

A Lady and Her Husband

By

Amber Reeves

www.saptarshee.in

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Email: <u>saptarsheeprakashan@gmail.com</u>
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CHAPTER I

ROSEMARY looked round her mother's drawing-room. It was a charming room, she thought, of its conventional kind, gay and luxurious, anxious to please, like some soft, pretty woman. She had never considered its origin before, but now she felt sure that her father must have planned it. It revealed his mind—large, cheerful, excellent—and showed the thorough competence of his taste.

She had chosen this room deliberately for an interview with her mother. She was going to tell her mother that she was in love, and she had found herself shy, afraid of the poor lady's emotion. In the publicity of the spacious room, where anyone might interrupt them, a display of feeling would be difficult.

She made sure, once more, of this train of thought. Then she looked anxiously at Mrs. Heyham. Mary was sitting in her usual place by the side of the hearth, and, for the moment, behind the glittering, fire-flushed tea-things, she seemed curiously unreal. She was wearing a chain that her husband had given her, set with pearls and crystals—that caught the light, and so did a brooch that was a present from Trent, her son. Behind these witnesses of masculine esteem there was the vagueness of grey stuff, of lace, of pale brown hair, and a face where the play of and shadows blotted out expression. Rosemary, seeking for some promise of immediate, cheerful sympathy, could see nothing but her mother's evident dignity and grace. On the point of

speaking, she hesitated. She had not the least idea, after all, how her mother would respond to her.

At that moment Mrs. Heyham looked up and met her daughter's eyes. "Yes," she said, "I like your new way of doing your hair, my dear, it suits you, it gives you height. And I like your funny green frock." She smiled a little shyly. She could not tell the child how lovely she found her.

But the tenderness in her voice reached Rosemary, making her feel suddenly affectionate and ashamed.

"Mother, dear," she cried, "how selfish I am!—Am I very horrid to you?"

She had forgotten the ungenerous detachment which she had planned, and as she spoke she crossed the floor to the rug by her mother's knee. She had been fussing all day about her own feelings, she told herself, and she had hardly given a thought to her mother's!

Mrs. Heyham paused before she answered. It was her custom to consider what she said, with a view to her children's welfare, and her replies, in consequence, were sometimes evasive. Horrid to her? What had made Rosemary, she wondered, worry about such a thing? "I hope you don't think so, my dear," passed this scrutiny, but did not satisfy her daughter.

"You don't say I'm not," she insisted.

Her mother reassured her. "Of course you're not."

Rosemary sighed. "I don't think many mothers are like you!" she admitted, and for a moment her

warmth made Mrs. Heyham anxious. These expansions from the children were apt to be connected with remorse. Well, whatever it was, she would hear it now—she put out her hand to smooth the soft hair pressed against her knee. But Rosemary, turning quickly, caught the wandering fingers. To Mary it looked almost as though she had taken fright. Her eyes were wide open and she was trembling a little. "Mother," she said, "I've something to tell you! I've promised—I'm going to marry Anthony."

Before she could stop herself Mrs. Heyham had pulled her hand away. Rosemary promised to marry! At eighteen! Rosemary who had been so careless of love! The girl, anxiously listening, could read nothing but disappointment into her "My darling!"

For a moment they looked at each other. Then came the amends, that Mary was never slow to make. This time she took her daughter's hand in hers. "You know how fond I am of Anthony—it isn't that. But you—you're so young—how can you know—how can you possibly know?"

Rosemary found no words that would convince her. Instead she turned away from her mother's eyes and stared into the fire. It was not a thing one could talk about, how one knew.

Mary looked down at her bright young head. She loved it too dearly, she thought, she could not lose it! "Won't you wait—" she began, but then she checked herself. It was passion, not happiness, that she had wanted to keep from the child for a little longer.

But Rosemary had heard her cry and was answering it. "We have waited ever since the summer. I didn't want to hurt you, mother, but I couldn't bear that anyone should know. Tony wanted to tell you at once, but I wouldn't let him."

Mary did her best to smile. She could not speak—she was humiliated. She had never intruded herself on her children or forced the delicate privacies of their minds, but she had stood apart only, she thought, to watch and direct them better because they were not conscious of her attention. And now, for months, Rosemary had known these new intimacies of love while she had seen no further—that was what it amounted to—than her charming manners!

Rosemary, from the tight grasp of her hands, guessed at Mrs. Heyham's suffering. "Mother, dear, don't mind!" she begged her. "Why should you mind so much?"

Why should she mind?—For a moment Mary struggled with tears. Then she turned resolutely from her painful thoughts. "My darling," she said, "I'm selfish, thoroughly selfish! You mustn't let me spoil your happiness. It's nothing, my dear—only a foolish instinct. You see, I feel that as each of you goes it closes one of the windows of my life!"

Rosemary sighed a little with relief. Here was the matter on reasonable grounds where one could argue about it! She rather enjoyed discussing feelings, though she was shy of showing them. She relaxed her attitude, which had been a little strained, and started to make her point. "But you haven't lost us, mother. We're still there, it's only that we're grown up. After all, having children is an experience, and you've got it there, so much to the good!"

Mrs. Heyham shook her head. She had not the habit of considering her life in terms of experience. Her mind had darkened again over Rosemary's words. Experience—that must be an idea of Anthony's—it was a wonder the child had not said "mental capital." She would never be rid of Anthony now—whenever she talked to Rosemary, Anthony would be behind her!

"And of course I'm not going to marry yet."—Rosemary reproached herself with not having made this clear. Her mother must think her callous. "I should feel sorry enough if I were really going away! You do know how much I love you, don't you, mother darling?"

