, he said, which had to be done and done at once, and *I'd* got to do it. He insisted on our going back to my studio, for he said I'd work better there; besides, we wouldn't be so likely to be interrupted.

In my studio, over coffee (he asked for coffee), it began to come out. He'd got into a mess, a devil of a mess, and I'd got to get him out of it. I'd got to write something; to make something up out of my head. *He* couldn't; he hadn't any imagination (he spoke of it as if it was a purely extraneous and trivial thing, as if he'd said he hadn't any small change about him). I had. That was where I came in.

"And where," I said, "do *you* come?"

He'd kept on working my interest up and up. Then he hung fire completely. Chivalry, I think, restrained him.

I had to drag it out of him bit by bit. It seemed that without any intention on his part, or any, he was equally sure, on Miss Manisty's, he had—by some ridiculous verbal ambiguity, no doubt—he had produced a terrible misunderstanding. He had given that lady the impression that he had proposed to her. That he was—that they were, in fact——

"When did you first hear of it?" I said.

"Last night, when Filson congratulated me on my engagement."

"Your engagement?" I said. "Good Lord, you don't mean to say it came to that?"

He said that that was—evidently—the impression he had created.

I suggested that he'd better remove it. It was quite simple, wasn't it?

No, he said, it wasn't; when it had been made public, so to speak.

And that was the mess, if you please, that I'd got to get him out of.

"Look here," I said, "what proof has she? Are there any documents?"

He said: None. Unless his temperature chart could be regarded as a document.

I asked him could he swear to what he'd said to her, to the actual words?

He said he could. He'd had nothing to do but to lie there turning them over and over. I tried to get it out of him what he had said. As far as I could make out poor Fitz stood committed, not so much by the things he'd said as by the things he hadn't, the things he'd allowed somehow to be understood.

I wanted to know how on earth, if he hadn't said anything, the question ever arose.

He explained with some hesitations that the whole thing began by her telling him that he need never have been ill at all; that he was ill in consequence of the life he'd led. He told her of course that she was mistaken; that he hadn't led a life, not what you would *call* a life; and she said that that was rather what she had meant—that he hadn't lived; that he was suffering because of the things, the beautiful, sane and necessary things he'd missed. He had offended the powers of life and they were calling out in him for propitiation.

She put it beautifully, he said. He'd never thought it could be put like that; in fact, he wouldn't have believed it could be put at all.

"She seems to have shown considerable ability," I remarked.

He didn't know about ability. She was very sweet, Simpson, and womanly. And she may have been right. Things go on inside you without your being aware of 'em. He certainly hadn't been aware; only, he was in that state when, if a thing's suggested to you, you feel as if it was so, don't you know.

I knew. And I implored him for Heaven's sake to tell me what he'd *said*.

It seems he'd said it was too late; he was too old and too tired, much too tired; he didn't really think he was ever going to be well again. And *she* had said that wasn't making very much of *her*, when it was her business to get him well. She supposed she didn't count. And of course he was obliged to say she did. After all the things she'd done for him.

I supposed that she'd thrown them up to him, the things she'd done.

"No," he said, "she didn't. There they were. I couldn't get over them."

"Well," I said, "and *then*? How did it happen?"

I couldn't get much out of him, he was so infernally chivalrous, but I gathered that it didn't happen then. She was clever enough to leave it alone for a day or two, to let it sink in. Then she came and broke it to him that he wasn't any better; but that it was all in his own hands. She had told him what was the matter with him. He couldn't go on as he had been doing.

Then (he glossed this passage, but I made out the substance of it) she broke down and said that if *he* could *she* couldn't.

That was what bowled him over—the unexpectedness of *her* collapse; for he hadn't understood in the least what she'd been leading up to. And still I had to pound and pound at him. "What did you *say*, Lumby? What *did* you say?"

What he had said—his damning, crucial utterance—appeared to have been that she wasn't to worry—"It was all right."

And while I stamped about the studio he explained solemnly that it was not by any means a laughing matter.

## v

The next thing he did was to ask me if I thought I'd got enough paper? Not letter paper; he didn't want that, but manuscript paper, the sort of thing I *wrote* on.

I instantly produced about a ream of *quarto*. (I could see that the quantity impressed him.) He took it from me, and made me sit down at my writing-table, and laid a sheet of it before me. He sat down facing me with another sheet of paper before *him*, and the ink-stand between us. In all his movements there was a slow, solemn excitement and determination. We would have to collaborate, in a sense, he said.

I asked him if he didn't simply want me to write a letter for him?

He said: No. The letter would have to be written, eventually, by himself. What he wanted me to provide him with was an Excuse. An Excuse, mind you, that would serve. And the Excuse, slowly elaborating itself in Fitz's brain, had taken on the form and substance of a Tale; a Tale told as I would know how to tell it; A Tale circumstantial and convincing; A Tale with all the sound and colour of life about it; a Tale that nobody would suspect of being a Tale; a Tale that would ring true.

There was nothing, I said, more serviceable and more convincing than a tale of a previous engagement.

A previous engagement was precisely what he had thought of himself; but an engagement, in Heaven's name, to *whom*? Besides, how could I make that convincing? He wasn't engaged to anybody and didn't mean to be. (You'll observe how abjectly literal and prosaic he was at this stage of the proceedings.)

I took up a pen and suggested that I should make it merely an attachment, and an unhappy one at that. Nothing so convincing as a tale of an unhappy attachment—and nothing, mind you, more difficult to disprove. She was bound to swallow it.

He assented and we put that down.

"She," I improvised—"the lady you are so previously and unhappily attached to—is young, and beautiful."

"No," he said, "not beautiful. Why should I give her unnecessary pain?"

"Because," I said, "you've got to get out of this mess somehow. *And beautiful*," I insisted, writing.

"And beautiful." He put it down obediently. "And she is dead."

"She isn't," I said. "What on earth's the good of her being beautiful if she's dead? She's alive. She's alive, Fitz, to her finger-tips."

He smiled, but he hesitated still.

"I don't want," he said, "to make it too bitter for her."

"You want, I suppose, to make it hopeless. She's not dead," I said; "she's married. You are only waiting till she's free."

"That's good," he murmured. "And as her husband's eighty I shan't have very long to wait."

(You see how crude he was.)

"My dear fellow, *no*," I said. "Her husband is a young man. But he's unworthy of her. He drinks, he—he does everything, everything he shouldn't."

"Why?" said Fitz. He saw nothing in it.

"Because he's got to kill himself. He's killing himself by inches. It's infamous that she should be tied to such a brute; but she can't divorce him, because—well—you're married to her in the sight of God."

This *was* good, I knew. But I hadn't reckoned with Fitz's indestructible morality.

"No, Simpson, no," he said. "I can't have that. I draw the line somewhere."

He looked straight in front of him as if he saw something; and he began to do a bit on his own.

"You're not making out," I said, "that it's purely platonic? You're not going to tell me that you only love her spiritually?"

"I think," he said, "it had better be a spiritual love."

"My dear chap, considering what you want it for, it had much better not. That woman won't care a rap for your Platonics. She'll say you're welcome to love anybody spiritually, provided——"

He waved me away. "Leave it to me, Simpson," he said. "I love her spiritually, because if I didn't, if I were married, to her in the sight of God and all that, I *might* get tired of her. Whereas—as it is—as we are——" (he amended it).

It was at this point that I began to marvel at him. But as yet it was only ordinary cunning that he showed. "By Jove, Fitz," I said, "you're right! As you are, you and she, you're bound to love her for ever."

"She and I——" He repeated it dreamily and still as if he saw something; and then he wrote it down. "Love her for ever," he repeated.

"It cuts both ways," I said. "*She* loves you for ever, too."

He looked up at me queerly. "Is that the way to make 'em?" he asked.

"It's one way," I said, "but I don't know that it's altogether *her* way."

He asked me then what I supposed her way was. "Her way," I said, "is different from Miss Manisty's way. And yet it's the same. That's to say, it's not quite so spiritual, Fitz, as yours is. For she's a mortal woman. Only what's coarse in Miss Manisty is fine in her. What's ugly in Miss Manisty is beautiful in her. Things that you would abominate in Miss Manisty you adore in her. Why, you know, Fitz, how it is with you when she touches you, as she does sometimes, with her little soft hand, how every nerve in you throbs and shivers deliciously——"

Fitz drew his breath short and hard. I went on; for I'd got to wake him up to it. "You *know* how you feel when you go in and find her in that low chair of hers, wearing a beautiful gown because she knows you're coming. She doesn't turn round, she doesn't see you, but she knows you are there, and she puts up her little hand over the back of her chair for you to take; and you take it, Fitz, and you kiss it. You kiss it like the man you aren't and not a bit like the immortal spirit you are. And then you stroke her hair and it feels all cool and springy to the touch. Thick brown hair it is——"



"It isn't," said Fitz in a thick voice. "It's golden hair—reddish gold."

"At all like Miss Manisty's?" I asked—to test him.

"I don't know," he said, "and I don't care. *She* isn't."

He was looking straight past me now, as if his eyes, that had refused to see so many things, saw something now that was worth while. I am convinced that in that moment he looked on the face of immortality.

I was going on to describe one by one the points of his adorable lady when he stopped me.

"Don't," he said; "for God's sake, don't! You're all wrong."

I asked him how the devil *he* knew.

"I know," he said, "because—because I'm beginning to see her for myself."

I let him see her, or think he saw her, for a minute, and then I put it to him: How could he care for any other women?

"How *could* I? How *could* I?" He stuck that down, too.

"Besides——" I began, but he waved me off again a little irritably and did a bit more on his own.

I went on rather severely, because I was there for this part of the business, and not he. "Besides, there are so many things you've got to do for her. You educate her children——"

"Her children?" He fairly cried out this time. "She hasn't got any children."

"She has," I said. "She has three. You can't do without them. They're a further responsibility for you and a tie and an expense. They—why they make it impossible for you to marry."

He shook his head.

"It's not possible," I said, "to exaggerate their importance. Look at the hole you're in. Hang it all, Fitz, she *must* have 'em."

But he wouldn't hear of it. "She hasn't," he cried. "She

shan't have children. I won't let her have 'em—not *his* children."

I said of course if he felt like that about it, if it made it more convincing for him, we'd leave 'em out. The great thing was for *him* to be convinced, for then he was more likely to be convincing. I was struck with the amount of passion he'd put into it. I *had* waked him up.

"And now," I said, "you've got to make it clear—clear to me, I mean—what your relations with her are. I don't believe in you, Fitz, altogether. It strikes me that this affair isn't quite so spiritual as you've made out."

Then he got angry and said his relations with her were none of my business, and I said: Excuse me, they were, if I'd got to carry the thing through for him and get him out.

Now whether he had convinced himself or whether I had set him going I don't know, but he paid no attention beyond a frantic sign to me to be quiet, not to stop him when he was "off."

To my amazement I saw that he *was* "off." His pen was flying along the paper. He was inspired, kindled, inflamed with an idea. I supposed then that I had inspired him, worked him up, but I know better now.

Presently he flung his pen down and thrust at me what he had written.

"She is everything to me. I believe that I am everything to her. She relies on me absolutely. I manage her affairs. She sends for me at any hour of the day or night. I have had to stand between her and her husband. Her life is in danger from his violence. I left the hospital to-day because I had a summons from her."

That last touch was his own and jolly cute of him. But up to there we might be said to have collaborated. The first sentences came jerkily, broken, jotted down automatically at my suggestion. So far I *had* inspired him. But I could put my finger on the place where he had had his soaring, burning vision, where he had caught fire from it and blazed.

And this was how it ended: "You say that I have missed everything, that I have never lived. I have missed nothing. I have lived—I live now—intensely, divinely, in every moment of my life; for every moment of my life is hers. Our relations are so intimate and so sufficing that they exclude every other interest and every other affection. I don't expect you to understand it, to understand that this is passion. You will tell me that it has been frustrated, and that it always will be, and I tell *you* that I know better. My passion has its own supreme satisfactions, its unspeakable fulfilments; and if I died to-morrow I should die immortally content."

"Is it all right?" he said. "Is it a human document? Does it ring true?"

"Ring true?" I shrieked it. "It rings too true! It rings as if you hadn't had to invent it!"

I knew that he was incapable of inventing anything.

But he swore he had. He swore he'd made it up every bit—except what I'd told him—out of his head.

"Will you swear," I said, "that you never saw that woman?"

At that he smiled strangely and said a strange thing. "I swear on my honour that I saw her—for the first time—to-night."

We cast the thing—Lumby's vision—between us into the form of a letter and posted it in Piccadilly.

It got him off. As Turner said: Trust old Lumby to get out of *anything*.

I saw, I insisted on seeing, Miss Manisty's reply. It said that certainly she would do as he had wished. She would leave him free to fulfil *all* his obligations. Though in her opinion such attachments were unwholesome and unnatural—"physically and morally disintegrating" was her phrase—he was to understand that she withdrew willingly and finally before what he seemed to consider a transcendent claim.

Evidently there was something about Fitz's outburst that had frightened her. I own that it frightened *me* a little. Coming from him, there *was* something unnatural about it,

something that I couldn't quite account for. It may have been that at the Braid Hospital he had been worked into a state in which he was peculiarly open to suggestion, and that, just as he had produced his neurasthenia at a hint from Miss Manisty, so at a hint from me he had produced that astounding Tale of his. I'm inclined to think, myself, that the whole thing was written in him somewhere and could have been read by those queer people who do read things, you know—between the lines of consciousness, I mean; that it was a sort of uprush from the submerged depths of Fitz's personality; that it could only have appeared under the excitement, the disintegration, if you like, of a supreme terror; that, in the grip of his mortal danger, he gave out something that was not his and yet was in him—perhaps as an ancestral passion, an ancestral memory. If you'd read the *Throgmorton Memoirs* (*he* hadn't, you'll remember) you'd know that his maternal grandmother, the beautiful Lady Adelaide, died of an attachment—a previous and unhappy one. There are things in her letters, things written between the lines, that show.

But even that doesn't explain why his vision stayed with Fitz and made him so alive and unhappy. For he *was* alive, alive as he had never yet been to the magic and the loveliness of women, to the passion and the wonder of living; and alive, very queerly and lamentably alive, to the immaterial, the undying thing he carried within him, to the Idea, to the haunting and avenging dream.

I don't defend Miss Manisty, but there's no doubt she had hit the right nail on the head. Fitz *had* offended, mortally and beyond propitiation, the Powers of Life. He had been made aware of wanting and of not having what he wanted. (No, I *can't* tell you which is worse, to have seen your vision too late and be tortured by it, or to have seen it too soon and have given it to someone to destroy.)

Turner noticed something wrong. He asked me what was the matter with Lumby. And I said: Nothing. He had developed an imagination, that was all.

"What?" said Turner. "At *his* age?" And I said that was what had made him so unhappy.

But Turner doesn't believe a word of it. He says Lumby couldn't develop what he hadn't got.

(*He* hasn't any imagination, either.)



THE PICTURES





## THE PICTURES

THOSE drawings are all right.

But if you want to see the most interesting things I ever did—interesting from your point of view—There!

No, you haven't got to say they're clever. Their interest—for you—doesn't lie in their cleverness or in the way they're done. It lies entirely in their sequence and in my utter unconsciousness of what I was doing. You'll see if you'll go through them as they come, the gradual putting together of a man.

I tell you I didn't know what I was about. I had my flashes, but that sort of continuous performance is your job, not mine. I was the blind instrument chosen by Heaven to express Markham as he never could have expressed himself.

Who was he? Only a model, and an amateur, utterly uninspired at that. He turned up, as they nearly all do, on a Monday morning. Of course you get them of all shapes and sizes, but I wasn't prepared for anything so small, so weedy, so insignificant as Markham. It was inconceivable that he should offer himself as a model. If he hadn't been so shabby I should have said he was an agent for some commercial enterprise. He stood on my doormat with the air of a superior person who has called by appointment on important business. He asked me if Mr. Roland Simpson was in.

That was his first insult, his pretending not to recognise me as the lord of the studio. Of course he knew perfectly well who I was. I had on my old painting-jacket, and I could see his little malignant eyes fixed on my palette and sheaf of brushes.

I said that Mr. Simpson was in, but he was engaged—

excessively busy. And I declare to you that this thing—it had no appearance, mind you, of a man beyond its wisp of a moustache—this deplorable object on my doormat actually sniffed when I told it I was busy. It said it would call again later on when I was—not quite so busy.

He did call again. He called on the following Monday when I was out, and on the Monday after that. He was weedier, shabbier, more insignificant and more contemptuous than ever. It was a perfectly beastly day—sleet turning to rain. He was soaked through and stood shivering in the pool he made. His face was all pinched and drawn and sallow.

I wasn't busy that morning, and I said so. The admission (curiously enough) seemed to soften him; but only for a moment. I told him he had better come in and dry himself. He came in with the lofty reluctance of a man pressed for time and conferring a favour; and he took up a position before my stove for ever so long, with clouds and mists and long shreds of steam wreathing and writhing out of him. It wasn't till he had turned himself round and began to steam backwards that he was able to look about him. Evidently he had never been in a studio before. He was taking it all in—the big north light, the platform for the model, the easels, and all my poor properties. He seemed to be counting them, appraising them—their shabbiness and cheapness, I supposed—for some unintelligible purpose of his own. Then—when he'd finished his valuation—he gave, well, you can only describe it as another and infinitely more complicated sniff. I can't tell you what there was in it; disparagement, hostility, defiance. Whatever malignity had been left over from his former attitude he pressed into that supreme, that implacable sniff.

I remember I mixed him some whisky and water, rather stiff and hot, and I looked for his eye to kindle as I gave it to him. It didn't. He took the whisky, took it as if it had been his birthright that I had kept him out of for many years, but he drank it with no enthusiasm. He didn't even

finish it. Whatever depths he had sunk to it wasn't drink that had brought him there.

By this time he was firmly seated, and he presently made it clear that he was prepared to sit to me for as many hours, he said, as I chose. I broke it to him as gently as I could that I had no use for him.

He said: "Then I suppose *I* shall have to starve."

He didn't whine about it (from the beginning to the end of our acquaintance Markham never whined). On the contrary, he smiled like one calling your attention to a preposterous case. That he should starve while *I* was nourished, what, he seemed to say, could be more preposterous? He displayed a decorous, a perfect and superb detachment in contemplating the monstrous irony of the thing. He implied unmistakably that it was up to me to put an end to it. By my putting an end to it the purposes of eternal Justice would certainly be appeased; but, as for him, responsibility in this matter could hardly be expected of him.

It ended by my engaging Markham to sit to me, from time to time, at three and sixpence an hour. But I told him again I was afraid I wouldn't have much use for him.

How little use I had those sketches you've got there will show you. First of all there are only bits of him—not even that, bits of his clothes, a boot, a sleeve, a trouser leg. Then *he* comes—a hand, a foot, dozens of them. There are his toes all crumpled just as he took them out of his boot. (No, he hadn't any socks on that time. He went away in a pair of mine.) Then the figure—every conceivable posture, and all spontaneous. Then his face——

The faces frighten you, do they? They used to frighten me, some of them.

And then——

I'm afraid he wouldn't have liked you to see these studies from the nude; but you've got to; it's the only way you can get at him. And if he'd known how tender you are—I shouldn't show them to you if you weren't.

You *do* begin to see him?

I say, do you feel a draught from that window? You've got a cold or something, haven't you?

Oh come, if I'd known you were going to take him that way—— You mustn't, really. Yes, I know, it's his poor back. I couldn't bear it either. There was something about it that fetched me, melted me, every time. If it hadn't been for Markham's back I don't think I could have gone on employing him.

That? It *is* terrible. He's crouching down, do you see, by the stove to warm himself. He didn't know at first I was drawing him. He always shivered when he had his clothes off. The other models get used to it. He never did. Perhaps I oughtn't to have done it. It was pitiful—his posture. But I couldn't resist it. I wanted just that, the sharpness of the spine and the strained curve of the lean hips——

That's not what you mean? Oh—he's looking round so queerly because he's looking at *me*. He hated me. I stood between him and starvation. I was the only thing that stood. That was why he hated me.

But I didn't realise the extent of it until I made him sit for the nude. I was tired of drawing Markham with his clothes on. I was just beginning to see something in him. I found that his precise type of insignificance was jolly difficult to draw. There was something subtle and elusive, as they say, about his character, his quality, the meanness of the little mean man.

And I was only half getting him. I felt that his face was powerless to express all the horridness of his horrid little soul. That, the essence of him, could only be revealed in its perfection through his whole body. He wasn't altogether valueless. There were possibilities there. The more I worked at his face, the more I wanted to see and to draw his body, poisoned, stunted and distorted by his soul.

But for a long time he refused flatly to sit for the nude. He said it was bad enough to have to sit to me at all, but there were limits to the degradation he was prepared to undergo. Though I mightn't think it, he had about him

some last shreds of human dignity. And for a long time I respected his poor prejudice. I didn't press him to chuck it; though I considered he owed me as much for all the time I'd wasted over him in the beginning.

But at last the day came when I had to tell him that he needn't come any more. There was absolutely nothing more that I could do with him. As he knew, I only wanted him now for one thing, and since he objected—I put it to him that I couldn't go on drawing his hands and feet and face for ever. There really wasn't, at least I thought there wasn't, any aspect of him that I hadn't got.

Well, poor Markham must have been at the last extremity. He consented. He suffered the ultimate humiliation.

After that his rancour became fierce and uncontrollable. Up till then he'd taken it out, as you may say, in faces. He'd never said anything. Of course I'd been aware of his contempt. He'd shown that pretty freely from the first, and I thought he resented the shabbiness of the scene in which he found himself. I'd placed him now as a broken-down valet dismissed for general incompetence. I fancied I perceived in him a flunkey's disdain for my way of living. I thought all the time that he knew, and wished to show me that he knew, I hadn't sold a picture since he came.

There, I own, I did him a great wrong.

There were moments when I longed to say to Markham that it was his fault if I hadn't sold a picture, and that if he continued to come much longer I should be a ruined man; that he surely didn't suppose his appearance in my canvases helped me to sell them. But I didn't say it. I ought to tell you that Markham didn't take any interest in my canvases. He never strolled round my studio looking at them, cocking his head and making remarks, stimulating or otherwise, like Miss Dancy.

Markham, by the way, hadn't realised Miss Dancy yet. If I had not concealed Miss Dancy from Markham, I had very carefully concealed Markham from Miss Dancy. That girl's sense of humour is ungovernable, and if I'd sprung Mark-

ham on her suddenly she'd have giggled in his face and hurt his feelings. Besides, she's a shrewd little cockney devil, and she's caught me more than once in flagrant philanthropy. She was quite capable of shooing Markham off my doormat if she'd found him there.

Well, one morning he found *her*—in my studio. (The charwoman had let him in.) She had been sitting, in a purple kimono, with her hair down her back, and I think it gave him a perceptible shock to see that I employed another model. For a wonder I'd sold a picture—"The Woman in the Torn Gown." The woman was Miss Dancy. She was saying the title was a shyme, because her gowns were never torn, and I was trying to soothe her down when Markham popped in.

I called to him to come here. I said: "What do you think of that picture, Markham? I've sold it."

(I really wanted him to know.)

He looked at it, and he looked at Miss Dancy, and he looked at me. And he laughed out loud. A sardonic laugh. I'd never believed in a sardonic laugh before. Now I heard one.

He said: "I think it's just the sort of picture that *would* sell. What else did you expect?" Then a horrible noise came out of his throat like the growl of a savage animal: "Ar-rr-rh! The Gr-reat Bir-ritish Public!"

Miss Dancy had turned round and was staring at him. To my immense relief she didn't giggle. There was something in the stare, I suppose, that was too much for Markham, for he turned his back on both of us and stalked out of the studio.

Miss Dancy's stare went after him. He must have felt it in his spine.

She nodded her head as much as to say, "*I* know you," as the door slammed behind him. Then she spoke.

"Green-eyed Monster. That's what's the matter with 'im."

I said the poor chap didn't know he had a rival. I

said she was such a stunner no wonder he was jealous of her.

She said: "Me, indeed! It's you he's jealous of. It's given 'im fits."

"But why? Why?" I marvelled.

"Because 'e's a Failure and you're a Success, Mr. Simpson."

"Me a success?"

I'd never thought of myself in that light, nor had anybody else besides Miss Dancy, who was always kind to me.

"Yes, you," she said. "He can't stand your 'avin' sold that picture. Shouldn't wonder if 'e was a bit in the same line himself. Come down like."

I remember we amused ourselves by arguing the point.

But, incredible as it may seem, the girl was right.

He called the next day about tea-time and I let him in. I hadn't any use for him, as Miss Dancy was sitting again that afternoon. But he was looking more than usually sharp and seedy, and I hadn't the heart to send him away with the sound of the tea-things in his ears. So he came in and found Miss Dancy fairly in possession, seated behind the tea-tray in my best chair, with an old coat of mine in her lap that she had been mending. Markham stood and glared at her, confirming *my* theory. She was in the purple kimono, with her hair down her back.

When he had had his tea he did what he had never done before. He walked across to the other side of the studio where there was a whole row of the drawings I'd done of him. He asked me if I'd sold any of those. (I hadn't.)

I said I didn't sell my stuff every day, worse luck; and he turned on me as much as to say I lied.

Then he burst out: "You sell more of it, Mr. Simpson, than you care to own up to. But you can't deceive *me*. D'you think I haven't eyes in my head? D'you think I don't know the meaning of all this here? Statues—and busts—and Persian carpets——" He was staring and pointing at things. "Those 'anging's, and those disgustin' cushions all about—

and you pretendin' you can paint the stuff that doesn't sell! I make no doubt you eat your bellyful." (I'm sorry, but he *said* it. I ate my bellyful four times a day according to Markham.) "You've only got to splash some paint down on a canvas any'ow, and you get your eighty and your hundred guineas for it. Everything you want you can get. *Women* ——" He snarled it. (Miss Dancy had gone behind a screen with the tea-things, and I could hear her giggling there.)

The place was inconceivably shabby. I assure you I hadn't a thing that to a sane mind would have suggested the smallest earning capacity. But Markham thought he was in a scene of brutal, terrifying, and iniquitous opulence. He thought poor little Miss Dancy was my concubine whom I kept in luxury. It must have been the purple kimono that excited him.

"And you talk about your Art. Your Art!"

I took him as politely as I could. There was nothing else to be done, with Miss Dancy behind the screen all the time, dashing my tea-cups about to cover her giggles.

I said suavely: "And you have no use for Art, Mr. Markham, as a Socialist."

I really thought I'd placed him that time.

It brought him up sharp.

"It's enough," he said, "to *turn* me Socialist."

I put it to him that that was all very well, but hadn't he noticed that I never *did* talk about it?

He replied, with a sudden astonishing coolness, that I was clever. I knew better than to talk to *him*.

And there's his face for you as I drew him, snarling. (I was drawing him all the time, only he didn't know it.) It shows you how far I'd got with Markham. With Miss Dancy's assistance I'd placed him as the unpleasant, peevish proletarian, little mean man; with a glint of insanity illuminating his meanness.

After that, Markham, who had been pretty continuous for nearly two years, suddenly left off coming.



Then one day I came on him in Kensington Gardens. He seemed to be crouching like a wild thing among the trees. I got him sideways on. I could have spotted the curve of his spine a mile off.

As I came on I saw that he was sitting on a campstool. He had a canvas on his knees, and a palette. I could see it and the gesture of his hand. He was painting.

It was one of those late afternoons in September when you get lots of blue and purple and gold in the gardens. The grass was a divine green, and Markham must have had a perfect pool of it in front of him, with a clump of trees beyond. I could swear to the bit he was trying to do, because I'd done it myself from the very same place.

Presently he got up and packed his things, and came towards me. I noticed how awkwardly he carried his wet canvas. I was going southwards down the Broad Walk, and he was heading north-west in the direction of Notting Hill Gate, so that the sunset caught him splendidly as he came.

He was walking rather fast, very upright and with his head in the air, walking under light as if under water. But that didn't account for the look on his face. It was the look of ecstasy; and the effect of it—on *that* face—was perfectly uncanny.

He went clean past me without seeing me.

If he'd seen me I think he'd have shown some self-consciousness. He was plunged deep; immersed in his dream, his vision. He seemed to float, to drift by me in it.

Uncanny.

It was as a visionary that I knew him next. There! That's how he looked when he brought me his pictures. Wonderful, is it? It's the only wonderful thing I ever did, and it isn't half as wonderful as he was.

His bringing them, of course, was only a question of time. I think he'd been saving them up, putting off with a voluptuous delay the moment when he should confront me with them—with his genius, you know—and crush me. He must have been brooding for months over this exquisite revenge.

You see, he hated me, hated me, and there was no other way he could think of to get back on me. He was tired of insulting me. It didn't really satisfy him.

Besides, he had his vanity.

So he brought his pictures. There were about a score of drawings in a ragged portfolio, and half a dozen or so of canvases. He didn't spring them on me all at once—he was too great an artist to risk spoiling his effect; he waited till I went off to wash my hands, and then he whipped them out like one o'clock and stuck them up, all in a row, in the best light in my studio, as if he was giving a one-man show there.

And when I came back he was ready for me.

He said: "There! If you want to see the stuff that doesn't sell—look *there!*"

I looked—at Markham. I was afraid to miss a second of him. His face was working in a sort of frenzy, and he waved his hands with wild gestures.

He said I needn't be frightened. He didn't want me to buy one. The pictures, he explained, were not for sale. Never in his life had he sold a picture. He would as soon think of selling his wife's honour or his own. Rather than prostitute his genius by selling pictures he preferred to strip and stand naked on that platform.

He seemed to have exhausted his frenzy in that evocation of supreme abasement. All of a sudden he became extraordinarily still. He said I needn't suppose that he was jealous of my success, that he grudged me one shilling that I earned by my unfathomable ignominy. He might have been some great, calm judge, merciful but incorruptible, pronouncing sentence on me. I needed all I could get, he said, to make up to me for the shame and the torture I must suffer in turning out bad work. Millions and billions of pounds would never have made it up to *him*. As it was, nothing could give him, nothing could take from him the blessedness of his state and the unsurpassable splendour of the things that he had seen. His genius was unrecognised now; but what *was* "now"? Why should he worry about a little miserable frac-

tion of a century, when he knew, with an absolute and self-sufficing certainty, that the everlasting future would be his?

I haven't given you precisely his own words, but that was the substance and the spirit of what he said. His certainty, his denunciation and defiance, the sense of rapture and of vision that he created were the most magnificent things of their kind that I have ever come across.

And the pictures? Oh, the pictures were deplorable. Worse, far worse, than anything you can imagine.

Don't look so unhappy. They didn't matter. It was the dream that mattered. The perfect artist may exhaust his dream by too complete embodiment. Think of the stuff Markham must have had *left over!* Surely you wouldn't have had him debase his vision by anything so banal as accomplishment? No—no—no! He kept it fine, he kept it pure, imperishable in its own spiritual medium. Why he should ever have tried to paint at all I can't think.

Yes, I thought I'd got him that time—a flash of him—the inspired Absurdity he was. It just shows you that inspiration may exist independently of the smallest capacity to produce.

A little mad? Perhaps. But what a benign madness! I declare I envied him. He was safe—safe—safe.

I thought *that*—his divine frenzy—was the end of him, as far as I was concerned; that he'd gone off in a blaze of glory. Months passed and he never turned up.

Then a note came, a little dirty note, giving Star Street as his address. He intimated that he was willing to sit for me again if I would make an appointment.

I made one for a day a week ahead. It came, but no Markham. He sent, by a late post, another dirty little note to say that he was ill and that his wife was ill. He hadn't been able to come. Didn't know now when he would be able.

The wording of that note struck me as suggesting more misery than Markham could bring himself to tell.

I went over the next afternoon to look him up. I didn't

know where Star Street was. But I found it somewhere near the Edgware Road—a street of considerable squalor—and finally I found Markham.

It was in an awful little room on the top floor, and the landlady said I might go in. But I didn't go in. I stood for two seconds on the threshold and saw what I had no right to see.

Markham, in his day clothes, was sitting beside a bed that faced the door. I couldn't help seeing it. I couldn't help seeing him. He was leaning over the bed, as he sat, and with his right arm he held, he supported somehow, a woman. He had raised her body half out of the bed, propped on her pillows. Her nightgown had fallen open, showing her starved breasts. Her head was dropping, all limp, towards his shoulder. The face was livid; the lips drawn up stark from the teeth; the eyes staring.

No, she was alive then; but she didn't look it.

To this face Markham's face was stretched—almost touching. And the look on it and the whole gesture of his body was indescribable. It had the impetus of passion and defiance—defiance of death—and, above all, tenderness. A terrible, straining tenderness.

I don't think he knew when I came or when I left; yet I'm certain he knew I was there, for he moved his other hand—his left—and drew her poor nightgown close. But he showed no resentment of my presence. He was past that.

I went to see him again. Afterwards. She had died that night.

There was nothing you could do for him except to pay the doctor and the undertaker. I believe he hated me for that more than ever. It rubbed it into him, you see, that I could do what he couldn't.

FAME



## FAME

### I

It all depends on what you call Fame. If you mean posthumous celebrity, then I've only known one man who really cared about it. Cared profoundly, with the absolute passion for the thing itself apart from anything he could possibly hope to get out of it. And that was Liston Chamberlin.

His passion was corroding in its very cleanness. It bit into him like pure acid, and consumed him. You may say he died for love of his own immortality.

Yes. Immortality *is* a large order. And you can reckon the chances at a million to one against it. You and I and the rest of us have got our celebrity here and now, and we would not barter our solid cheque for such a ghost of an offchance. *He* would not have sacrificed that millionth chance of his for anything you could offer him here and now.

It seems incredible that a novelist like Liston Chamberlin should have subsisted for twenty years in obscurity. I suppose there are reasons. He was brutal before brutality became the fashion. And he got a sort of beauty out of it. That bothered people. They never knew where to place him. His austerity put them off; and he had no humour. He did not know how to be funny about things that are not funny. So up to the very last he was hardly known in this country. I doubt if he would ever have been known at all if it had not been for Walter Furnival.

Furny's own ambition was to discover somebody. He discovered Liston Chamberlin, and having discovered him he kept him to himself. He wanted to do for Liston Chamberlin what Grevill Burton did for Ford Lancaster.

And he's done it. He's done considerably more than

Burton did; and he had to do it all himself, because in Chamberlin's case there were no letters, or none that were any good; and no diary. Chamberlin seems to have had a horror of committing himself. He never put down so much as a note of any personal matter. As for confiding in people, he simply could not do it. Not even in himself. He was made up of irritable suspicion and morbid secrecy.

And yet, oddly enough, he trusted Furnival. It was settled between them, in a sort of holy compact, when poor Chamberlin was dying, that Furnival was to write his *Life*. So that Furny, mind you, was so far within his rights. He says he did ask Chamberlin what material there was and that Chamberlin said there was what we knew about him (we had only known him three years), and there was his work. I suppose the poor chap thought he would be safe as, after all, we knew so little, and he could trust Furny not to invent things. He has not the imagination.

What he did not allow for was Furny's conscience and his perseverance.

There was Chamberlin's work, then, and there was what we knew about him. Quite evidently they were enough for him. But they were not enough for Furnival.

What we knew about him was that he had, by the mercy of Heaven, an income that he could just manage to live on, and that after his death it went to his wife. We knew that he was married and that he did not live with his wife. We knew that Mrs. Liston Chamberlin was a woman of no education and of an incurable coarseness. We knew that she did not understand Chamberlin. Not that he made any complaint against her on that score. He did not expect her to understand him. He simply left her. You gathered that there had been other grounds, and that the dreadful woman had been at the bottom of all Chamberlin's misfortunes (he had never made any secret of *this*, at any rate). We knew that he was a gentle creature, embittered by misfortune and neglect, but charmingly grateful for any little thing you did for him. We knew that he was forty-nine when he died.