She started to rise, so that she might reach her mother to kiss her, but Mary rose too. For a moment they clung together, trying each of them, to think of nothing but their mutual love. Then Mary made the need of wiping her eyes an excuse for freeing herself. "I'm going upstairs," she said, "and when I come down I shall be a much nicer, more satisfactory mother, and very glad that you have chosen such a dear boy. I'm delighted that it's Anthony, dear, you must tell him so from me. And now if I were you, I would go and see your father—he's in the library. You will be glad to get it all over." She smiled, pressed Rosemary's hand again, and turned towards the door.

Rosemary, left alone, did not go to her father at once. She was angry with herself. "I didn't do it right," she thought, "I hurt her. I don't see why she should have been hurt, but she was." For a moment, though she sought, she found no explanation; then she decided, "It is father, I suppose, he has kept her so wrapped up. And now, when she has to face a fact, she is not accustomed to it. But all the same I do wish I hadn't hurt her."

She sat down again in her comfortable chair and recalled the conversation. It had been self-conscious, she felt, and artificial, they had not really been open with one another. And yet she did not know what was wrong—it was very difficult.

But she could not keep her mind fixed for long on this distasteful subject. The fire-light and the solitude were pleasant, and her thoughts went back to Anthony and the summer. It was in the early summer at King's Leigh that she had first loved Anthony, though she had not known it. It gave her pleasure to remember the day. She had been bathing with Laura in the stream at the bottom of the garden, and on their way back they had met Anthony coming down the path with towels under his arm. It was blowing, and the wind blew back the folds of his thin shirt. He had asked them whether the river was clear again after the storm, and she had told him yes,—the water was still brown, but you could see the white stones on the bottom. Then absurdly, like a child, she had flushed with shame. Laura and she had been pretending that they were water nymphs, and she had twisted leaves into her hair. Anthony was looking at

the green crown. It had seemed unbearable that he might think she was foolish—laugh at her—without waiting for Laura she had walked away. She had gone quickly through the rose-garden because she did not want Laura to follow her, and along the old stone wall. There was no one under the beeches at the end and she had stopped there, telling herself that it was beautiful. The lilies and the blue larkspurs shone in the sun, there was no wind tinder the trees and the still air felt warm. She had looked up to see the light coming down through the young leaves—it was bright and it glowed, like light in the trumpet of a daffodil. And then, as she stood, a little dazed by the shining leaves and the heat, something that hurt her seemed to stir in her heart—she had thrown herself down beside the trunk of the tree because she had found that she was crying.

She had only been a child then, afraid of love, afraid and exalted beyond any need of Anthony. She had been in love with the summer days, with poetry, with warmth and colour, and flowers. The world had become a place of caressing, delicate contacts, even the air seemed kind to her as she moved through it. Under her happy senses her spirit had quickened. Here, she had thought, was worship—if she could worship—here, in this awe and delight, this conviction that she was one with the flowering earth, with its light, its heat, its joy. Here was the new birth—she had lost her old self, her old hopes and desires, and had become instead a vessel filled with the wonder and the beauty of life.

This ecstasy had not stayed. It had been banished by something more personal, less diffused, by a return of her mind upon itself. It was a new troubling thing—she could remember the first surprise of its insurgence. It had been a hot afternoon and she had been walking by the river, slowly, without any thought of where she was going. A willow bush grew in the long grass by the edge of the water, and beside it she had seen Anthony's blazer lying on the ground. Anthony was playing tennis with Trent; he must have forgotten it. It was a pleasant, secluded place, and the patch of colour on the grass seemed to make a reason why she should stop. She had sat down in what shade the bush afforded—presently she would carry the blazer back to the house.

The light flickered on the water; Rosemary sat lazily inert watching the willow leaves as they stirred a little, and the pointed shadows that changed their shape as they moved over the uneven grass. A white butterfly was circling above her, and while she looked he fluttered down on to the blazer's tempting brightness. The surface did not please him—his eager trunk found no honey-Rosemary, her face held low, saw the under surfaces of his wings gleam blue as he rose from the deceptive cloth. She put out her hand to it, idly, where it lay warm in the sun, but when her fingers met the soft stuff she paused. In the short space of her movement the action had become intimate, had assumed significance. She felt that Anthony must know that she wanted to touch his coat. Then she took courage. Her doubt, her

hesitation, were nothing to Anthony. His coat was thrown down, forgotten, disregarded. She might touch it or not, no sense of his could be fine enough to betray her. She had pulled it towards her and buried her face in the limp, kindly cloth before she realised, trembling, what she had done.

Now, remembering it, she moved in the big chair and sighed. She almost regretted that moment of sharp feeling. She was happy now, but even the first secret delight of her happiness was at its end. She had told her mother; she had still to tell her father, and Laura, and Trent. And they would all discuss it and fuss about it. Trent would think it his duty to express his opinions. She had been foolish, really, not to choose a time when Trent was away.

She felt restless—she pushed back her chair and went over to one of the tall windows. Outside a spring gale was flinging drops of water from the plane trees in the London square. The rain had stopped, there was blue in the sky, and an old man who sold primroses had left his shelter and was carrying his basket down the empty street. It was a day for a long walk over the Downs with the dogs.

She was watching the yellow gleams of light that lay on the pavement and its iron railings, when her attention was caught by a cry from the old man. Hope had entered his heart when he saw her and his features were now bent to an encouraging smile. "Here y'are lidy," he called, and held up the basket.

Rosemary shook her head, and then, to end the matter, walked away from the window. Her mother

was right, she thought, she might as well get it over. Slowly and reluctantly she went downstairs.

Meanwhile Mrs. Heyham had gone to her sitting-room. She shut its door behind her with relief. Here, alone, there was no need to think of Rosemary's feelings. She could give way now, a little, to her jealousy and her regret, to the fierce dislike that she had felt when she thought of Anthony touching her daughter's hair—turning up her face to enjoy its loveliness.

They had loved one another for months, and she had never known! To her neglectful eyes the child had seemed unchanged. It had been a joy to her that Rosemary, fastidious and a little reserved, had never been swayed or excited by the people who moved her sister. She had believed that this younger favourite daughter possessed some quick instinct of her own, some power of direction that was enough for her. Mary had been able to stand by and see her avail herself of the widest freedom in the confidence that it was Rosemary with whom she had to deal, not some friend or some enthusiasm of the moment. And now men had come into her life, and love, and approaching marriage. To her mother it seemed that they must spoil it. Rosemary's liberty of mind was gone, she must respond to a man's clumsy, imperative emotions, tune her mind to his, find her growth and her insight checked by insistent personal ties.... That was all very well, later on, but Rosemary was only a child.

She turned her mind, with an effort, from this unbearable thought. It was her duty, she reminded

herself, not to be miserable, but to be honest. Being honest now, as generally, meant to Mrs. Heyham discovering a way to accept any blame that remained when she had made excuses for everybody else. On this occasion she found it as easy as usual to persuade herself that she was behaving badly. She was doing, she must admit it, just what she had despised in other mothers. She was regarding her children as mere objects for her own affections. She had not grudged Laura, because she had felt that she herself was giving the brilliant creature to Harry, because in Laura she had wanted to live through again her own early wifehood and motherhood. Now she was hurt and bitter because Rosemary had put her aside, had claimed a right to her own youth and her own beauty. She could only feel that Rosemary did not know what a priceless gift they were.

Since Laura had married she had been hoping, as silly old women hope, to fill a greater place in Rosemary's life. She had felt that this was the time for which she had waited ever since Rosemary had learned to walk. She had stood then, a mere mother, outside the excitements and mysteries of nursery life. All through the children's youth she had waited, greedy for their love. Now, it seemed to her, her chance was gone.

Now she was middle-aged, and her life was failing her. With the children went its purpose and its meaning. She had worked hard to be the sort of mother they liked, to make her home a congenial background for their activities. She had not oppressed them with her own needs, or forced their

affection from them. And now they were going, going to other homes where she would be only a visitor who rang their door-bells and asked their servants whether they were in. She could no more share them with their husbands than she had shared them with one another when they were babies. She could not even arrange the world for them as she had then. They had grown up, as modern girls do, in touch with an intricate life that meant nothing to her. She had given them her ignorant sympathy, her facile interest, her approval, where she could, but if they had valued these it was because they loved her. And it would not matter to them any more what she and their father felt. They would wait on someone else's ideas and someone else's moods. She had tried her utmost to be just to them, to hold herself in check—it only made her feel the more for them now the slowness and the egotism of men. They were happy—she wondered how much their happiness had cost of the freedom she had so painfully given them

She rose from the chair where she had been sitting to walk up and down the room. She was stung again by the knowledge that Rosemary was gone, that she looked to other loves, to a new life, to another loyalty. She tried in vain to change her thoughts by centring them on her own foolishness. "I've been dreadful," she told herself, "ugly, grasping, blind! She has a right to choose her happiness." That was bald—bald enough to shock anyone into common-sense. But she could not quite believe it. Why—why had the child not waited!

One thing she could at least do, she told herself. She could use self-control, and refrain from causing discomfort to others by her selfish pain. She had failed already quite sufficiently that afternoon.

The clear discernment of a duty was always a relief to Mrs. Heyham, a stimulus to which she could respond mechanically. She now turned her mind, after an effort, to considering the matter from Rosemary's point of view, to any thoughts, indeed, that would keep her mind from its ungenerous fretting. And Rosemary's interview with her father, she supposed, was now taking place. It would not be terrible. James's children, like everyone else, found him a sympathetic and delightful man. But Trent was another matter. It was a pity that neither his sisters nor she could really get on with Trent. She had never felt for him the passionate love a mother sometimes feels for her only son. She had hoped to, she had tried to, but Trent had baffled her. It was wrong of her, for poor Trent was loyal and affectionate. It was a pity, perhaps, that they had sent him to Harrow, where his family could not follow him. That was perhaps why they could not follow now his perfectly correct and manly view of life. She was struggling with a sense of fatigue and incoherence among these familiar reflections when the door opened to admit her husband.

James seldom forgot to kiss his wife when he found her alone, not only because he was a methodical man, but because he seldom forgot that he was fond of her. To-day he kept his arm around

her shoulders and looked down at her tenderly. "Poor little mother," he said, "to have nobody left but me!"

She let him draw her head against his shoulder where it was easier to cry. He used to call her "little mother" long ago, when the children were babies and belonged to her.

After a little he thought that she had cried enough and ought to be cheered up now; he made her sit in a comfortable chair while he went over to the fireplace.

"Of course Rosemary is much too young for this sort of thing," he said, believing that the only permanent cheering up is obtained by facing facts, "but we must admit that she's done very well for herself, better than poor Laura."

This was the first time anybody had thought of calling Laura "poor," and Mrs. Heyham looked up for explanations.

"Hastings," her husband went on, "is a thoroughly decent fellow, he's a cut above most of the young men the children have in the house. And since Laura isn't here, I don't mind saying that Moorhouse is a bit of a fool. I fancy he came the man of the world over Laura!"

"He makes her very happy,"—Mrs. Heyham's voice was a little doubtful—"and he's an excellent man of business."

"It's quite possible she'll soon have as many cares as you, my dear, but, as you know, I've always declared that since my girls would have enough to live on anyhow I did not mean to make money the most important thing. I don't object to it, of course,

but I don't see why I should let it sway my judgment. Laura's man is not good enough for her, and I shall be disappointed if Hastings doesn't turn out a son-in-law to be proud of." He smiled at Mary, and stroked his trim little pointed beard.

Mrs. Heyham did not answer, but she realised, as she looked up, how proud she was of James. He was a hard-working business man himself, and after thirty years of it he might have been forgiven if he had been a little obsessed by ordinary business standards. Most men in his position wouldn't have looked at a penniless boy whatever they thought of his intellect and character. But James did not keep his principles for nothing. She could almost wish for once, that he had been a more conventional father, and she felt a moment's anxiety as she wondered how far his complaisance had extended.