Beyond that we knew absolutely nothing. Not a date. Not a place. We did not even know where he was born.

Perhaps—if Furnival had let it alone. But Furny never could let things alone. He was going to write that *Life*; and as there was not any material (unless you call Mrs. Chamberlin material), he had to ferret about for some.

He began with Chamberlin's publishers. (That'll give you some idea of his destitution.) Thus he learned what none of us had suspected, that Chamberlin was a shrewd man of business, and that within his poor limits he had been relentless. For, really, he did not sell. Furnival saw the accounts and the correspondence.

I said just now he had not any letters. I meant *we* had not any. His publishers had hundreds—stacks of letters, cupboards full, sorted and dated, a correspondence ranging over a score of years. They admitted that Chamberlin had been faithful in the absence of any temptation to be otherwise. That fact in itself is significant; Furny said it gave him a sort of shock at the very start.

They let Furnival take a lot of it home with him. And, really, he might have done worse; because, you see, of the dates and the addresses. (Except for the dates and the addresses, which varied, Chamberlin seemed to have been saying the same thing for twenty years. The letters conveyed nothing but requests for money, for more and yet more money, for information concerning money—inquiries as to when money would be due, and how much money, with suggestions that more money was due than had actually been sent. Through all Chamberlin's agitations and reproaches and suspicions you gathered that the firm had really been very decent to him.)

And in that endless letter-writing, covering twenty years, not a hint of any personal relation with anybody. It was the dates and the addresses that gave Furnival his clues. He found out in one evening that when Chamberlin was a young man he had lived for two years at Queningford, in

Gloucestershire. The first letters, which were exactly like the last, had been written from that place.

Furnival went down the next day to Queningford, in Gloucestershire. He rather hoped he would find Chamberlin's people there and strike the origins at once.

Well, he did not. None of Chamberlin's people lived at Queningford. They never had lived at Queningford. Nobody in Queningford knew anything about them or very much about Chamberlin. The postmaster remembered a gentleman of that name who had left the place about twenty years ago. He referred Furnival to the vicar. The vicar knew nothing about Chamberlin. He had come to Queningford after Chamberlin had left it. He referred Furnival to the doctor. The doctor did not know much. He had been a boy of eighteen when Chamberlin had left. He said, Oh yes, he *remembered* him all right (he seemed to imply that you might have cause to); and his father, who had had the practice before him, knew Chamberlin very well indeed.

Furny says he got the impression even then that it was a lucky thing for Chamberlin that the old doctor was dead and that his knowledge had died with him.

The young doctor was not at all surprised to hear that Liston Chamberlin had made a name for himself. He believed he was a clever fellow. He referred Furnival to a Mrs. Ringwood, who lived at Kempston, about three or four miles away. She might be able to tell him something. She might even have letters. Yes, it was quite likely that she would have letters—but whether she would care to show them . . .

## II

Furnival went to Kempston. He was pretty certain from the doctor's manner that he had struck the trail. Clearly Liston Chamberlin had left some sort of legend behind him at Queningford, and clearly the Kempston lady knew it. Possibly by this time she was word-perfect. It's in villages

like Queningford and Kempston that legends survive in their primitive simplicity. And Mrs. Ringwood was simplicity itself.

Furnival knew—the minute he saw her in her little drawing-room, full of innocent, intimate, shabby things: green plants in pots, and photographs of the dearest members of the family—he knew that whatever she did she would not elaborate. It was a question whether, with all the innocence and intimacy, he would get enough out of her.

But you know Furny's air of rectitude, how utterly disarming it is, and how women like him. Mrs. Ringwood liked him; and he seems to have liked her. He described a plump little handsome lady of fifty-five or sixty, who carried her head as if it supported a coronet, and her body as if it dragged a train; but all shabby: with frizzled hair, rather untidy. Even her handsome little face was shabby, as if it had seen hard wear.

She had the shrewdness of the very simple. She cross-questioned Furnival. She said to him: "A friend of Mr. Chamberlin's? But you're too young to have known him when he was young!" He said that was exactly why he had come to her.

Then she asked him what it was that he wanted to know about him, and he said, "Everything—the way he looked—the way he behaved——"

She smiled slightly.

"—the sort of things he did."

"Oh, the sort of things he did." She said that without smiling.

And she had no portrait of him and no letters. She had not kept any of his letters. Except one.

Yes. She *had* one.

But she did not respond to the gleam in Furny's eyes.

All the same, she made him stay for supper, on some pretence of things coming back to her gradually. But they did not come that first night. They did not begin to come till

Furny's last night. He had been at Queningford a week, stopping at the inn, and walking over to Kempston in an afternoon or evening. It was all to the good, he said, that prowling about in the haunts, the sacred haunts of Liston Chamberlin's youth. Mrs. Ringwood had been able to tell him where they were.

But on his last night she broke out.

"I suppose," she said, "it's his genius you admire so much?" He had been telling her about it to draw her.

Furny said: "Well, of course it *was*. What else was there?"

"To admire?"

"To know about."

"You really *want* to know?"

He said he did. He *had* to.

She got up then and fetched a photograph out of some drawer, and a letter in an old envelope. Furny had a wild hope. He said: "You *have* got one, after all, then?" and that it was photographs he wanted more than anything. . . . Then he looked.

It was a photograph of a girl. A young girl of about seventeen, and beautiful.

That, Mrs. Ringwood said, was her daughter, Mrs. Lambert. She was the girl he was engaged to. Furnival could read what he had said about her. And she gave him the letter. There had been others, she said, but this was the only one she had kept.

Furnival said there was not much in it. It was the ordinary young man's letter. If Mrs. Ringwood would only consent to the engagement Chamberlin swore that she would never regret it. What were her wretched prejudices beside her daughter's happiness? And weren't Dorothy's instincts to be trusted? And he did not feel "passion" in Mrs. Ringwood's sense (whatever that may have been); oh, dear me, no; it was something Chamberlin knew to be everlasting; and there was not one man in a million who could feel what he felt, or see the girl's beauty as he saw it. Of course he

was not good enough for her. Who *was*, he should like to know? She was exquisite through and through. And there was a sentence Furny remembered: *I see all her thoughts like threads of gold in crystal. I don't believe she ever had one that was not beautiful.*

Mrs. Ringwood seems to have told him that the child was sensitive, and that she was afraid he would make her unhappy; for Chamberlin wrote: *The man who made Dorothy unhappy would not be fit to live.*

She read it aloud over his shoulder and said: "Then he condemned himself."

Furnival said: "He did not *marry* her?" And Mrs. Ringwood: "No, thank God. But he could break her heart without going as far as that. If you knew Liston Chamberlin you'll know that he never went farther than was strictly necessary."

And then it all came out. I mean Mrs. Ringwood's pent-up bitterness did. Furnival had wanted to know how Chamberlin behaved. Well—he behaved like a cur. He had wanted to know the sort of things he did. They were the sort of things that men don't do. "Don't *do*, Mr. Furnival." Mrs. Ringwood did not purpose to go into them. But Mr. Furnival might consider himself well-posted when she told him that Mr. Chamberlin was a cur.

He said that the word in that little lady's mouth had a most awful cogency. And when Furnival asked her: Then why did her daughter care for Chamberlin? she said: "*Because* men don't do these things women don't think of them. You don't provide for the impossible."

Furnival certainly had not provided for it. He remarked gravely: "He was a very great genius."

"And that's his excuse in your eyes?"

"It's his explanation. At any rate, it's all we need to know about him."

"Then why," said Mrs. Ringwood, "did you want to know any more?"

Furny admitted that she had him there.

"I wish," she said then, "you'd go and call on her. You'd see then how beautiful she was."

"You mean," said Furny, "I shall see how awful *he* was."

"You'll see why I had to tell you. Since you *are* on the prowl."

It was as if she said, "If you're out for truth, my friend, you shall have it."

### III

Well, he went to see Mrs. Ringwood's daughter, Mrs. Lambert. She did not live very far away; at Colne Marston. I've no doubt it was her presence in the neighbourhood that had kept Chamberlin's legend alive. He had a letter to her from her mother.

He had asked Mrs. Ringwood—and there, I think, he failed in tact—whether Mrs. Lambert would mind talking about Chamberlin, and was told that of course she would not. She was much too happy. He was to say that Mrs. Ringwood had sent him.

He says that when he saw her he had no doubt why he had been sent. It was as if Mrs. Ringwood had realised how improbable her charges must have sounded and had referred him to the living proof of them. Dorothy Lambert, twenty years after, was more beautiful than the portrait of Dorothy Ringwood taken at seventeen. She *was* exquisite through and through. The man who made that woman unhappy *was* damned. He could see at once what Chamberlin had meant by the gold threads in the crystal.

He explained his appearance. He says he hated doing it. He did not know how she was going to take the shock of Chamberlin's name. He felt as if he were throwing a chunk of something beastly into clear, still water. He says something did come over her—the crystal clouded for a second while the thing plumped.

He told her that he understood from Mrs. Ringwood that

perhaps she could tell him something about Liston Chamberlin.

She smiled. The crystal was clear again. Hard and clear.

Then she said: "I'm sorry. I'm afraid I can't tell you anything—anything at all."

It was as if she had said: "You're mistaken if you think you'll get me to help you to hunt him down."

He took it in. He says he felt like a mean ferret, and he wondered why on earth Mrs. Ringwood had sent him to Mrs. Lambert. But, when he looked at her again, quite suddenly he knew. I can see Furny rising to it in his rectitude.

He said: "Perhaps that's what Mrs. Ringwood wanted me to realise. She—she was awfully kind to me."

"She would be."

"And she really helped me a lot."

"Ah—she remembers. I can't help you, because I have forgotten. You see—it was so long ago."

And it was as if she said: "My mother never forgave him. But I have forgiven him. It was so long ago"—without seeing that her forgiveness was Chamberlin's damnation. That, of course, was what Mrs. Ringwood wanted Furnival to see. He was to realise that she was as beautiful as all that.

All the same, she said, she wanted to help him, and she referred him to a Mr. Benjamin Acroyd, who had known Liston Chamberlin when he was a young man.

#### IV

Mr. Benjamin Acroyd lived in Middlesborough of all places. But Furny was quite glad to go there. He said it felt like really getting at the sources. He was glad to go anywhere that was not Gloucestershire.

Mr. Acroyd was an ironmaster. Furnival talks about him as if that one word placed him before you as a grim man who dealt in hard and powerful things with mastery. It

took him a full fortnight to break down Mr. Acroyd's defences. (Mrs. Ringwood had surrendered in half the time.)

He says Mr. Acroyd behaved at first as if he had taken a dislike to him. And the neighbourhood wasn't any good; for Chamberlin had never been in Middlesborough. He spent his time tramping along black roads and over great wastes strewn with pig-iron, meditating on Mrs. Lambert's beauty and wondering what the story really was. He was determined to get it out of Acroyd.

In the end he hadn't to get it out of him. Acroyd hurled it at his head, to stop the sheer nuisance of him, I imagine. The ironmaster had been fairly hospitable, all things considered, and on his last evening Furnival had drawn him by saying that the worst he'd ever heard about Chamberlin was that he'd broken off his engagement to Miss Ringwood. That, he submitted, was not a very black mark against a man. Then Mr. Acroyd thumped the table with violence and replied that as it happened it was Mrs. Ringwood who had broken it off, and the black mark against Chamberlin was that he'd given it out that *he* had—for reasons. And that, mind ye, after the domned scoundrel had borrowed every penny of the poor child's money to pull him out of some dirty scrape he'd got into with another woman.

Furny says he was so frightened that he could only ask foolishly whether Chamberlin had paid the money back. And old Acroyd went on thumping and thundering. "He never paid anything back! Never!"

(We gathered from this utterance that Acroyd had had dealings with him of his own.)

Poor Furny said he wished Acroyd hadn't told him. And Acroyd said that was "a good 'un." "Ye've been badgerin' me for a whole fortnight to tell ye, an' I tell ye this, too, that if I and one or two others hadn't held our tongues for Dorothy Ringwood's sake, the man whose life you're going to write, Mr. Furnival, would have been horsewhipped till he couldn't show his face in decent society."



Furnival couldn't say anything except that, if Miss Ringwood could forgive Chamberlin, he thought that we might. And Acroyd floored him by asking: "What makes ye think she's forgiven him?"

Furny said: "Her whole manner." And Mr. Acroyd said: "Manner be domned. She wouldn't have sent ye to *me* if she'd forgiven him."

It looked like it. And yet Furnival thinks she trusted Acroyd with Chamberlin. As it was, he did his best to stop Furny writing about him. "You take my advice, Mr. Furnival, and leave Liston Chamberlin alone. You'll not do him any good—or yourself either."

## V

But Furny couldn't leave him alone.

He made it a matter of conscience. He said he couldn't possibly have left him *there*, with that horrid light of Acroyd's beating on him. Besides, he believed he was on the right track at last.

After all, Acroyd had told him a lot of things—that Chamberlin was born at Clevedon, in Somerset, and that his people lived there. The ironmaster's father had had a villa at Weston-super-Mare, where they used to go in the summer. Acroyd's sisters had been at the same school in Cheltenham as Chamberlin's sisters. That was how they had become acquainted. Miss Amy Chamberlin was still there, in the old house at Clevedon. He said he didn't advise Furnival to go and see her. But he referred him to a Mrs. Hammond, who had been nurse to the Chamberlins, and was living now at Portishead on the Bristol Channel.

And to Portishead, on the Bristol Channel, Furnival went. His blood was up, and I think nothing would have held him back.

But he took me with him.

We found Mrs. Hammond, very upright and rigid in black silk, established in a bed-sitting-room over a confec-

tioner's shop in the town, where she received us with great dignity. Furny's integrity brought us unscathed through the interview, though Chamberlin's nurse was a most formidable old woman.

She was inclined to talk a great deal about Chamberlin's family. Thus we learned, among other things, that Mr. Acroyd had "fancied" Miss Amy, and that the family wouldn't hear of it. (She impressed on us that they were "county"); but it was a long time before we could get her to tell us anything about Chamberlin himself. It came from her bit by bit that Master Liston "wasn't nice like the other children."

"He had little wirrettin' ways with him. No, sir, I don't mean worrittin'; I mean wirrettin'. That's worse. He'd paddle about in all the dirt he could find, and when he couldn't find it he'd go and look for it. He served livin' things something cruel. He'd pop the kitten in the 'fridge-erator and set the guinea-pigs out in the sun till they was all a pantin' and a sweatin'.

"Nasty tricks he had. And he didn't seem to grow out of 'em same as other children do. And then, I dunno, I'm sure, but I think he *done* something. I don't know what it was, and if I did I wouldn't tell you, but he broke his poor mother's heart. I can tell you that, for it's well known. His brother, Captain Chamberlin, that's Master Arthur, wouldn't speak to him for the last ten years of his life, and, mind you, he was the pick of the bunch, the Captain was. And he's dead."

We reminded her that Liston was dead too.

"Well," she said, "he may be now that there's none of them left for him to torment, except Miss Amy."

"Miss Amy——"

"His youngest sister."

"Do you think," Furny said, "she could tell us anything?"

"No, sir, I do not. I wouldn't go and see Miss Amy if I was you."

But she admitted that it would do no harm to write.

She gave us Miss Amy's address at Clevedon, and Furnival wrote to her from London.

The answer came by return. Miss Chamberlin had nothing to tell Mr. Furnival about her brother, Mr. Liston Chamberlin. As the only surviving member of his family she had a right to remind Mr. Furnival that Mr. Chamberlin's work, and his work only, belonged to the public. His life was surely sacred to his family and to himself. She desired that her brother should not be written about, and felt sure that Mr. Furnival would respect her wishes.

Well, Furnival didn't think that Miss Amy's prohibition need deter him after the solemn covenant made with Chamberlin himself. It was quite clear that Liston had quarrelled with his family, and you couldn't expect to get much out of Miss Amy.

But there was a postscript. Miss Chamberlin referred Mr. Furnival to a close friend of her brother's, Miss Mary Temple, who might perhaps give him some information about his unpublished writings. She enclosed Miss Mary Temple's address.

The words "his unpublished writings" made Furnival sit up. Clearly, Miss Amy knew nothing about them.

That was how it was—always when it came to the exciting point you were referred to somebody else. It was as if they were all afraid of him.

## VI

We hadn't to travel far, this time. Miss Temple lived conveniently near, in Regent's Park. But Furny said he wouldn't have cared where he went. Anything to get away from that dreadful, unburied corpse of Chamberlin's youth, the whole unspeakable aroma of personal reminiscence. We felt sure that Miss Amy wouldn't have sent us to Miss Temple if Miss Temple had anything horrid to relate. It looked, he said, as if this time we were going to get something really worth while—Miss Mary Temple might be the

repository of some priceless document. Anyhow, we gathered that she belonged to Chamberlin's later period, when we *knew* that he was decent. After all, we said, Dorothy Ringwood had forgiven him, and what—against our knowledge of him—was the testimony of a servant or the prejudice of a narrow-minded, irascible, obstinate master of pig-iron? I think we hoped that, if Miss Mary Temple was personal and reminiscent at all, we might get some beautiful impression, probably some final vindication of Chamberlin at her hands.

The impression we did get—it was no more than an impression—yet, well, I can't answer for Furnival, but to me it was more vivid, more authentic than anything the others had conveyed. You see, we hadn't allowed for Miss Temple, for the woman herself; we had thought of her too much as a repository.

Oh, well. I suppose she was *that*. I suppose there's more Chamberlin material stored up in that woman's memory than we shall ever get at. It's there, in stacks and rows, whole ranges of the unpublished, and all priceless.

You felt—you couldn't look at her without feeling—that it was only the priceless things that she would keep.

She was about Chamberlin's own age, and one impression we got at the first glance: that their friendship couldn't have been a recent thing; it covered a considerable period of his life and hers. For he had left his mark on her, and you saw that it must have taken time to score it so subtly. We were told afterwards that she had been pretty once, and you could believe it. Her face had that look of peculiar torture and devastation that you see in dark, fiery, secretly-tender women who have been taken, at their tenderest, and wrung hard. Their darkness and their fire fixes it. I've seen middle-aged blonde women who looked like dish-cloths, all washed out without crying, and then wrung. Mary Temple wasn't washed out; she was burnt in; and the effect was rather beautiful, like fine stencilling.

I never saw a woman look so tired. As if her heart or

her brain, or her eyes, perhaps, had been worked beyond their strength. And yet she couldn't have had to work; she was too well-off. You could see that by the house and by her clothes. She was dressed in a sort of half-mourning, black and white; but whether it was for Chamberlin or not I can't say.

At first—at first she was frightened when she heard his name. Her eyes seemed to flutter and beat us off. But she became sympathetic as soon as she grasped what Furnival was doing (sympathy was evidently her strong point). She said she would be glad to help him if she could; but—she was afraid she couldn't give him very much. If, she said, we could tell her more exactly what we wanted . . .

We didn't tell her all at once that what we wanted was the Unpublished Works. You couldn't—when it came to the point, you couldn't—treat her as a mere repository. It would have been indecent to ignore her, and what she stood for. You see, at the very start she gave you the impression of standing, somehow, for everything that really mattered. So we said, Oh, anything she cared to tell us.

You could see that she had some difficulty in talking about him; not as if she was reluctant; in fact she was almost—in her tired way—eager, but as if she hadn't been used to it and didn't quite know how to do it. We had to help Chamberlin's "close friend" with all sorts of questions. We confessed that we were not "close," and that we hadn't known him very long; and it all came out by bits under a gentle cross-examination. She had known him five-and-twenty years. She said it shyly, as if she really didn't want to shame us with her knowledge. Yet under the shyness, you could feel her little spurt of pride. His people? No; she hardly knew them at all; she didn't think that any of them would remember her. She used to stay in his county sometimes, when she was a girl, and she met him now and then in her friend's house. And afterwards—they corresponded. That was how their friendship had begun. He used to send what he wrote as soon as he had written it; and

when he came to London she saw him, oh—constantly. He brought her all his manuscripts and she used to copy them out for him—for, you know, poor dear, his handwriting . . .

We did know. His handwriting was almost illegible. To begin with, it was so small that you wanted a magnifying glass to see it; and the lines were all squeezed together to save paper; and he had a vicious habit of correcting *on* to them, instead of erasing, so that the original showed through, and it took you ages to disentangle them.

"I think," she said, "I must have copied out everything he ever wrote for seventeen years."

I remember saying: "Oh, but you couldn't—not from his rough draft." And she smiled (thinking, I suppose, of his awful handwriting) and said very simply, "I did. I had wonderful eyesight. Besides, what could you do?" He was desperately poor, she said, and he couldn't afford to get anything typed.

"He wasn't desperately poor when we knew him," we said.

She suggested that perhaps we didn't know him before he married. That was how we came to ask her when he *did* marry.

She'd given us all the dates we wanted instantly, but at this date she stuck. She seemed to have to think back to get it. It was, she said at last, about seven years ago.

Then Furny thought it was time we asked about those unpublished writings we had been told she had.

"But I haven't," she said. "I haven't anything."

Furny asked her: Did she think they existed, then—those unpublished things?

Oh yes, she knew they existed. He had given them to her and she had copied some of them, and she knew. But he had had to take them away—five years ago; and he had given them to somebody else. We needn't worry about his unpublished novels. They were not his best.

She was sorry, though, about the letters.

"The letters?"

"Yes. His letters to me. I had scores of them, and they were valuable. That," she said, "was why I couldn't keep them."

We looked at her, and she answered our look.

"I haven't anything—anything at all."

This time it was as if she had said: "Why do you come to me? I haven't anything. I was stripped. I am utterly destitute.

"You know—I ought to have explained" (evidently she thought she had to explain) "I didn't see anything of Mr. Chamberlin for the last five years of his life."

Somehow we couldn't say anything to that. We couldn't even look at her.

Then she looked at Furnival and said: "I'm sorry," as if she were begging his pardon for having failed him.

We were just going when she said could we wait a minute. There *were* one or two letters that she could let us see. She had kept them because she thought they would have no interest for anybody but herself. If we cared . . .

Of course we cared.

She went upstairs somewhere (to her own room, I imagine), to find them. She couldn't have been a minute.

It was when she came back with the letters that it happened—the thing that made Mary Temple a dreadful memory for us.

Neither Furnival nor I could read those letters, they were so illegible. Then Mary Temple offered to read them to us. She knew Chamberlin's handwriting by heart, she said.

Well, she couldn't read them, either.

We heard her saying to herself: "I can't see. I can't see one word."

Then she began to cry. That was the horrible thing—she cried because she couldn't see to read her letters. And when you think that she had been reading them—and copying all his manuscripts—for seventeen years . . . She had given him the eyes out of her head.

She explained it by saying that she had had a nervous

breakdown seven years ago, and that her eyes had never been the same ever since. She'd forgotten that she'd just told us it was seven years ago that Liston Chamberlin married.

Before we went we *had* to ask her who had got those unpublished novels now.

She told us: "His"—she hesitated—"his secretary, Miss Kate Massingham." She gave us the address.

"And the letters?"

She couldn't say. Miss Massingham *might* have the letters, too.

As we turned away from the house Furny asked me, did I think it was Platonic?

I asked him, could anything that was *not* Platonic look like that?

## VII

The letters, we agreed, were what we really wanted now. I remember we wondered why Chamberlin had taken them from Miss Temple. That part of it was not quite clear to us. They couldn't have been *more* valuable than the great novels which had all passed through her hands. Those seventeen years, Mary Temple's years, were his best period.

There was the break; but that couldn't have been *her* doing. Whatever had happened or not happened, it was she who had been broken. She wasn't likely to have thrown Chamberlin over because he had married another woman. She wasn't—palpably she wasn't—that sort. If he had broken with her it was, palpably, because he couldn't get anything more out of her. She had destroyed her eyesight. Palpably he had exploited every drop of her blood and every nerve in her body; he had squeezed her dry and thrown her away. But even then she must have had her uses as a repository, the safest he had ever found, so that if the letters had no more than a literary value there was no reason why she shouldn't have kept them. Furny had a theory that he had



taken them from her because they were compromising—not to her, of course, but to him—when he transferred his interest to another woman. Furny, you see, was thinking of Mrs. Liston Chamberlin.

I wasn't. Somehow you felt that she, poor soul, had never counted. She had just been squeezed in somewhere between Mary Temple and somebody else.

I told Furny I didn't think much of his theory. He didn't think much of it himself after we had seen Kate Massingham.

She wasn't living at the address Miss Temple had given us, and we tracked her down finally into rooms on a top-floor in Bloomsbury Street. Literally we tracked her down, and she turned on us like a hunted animal at bay.

There was something fine about her. There was something fine even about the scene she made up there; the fineness of a savage thing, quick and slender and supple and defiant.

I've got her here somewhere. She was worth drawing. Yes, here she is. All blonde and long. Long jaw, long nose, tilted like a dog's muzzle, questing. And her wide, restless mouth, and her whitish-blue, rather bulging eyes. But it isn't like her. You couldn't draw her face, it kept on moving so. And you can't get her colour. It was all white, and the heat in it didn't show; it was so deep down. You know the feverish all over, incandescent blonde that never flushes. She was that sort.

Her upper front teeth jutted rather when she talked; and the edges were pitted. I've got her hair all right, though; gold over fawn.

She must have tried to hold on to him to the very last.

She stood there with her hands in the pockets of her coat and stared at us with her pale eyes. Then she asked us what we wanted.

We told her that Miss Temple had given us her address. "Oh, *she* sent you to me, did she?"

And she began to ramp about the room with her fine animal slope and stride. You could see she was excited.

Then suddenly she turned and faced us and gave herself completely away.

"What did Mary Temple say about me?"

We said Miss Temple didn't tell us anything about her except that she had been Mr. Liston Chamberlin's secretary.

"She told you that? That *I* had been his secretary?"

She stood still and then quivered. She almost snorted. "That's what *she* was."

It's absurd to talk about giving herself away. She wouldn't have looked on it in that light. I think she wanted us to know that she had been Chamberlin's mistress. She was proud of it. She considered herself superior to Mary Temple, who thought she had had everything and had had nothing. Nothing at all.

Certainly, we said, we had understood that she had acted as Mr. Chamberlin's secretary for the last five years of his life.

"I see," she said. "You've been round raking up things. Why can't you let him rest quiet in his grave?"

I asked her if she could see Liston Chamberlin resting quiet anywhere? And she said, No, she couldn't. Nor letting other people rest.

We were sorry for her. She looked so hunted and so haunted. Furnival said we wouldn't have troubled her if we hadn't heard that she had the manuscripts of his unpublished novels.

"Well," she said, "what if I have?"

Furny intimated politely the interest that they had for him.

"And you think that I shall give them up to you?"

He put it to her that, considering that Mr. Chamberlin had appointed him his literary executor, he had a claim.

"You want to publish them?" she said.

Furny said: "Not necessarily. I want to see whether they're worth publishing or not."

The girl wanted to know if he considered himself a judge.

The perfect impudence of it took Furny's breath away. But he behaved beautifully.

It wouldn't be left altogether to his decision. He proposed to submit all Mr. Chamberlin's unpublished works to a select committee. A committee of persons who undoubtedly *were* judges.

Miss Massingham smiled as if she saw something funny in Furnival and his committee.

"And supposing I refuse to give them up?"

Furnival explained, with an increasing politeness, that nobody was asking her to give them up for ever, or to give up the original manuscripts at all. No doubt there were typed copies she could let him have.

"I could," she said, "but I won't."

"Why not?" Furny was still very sweet and reasonable.

"Because I intend to publish them myself."

It was so preposterous that neither Furny nor I took it in all at once. We thought she was playing with us, or, more likely, holding out for her price. There we misjudged her.

"I suppose," she said, "you think I'm not the proper person?"

We did think it, and we said so.

"I am," she said, "if *he* thought so."

When we asked her if she had Chamberlin's instructions in writing she simply laughed and said she supposed we thought she was lying. We would have to take her word for it—because she had the manuscripts.

We could do nothing with her. We tried all sorts of things down to bribery, but she was not venal. She persisted to the very end: "I am not going to let you see them. I am not going to give them up, and I am not going to give up publishing them. I can't——" Her voice stuck in her throat. You saw her struggling with it. She got it out as if it choked her.

"I can't give up everything."

Then, as if she was furious with herself and us: "I don't want to talk to you any more. You had much better go."

It wasn't till after we'd gone that we remembered the letters—the letters to Mary Temple.

"Do you think," said Furny, "she's given *them* up?"

I said I didn't.

"Then," he said, "what did she mean by saying she'd given up everything?"

I said I imagined she meant that Chamberlin had made her pay. He would, of course.

And poor Furnival kept on worrying about the letters. Of course she'd had them. What did I suppose she'd done with them?

I said you could only suppose she'd destroyed them. She was capable of it.

You know how innocent Furny can be sometimes. He said: "Why?"

So as not to give the other woman a show. Her show, you see, would have been by a long way the best.

Yes. I'm quite sure about that. Even Furny saw it.

### VIII

Our chain of witnesses had snapped short with Kate Massingham. You'll notice that she did not refer us to somebody else, as all the others had done. So, as we hadn't got the Mary Temple letters, we went over the business ones again, looking for some clue.

There were any amount of addresses, evidently of rooms where Chamberlin had lived. We decided that if the worst came to the worst we could look up his former landladies. And in the end we were driven to it. (We chose only the addresses at which he appeared to have stayed longer than three months.)

We got nothing out of the first three we tackled. Either they were bad observers, or they had poor memories, or they were not interested in Chamberlin. I think we would have

abandoned this line of research as hopeless if Furnival hadn't spotted the one personal allusion there was, after all, embedded in the correspondence. In a letter written from Ormond Terrace, Regent's Park, to reproach the firm for having only sent him a dozen copies instead of the three dozen he considered himself entitled to, he had given instructions (underlined) that all parcels and letters containing cheques, or even references to money due to him, were to be addressed to Bloomsbury Street. He was obliged to make this rather extraordinary request as he had every reason for believing that his landlady tampered with his correspondence.

The dates showed us that he had lived five years at Ormond Terrace in the house of the woman he suspected. The last year covered the period of Mary Temple's illness and of his break with her. The address in Bloomsbury Street was Kate Massingham's address.

All this, and Chamberlin's queer outbreak of suspicion, points to some sort of crisis in his private affairs just then. He must have known Kate Massingham at least six months before his marriage.

We were on a fairly clear track as to dates, and I told Furnival I didn't know what he hoped to gain by going to Ormond Terrace. But we went. He insisted on it. I suppose I ought to give Furny credit for his instinct. It was almost as if he had known.

I must say he spoilt it all afterwards by saying that he went because he felt certain he was on the track of the Mary Temple letters; he was so convinced that I was wrong about them.

A rather attractive little maidservant took us straight into Mrs. Pannett's complicated house at the back. She had broken it to us that if it was rooms we wanted, we hadn't a chance; Mrs. Pannett's rooms were always let. So that, if we'd thought at all about Mrs. Pannett . . .

But we didn't, because of what we saw as soon as we got into her room. On a table in one of the recesses, all among

the gift-books and the shocking china, there was a photograph of Mary Temple framed in blue plush; and on the chimney-piece, beside the dreadful vases in opaque glass with frilly brims, there was a photograph of Mary Temple in a black ebony frame.

We were looking at it when Mrs. Pannett came in.

She was looking at us and smiling at us before we saw her. Then she asked us if Miss Temple had sent us.

You never can tell, but somehow I didn't see that woman tampering with Chamberlin's correspondence. She was too plump, too bustling and prosperous, and too decent.

All that plumpness stiffened when we told her what we had really come for, and I think she looked at us with a faint suspicion.

Well, no; she didn't think she could tell us anything about Mr. Chamberlin. Not unless we'd tell her what we wanted to know about him for.

Furny told her. About the book he meant to write. And that started her. You could see she respected Furny, probably because he was so well-dressed and obviously upright. I suppose she was proud to think she was collaborating.

She sat down to it, plumply and comfortably, and began to tell us things—all sorts of things. She was a repository, if you like, of queer reminiscences.

She told us, first of all, that she wouldn't have taken Chamberlin if it hadn't been for Miss Temple, who engaged his rooms for him. She told us that she had been house-keeper to Miss Temple's father when they "lived at Stavelings," and that her niece, Emma Johnston, was parlourmaid with Miss Temple—Miss Mary, she always called her—now. She told us that Miss Mary had nursed Mr. Chamberlin through a bad illness he'd had, and that she sent him to Ormond Terrace so that he might be well looked after, and that if she'd known the job it was going to be, she doubted if she'd have undertaken it, even for Miss Mary. Certainly she wouldn't if she'd known then what she knew now.

She told us that Chamberlin took a hot bath in the eve-

ning, and affirmed that there were two sorts of gentlemen, the sort that takes a hot bath in the evening, and the sort that takes a cold bath in the morning. Mrs. Pannett had found the cold bath variety more apt to be the right sort. She told us that she wasn't always sure that Mr. Chamberlin had really gone into the hot bath; the splashings round on the linoleum, she declared, were most suspicious (I think she meant spurious).

She told us that he "did things" with ink. And when we asked what things, she uncovered the table where Mary Temple's photograph stood and showed us an immense black stain. Sprawling all over it like the map of Denmark. We tried to persuade her that the table—it was cheap walnut—could have had but little value before Chamberlin had decorated it, and that it was now a priceless relic; but she couldn't see it. His effect on all her furniture, we gathered, had been depreciatory.

And it wasn't as if he couldn't be careful enough when it suited him. "Sir"—she looked at Furnival as if she were preparing him for some supreme announcement—"he used to save up his shirts."

You wouldn't have thought the poor chap's shirts could have led us much farther. But they did.

We asked her, frivolously, what on earth he saved them up for; and she was off.

She told us it was like this. (You *must* have her own words.) He'd put on a clean shirt, it might be on a Sunday afternoon. But he'd leave it off on the Monday morning and go back to the dirty one he'd worn the week before. Then p'raps on the Thursday evening he'd put on the clean one he'd left off, and on the Friday it'd be the dirty one again—as if he wasn't happy till he'd gone back to it. It wasn't dirty enough, you see, for *him*. And sometimes it would be a whole fortnight before she could lay her hands on one shirt to send to the wash.

At this point I ought to tell you Furny rose up in his recitude and said that this was not the kind of thing he

wanted to know or that he cared about. But she only smiled at him and said: "You wait. That set me thinking, and before long I noticed that it was only when he was going to see Miss Mary that he'd put his clean shirt on. And well he might—for there was nothing Miss Mary wouldn't have done for *him*. I'm not saying there was anything between them——"

(Furny said: "Of course not," very stiffly. Can't you hear him?)

"—but he'd have her photograph—that one in the black frame—on his table before him, all day, where he could see it while he was writing; and all night it was on his chimney-piece facing his bed where he could see it first thing in the morning when he woke up. And that made me wonder.

"He was with me five years, and it was like that for the first four; and then, for the last year, it was different. Miss Mary was left all night on the writing-table instead of setting on his bedroom chimney-piece. Then one morning I found her lying flat on her face on the floor, where he'd pushed her off. With his papers—they'd work up and up the table as he wrote, till they fell over the edge. He picked *them* up, right enough, when he left *her*.

"Then me and my niece Emma, we noticed that he didn't trouble to put a clean shirt on when he went to see Miss Mary. He just went in last week's dirty one, so bad that Emma said she didn't know how Miss Mary stood him. I suppose she found some excuse for him. She'd tell herself he couldn't help it; he was so poor. Mind you, he wasn't so poor as he must have made himself out to her, to get her to help him. He let her go on doing it all the time when he was saving up the clean shirt for somebody else."

We asked her how she knew it was for somebody else.

"Because She came here—to his rooms. She called herself his secretary."

"Miss Kate Massingham?"