"You told her—of course—that they'd have to wait?" she asked.

"There was no need, the child showed very proper feeling, but I did say that I didn't suppose you would consent to her setting out on married life at eighteen. In any case, it appears that the young man wants to be earning enough to pay for his own share of the ménage."

James was evidently pleased with the interview that had just taken place. "She's a dear child," he went on after a minute; "you're to be congratulated on both of them, Mary, though I admit that as a wife I prefer their mother. The women of your day had more character, though nobody made a fuss about their brains. Nowadays young people treat each other

as if they were all friends of the same sex; it may suit them, but I know I shouldn't have liked it."

Mrs. Heyham did not move, and he wondered whether his talk was having the desired effect. He felt very sorry for her—when he thought about it he often felt sorry for women. Good women had such a hard time of it, they suffered so inevitably as life went on. It was rough on them losing their looks, it was rough on them when their boys went to school, and many of them had a bad time with their husbands. Men wouldn't have stood it, but women—thank God for it!—were like that. Men were not grateful enough, but he had done his best to make life smooth for Mary and the girls.... Poor Mary, he was glad she had cried on his shoulder. She was a dignified little thing, it was not always easy to tell what she was thinking.

He went over to her and stroked her hair. That, to his mind, was the use of her hair, and to please him she dressed it in a way that was not easily disarranged.

She looked up at him, and he saw at once that she was still a little excited. "James," she said, and then paused. He sat down on the arm of her chair so that he might give her better attention. When she spoke it was in the slow thoughtful way he deplored. It meant that she was taking things too hard.

"What do other women do when the children go?" she asked him. "How do they fill up their days?"

"I should say a good many of them were glad of a rest," he told her reassuringly. "It's not such easy work bringing up children. Haven't you noticed a friend whose grey hairs have gone brown since her daughters married? We shall have you a gay young thing again in no time. Or you could take up politics and make Trent stand for Parliament—the old lady would look fine as candidate's mother!"

She shook her head. "You forget the candidate's wife. I don't think I want to play second fiddle to Trent's Lady Hester. But I suppose that is about what they do. Either they knit boots for their grandchildren, or they go on committees."

The mention of Lady Hester had ruffled James's good humour. "If Trent waits for her, he'll wait some time," he said. He shrugged his shoulders and then they both smiled. "Trent's good at waiting," he admitted.

Mary jumped up from her chair and took his hands. "James," she whispered, "I sometimes wish there were something Trent wasn't good at!"

James kissed her. That was all right! Here was the old lady quite cheerful again. They must all be very kind to her for a day or two, and when she realised that Rosemary wasn't leaving her yet and got used to Anthony's new status she would see that there was nothing to be unhappy about for a long time. And when the disaster came she would be busy waging war on Laura's nurses.

"I told Rosemary she could have her young man to dinner, my dear," he said, apprehensive, but feeling that on the whole it was better to get it over. "It seemed the only decent thing to do." His wife appeared to have accepted the worst. Her "I'm glad, I forgot to tell her," was serene. "Laura's been here to say that she and Harry aren't coming. That's just as well, Trent will be quite enough for them in one evening."

CHAPTER II

BUT Mrs. Heyham, though she did her best, could not settle down as she ought to have done. James watched her carefully, and though she was charming about it he felt that the engagement still distressed her. She was a little pale, he thought, and detached and indifferent to carefully planned amusements. Something more radical would have to be done. He would have liked to take her abroad, but he had business matters in hand which he could not trust to Trent. Nevertheless things must not remain as they were. He took his problem to Rosemary, whose own conscience was not untroubled. "We've got to think of some way," he told her, "of interesting your mother."

Rosemary agreed with him. Now that she turned her mind to it she could see that her mother's life needed interests. For what, when she came to express her sense of it, had Mary's life been? She expended some little ingenuity in pointing and amplifying her own conception of such an existence before, in her turn, she consulted Anthony.

Her mother, that was the gist of it, had not lived. Here, in this great world of speed and steel and electricity, this world of banks and syndicates and organised labour, Mrs. Heyham had kept her house and nursed her babies as she might have done a hundred, five hundred, years ago. She used the clothes and the food and the furniture of the twentieth century because they were there, at her hand. She knew nothing of how they were made or

of what brought them to her. She lived like an insect in a coral reef, ignorant of the laws by which she was governed. Mathematics, the triumph of man's intellect, meant some x's and y's, some circles and triangles in children's school-books. Philosophy meant that a great many cultivated people do not believe in God. Biology meant that in some indiscreet manner we are descended from monkeys; economics that the Conservatives think a lot can be done with Tariff Reform, and the Liberals have been left to make the best of Free Trade. Industry was represented in her mind by the shops where she bought her clothes and ordered her provisions, by factories, heard of but never seen, by a bank with large stone pillars that sent her cheque-books, by so much money from her husband every week. When she tried to escape from it all, at least to vary it, she travelled on padded seats of first-class carriages, she slept in hotels where she was carried to her room in a lift, she stared at views whose last details of excellence had been dissected in guide books. Public opinion, since she was a rich woman, did not allow Mr. Heyham to beat her or to take her money, and she could walk alone in the street without being insulted. She could read novels about other women's love-affairs, she could turn up the light in her house by putting her finger on a knob. Yet she had no clue to the meaning of her life or of the lives of the people who served her and worked for her. She knew as little of the city she lived in as she knew of the fields where primitive women toiled. She was shut off—like all of us, Rosemary thought—from the

wild things of the earth, from its oceans, its forests, its snows. She was denied man's heritage knowledge, the rewards of his search for truth. She was sheltered from the need of working with her hands. She had lost the keenness of her savage senses and the strength of her savage impulses. She had lost her bodily hardness, her mental vigour and curiosity. Even her love of luxury had gone—she did not care, as some women do, to scent herself and hang herself with jewels, to wrap herself in soft furs and in supple bright-coloured stuffs. All these desires had withered to a mere dislike of dirt and disorder, a vague positive aspiration that things should be nice. Mrs. Heyham was a graceful woman, good, simple, sensitive. She respected herself and she was respected by others. That was her spiritual share of the loot of the centuries!

They were walking through the park to Hampton Court when Rosemary tried to impose this view of the matter on Anthony. He listened to it with interest but without excitement. He was a fair-haired, sunny-tempered youth, a little lazy about giving rein to his own enthusiasm but tolerant of Rosemary's, for he admired her wits. It was a fine afternoon. He turned appreciative eyes to the long lines of trees changing from green to grey in the slight pleasant haze. Then he looked back at Rosemary. "Well," he asked her, "granting all that—and you've put it very nicely—what is your solution?"

Rosemary had thought of a solution and a very good solution too, suitable, revolutionary, and high-minded. She was not deterred from explaining it by

Tony's indolent tone. Rosemary was herself a Socialist and she could not help feeling that if her mother were to take up some sort of work among her father's employees the results must be thoroughly satisfactory to all right-thinking people. Her father was a good employer—neither she nor Anthony doubted it—but it is admitted that only a woman can understand a woman's difficulties. If you thought of the matter with an open mind, some such devotion of herself seemed only Mrs. Heyham's duty. There could be no doubt that she ate and wore the profits of the business.

"Delightful for the girls, but what is your mother going to get out of it?" Anthony asked. He thought of his own mother, a strong-minded lady who made a great point of remembering that she was only a woman. No child of hers would willingly have extended the sphere of her influence, but then she lacked essential human kindness. Mrs. Heyham, on the other hand, was the kindest woman he knew, she was kinder than Rosemary. He wouldn't, personally, have considered that her life or her personality needed any addition. They seemed to him gracious, complete, and satisfying, and he did not think that she herself would wish to tamper with them.

But Rosemary was answering him. Why—she told him, looking round in her turn at the still trees and the sunny grass—here would be her mother's chance. She could leave her artificial, opulent home and go out into the world, the man's world, that she had never seen. She would touch it, study it, find out her own place and her value from it. She could live

again, not only with her charm and her sympathy and her admirable legitimate affections but with her mind, with her soul—Tony might jeer at the word as much as he liked, but it was exactly her soul that Rosemary meant. She would learn that out in the world justice and mercy and pity are not easy, natural things. They must be found—fought for, insisted on. "Mother," she finished, "has never fought for anything in her life."

"On the contrary," Anthony told her, "you know nothing about it. A woman like your mother—I speak with the authority of all the ages—finds her life and her adventures in herself. She doesn't need to be stirred by your gross realities, your sordid politics, your miserable clamour for things to eat and a hole to go to sleep in. She lives, so to speak, in the depths of the sea, dark-green and heavy, far away down, while you, my dear Rosemary, are running about in a bright red bathing-dress and splashing in the little waves on the beach." He smiled at her all the same as if he approved her choice of occupation.

"And the air," Rosemary reminded him, "and the sky, and the sun! But seriously, Tony, isn't that all drivel? There may be a mystical life that can do without experience, but most women haven't got it—mother hasn't. Taking things as they are, what can you find to criticise in my plan?"

Tony turned to look at her and met her earnest eyes. She was a beautiful creature, he thought, and he liked her gallant tilting at destiny. It was rather jolly of her to marry him. When he spoke, his voice expressed an easy-going affection. "If I were your mother," he informed her, "I wouldn't stir a finger to touch what you call life. However, from your point of view, your plan is all right—if you can persuade your father."

Rosemary had no doubts upon that score. She could easily manage father, and her mother would simply have to be persuaded. Really it was a masterly idea—it would be thrilling, most thrilling, to see what she made of it all.

To her father next day she presented the plan as if it meant nothing more than a trifling charity, and Mr. Heyham, after careful thought, saw no objection to it. He was not aware of any deficiencies in his system, but he was a broad-minded man and could very well believe that there were a lot of little things that might be done for the girls as long as they were done in a proper way. He had always deplored the spirit which makes so many employers regard their business contract as the only link between master and men. He had given his support to Progressive legislation when his party introduced it, and when he went into one of his restaurants he liked to see the waitresses looking cheerful and well-fed. He knew that he was popular, and the thought of Mary among the work-people, doing good to them and adored by them, was pleasant. Also, and this was the chief consideration, it was just the thing for Mary. Her own children were leaving her and what she wanted was somebody to mother. He thought well of Rosemary for her idea; he told himself that there is a good deal to be said for these modern young women.

Laura, whose own struggles with housekeeping had given her a new respect for Mrs. Heyham, showed the easy enthusiasm of the irresponsible. It would be splendid for mother to have this fresh outlet for her powers, and it would be so nice for them all to feel that everything was being looked after from a woman's point of view. Perhaps later on, if mother organised clubs or anything that might help her—after all, they all shared in the profits of the business and in a sort of way they were responsible. She also felt that it was so splendid of father to want to let mother in, not like most men who are so vulgar about their wives. And—this when she had been told of the young man's attitude—it was just like Trent to make a fuss about what everybody else wanted.

Rosemary, though she was glad of this warm reception, did not feel that it took her very much further as to Trent. If Mrs. Heyham chose to see a difficulty in his beastly mulishness she was not likely to be moved by Laura. After all Trent worked very hard at the business and, in a way, he had plenty of brains. You could not disregard him as if he were a boy or a fool.

"Why not, when he behaves like one?" Laura had only looked in for a few minutes and as she was in a hurry she was inclined to take a lofty way with obstacles.