"That's the one. Tall, she was. A yellow-haired thing. *She* was after no good, I can tell you. And when she took



to coming every evening, every evening he'd put on a clean shirt. That was how we *knew*.

"And she, that Kate Massingham, was that jealous of Miss Mary that she took her photograph and dropped it behind the chiffonier, where I found it, spring-cleaning after him when he'd left.

"But she didn't get the letters——"

The letters! We forgave her then. Who could have supposed that Chamberlin's shirts could have led up to his letters?

Mrs. Pannett said: "No. She didn't get 'em. *I* took good care she shouldn't." (We could have fallen down and worshipped Mrs. Pannett. We were quite sure she'd read them, but we didn't mind.) That, she said, was what she wanted to talk to us about.

We said it was what we wanted to talk to her about.

Then, perhaps, we could tell her what she ought to do with them?

We told her that she ought to hand them over to Mr. Furnival. That was, in fact, what he had come for.

She shook her head and said she'd heard there was a property in letters.

We told her that Mr. Chamberlin's letters were Mr. Chamberlin's property, and that as Mr. Furnival was Mr. Chamberlin's representative, her proper course was to hand them over to him.

She looked troubled, and we thought we were going to have difficulty. She seemed to be arguing some point with herself.

Then, *that* way, she said at last, Miss Mary's letters would be Miss Mary's property, and she would have to send them to Miss Mary.

We asked her then if she meant Miss Temple's letters to Mr. Chamberlin or Mr. Chamberlin's letters to Miss Temple?

It was her letters to him.

She unlocked a cupboard in a recess and took them—out of a tea-caddy, I think; there were fifty-three of them, in bundles tied up with string.

"I suppose," she said, "it'll *be* Miss Mary's letters. It's her handwriting on the envelopes, and her postmark. I found 'em all lying about in the drawer where he'd emptied 'em, and I took 'em and I hid 'em somewhere where that cat couldn't get hold of 'em."

Each envelope was secured with sealing-wax.

"What?" I said. "Didn't he open them?"

"Oh yes, sir. But I sealed every one of 'em up so as nobody should pry into them." It was clear that they were sacred to her. She hadn't even peeped.

She wanted to know what she was to do with them. She didn't like to send them back to Miss Mary because she knew he'd served her something shameful. Besides, Miss Mary mightn't like to think she'd found them.

We assured her that Mr. Furnival was the proper person to return them to Miss Temple.

He did, and told her that Chamberlin had sealed the letters himself. It's the first time I ever knew Furny tell a lie.

Mrs. Pannett must have thought there was something in Miss Temple's letters to Chamberlin. When you think of those fifty-three seals!

But she couldn't tell us anything about Chamberlin's letters to Miss Temple. Except that once she'd seen him cramming packets of letters into a big tin dispatch-box, and she'd seen the "secretary" take it away in a taxi.

She was as convinced as I was that, if those were the Mary Temple letters, Kate Massingham had made away with them.

Just before we left she asked us if we had seen Mrs. Liston Chamberlin. She thought she might be able to tell us something.

## IX

It hadn't occurred to us to look up Mrs. Chamberlin, and we decided that we didn't care to.

Furnival said he had had more already than he could

stand, and we could hardly suppose that Mrs. Chamberlin's reminiscences would be more edifying than those of the other women Chamberlin had exploited, since even poor Mary Temple couldn't say a good word for him. What had struck us was the damning silence of all the nice women concerned. And Mrs. Chamberlin was not a nice woman.

So Furny contented himself with the material he had. He shut himself up with it for months.

He was absolutely determined to write Chamberlin's Life. Nothing would make him give it up. He'd promised Chamberlin, and he was going through with it. You know his pig-headed conscientiousness. He said that Liston Chamberlin was one of the two or three men of genius our generation had seen, that his Life had to be written, and that *he* had got to write it; though how on earth he was going to do it he did not yet know. He seemed to think that if he brooded long enough, light or inspiration or something would be given him.

It really was a horrible position for poor Furny, for he had admired Chamberlin more than any of us, and he had liked him. And from all his long and expensive pilgrimages he had brought back nothing but a handful of revolting stories. He was torn between his decency that prompted him to suppress them and his love of the exact, complete statement. He couldn't make up his mind whether he should present Chamberlin as he was, in those dirty shirts of his, or as he wasn't, groomed out of all recognition. He rejected as imbecile the third alternative—of not presenting him at all. On the whole he was inclined to the hard, firm beauty of the unbiased portrait. A portrait of Mr. Chamberlin that that uncompromising louse of reality would have been the last to take exception to. It would be all in the Master's great tradition. He talked as if he felt Chamberlin's genius behind him, utterly impersonal, urging him to keep back nothing. He said he could see Chamberlin writing his own Life, with his own relentless realism, unexpurgated and unabridged.

I couldn't. I could only see Furny wrestling with a frightful temptation.

In the end decency prevailed.

He got it all down—oh, quite relentlessly. And then he submitted the manuscript to a select committee composed of Grevill Burton and himself and me—and Ormond Scrymgeour.

Scrymgeour was reader for the firm that published Chamberlin, and he voted for the thing as it stood against Burton and me, and Furny's decency. They'd scented the scandalous success of it. I suppose they looked to Chamberlin's *Life* to recoup them for their losses on his *Works*. I may mention that Ormond Scrymgeour had had the duplicate of the complete manuscript and kept it. Also he had copies of all the letters to the firm.

Well, you remember what happened, and the fuss there was. First, Furny came out with his *Life and Letters*, which would have been innocence itself if he hadn't been so palpably jumpy—why, the thing quivered all over like a jelly with his agitations—and if you couldn't read between the lines where he'd left whole chunks out . . . besides all the t's he hadn't crossed and the i's he hadn't dotted . . .

The reviewers all said Mr. Furnival had performed his difficult task with admirable discretion, and everybody had forgotten all about it, when out comes Scrymgeour with his *Real Life of Liston Chamberlin*, with all the gaps filled and a scathing preface charging poor Furny with that British cowardice and hypocrisy which Chamberlin had fought against all the days we had made so miserable for him. You remember how Furny protested and how Scrymgeour defended himself—Chamberlin had the amazing frankness of the scoundrel by genius and predilection—if he had lived he would have given us an autobiography that would have stood between Benvenuto Cellini's masterpiece and the *Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau*. He, Scrymgeour, was only doing for Chamberlin what Chamberlin would have done for himself if he had lived—and so on. And how

Furny came out again and went for Scrymgeour; and how Scrymgeour went for Furny tooth and nail, till at last Grevill Burton broke cover and went for Scrymgeour and settled him; and how among them all they sent the *Real Life* into its hundred-thousandth.

What you probably don't know is that when the beastly row was at its beastliest Mrs. Liston Chamberlin wrote to Furnival, care of his publishers, and asked him to be good enough to go and see her.

We both went.

We found Chamberlin's widow living in a little dingy house off Kilburn High Road, where she supported herself by dressmaking and letting rooms. Her maiden name—I suppose it was her maiden name—Miss Godfrey, Dressmaker, was on a brass plate on the door. She hadn't used his name for that.

Yes, she really was a dressmaker. I know Furny sat on a polonaise or something with pins in it. There were pins all over the place, and the floor was littered with the débris of her art. Finished specimens lay about on tables and chairs.

She came to us there. We had wondered what she would be like; we didn't expect to see Chamberlin's mark on her as we had seen it on the others, because we had understood so thoroughly that she had left her mark on him. I caught Furny stiffening himself for the encounter with the coarse, rapacious creature. He was so sure that he was in for something disagreeable. And then I caught Mrs. Chamberlin smiling at him, not in the least as if he amused her, but as if Furny were a sensitive animal and she thought he was afraid of her and wanted to soothe him.

She must have been about forty-five or fifty. A comfortable woman, well built and well preserved, with a firm plumpness. That marvellous and illuminating and disarming smile came out of a plump and round and rather faded face. It was the smile of an incorruptibly sweet nature. She had a lot of quite young brown hair, and blue eyes that

must have been adorable once; they were still young and innocent and a little wistful.

She said: "This is a queer place to show gentlemen into," and took us into a little room at the back. The room's important. It was furnished with more freshness and comfort than you expect in that sort of interior; there was a thing like a divan in the recess covered with that woollen embroidered stuff you see in studios; a pair of leather slippers stuck out under the edge of it. Above this divan was a shelf with some books and a brown box of Havanas on it. And a man's shabby coat hung on a hook on the door. I confess that these things made me wonder for a minute whether—until I recognized the coat.

She must have known what we were thinking, for she began to talk with studied irrelevance about the weather.

We sat there ever so long talking about anything but Chamberlin (with his coat staring us in the face!) until one of the sewing-girls brought in a tea-tray. Up to that minute Mrs. Chamberlin had been rather faded and middle-aged. And then, quite suddenly, her youth sat up and smiled at us, and we remembered that she had been a barmaid in her father's inn. She had made tea for us, with some idea of paying back our hospitality to poor Chamberlin. It was something in the way she made it—her gaiety, her gesture as she thrust the tea-cups at us at arm's length over the table. You could see her behind the bar, pulling at the handles of the beer engines in her young competence, and smiling. The illusion was brightened by her black gown and white linen collar and cuffs and the silver brooch made of the letters of her name: Fanny, offering the perpetual provocation to call her Fanny.

Mrs. Chamberlin's youth had come in with the tea-cups and it went out with them.

And then she told us why she had sent for Furnival. She had seen, she said, the talk there'd been in the papers, and she'd read the books, Mr. Furnival's and two other gentlemen's—she supposed he called himself a gentleman—and

she didn't wonder at the remarks that had been made. The whole thing was a disgrace. And it had all come from going round talking to the wrong people. If, she said, we had only come to her, she could have told us things.

She hadn't liked to come forward. She never had come forward when Mr. Chamberlin was alive. Mr. Chamberlin had thought it best she shouldn't. She was in a different station from Mr. Chamberlin, and she dared say we knew they'd been living apart for the last three years. That was because he had the idea she couldn't understand him, and he was irritated with her pronunciation and that. But if she'd known what Mr. Furnival was doing she wouldn't have kept back any longer. Because she could have saved it all.

She didn't blame Mr. Furnival. He'd meant well; and he'd tried to understand Mr. Chamberlin. But he'd gone to the wrong people. People who never *had* understood Mr. Chamberlin. That Mr. Acroyd—a coarse man. And Mrs. Hammond—no more than a servant! What could they know about such a man as Mr. Chamberlin?

And there was Miss Temple—Miss Temple had been a good friend to him, she didn't deny. The best friend, perhaps, he'd ever had. But there'd been nothing between them. Nothing. And amongst us all we'd put it about there had; we'd made it look as if he'd served her badly. Well—if he did, if he served any of them—it wasn't his fault, for they none of them went the right way to keep him.

Furnival reminded her that Miss Temple, at any rate, had stuck to him through thick and thin. And Mrs. Chamberlin said that was what she meant. They *all* stuck to him. They were like so many belladonna plasters; and not one of them had the sense to see that it irritated him, their sticking.

She'd read all about that Miss Ringwood. Well—she couldn't say as to the rights of it; but you might depend upon it Miss Ringwood was just such another as Miss Temple. They all took Mr. Chamberlin too serious-like.

That Mrs. Ringwood had hurt him cruel. And he was just like a child if you hurt him. He'd strike out—spiteful!

—and he'd use any language he could lay his tongue to. But he'd no more cruelty in him than a sick baby.

And none of us had seen it. None of us had seen that he wasn't what you might call perfectly grown-up. People were annoyed when he did queer things. But that was *their* fault. It was like expecting a full-grown man's behaviour from a child.

She passed, by some underground track of her own, to Chamberlin's genius. (It was odd; but none of the others had so much as mentioned his genius.) She took essentially the same view of him that we, Grevill Burton and Furnival and I, took; only that what we called his genius she called his brain.

Nobody, she said, made allowances for it. And yet it was more him than anything. It was that big and that restless that it didn't leave him any health or any strength over. It might have been a growth, a tumour or a cancer—it gnawed into him and sucked him dry.

And here we were, taking our revenge on him for what he couldn't help. Not Mr. Furnival, perhaps, but that Scrymgeour.

She said all this without any accent of reproach, with that extraordinary sweetness and patience and comprehension that accepted everything, even us; and yet with a sort of pride; as if she were the only human thing that had ever understood him, and she knew it.

In the end we said Chamberlin was a fool to have left her. She smiled at that. But, we said, he did leave you.

No, she said, he had never left her—really. It was by letting him go that she'd kept him. And he had come back. Nobody but she knew how many times he had come back. When he was ill and wanted nursing; and when he was sore and wanted soothing; and when he was down on his luck. (We heard afterwards, though not from her, that for the five years of their separation he lived on a pension that she allowed him out of her earnings.) There was this room she'd



kept for him—she thought we'd like to see it—just as it used to be. She'd make his bed for him in the corner, and he'd curl up there all by himself and sleep off whatever it was that was troubling him.

If you'd only come to *me*, she repeated, there were things I could have told you. You don't know how kind he was. Why, when I had one of my bad headaches he'd leave anything he was doing to get up and make me a cup of tea.

And when he was late coming to bed at night he'd take off his boots and creep about in his stocking feet, as quiet as a mouse.

"And flowers he'd bring me.

"Little things like that." She brooded.

"Little things like that."

We asked her if she had any letters.

"Letters? I should think I *had* letters—scores of 'em."

We looked at each other. She caught the gleam of cupidity in Furny's eye. She said: "But I couldn't let you print 'em. They was that profane."

"Profane?" (We knew he used to make a mock at his wife's religion.)

"Quoting Scripture about me and calling me the Comforter and the Spirit of Truth, and I don't know what all. But would he have done it if I'd hung myself round his neck and stayed there? Not he!"

We said she certainly seemed to have understood him.

"I understood him so well," she said, "that he never knew it."

That was our last pilgrimage. This time it had been a real one. The woman wasn't a repository, she was a shrine. As we went home from it Furny said there was only *one* thing he regretted—that he hadn't "got her in."

I said it was a good thing he hadn't. She would have damned Chamberlin more than any of them. She probably knew it, and that was why she had kept out of it.

And as if he hadn't been damned sufficiently Kate Mass-

ingham came out in the autumn with a volume of his unpublished writings. As Mary Temple had said, they were not his best.

Also there was an introduction by Kate Massingham.

It began to prey on Furny's mind. The awful thing, he said, was that if only we had left Chamberlin to his obscurity we should never have known these things about him. And now everybody knew them. Nobody would forget them until *he* was forgotten. All his life he had longed for Fame—just pure Fame.

And this, said Furny bitterly, was what we'd given him.

MISS TARRANT'S TEMPERAMENT



## 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 couldn't 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 humour 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 splendour, 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 tea-time. 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 young 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 should 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 an Anberley. It was owing to the outrageous carelessness with which Fanny Brocklebank mixed her house-parties. She delighted in having combinations in startling contrasts.

Straker was not at all sure that he himself hadn't 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 Reggie Lawson and then by Mr. Higginson. It was for Mr. Higginson that Philippa was coming to Anberley—this year; last year it had been for Reggie Lawson; the year before that it had been for him, Straker. And Fanny did not scruple to ask them all three to meet each other. That was her way. Some day she would carry it too far.

Straker, making his dilatory entrance, became aware of the distance to which already his hostess had carried it. It had time to grow on him from wonder to the extreme of cer-

tainty in his passage down the terrace to the south-west corner. There, on the outskirts of the group, brilliantly and conspicuously disposed, in positions of intimate communion, were young Lawrence 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 have been asked to Anberley at all. Nobody but Fanny would have dreamed of asking them, still less of combining them with old Lady Paignton, 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 Reggie Lawson, who sat in agony, sustaining a ponderous topic with Miss Probyn. He remembered Reggie? Her half-remorseful smile implied that he had good cause to remember him. He did. He was sorry for young Reggie, and hoped that he found consolation in the thought that Mr. Higginson was no longer young.

He remarked that Reggie 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 towards 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, rapt 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 candour. 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 him.



"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 need not. 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 an 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 Anberley, 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 Lawrence Furnival, the profane Furnival, the scorner of marriage, caught and tied; punished (she sensed 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 Reggie'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 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 Lawrence 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 colour in her white face or in her black hair, she had no colour 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 Anberley a desert place for the illusion of her sombre 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 Anberley'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 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 realised 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 Anberley was filled with her, filled with white surfaces of neck and shoulders, with eyes sombre 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 was concentrated on one man, Lawrence 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 shame-faced. 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 Philippa 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. Reggie Lawson had joined him, 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, Reggie'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 Peggy. He left her talking to Mr. Higginson, listening to Mr. Higginson, be-

having beautifully to Mr. Higginson, and ignoring Reggie. 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 a hundred 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's 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 marvelled to see them getting on so well together. (Fifteenth round.)

Reggie had left them; they weren't getting on together quite so well.

(Twentieth round.) They had risen; they were coming down the steps to 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 into the lane 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 them 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 in 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 towards 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 Tarrant?"

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 honour I can't."

Straker wondered what Furny's honour had to do with it.

"Why is she hanging around like this?"

"Hanging around?"

"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, 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 wouldn't 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 Reggie Lawson, as she had considered Mr. Higginson, who wasn't so young. As for Reggie 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 Lawrence 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 behaviour that Monday, after tea on the terrace, was one of the most disconcerting things that had occurred at Anberley. Furnival insisted on sitting very close to Miss Tarrant, staring at her with hot eyes, and a mouth slightly loose, very slightly open. His face had a queer drag in it, not a pleasant sight for anybody who happened to understand what it meant. You could see that Mrs. Viveash couldn't bear it, that she kept looking away, that Brockle-

bank 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 Reggie was alienated, too, so profoundly that he spoke about it aside to Straker.

"Between you and me," said Young Reggie, "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 Reggie had turned, that he *could* turn. He liked Reggie, and he felt that he owed him a good deal. If it had not been for Reggie 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 Reggie 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 Reggie 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 splendour and abundance, with Lawrence Furnival. Not that Reggie had ever made a fool of himself. 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 of Anberley the flaming pageant of his passion. Straker was not sure how far this restraint, this level-headedness of young Reggie had been his undoing. It might be that Miss Tarrant had required of him a pageant. Anyhow, Reggie's case had been very enlightening to Straker.

And it was through Reggie, 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 the 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 Reggie in his young, physical perfection and with the charm he had—a charm that spiritualised him, a charm that should have appealed to everything that was super-sensuous 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 Reggie at his best—and for Mr. Higginson!

To be sure, compared with Mr. Higginson, he was impecunious; but it was *that*, to Straker's mind, that gave him, with the other things, his indomitable distinction. Reggie'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 Reggie's charm. That she should deliberately have reckoned up his income, compared it with Mr. Higginson's and deducted Reggie 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 Reggie'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 Reggie's perfection that it called, it clamoured 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 Lawrence 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 fullness 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 the things you have 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 Anberley lured them, westwards, 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; and somehow, in her mood, she seemed to make all nature play it with her; she called on the trees and the flowers and the birds, on the small, shy animals and on the children in the village to come out and play with her, to help her to amuse Straker.

"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—in half an hour."

"Not in millions of half-hours."

"Consecutive?"

"Oh, yes."

She tilted her head back and gazed at him with eyes narrowed and starting 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 Anberley is built out fanwise from the big west drawing-room on to the south-west 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 Anberley. And all among Brocklebank's roses they came upon Furnival and Mrs. Viveash.

Among the roses she shimmered and flashed 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 Mal-maison rose, bending her body backwards and sideways so that she showed to perfection the deep curved lines that swept from her shoulder to her breasts and from her breasts downwards to her hips. A large diamond star hung as by an invisible thread upon her neck; it pointed downwards to the hollow of her breasts. There was no beauty that she had that was not somehow pointed to, insisted on, held for ever 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.

"Just look at their complexions. They oughtn't to be allowed about."

She plucked an American Beauty and laid it against the dead white hollow of her breasts, and coiled 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 mouth. 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 her 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 Crimson Ramblers to shake as if they indeed felt and shared her terror.

Miss Tarrant turned from Furnival to Straker with her



rose. "Look at it. Can you resist it?" Then suddenly: "What does it remind you of?"

"It doesn't remind me of anything," said Straker.

"It reminds *me* of Mrs. Viveash's face."

She laid it now on Mrs. Viveash's shoulder where, in the living warmth, it did the rose and golden beauty 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 didn't 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 Dorothy Perkins, one of Brocklebank's choicest blooms. Miss Tarrant cried out:

"Oh, stop him, somebody. He mustn't take what isn't his. Those roses are Mr. Brocklebank's."

"They ain't a part of Brockles," Furnival replied. He approached her with Brocklebank's Dorothy Perkins and with his own dangerous, his outrageous fervour. "You say it feels," he said. "It's what you want, then—something tender and living about you. Not that awful twinkling, winking thing you've got there. It tires me to look at it." He closed his eyes.

"Don't look at it," she said.

"I must. I can't help it. It's part of you. I believe it grows there. It makes you look like that woman in What's-his-name's poem, who had eyes in her—in her back or somewhere."

"Her *neck*?"

"You know what I mean. Somewhere where other women don't have eyes."

His words came from him in short, savage jerks, as his passion shook him. Before Straker, before Mrs. Viveash, it

made him indecent, monstrous, 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," she said. "You'd better go and take it to her."

He flung the Dorothy Perkins on the floor. He trod on the Dorothy Perkins. It was by accident, but still, he trod on it, so that he seemed rather 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 for 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. And in the twilight, midway, Furnival stopped and put his arm round the lady's waist, and she lifted up her face and he kissed her, full in sight of Miss Tarrant and of Straker.

Philippa said something designed to distract Straker's attention from the unspeakable occurrence; 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 towards 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 heard her, that Philippa was telling Fanny about Furnival and Nora Viveash.

## VI

It was as if nothing had happened that she came to him on the terrace the next morning (it 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 Lawrence 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 conviction. 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 Anberley 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 him 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 bleached 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 Anberley, 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 next moment 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 hiding, 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 is 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 the 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?"

"I mean 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 would 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 manœuvre in silence, and with an air so withdrawn, so obscurely pre-destined, that he seemed innocent of all offence. 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 this 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 that 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 fiercely.

## 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 Lorry 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 could 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, Furn'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. In morality she understood and could excuse; for immorality there was always some provocation; what she couldn't stand was the unfairness of Philippa's proceedings, 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 wouldn'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 is 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 when 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 and I will—anybody!"

"Look here, Fanny, let's get it quite clear. What *are* you worrying about? Are we 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 Furny. 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 dispersed the whole lot to-morrow, 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 can I 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 Anberley was set apart as a refuge for any two persons who desired uninterrupted communion with each other. He, himself, in the library at Anberley—but that was more than two years ago, so far before Philippa's time that he did not associate

her with the library at Anberley. 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 Anberley 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 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 illuminated corner on the right, Miss Tarrant and Lawrence 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 over 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 something terrible between them, some happening that 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 she signed for 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 upwards; 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."

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, as he didn't want to show himself, just yet, to the others.

They strolled together amicably towards 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 proposal."

"You did, did you?"

"She knew I wasn't going to marry anyone, 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 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 kicking. She said she wouldn't have noticed my existence 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—chastity, Straker, till I blushed. I'm 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 marvellous solemnity, as if they were holding for a moment some sort of 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 that seven-fifty train."

And he went. Straker saw him off.

## IX

That was far and away the most disconcerting thing that had happened at Anberley within Straker's recollection.

It must have been very disagreeable for Philippa.

When, five days ago, he had wondered if he should 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 Anberley 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," she said. "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 towards 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 matter. 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 realises 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 did tell 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 know. 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 last 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 poli-

tician, 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; 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. They succeeded in getting hold of him, and they wouldn't let him go, and between them, very gradually, they got him straight. He hadn't, they 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 Anberley 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 schemes 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 Anberley, 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 Anberley 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 used to 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 Anberley 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 Lawrence 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 afterwards, as she had come to him to ask 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 Lawrence 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 Lawrence 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 Nora 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 introductions, said that she had heard of Mr. Straker very often from—she hesitated, and Straker understood 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 her 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 touch which 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 Anberley. 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 perfect 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 Lawrence 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 Anberley 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 do 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 high moral——"

"Don't talk to me about your high 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, nodding gloomily towards the Anberley woods.

Straker smiled. He was looking westwards over the shining fields where he had once walked with Philippa. Already they were returning. Furnival hadn't allowed himself to be taken very far. As they approached, Straker saw



that Philippa was talking earnestly to Furnival, and that Furnival wasn't 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 Dorothy Perkins 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.

"So 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 up her little finger and he'd come back to her; she said there ought to be fair play. So 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 Lawrence Furnival and a lady whom Philippa introduced to him as Mrs. Lawrence—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 Philippa again, and as their correspondence ceased after his marriage he gathered that she had no longer any use for him.



## COMPENSATION



## COMPENSATION

YES, it's certainly an extraordinary devotion, but Cotterill's an extraordinary man. And Mrs. Valentine is not and never was an ordinary woman. If they'd been ordinary people, they could never have kept it up for nine years, at the height they have. One or two things would have been bound to happen; either he'd have dropped it—I mean he'd have dropped her—or he'd have married her. He was head over ears in love with her at one time; and she—she's almost as much in love as ever, and almost as beautiful. You'd have thought that nine years of doing without him would have played havoc with her looks; but it didn't.

No, eleven. They'd known each other for two years before Dicky Valentine died. Everybody thought that, when she was free from the brute, Cotterill would marry her.

Why didn't he? Well, you see, she had her secret, her poor little guilty secret that she'd kept for years. How she managed it I can't think. Her friends must have been rather unusually loyal. Or perhaps she deceived them all. She certainly succeeded in deceiving me. Sometimes I fancy she deceived herself. It would have been easy.

Great Scott! I can hardly believe it now, when I look at her.

When I come to think of it, she hadn't many friends here. I got to know her through Frances Archdale, and Frances would have died rather than betray her, if she knew. But Frances was a new friend, and it's the old ones who are so good at going back on you. All hers were stowed away safely in the provinces. We knew nothing about her, beyond what she let us see.

But we knew all about Valentine in the first six months.

You'd only to look at him, to look at them together. She couldn't prevent that. And then, the things you'd heard about him—— It was no use her pretending that the marriage wasn't a mistake, one of those ghastly, irreparable ones. Well, not irreparable. If all the tales were true, she could have divorced him ten times over.

Why didn't she? For one thing, she was too proud to admit that she'd made any mistake at all. And she was fastidious. If there was too much dirty linen to be washed at home, it was much too dirty to be produced in public. And she had a passion for the beautiful thing. She did what would have been considered the beautiful thing thirty years ago: she stuck to him.

How could she? You mean how could she go on living with him? She didn't. She let the same roof cover them, that was all. And it was her roof, mind you, not his, and her money——most of it. That made a difference. It wasn't as if he hadn't let her alone. He let her alone all she wanted. And it wasn't as if he'd cared—as *she* understood caring——for another woman. In any case, he couldn't have married them all. Otherwise the beautiful thing, I suppose, would have been to let him go and marry them.

And there'd been a child. They'd both been fond of it. And it died.

Of course, if it had lived, she never could have kept her secret. It would have given her hopelessly away. On the other hand, when you think how she was punished for the deception she practised on us all——

Most people haven't a notion of it, even now. They think that Dicky was enough to make her loathe the thought of marrying, and that she refused Cotterill——

Oh yes, he did the proper thing. He proposed to her, all right. I was going to say people think she refused him because she funked it. Not a bit of it. She had pluck enough for anything, except one thing. It was Cotterill who did all the funking——when he knew.

You mustn't suppose that there was any conscious decep-



tion. Why should she have told us? Why should she have told anybody? I can't see that she was bound to tell even Cotterill, when Nature had kept her secret for her so well.

Look here—these are some drawings I did of her seven—ten years ago. It's almost a child's face, a young girl's—the tiny firm oval, and the big eyes under the black eyebrows, making play all the time, taking your attention off it. Colour? Oh, grey—black—green—I don't know! Look at that little bud of a mouth, moulded on the delicate, narrow hoop of the jaws—gathered close and firm—keeping her secret. There's another of her. See the corners of her mouth, lifted in a little flying, quivering smile that's got joy and a sort of fear in it, as if she knew that she would be found out some day. She might be a nun—a little Madonna, fathered by a faun. That was how she looked when she was happy, how she looked when Cotterill came into the room.

Oh, I've got dozens of her. They're the only records, for she wouldn't be photographed. She was afraid. I know now she was afraid—(of the secret's coming out, you know). There have been photographs taken of her, she told me; but she'd destroyed them all. It was her clothes she must have been afraid of; not her face. She wasn't afraid to sit to me, because, she said, she knew I'd be merciful. But she always wore the same sort of gown, some abstract thing that simply curled round her and clung to her and couldn't be spotted. And she never wore it anywhere else. I knew she did it, just as any other woman might, so that, years hence, she shouldn't be dated. That was natural enough. It didn't make me suspect her the least bit in the world.

Of course, with any other woman I should have seen it. It would have been somewhere—it always is—about the eyelids and the corners of the mouth, or when you catch the eyes in a queer light and they're tired. But I never caught her—never, never. Even that little wavering smile didn't enlighten me. It may have helped to blind me. There was such adorable innocence and youth in it. And she was never tired. It was that, her amazing vitality, that did the trick.

But it's horrible to think what she must have suffered. Going all the time shivering in her shoes lest she should be found out; always afraid of something or somebody turning up to give her away. If only she could have realised that it didn't matter.

I stick to it. If she *was*, it didn't matter. She was what she looked—adorable, simply. No wonder Reggie Cotterill fell in love with her. I've fallen in love with her myself, in and out, scores of times. We all went through her mill, and I can assure you she ground some of us exceeding small. That shows how much it mattered.

I don't think it mattered much to her when it was only us. But when it came to Cotterill it began to matter awfully. Not as long as Valentine was living; but afterwards. The incredible thing is that she thought I knew it all the time. That's why she came to me—to ask me to break it to him. She said she wanted him to know before things had gone too far. "Things," as she called them, had gone so far that I gathered it was a question of being very gentle with him. But she said it wouldn't be fair to Reggie to let them go any farther.

I can see her now, sitting curled up over there on that divan, looking at me with her large, sorrowful eyes, and that smile of hers flickering and dodging about, so as to take my attention off them. The uneasiness of it would have given any woman away, and I thought how very crude and in-artistic and altogether unlike her it was to take that tone with me, as if I didn't know as well as she did the lengths she'd gone with Reggie. Why, they were all over the place together. If she didn't actually turn up everywhere where Reggie was, Reggie contrived to pop in anywhere that she was. I was simply waiting, from hour to hour, for one of them to tell me of the engagement. And I thought: Here she is asking me—me of all people—to break it to poor Reggie that she doesn't care for him.

I said I thought she ought to break it to him herself. It wouldn't come particularly well from me, in my state of

mind. And she just gave a little laugh and said: "Oh, *your* state of mind!" As if that didn't matter.

And then she declared that she'd never said anything about not caring, and I asked her what she really had said.

Simply that I'd got to tell him. Because I was a friend of his, and she couldn't.

I suppose I must have laughed at that, for she said: "Oh, Roly, *don't!*" as if I'd hurt her. And I can hear myself crying out: "Tell him *what?*" in sheer desperation, and her saying very softly: "The truth, Roly."

Heaven knows what I thought then. There was only one thing you could think. And somehow it didn't surprise me in the least. It was as if I'd been waiting for it to come out some day. I must have been thinking it all the time, I suppose. It was the secret of her mystery. And she went on, rubbing it in:

"The truth about me, the awful truth."

Of course I went on drawing her as if nothing unusual had happened, as if she hadn't had a fit of hysteria in my studio, and given herself away. I tried levity. I said I didn't see how any truth about her could be awful, and that, anyhow, she was forgetting that I didn't know it—the awful truth.

But that line didn't answer. She said I was only making it worse by trying to turn it off in that airy way. That I needn't pretend that I didn't know it, that she didn't flatter herself she'd taken *me* in. But that I didn't matter. The awful thing was that Reggie didn't know it. That he *had* to know.

It was at this point that inspiration came to me; I remember saying quite coolly: "Why should he?"

And she shrank back in her cushions and looked at me out of them, straight and sharp—I shall never forget that look—and said: "Don't tempt me, Roly! Don't say that!"

And I said it again: "Why should he?"

It seemed the absolutely right thing to say.

She said, because he was bound to, some day. She couldn't hope to keep it up for ever. Then she flew off at a tangent and asked me how old he was.

I told her he was not quite thirty, but what on earth, I asked, had that got to do with it?

She said: "Everything! If it wasn't for that——"

I assured her that if *that* was all, she needn't worry. She surely didn't suppose she'd trapped an innocent! Young Reggie knew his way about to such an extent that, though he was barely thirty, he might be considerably over fifty.

She said that was no good, since he didn't look it. She told me my saying it simply proved that she was right, and that I knew perfectly well all the time.

Up till then she had been fairly lucid. I could follow her main theme; that seemed simple enough in all conscience; but her dodgings, her turnings, and her windings beat me. I think my face showed her how very little I knew, after all. I tried to persuade myself that it hadn't shown her anything.

She put her little head on one side, examining and appraising the expression of my face.

Then she leaned forward suddenly and said: "Look at me, Roly, look at me straight." (I *was* looking at her.)

"Do you mean to tell me—seriously—that you don't know?"

There was something in her eyes that made mine scuttle, and I lied. I lied frantically. I shouted: "No—no—no! I don't know anything!"

She clapped her little hands over her ears; and when they'd dropped I heard her saying very slowly and distinctly: "You—don't—know—how old I am?" And then: "I'm fifty."

I hardly like to think what my face showed her then. There was an abominable pause before I recovered sufficiently to say she couldn't expect me to believe her.

"It's true!" she cried. "Forty-nine to-day, Roly, to be

strictly accurate. To-morrow"—she shivered it out—"fifty. You *thought* I was going to tell you something awful; and it's no use your trying now to look as if it wasn't."

It was so much more awful—to me—than what I *had* thought, that I could only keep on saying I couldn't believe it, while she murmured, "You must have seen it. You must have seen it all the time." She said I was a dear to pretend I didn't see it. And when I swore that there was nothing to be seen, she said, no, but there would be soon. She couldn't hope to stave it off when she was past fifty. She was afraid now; and the fear of it would make it come all the quicker, and if she had an illness, God help her!

I mumbled something about its making no difference. And she shook her head and said: "Twenty years' difference, Roly. That's what it makes."

I did all I could. I asked her what in Heaven's name she wanted. I told her madly that a woman couldn't be more than beautiful, more than enchanting, more—I piled it on—than irresistible. And she laughed, and stuck to it. "Oh, yes—she can be young."

And I insisted that she *was* young. I told her, with the most perfect truth, that she didn't look a day older than thirty, not a day older than Reggie.

She had been shaking her head at me, and smiling as if she were really amused at my absurdity. Now she sat up straight and became tragic. She said that was the horrible part of it—her not looking it. If only she *had* looked it, all this would never have happened: Reggie wouldn't have cared for her and made her care. She said it was a judgment on her because she had been so impiously glad she didn't look it. She told me how she used to watch other women, happy women, women with children, women younger than herself, and count their wrinkles year by year, and see their poor faces all going to pieces, and feel glad and triumphant because hers didn't. She felt that that was her one compensation for all she hadn't got and all she'd gone through. And

all the time it was nothing of the sort. It was her tragedy, her curse, the worst, the cruellest thing that could have been done to her.

It couldn't have come to that, she said, if her little girl had lived. The little girl would have been thirty now. "Fancy that, Roly!" (I couldn't. The whole thing was preposterous, impossible.) "Everybody would have known then—even Reggie."

She spoke as if Reggie were alone in his peculiar hallucination. And she completed the *naïveté* and pathos of it by saying: "You know, Roly, it isn't really my fault. I've never told a lie about it. I only just didn't contradict people."