Rosemary did not agree. "It's very tiresome of him, but what is the use of owning a business if you can't be tiresome and obstinate about it? That's what employers mean when they write to the papers and say that they must be allowed to manage their own affairs in their own way!" In her heart Rosemary was not sorry to see Trent embodying her notion of the grasping capitalist. She was fond of her brother, but she preferred a dramatic interest.

Laura refused to see matters in this light. If they wanted to win, the point to be stressed was not Trent's rights but his ungraciousness. "But, my dear Rosemary," she said, "he can't have any serious objection! Isn't it obvious that he's merely trying to be disagreeable? Unless of course—" this struck her as a good idea—"he thinks his Iredales won't consider it the thing!" She had a train to catch and as she spoke she moved towards the door.

Rosemary shook her head. She didn't believe that Lord Iredale's objection to Trent as a cousin would be affected by any charitable enterprises that Mrs. Heyham might undertake. Trent's reasons, whatever they were, were clearly not of a kind that he could make public.

This, as Trent himself felt, was the weakness of his position. He was not a man who could make a show with sentimental values and this was a matter of sentiment. Trent liked little soft childish women. He liked, in a quiet way, to be made a fuss of; he did not long to be understood, but only to be prettily admired. Women who sat on committees and superintended movements were apt to cultivate an impersonal manner which he found chilling. He had not much leisure for ladies' society, but when he did adorn it he expected to be received with womanly charm. And his grievance now was that Rosemary,

with her confounded ideas, was getting hold of, was doing her best to spoil, his charming mother.

However you looked at it, it was a horrible plan. Mrs. Heyham, as Trent saw her, was the last person to throw among waitresses and factory girls. Their girls were no worse than the rest, in fact the firm made distinct efforts towards moral tone, but he could not believe in his heart that they were better. And Trent was afraid of waitresses. At Oxford there had been a rather large waitress who made advances to him. She was a moist lady with bright yellow hair, and Trent still shivered with disgust when he thought of her dirty fingers on the edge of his plate.... That was the sort of person Rosemary wanted to bring into contact with his mother! He pictured Mrs. Heyham being imposed on, made use of, duped and talked over by malcontents and agitators. Sooner or later there was bound to be trouble and once she was there they would have to stand by her. On the other hand the prospect of his mother hardened, his mother become managing and suspicious, his mother under the influence of inspectors and Trade Union officials and Socialists of all kinds, filled him with a mild anguish.

Trent did not realise that Mrs. Heyham, who was now forty-five, had a character of her own. She had been almost his ideal of a mother, receptive and sympathetic, and he could not think of her now as anything but immature and easily swayed. A wave of protective feeling rose in his heart. It was particularly shocking that her own husband should expose her to this danger!

But though these considerations glared broadly before his eyes he could not state them directly. Trent had, of a formal kind, an immense respect for his mother, and he accepted the fact that it was as impossible for her husband to discuss her with her son as it was for her son to discuss her with anyone else. It was unfortunate, he thought, that the serious approach had come from his sister and that when James had mentioned the plan to him he had done so in a casual manner, alluding to it as Rosemary's newest idea. Trent had hoped to avoid offence by laughing too, saying that Rosemary's imagination was given to running away with her, and promising that he would think it over as fully as it deserved. Thinking it over had only produced reasons to fortify his impulsive aversion, and if he did not mention it again it was because he hoped that Mr. Heyham might have seen fit, on reflection, to drop it. Trent never made it harder for people to do right by enlisting their pride against him.

But James, who had learned from Rosemary of Trent's real attitude, had as a matter of fact been waiting, not to retreat from his position, but for some sign of an apology from his son. In business matters Trent might stand up to him if he could. Young brains were sometimes a match for experience, and in any case they could only develop by making a fight for it. But where his own wife—where Trent's mother—was concerned, Mr. Heyham was still the head of his family, and he was hurt that Trent should lack the good taste that would have taken this for granted. He had never exacted a show of respect

from his son, and he had perhaps assumed too easily that the young man had understood his attitude. He ought to have understood it; if he hadn't he showed a mental coarseness which his father did not find easy to forgive.

Mr. Heyham had always stuck up for Trent, if only because he was a boy and the girls were down on him, but it seemed to him quite possible now that he had been wrong. The possibility was not pleasant, and James, when business allowed it, preferred his thoughts to have a mellow savour. He therefore decided, when two days had passed and Trent had said nothing, to finish the matter out in the library after dinner.

He waited until Trent had left the hearth-rug and settled himself in a chair. James himself remained standing, it was always, he felt, annoying to have your adversary leaning over you. Trent was looking particularly thoughtful, for he was trying a new kind of cigar.

James opened briskly. "Rosemary and I are anxious to know, Trent, when we may mention this plan of ours to your mother?"

Trent was deeply disappointed. He had hoped, at the least, for a reasonable openness of mind, and he was met with what looked painfully like a display of temper. It was clear that argument was no use, there was nothing for it but to be firm.

"As soon as you like, sir," he said in a tone which he hoped would express the sentiments desirable to a man in his position, "as long as my mother understands that it has nothing to do with me."

"As long as we tell her that you wash your hands of her!"

This was unfair, and Trent hated unfairness. He stared hard at the cigar for a moment while he tried to master his irritation, telling himself that thirty years of business make a man quick to put others in the wrong. His father, watching him, was struck by the attitude. "Good lord," he thought, "he might be a curate! Well, well...." Meanwhile Trent was answering. "My dear father, once we're committed to this plan it won't be possible to wash our hands of it. But I don't want my mother to think I approve of it."

"It would be interesting," said James, who was accustomed to come off best in verbal disputes, "exceedingly interesting to know why!"

Trent picked his way as well as he could, among his reasons. "Well, in the first place, I'm convinced that it will make difficulties. Perhaps I see more of the girls than you do, and they're as discontented as they can be. Especially the waitresses. We simply can't afford to have them upset." He hesitated.