I was still dancing round and round the horror, declaring that, if she'd lied about it, she wouldn't have been far from the truth, and that, anyhow, it wasn't anybody's business. But she pulled me up sharp: It was Reggie's business, and I'd got to break it to him.

And for the life of me, I couldn't face it. I couldn't be honest with her. I tried to stave off the dreadful moment; and, before I knew where I was, I was saying it wouldn't make any difference to Reggie.

She said it was just Reggie it *would* make the difference to. Didn't I remember when Norry Hyslop ran away with Lena Wrace, and how we were betting whether Norry'd stick to her or not, and how Reggie had said of course he wouldn't, and how she had asked him, "Why not?" and he'd said: "Because Lena was old; she was forty-seven." And she put it to me: Could I look her in the face and say it wouldn't make any difference to *me*?

I sang out: "Try me—try me!" But she only flicked at me: "Oh, *you*; you're safe!" All she wanted *me* to do was to tell Reggie.

Now that was what I funk'd more than anything. I funk'd it for my own sake, because it was a beastly thing to have to do; and I funk'd it for hers, because I knew that if *I* told Reggie he'd believe it, and if *she* told him, he wouldn't. He couldn't, any more than I could . . . in his place.

But she nailed me to it: If I cared for her the least little bit in the world, I'd do it. And it must be done at once—that night—before he had time to say anything to her.

I asked her why she didn't tell him herself. She told me it was because she couldn't bear to see the look on his face that she had seen on mine.

I'm glad she didn't see it. I don't know what she meant by the look on my face, but it couldn't have been anything like the look on Reggie's when I told him.

You know how tight and stiff and correct Reggie's face is now, and it's nothing to what it was nine years ago. Well—imagine that tightness and stiffness and correctness going suddenly loose, and then pulling itself up square with a jerk, and his mouth shutting up tighter than ever. And then a sound like an enormous sigh. I remember thinking that was funny. A sigh, however enormous, seemed an inadequate tribute to the tragedy of the situation. But it wasn't a sigh. It was the breath he'd taken in and held tight with the shock of it, struggling out again through his nose.

I said it was incredible. And I could see his lips trying to form the word after me—"Incredible"—and refusing. I said I didn't believe it; and he managed to cough out something about not believing it either.

But he did believe it. His eyes gave him away. They gave him away more than anything. They were wretched. They saw so much, and they let me see what they were seeing—all the detestable things that would happen soon to that beautiful face, and to that adorable body. I could see in them reminiscent desire, and desire premeditative, baulked of its end and arrested. And a hopelessness beyond all that. I could see a profound mistrust of himself. And, subtler than anything, I saw the secret wound in the place where he was most vulnerable, his vanity. I could see what the mind behind those eyes was doing: It was remembering, foreseeing, calculating—doing sums in time, and in flesh and blood. And it was appalled at the result.

If he'd been any other man, I should have said that he

wanted children. But Reggie didn't want them. He only wanted to feel that he could, in all probability, have them if he happened to want them. His agony was an extremely complex affair, and there *was* that in it. But, complicated as it was, it came to this: that he had believed, like all of us, in Mrs. Valentine's youth; he had fallen in love with it. And it didn't exist, except as a perishing illusion, and every year would make the illusion more perishable.

No wonder she had been afraid of what she would see in Reggie's face. And, my word, how well she must have known him! (Valentine, I suppose, must have taught her something.) I think he was aware that I saw through him, aware, perhaps, that she had seen through him too.

I said, as vaguely as I could, that she had seemed to think somehow he ought to know it. And I expected him to thank me for having told him, and get up and go.

Not a bit of it; he turned to me a face that he evidently considered pure from subterfuge, and said:

"What difference does she suppose it makes?"

From the defiance in his voice and from the way he braced himself, I knew that he was going through with it.

Then, of course, I saw just how preposterous the whole thing was. I saw it sanely all round. I saw Reggie's youth as I hadn't, really, seen Mrs. Valentine's. I saw the deadly danger, and the rottenness of sentiment and glamour and illusion when it comes to this simple, primary affair of mating. I saw that the revulsions I had observed in him were only the natural healthy reaction and self-assertion of his youth. I saw the folly and the dishonour of dishonesty, the inevitable uncleanness of the attempt to resuscitate a dead impulse. And the horror of it, and the insult—to her. And I tried to make him see it. I talked to him like a father for an hour and a half. But it was no use. He persisted in saying that it made no difference. He was going through with it.

And as he went away, the look on his face was the look of a man striding up to the muzzle of a gun that's going to



blow him into little pieces. I could see him stalking into Mrs. Valentine's drawing-room with that look on his face, and I wondered how it would affect Mrs. Valentine when she saw it.

Now, this is where I don't see clear through Reggie. Of course, I know he wanted to do the correct thing, just as Mrs. Valentine wanted to do the beautiful thing. I don't think it exactly occurred to him that he might have compromised her; they'd been seen everywhere together; though, for the matter of that, he would have compromised her more if it had been somewhere and not everywhere. But he must have felt that he'd gone too far to draw back with perfect decency. I'm sure he had one high moment when he was prepared to sacrifice both himself and Mrs. Valentine to his rectitude.

Only, when I think of what happened——

He proposed to her the very next day, her birthday.

I don't want to discredit Reggie's performance. I believe he had convinced himself he was taking a tremendous risk. You could see it from the way he swaggered up to his big gun to be blown to pieces. I think, myself, he rather overdid the swagger. But that only shows the genuine funk he was in. Yet, in the light of what actually happened, I can't help wondering whether he didn't know, inside him, all the time, that there was no risk, that the gun wouldn't go off and blow him into little pieces, that it wasn't even loaded—whether he didn't, in fact, trust Mrs. Valentine to refuse him. As indeed she did.

And on what grounds do you suppose she refused him? Not, if you please, because there were twenty years between them—she said she knew that that wouldn't make any difference to Reggie—but because—she broke it to him very gently—because she didn't care for him. She said she never had cared for him, as he cared, and never would. She even went so far as to intimate that Reggie wasn't the sort of man she *could* care for—in *that* way. You know the subtle distinction women make.

Scored off him? My dear fellow, you don't imagine that she wanted to score? She wanted to save him, to pull him through, with his sense of his own rectitude and chivalry intact, and to make a clean job of it. She did the beautiful thing so beautifully that it would never have to be done again.

And when you think how she must have suffered. Why, the look on Reggie's face alone . . . I don't suppose he could disguise it, the blessedness of the relief he felt. He was still shining with it, like Moses on his mountain, when he came to me that evening to tell me.

The relief, of course, was only natural. What struck me as odd about him was his complacency. Because, after all, she had said things— You know Reggie's colossal vanity. Well, that last stroke of hers must have been a stinger. And Reggie—vulnerable all over—didn't seem to mind it in the least. In fact, he seemed positively to like it. He dwelt on it with a sort of sensuous pleasure.

So it's quite clear that he didn't believe her for one moment. His vanity couldn't have stood it if he had. It's equally clear that he wanted to believe her, and that he made himself believe that he believed her, when he knew he didn't. Every way you look at him, he seemed tortuous. I always thought he was a bit of a humbug.

No—I'm forgetting his devotion. *That's* genuine. Look how astonishingly it's lasted. He goes about with her still—everywhere. He spends, on an average, three afternoons a week and four evenings with her in her drawing-room. She's growing rather like Reggie—stiff, you know, and correct. And Reggie runs her close—crows' feet and hair grey at the temples. And she's lost her faun-face. She doesn't come and curl up on my divan any more. She looks always like a little Madonna. And Reggie adores her. He's put her into a little shrine, and keeps her there. And the little Madonna stiffens in her shrine behind her elaborate golden door. She's getting a little more rigid every year. But I think she's happy. Shut in there, she smiles her little stiff, Madonna

smile. She triumphs over time and Reggie still—in her way—after nine years. She's fifty-nine, and he's not quite thirty-nine. Every now and then she tries to marry him—to somebody else. As a test, I suppose, of *her* devotion. But it has not come off yet.

And the secret of it? Well, no doubt it's some peculiar fleshless form of passion with both of them. But I think it's two-thirds gratitude: she's grateful to him for having cared for her; and he's grateful to her for having let him off so beautifully, for having saved his rectitude.

And a little humbug on both sides? Well—perhaps. You can't blame them. The facts were cruel; no wonder they couldn't face them. I like to think she's had compensation.

I suppose Reggie's devotion *is* compensation—of a sort.



THE PIN-PRICK



## THE PIN-PRICK

THAT? That's one of poor May Blissett's things, the one she used to say she'd leave me in her will, because, she said, she knew I'd be kind to it. Her reasons were always rather quaint. She spoke of it as if it were a live thing that could be hurt or made happy.

I've tried to be kind to it. I've framed it as it ought to be framed, and hung it in not too bad a light. I—I've consented to live with it.

You needn't look at it like that. Of course I know it isn't a bit alive in *our* sense. She couldn't draw, she could only paint a little; her inspiration was reminiscent, and she got hung more than once in the Academy. She was like so many of them. But she had a sense of beauty, of colour, of decoration, and, at her best, a sort of magic queerness that was suggested irresistibly even when the things didn't quite come off.

That *this* hasn't come off (not quite) is really—to me—what makes it so poignantly alive. It's a bit of *her*, a little sensitive, palpitating shred, torn off from her and flung there—all that was left of her. It stands for her mystery, her queerness, her passionate persistence and her pluck. To anybody who knew her the thing's excruciatingly alive.

It's so alive, so much her, that Frances Archdale wonders how I can bear to live with it, with the terrible reproach of it. She insisted that we, or, rather, that she was responsible for what happened. But that's the sort of thing that Frances always did think.

Certainly she *was* responsible for May's coming here. She was with her when she was looking over the studio above mine, the one that Hanson had—it had been empty nearly a

year—and she brought her in to me. I was to tell her whether the studio would do or not. I think, when it came to the point, Frances wanted to saddle me with the responsibility. There were no other women in the studios—never had been; they're uncomfortable enough for a man who isn't fastidious; there's no service to speak of; and May Blissett proposed to live alone.

I looked at her and decided instantly that it wouldn't do. You had only to look at her to see that it wouldn't. She was small, and presented what Frances called the illusion of fragility—an exquisite little person in spite of her queerness. She had one of those broad-browed, broad-cheeked and suddenly pointed faces, with a rather prominent and intensely obstinate chin. The queerness was in her long eyes and in the way her delicate nose broadened at the nostrils, and in the width of her fine mouth, so much too wide for the slenderly pointed face, and in the tiny scale of the whole phenomenon. She was swarthy, with lots of very dark, crinkly hair. There was something subtle about her, and something that I felt, God forgive me, as mysteriously and secretly malign.

Even if we had wanted women in the studios at all, I didn't want that woman. So I told her that it wouldn't do.

She looked at me straight with her long, sad eyes, and said, "But it's just what I'm hunting for. Why won't it do?"

I could have sworn she knew what I was thinking.

I said there would be nobody to look after her. And Frances cut in, to my horror: "There would be *you*, Roly."

It was only one of her inconsiderate impulses, but it annoyed me and I turned on her. I said, "Has your friend seen that studio next to *yours*?" I knew it was to let, and Frances knew that I knew. I suspected her of concealing its existence from May Blissett. She didn't want her near her, she didn't like the responsibility. I wished her to know that it was her responsibility, not mine. I wasn't going to be saddled with it.

Her face—the furtive guilt of it—confirmed my suspicion



as we stared at each other across the embarrassment we had created. I ought to have been sorry for Frances. She was mutely imploring me to get her out of it, to see her through. And I wasn't going to.

And then May Blissett laughed, an odd little soft laugh that suggested some gentle but diabolic appreciation of our agony.

"*That* wouldn't do," she said.

I was remorseless, and said in my turn: "Why wouldn't it? You'd be near Miss Archdale."

She said: "We don't either of us want to be so near. We should get in each other's way most horribly. Just *because* we like each other. I shouldn't be in *your* way, Mr. Simpson."

She was still exquisite, but at the same time a little sinister.

I remember trying to say something about the inference not being very flattering, but Frances got in first.

"She doesn't mean she doesn't like you, Roly. What she means is——"

"What I mean is that, as Frances knows me, and likes me a little—you *said* you did"—it was as if she thought that Frances was going to say she didn't. She flung her a look that was not sinister, not sinister at all—purely exquisite—exquisitely incredulous, exquisitely shy. And she went on with her funny explanation—"I should be on her mind. And I couldn't be on *your* mind, you know."

I said: "Oh, *couldn't* you!"

But she took no notice. She said: "No, if I come here—and I'm coming"—she got up to go. She was absolutely determined, absolutely final—"we must make a compact never"—she was most impressive—"never to get in each other's way. It's no use for Frances and me to make a compact. We couldn't keep it for five minutes."

She had the air, under all her incredulity, of paying high tribute to their mutual affection.

"I'm coming here to work, and I want to be alone. What's more, I want to feel alone."

"And you think," I said, "I'll make you feel it?"

She said: "I hope so."

She had put herself between Frances and the door. "You'd better stay and explain it if he doesn't understand. I'm going."

She went like a shot, and I gathered that her precipitance was to give me the measure of her capacity for withdrawal.

Frances stayed. I could see her stiffening herself to meet my wrath.

"Frances," I said, "how *could* you?"

Frances was humble and deprecating—for her. She said: "Roly, she really won't be in your way."

"She will be in it," I said, "most abominably. You know we're not supposed to have women here."

"I know; but she's not like a woman. She was trying to tell you she wasn't. She isn't. She isn't—really—quite human. You won't have to do any of the usual things."

I asked her what she meant by the usual things, and she became instantly luminous. "Well—she won't expect you to fall in love with her."

I'm afraid I said Heaven only knew what she'd expect. But Frances walked over me with "And *you* needn't expect *her* to fall in love with you."

And she put it to me, if there'd been a chance of that sort of thing happening, if May had been dangerous, would she have risked it? (We were engaged in those days.) Would she have gone out of her way to plant her up there over my head? Would she have asked me to look after her if she had—well—required looking after? And she reminded me that she wasn't a fool.

As for May, that sort of thing was beyond her.

"Is it?" I said, "beyond any woman? I wouldn't put it——"

"Past her," she snatched me up. "Perhaps not. But she's past it. Gone through it all, my dear. She's utterly beyond. Immune."

I said: "Never. A face with that expression—that half-malign subtlety. She might do things."

And Frances turned on me. You know how she can turn. Malign subtlety. Malign suffering. The malignity was not in the things she'd do, poor lamb, but in the things that had been done to her.

And then she sat down and told me a few of them—told me what, in fact, May had gone through.

First of all, she had lost all her people. Father—mother—brothers and sisters (she was the youngest of a large family). That was years and years ago, and she was only thirty-two now, so you may judge the frantic pace of the havoc. And by way of pretty interlude her father had gone mad—mad as a hatter. May had looked after him. Then they lost all their money. (That was a mere detail.) Then she married a man who left her for another woman. Left her with a six-months'-old baby to bring up. Then the child died and she'd divorced him—he dragged her through horror. Then, as if that wasn't enough, her lover—I beg her pardon, the man who loved her—was drowned before her eyes in a boating accident. Nothing, Frances said, had happened since then. What could, when everything had happened? As for doing things, there was nothing poor May wanted to do except pictures. And if she thought she could do them better here over my head, wouldn't I be a brute to try and stop her?

Of course I said I shouldn't dream of stopping her, and that it was very sad; it was, indeed, appalling. But it seemed to me that though Frances had let out so much she was still keeping something back. And a brutal instinct made me say to her: "What is it, then, that you dislike so much in her?"

She took it quite simply, as if she had been prepared for it. She even smiled as she answered, "Nothing—except her obstinacy."

I asked her wouldn't that be precisely what would get in my way?

And she said, No. May's obstinacy would consist in keeping out of it.

Still, I objected, obstinate people were nearly always tactless. And Frances said, No, not always. She said—dear Frances!—"I'm not obstinate. But I'm tactless if you like. Look at the horrid mess I got us both into just now. And look how she got us out. She saved us."

I admitted that she had. And Frances finished up triumphantly: "Can't you trust her? Can't you see that she's beyond? That she really won't be there? There never was a more effaced and self-effacing person, a person more completely self-contained. I assure you, none of us—of *us*, my dear—exist for her. So she needn't, really, be on your mind."

And she wasn't. Not for a moment, from the day of her coming till the day . . . Though I must say, afterwards . . .

To begin with she chose a week-end for her installation, a Friday till Tuesday when I was away. I literally didn't know that she was there, so secret and so silent was she in her movements overhead. I couldn't have believed it possible for a woman to be so effacing and effaced. It was super-feminine; it was, as Frances said, hardly human. And yet she didn't overdo it. I had to own that the most exquisite thing about this exquisite and queer little person was her tact. By overdoing it the least bit, by insisting on her detachment, her isolation, she would have made us disagreeably aware. When you met her on the stairs (she used to run up and down them, incredibly soft-footed) she smiled and nodded at you (she had really a singularly intriguing smile), as much as to say that she was in an awful hurry, life being so full of work, of a joyous activity, but still it was lucky that we *could* meet like this, sometimes, on the stairs.

And she used to come in to tea, sometimes, when I had a party. She took hardly any room in the studio, and hardly any part in the conversation, but she would smile prettily when you spoke to her; the implication being that it made

her happy to be asked to tea, but it was not so necessary to her happiness that you would have to ask her often. She used to come a little late and go a little early—and yet not too early—on the plea (it sounded somehow preposterous) that she was busy. Even the poor art that kept her so was tactful. It had no embarrassing pretensions, it called for no criticism, you could look at it without sacrificing your sincerity to your politeness. And if it hadn't been, May was too well-bred ever to refer to it. And it kept her. It got itself hung, as I've said, now and again. Supremely tactful, it spared your pity.

In short she made no claim on us, unless indeed her courage called to us to admire the spectacle it was.