"And what in the second place?"

"In the second place, then, I must say that I don't think it's suitable for my mother. Our girls are not like villagers, they're not accustomed to ladies. And mother has never had any experience of this sort of thing."

By this time James was angry too. Trent had as good as said that he didn't take proper care of his own wife. That wasn't an arguable matter, so he let it

rankle a little and turned to the other point. "I really can't congratulate you on your apparent experience," he said. "Our waitresses are a perfectly respectable lot of girls; I shouldn't in the least mind my daughters going amongst them. In any case I can't see why you should think that your mother is likely to corrupt them!"

Here was more unfairness! "I didn't say corrupt. I said upset. Anything they are not accustomed to upsets them. Look at the trouble we had over stopping their tips, though they must have seen that it's a far better plan to have a regular bonus! What I feel is that the person at the back of this is Rosemary, and frankly I'm not prepared to be responsible for Rosemary's ideas."

Rosemary's ideas received no defence from her father. He had thought of a new weapon. "My dear fellow," he retorted, "suppose we look at this from your mother's point of view for a moment. It may not occur to her that her influence is likely to be disastrous and upsetting. She may even feel that she has some rights in the matter, seeing that half the business is hers! You forget that it was your mother's money that bought out old Clarkson!"

Trent had forgotten it, indeed it was not often remembered by anyone but Mary's unsatisfactory brother. When Trent heard it mentioned now he knew that he had lost; money is money, even when it belongs to a woman. But he was too much annoyed to admit defeat. "I wasn't disputing my mother's rights, sir; if it were even her own wish it would be different. But, as I understand it, she is to be

persuaded into a rôle of interference that is the last thing she would have thought of for herself!"

His father laughed. "In fact there's a general conspiracy in the family against the dignity and peace of mind of Trent Heyham, Esq.!"

Trent, he flattered himself, could be a gentleman even in an argument. Such cheap sneers were unworthy of his father. They were not argument. He did not answer them.

James, too, felt that almost enough had been said. Trent hadn't a chance, and there was no need to press the boy.

"Look here," he said, quite agreeably, "I'm not prepared to discuss your mother with you. You can take it from me that nobody is going to persuade her against her wishes"—Trent grunted, he knew Rosemary's powers—"and I'm not going to discuss the whole position of women with you either, though I don't mind telling you that you know nothing about it. But before we close the subject you must understand that I really can't undertake to explain your views to your mother. They're beyond me. But of course I shall be delighted if you can make her see why she is going to do all this harm. Only you'll have to put it off until to-morrow because I mean to speak to her myself first." Victory had made him energetic, and he felt this was a good moment for explaining the matter to Mary. He stood up, paused for a minute as if he were waiting for Trent's answer, and then walked briskly, almost gaily, out of the room. He knew that he had left Trent nursing a grievance. He knew that Trent did not mean to speak to his mother, and that he felt insulted by the accusation. He did not care whether the poor young man felt insulted or not. For the moment Trent was merely a defeated adversary.

Moreover he was a nuisance. Mr. Heyham had never felt certain that Mary would take to the plan, and now it had become necessary that she should receive it with enthusiasm. He was not going to overpersuade her, he had said so, and, besides, it is of no use forcing a person to do a thing for her own amusement. But Trent had certainly made it difficult for him to give way on the matter. Trent was a self-righteous young fool. Damn him!

Mary was alone in the drawing-room, for Rosemary had gone to a theatre with Anthony. James became more impressed by the beneficence of his scheme when he noticed that Mary was doing nothing. But she took up some knitting and pretended to be busy directly she saw him—brave little woman!

He hovered over her rather awkwardly for a moment. Twenty years ago, if he had wanted to persuade her, he would have sat down on the footstool at her feet, and some unreasonable impulse was urging him now that the footstool would be appropriate. He made no conscious decision, habit settled him in his usual chair, but for once he went doubtfully. He remembered the time when their house had seemed to him merely an opportunity for being alone with Mary, when his heart had beat with a little feeling of triumph as he closed the street door. Then the children had come, with their right to

interrupt, to burst joyfully into rooms, and now that the children were going he had discovered a sense of what was due to the servants. It would be ridiculous now to jump up because the moment had come for some of the servants' confounded fidgetings. He told himself that there was nothing to regret. He and Mary were beyond the old constant need of these little symbols and affirmations. It would be absurd if they weren't, after twenty-six years together. Such things had to give way to the other pressures and interests of life, but that didn't mean that love had given way!

He looked fondly across at Mary, satisfaction completely restored. It was a commonplace that there are not many wives like Mary, and a matter for congratulation that he had, on the whole, been able to make her a very decent husband. At any rate, she thought so, bless her, and he was perfectly willing to admit his debt to her belief. If James had really believed in a God he would frequently have thanked Him for His forethought in creating good women.

As it was, the force of Mr. Heyham's gratitude went to increase his determination. "I suppose Rosemary has been telling you of the great things you are to do?" he began lightly, wasting no more time.

"Well, she hasn't said anything, but she has been looking at me with an appraising eye. And she has lent me one or two books to read." It was plain to Mary that James wanted her to be pleased about Rosemary's scheme, so she prepared herself to

receive it. "Dear James! Dear children! How sweet of them to think of me!" she told herself hurriedly.

James seemed amused. "I saw she was trying to make Trent read somebody's *Principles of Economics* the other day."

"I don't think these were economics. I'm afraid I haven't looked at them yet, though I meant to begin one this evening. She said they were books that would give me an insight into the lives of the poor."