For, when you think of the horrible things that had happened to her, the wonder was how she ever contrived to smile at all. But that was what she had effaced more than anything, the long trail of her tragedy. Her reticence was inspired by the purest, the most delicate sense of honour. It was as if she felt that it wouldn't be playing the game, the high game of life, to appeal to us on that ground, when we couldn't have resisted. Besides, it would have hurt, and she wouldn't for the world have hurt us. Her subtlety, you see, was anything but malign. It was beneficent, tender, supernaturally lucid. It allowed for every motive, every shade. And we took her as she presented herself, detached, impersonal, and, as Frances said, immune.

I said to Frances: "We needn't have worried. You were right."

And Frances exulted. "Didn't I tell you? She's quite kind to us, but she doesn't want us."

She had made us forget that we hadn't wanted her.

She had made me forget that I had ever said she'd do things. Even now I don't know what on earth it was I thought she'd do.

She had been living up in that studio, I think, three years before it happened.

I can tell you just how it was. On the evening, rather late, Frances came to see me. She asked me if I'd seen anything of May Blissett lately.

I said, No, had she?

And she said, Yes, May had called that afternoon.

I noticed something funny about Frances' face, something that made me say: "And you weren't very glad to see her?"

She asked me how I knew she wasn't, and I told her that her funny face betrayed her.

Then, by way of extenuation, she told me the tale of May's calling. I remember every word of it, because we went, she and I—she *made* me go over it again and again afterwards. She told me she was not really at home that afternoon to anybody but Daisy Valentine. Daisy had got something on her mind that she wanted to talk about. I knew what those two were when they got together—they were as thick as thieves. And as I also knew that the something on Daisy's mind was Reggie Cotterill, I understood that their communion would be private and intimate to the last degree.

And it seemed that the servant had blundered and let May Blissett in upon the mysteries, before they had well begun, and that she'd stayed interminably. There they were, the two of them, snug together on the sofa; their very attitude must have shown May what Daisy was there for. They were just waiting for tea to come before they settled down to it. Poor Daisy was quivering visibly with the things she'd got to say. Couldn't I see her? I could. I gathered that the atmosphere was fairly tingling with suppressed confidences, and that May, obtuse to these vibrations, sat there and simply wouldn't go.

I remember I suggested that she too might have had something on her mind and have had things to say. But Frances said, No, she never had things. She'd come for nothing, nothing in the world. She was in one of her silences, those fits which gave her so often the appearance of stupidity. (I knew them. They were formidable, exasperat-

ing; for you never could tell what she might be thinking; and she had a way of smiling through them, a way that we knew now was all part of her high courage, of the web she had spun, that illusion of happiness she had covered herself up in, to spare us.) Frances said she wouldn't have minded May's immobility for herself. It was Daisy who sat palpitating with anxiety, wondering why on earth she didn't go.

I wondered too. It was so unlike her. I said so.

And Frances, who seemed to understand May through and through, said it wasn't. It was most characteristic. It was just May's obstinacy. If May had made up her mind to do a thing she did it *quand même*. Generally she made up her mind not to be a nuisance. She'd made it up that afternoon that she'd stay, and she stayed.

"I'm afraid," Frances said, "we weren't very nice to her. We let her see we didn't want her."

"And then?" I asked.

Oh, then, of course, she went.

I must say I marvelled at the obstinacy that could override a delicacy so consummate as May Blissett's. And I thought that Frances' imagination must have been playing her tricks. It did sometimes.

That night, about nine o'clock, I ran up to May Blissett's studio. I knocked at her door three or four times. I knew she was there. I'd heard her come in an hour or two ago. Then, remembering our compact, I went away, going rather slowly in the hope that she'd relent. I can't tell you whether I really heard her open her door and come out on to the stair-head after I'd got down to my own floor; whether I really thought that she leaned out over the banister to see what was there; or whether I tortured myself with the mere possibility—afterwards.

It must have been about six o'clock in the morning when they came to me, the hall-porter and his son. They told me that Miss Blissett was not in her room and that they couldn't get her studio door open. It wasn't locked, they said; it had given slightly. But it seemed stuck all over. And an uncom-

monly queer smell was coming through. They thought it was some sort of disinfectant.

I went up with them. You could smell the disinfectant oozing steadily through a chink in the studio door. We opened the big French windows opposite, and the windows of the bedroom and the stairs outside. Then we began to get the door open with knives, cutting through the paper that sealed it up inside. The reek of the sulphur was so strong that I sent the men out to open the studio windows—they were sealed up too—from the outside, before we finished with the door. One of them came back and told me not to go into the room.

But when the smoke cleared a little I went.

Oh, it was all quite decent. Trust her for that. She was lying on the couch which she'd dragged into the middle of the great bare studio, all ready, dressed in her nightgown, with a sheet drawn up to her chin. The whole place was dim with the fog of the sulphur still burning. She had set the candles, one on each side, one at the head, and one at the foot.

No, there's nothing stately and ceremonial about a sulphur candle. Have you ever seen one? It's a little fat yellow devil that squats in a saucer. There's a crimson ooze from it when it burns, as if the thing sweated blood before it began its work. *One* of those stinking devils would have done what she wanted, and there were four. Can't you see her going softly round the couch in her white nightgown, lighting her candles, smiling her subtle and mysterious smile? The ghost of it was still there. I am sure she was thinking how beautifully she had managed and how she had saved us all. The dear woman couldn't have had any other thought.

Even Frances saw that.

Frances nearly went off her head about it. Just as she did afterwards about poor Dickinson. She declared that we, or rather she was responsible. She'd had a letter from May Blissett written that night.

It's stuck in my head ever since (it wasn't long).



*Forgive me for stopping on like that. It was very thick-skinned of me when I saw you so dear and happy there together. But somehow I couldn't help it. And you have forgiven me.*

A perfectly sane letter. Not a word about what she meant to do. Evidently she didn't want Frances to connect it with their reception of her.

But of course she did. She insisted that if she had only sent Daisy Valentine away and kept May, May would have been living and happy now. She had shown her that they hadn't wanted her, that she was in their way, and May had just gone and taken herself, once for all, out of it. In the sight of God, she had killed May.

I couldn't do anything with her. I couldn't make her see that the two things couldn't have had anything in the world to do with each other, that the affair of the visit, to May—after what she'd been through—would be a mere pin-prick; that you don't go through such things to be killed by a pin-prick.

But Frances would have it that you do; that it was because of what May had been through that she was so vulnerable.

Besides, she maintained that her responsibility went deeper and further back. It was that from the first she had been afraid of May Blissett, afraid of something about her. No, not her queerness. Her loneliness. She had been afraid that it would cling, that it would get in her way. She had compelled her to suppress it. She had driven it in, and the thing was poisonous. I reminded her that May didn't want us, and she wailed: "We tried to make ourselves think she didn't. But she did! She did! She wanted us most awfully all the time."

If she had only known! And so on.

I did all I could. I pointed out to her that poor May was insane. What she did proved it. In her right mind she would never have done it. She would have been incapable of that cruelty to us who cared for her. But Frances stuck

to it that that was just it. She wouldn't have done it if she'd known we did care. It was the very essence of her despair that she had thought we didn't.

Sometimes I wonder whether Frances wasn't right; whether, if I had run back and caught May Blissett on the stairs—— But, you see, I wasn't absolutely sure she was there.

I mean she may have lit her candles before that.

THE BAMBINO



## THE BAMBINO

No. That isn't mine. It's a thing of Frances Archdale's, her sister-in-law, Mrs. Jack Archdale. You know the man I mean. He buys pictures.

You think it's odd he didn't buy this one? Wait till you've heard the story.

I've seen her sitting like that, like a Flemish Madonna: sloping knees, and the naked slip of the child standing between her hands; her hands half holding, half adoring. *He* must have seen her—and her hands. They're in the centre of the picture, large and white and important; as if Frances had known.

You'd have thought it wasn't possible to hate a woman so unfortunate as she was. She ought to have been immune. Yet I believe I'd have hated her even if she hadn't smashed that incomparable old Chinese bowl poor Lawrence left me. But no doubt that began it: the sight of the precious thing slipping through those large, awkward hands that were always in movement, always seizing and dropping things, the long fingers splaying; and her husky drawl: "I'm so sor-ry, Mr. Simp-son." She sent me a blue and white bowl from Liberty's the next day, and seemed to think that, if anything, that left me in her debt.

On the whole she was let off easily, because, with all her multiplied misfortunes, she never faced the full implications of disaster. She was too complacent.

I remember the season when Jack Archdale brought her to town and we all raved about her, his slender Flemish Madonna, with her long, slender shoulders, her long, slender, skim-milk face, her long, slender nose that overhung her

upper lip that overhung the lower one that overhung the soft round of her chin sloping away into her neck. And the thin gold rain of hair on her cheeks, loosened from the two sleek bands, untidily. There was something so helplessly yielding and retreating about that profile that you weren't prepared for her obstinacy, that obstinacy which——

Well, it was the helplessness that caught Jack Archdale.

The first time I saw her, at their house-warming, she was unfortunate, standing on a priceless Persian rug and pouring claret-cup over it from the glass she tilted, following Archdale with her pale, moony eyes. Her name was Adela.

He adored her in a funny, abject way, sitting dumb (you couldn't talk to Adela) and staring at her. When the baby came he adored the baby; they both adored it, and they were both jealous of the adoration. You'd come in and find them quarrelling about which was to hold it. He'd be saying: "Give him to me. I want him." And she, with her queer drawl: "You might let me have him, Jack. He's more mine than yours."

And he'd shout back at her: "He *isn't*." Not ragging, you know, but quite fierce and serious.

He talked about the Bambino half the time; he'd bring the conversation round to him from anywhere. I remember dining with them one night before they left London. (They were always asking me because of Frances.) He'd bought a picture of mine that year, and he thought it funny to say: "Roly doesn't come to see *us*, he comes to see his old picture."

She sat there, stretching her white goose neck to get out her drawl. "Aren't you aw-w-fly glad when pee-ple buy your pictures?"

He tried to head her off. "He *isn't*. He feels as I should if somebody bought the Bambino."

And she went blundering on. "He knows it's safe with us. He knows it's all in the family."

I said he didn't know anything of the sort. Frances had chucked me the week before, and I was still bitter about it and afraid of Adela because she had an unpleasant way of

throwing Frances at me. (You summed Adela up when you said she had no tact.) I could see Archdale making signs to her, but she did it again with her lazy air of not being able to help it.

"What are you going to do with yourself this winter?" The poor woman couldn't see she hadn't changed the subject. She was like that.

In the smoke-room he worked round to *his* subject again. I'd asked him how he liked his country house, and he said, "It'll be a jolly place for the Bambino to grow up in. And to step into when I'm dead.

"It's all very well," he said. "He's delicious to kiss and all that, and he'll never be prettier than he is now. But I wish one could skip fifteen years or so. I want the Bambino grown up, *now*. I can't wait twenty years to know what he's going to do, the sort of things he'll say, what his mind'll be like. He's got no end of a mind, Roly, already. At thirteen months. You wouldn't believe it.

"Women are funny," he said. "Adela doesn't want him to grow up. She'd keep him a Bambino always if she had her way."

I can see him with that queer, ironic face of his, gripping his old briar pipe with his teeth while he smiled, thinking of the things the Bambino would do when he grew up.

It was four years before I got the rest of the story; and what I couldn't make out, what I couldn't even have tried to get from either of them, Frances told me.

I'd lost sight of them somehow all that time; then one day I met Jack Archdale at Frances', and he motored us both down to that place of theirs in Buckinghamshire. I can't say I enjoyed the run. Archdale was a sulky, nervous driver. He stopped dead to change his gear, and he took his corners badly. That wasn't like him; he used to be so cool and careful and efficient, and I remember wondering why on earth he was so jumpy and why he sulked so now. He didn't even rise when I asked after the blessed Bambino.

And we weren't in his house five minutes before he let us

see that he'd grown a temper. He hadn't the ghost of one to start with; that I can swear to. I supposed it was the fruit of seven years' marriage with a goose-faced Madonna.

*She* hadn't changed, except that she seemed much more glad to see us than she used to be; so glad, in fact, that it struck me she was positively afraid to be left alone with Archdale and his temper.

I expected every minute that he'd say: "Where's the Bambino?" I said it myself at last, to create a diversion.

Adela seemed gratified, and went out to get him, and Archdale got up and stood by the window with his back to us, pretending to stare at things in his garden. Frances looked round at him uneasily, and I supposed then that he and Adela had quarrelled about the kiddy. It was what they would do. I began to long for the Bambino to appear and break the tension. I think I expected an excited, dramatic entry; I reminded myself that the Bambino was now five years old.

So I wasn't prepared to see Adela come back with a baby in her arms—a baby too young to display excitement, too young to talk. It could only make queer, immature noises.

I said: "What? A new Bambino? And you never told me!"

Adela was smiling stupidly, and Archdale kept his station by the window. The new baby looked as if it didn't see any of us. There was something odd, something morbid about its detachment, and I touched its soft magnolia cheek to feel if it were real.

"I can see it's new," I said, "but—isn't it awfully like the old Bambino?"

"It *is* the old Bambino. There isn't any other."

She put it to the ground. Then I saw.

She had got her way. The Bambino would be a baby all its life. Its mind had stopped dead at fifteen months.

Archdale turned, as if he had got up courage at last to stand with her and see her through. He had braced himself to look at the Bambino.



It couldn't walk; it sort of toddled, with a series of little headlong, shambling rushes, wagging its head till the heavy bulging forehead swung forward and upset its balance. It hadn't sense to grab at things and save itself.

When it fell Archdale rushed to it with a sudden gasping cry. He held it up in his arms, turning with it to Frances and me sternly, as if he defied us to see anything in it but its beauty.

Oh, yes, it was beautiful. It isn't true that idiots always have vacant faces. The Bambino's face was full, full of a heavy, sleeping mournfulness—mournfulness carved into the exquisite, morbid bow of his little mouth, into the straight pure line of his nose, and fixed in his black, drowsy eyes. But an unutterable, not human, mournfulness, without any reminiscence of foreboding. Animals—the unmoving sadness of a cat's eyes would be near it, only that has something human in it.

Adela began talking. "He *is* a little backward. But I tell Jack it's because his mind's too big for his body. He's going to be something wonderful. You've only got to look at his face to see he's thinking." She really thought that.

I believe even Jack thought then it wasn't quite hopeless. He had theories; tried experiments; took infinite precautions. He had the nurseries moved to the ground floor so that Adela shouldn't carry him up and down stairs, and a gate put at the bottom of the staircase so that he shouldn't crawl up and fall down it. The day nursery was hung with glittering balls, and glass prisms that shook in the sun and sent rainbow patches darting about the walls and ceiling. He thought if you could once catch the Bambino's attention you might draw his mind out of its hiding-place. They gave him yards and yards of paper ribbons, pink and green and blue, to play with. The Bambino had dark days when he sat on his big mackintosh mattress like a porcelain idol, doing nothing but wag his head. And he had bright days when he seized the paper ribbons and tore them to bits. And

days of surpassing brilliance when he shambled along the garden walks and tore down Jack's delphiniums and gladioli from their borders. His progress was marked by a trail of decaying blue and scarlet spears.

Frances told me how it happened. Yes, it was Adela; Adela's hands that couldn't hold things; Adela's obstinacy. He had told her not to carry the Bambino up and down stairs. So she did it. The hall stairs were very long and steep, very narrow at the turn. She was coming down them with the Bambino on one arm and the tail of her gown on the other. He caught sight of Archdale in the hall, and was struggling to get to him. . . .

Adela doesn't see the connection between that fall and his "backwardness." She doesn't see yet what's happening to Archdale. She doesn't see why they have separate rooms. Nor why he was terrified the other night when she came in with the big lamp in her hands flaring. He jumped up and took it from her, and she stood there splaying her hands and smiling while he growled at her: "You——"

He didn't say it. It was the one word his mind shied at, the word you hoped he'd never have to hear. If you'll believe me, she positively shrieked it. "Really, Jack, anybody'd think I was an idiot!"

He looked at her, and Frances and I looked at each other. We'd both seen the same thing, only I didn't know what it was till Frances told me.

"He can't help it," she said. "He's afraid of everything. . . . She wants to have more babies, and he won't let her. He simply couldn't stand seeing her hold them."

I said it was rather cruel; and Frances said: "Oh yes, cruel. That's the awful thing, how it's changed him."

I suggested that it hadn't changed Adela, and she put it to me. Could I see anything changing Adela?

I couldn't. After all I was sorrier for him, and I said so. I knew Frances didn't like Adela.

But she shook her head, and said: "I'm not sure. He knows the worst, and she doesn't. It'll be awful when she

sees it. She can't go on pretending when the Bambino . . . Besides, she may have to see what you've seen."

"And that is——?"

She stuck it straight in front of me. "Why, that he hates her."

I suppose that's what I saw.

I wish Frances would take the damned thing away. But she's afraid of it. She's got in too much: the sweet, milk-white, fatuous beauty. And the hands, the terrible, imbecile hands; the insecurity.



THE "WRACKHAM MEMOIRS"



## 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 straggling beard; the tempestuous, dishevelled 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 afterwards 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 realised 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* splendour 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 realise 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 parlour 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 twelve-thirty 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 sombrely.

"It was not," he said, "what I had expected—that meagre 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 beside 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 behaviour 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 afterwards 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 Harbour (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 darknesses 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 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 wings, 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 con-

secration, 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 recognise 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 splendour 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 pitifully 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 recognised 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 splendour 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 hypnotised 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 make 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 for ever from the papers. There is no doubt but that his death staved off the ultimate extinction. It

revived the public interest in him. It joggled 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 unbusinesslike 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, 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 candour 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 honoured (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 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 honour, 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 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 profoundly, 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 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 realise 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 realise *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 afterwards, 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 it 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 mountain-side 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 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—do that 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 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 humour, 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 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 one evening I went 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 downwards.

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 realise. 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 realise 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.

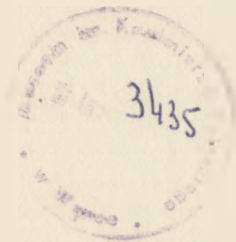
It took us half an hour to burn them. We did it in a sort of sacred silence.

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.









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