James was touched by the thought of little mother bent over Rosemary's books. "Tyrannous young bluestocking!" he said, "I don't think we need bother our old lady with books! It's just where books fail that we want her to come in. The fact is, mother—I don't know whether you will forgive us but your family have been hatching a plot. Rosemary is concerned about the workgirls ground down under the masculine heels of Trent and her father, and I am very much concerned about the old lady. I don't think she's as happy as she ought to be. She's an active old thing, and it's no use her pretending that she can settle down to knitting. I believe if she looks she'll find the sock she's got there has two heels to it. So we thought that if she were to give some of her time to combating the firm's ruthless oppression it would be a new interest for her, besides putting an end to one of the worst excesses of the capitalistic régime!"

Mary was startled into opposition. "But, my dear, what could I do? I'm certain I shouldn't suit Rosemary at all—I should probably be on the side of

the tyrants! And I know nothing about it!" She smiled at him to hide a sudden feeling of fear.

James was very soothing and very affectionate. She needn't be afraid that she would have to participate in crimes—things weren't as bad as that, in spite of Rosemary's friends. And she mustn't fear either that she was going to be asked to move mountains or change human nature. It was really the mere fact of her interest that was important. The girls would feel that someone cared about them, someone who needn't have cared; they wouldn't suspect her motives as they always suspected the motives of their employers. And her presence would help them in other ways. A word or two would encourage the lady managers to treat their staffs more kindly though James could assure her that they were a kind set of women, wonderfully kind when you thought how heavy their responsibilities were—yet Mary's example would perhaps infuse a new courtesy into their intercourse with the girls. And perhaps Mary's quick eye would see little things that might with advantage be altered—it was very difficult for a busy man to realise where rules pressed perhaps a little more hardly than they were meant to, and the lady managers hadn't always the fine sense that could be trusted only to complain about the right things. It is difficult to explain the necessities of the case to people of no education without appearing brutal, or even to concede a reform without appearing weak. On the whole they had had to discourage complaints. But a private word to him from Mary would stand in

a entirely different category. It would be like giving him double time, two pairs of ears, two pairs of eyes.

He didn't for a moment propose that she should make a burden for herself, or tie herself down to stated hours and times. She was to take them as lightly as she chose, and they would know how to be grateful.

Mary submitted to the flood of these persuasions in helpless silence. James did not like being checked in the middle of his explanations. Moreover, taking his argument point by point, she could not answer it. James was so just and so reasonable—everything he said was sure to be true. Her only defence was that she didn't like the idea that she was afraid of it. She did not want to be mixed up in James's business. She had been perfectly content to trust him where she could not follow him. His work, to her, seemed vast, complicated, laborious, and she credited him with a display of qualities in relation to it which matched the candour, the courage, the generosity she so counted upon at home. She knew that he shone at business as he shone everywhere else, but for her it was different. How would she fare in this world where men made the rules, with its stalwart virtues and strange stumbling-blocks? How could she know that she wouldn't give offence, be weak, or foolish, make James look down on her? "It would be all very well for Rosemary," she told herself, "but I can't—no, I can't-it's too much for me!"

"Well, what are you hiding in that wise little head of yours?" her husband was saying.

She could not find words. Her opening "James" remained unsupported. She would have liked, instead of answering, to cry.

"Is it as dreadful as all that? Are we bullying our little mother?" James had crossed over to her and taken both her hands, and made her stand up in front of him by the fireplace. "She must have a little more courage—oh, yes, I can see she is afraid, afraid of making a mess of things and not coming up to expectations. But she must pull herself together and remember that I've just been telling Trent, that in a way she owns a good deal of this terrifying business, and in a way she is responsible for it. Trent and I have done our best to administer it for her, but as Rosemary thinks, though she's too polite to say so, we are dull masculine creatures at best, and the place needs its mistress's eye."

If James spoke like that it meant that his mind was made up. There was no real use in disputing and making matters more hard, more definite. Nevertheless, she spoke. "But, James, supposing we don't agree?"

James accepted the admission with a smile. "My dear, are we in the habit of quarrelling? And do we always agree? Well, then! When we don't agree we shall talk things over."

"And I shall give way!" Of course she would give way, it was simple enough.

James shook his head. "I'm not so sure about that! I know somebody who can be as obstinate as a tiger with a bone! I'd sooner move mountains than move her from off one of her scruples! She's a

dreadful little person to tackle when her mind is made up!" Mary's obstinacy had been agreed upon between them since she had successfully refused to have footmen in her household, or even a boy and a butler.

Mary reassured him. "But in this case you'll have the making of it up!"

James thought it probable he would. "Well, there's no need to sigh like that!" he told her. "In six months, ridiculous one, we shall have you thanking us for a new lease of life!"

Mrs. Heyham smiled faintly, and let him swing her hands in and out. "You said you had to remind Trent," she asked presently. "Does that mean that he doesn't agree with you?"

James let go her hands that he might clasp his own behind his back. "I rather gather that Mr. Trent believes in women leading a sheltered life. Dewsprinkled flowers and bloomy grapes and that sort of thing. He was distressed at the idea of your going among the girls, who don't meet his ideas of nice people. And on the other hand he seemed to fear that you would prove a channel for Rosemary's revolutionary doctrines—want to hand over the business to the London County Council, or whatever the theory of the moment is."

Mary could laugh. "Dear Trent—to tell you the truth, though I wouldn't care to admit it to Rosemary, I've only the dimmest notion of her theories! It's a subject on which I've felt too ignorant for discussion. But, seriously, James, how can I undertake the work

you suggest if one of the directors objects?" For a moment she felt grateful to Trent.

"I don't think we shall hear much more of Trent's objection, my dear, and even if his manners were worse than I think them, it's of no consequence. I made him a director because I thought it more fair to him, but until I retire I, and not Trent, am at the head of the firm." He spoke in his business voice.

There was nothing very hopeful in that, and Mary felt weakly inclined for a compromise. "You'll give me a night to think it over, won't you, James?" she asked. "It's just possible I might discover an argument that would send you and your old plan packing."

James laughed and kissed her. "Oh, I'm quite ready to allow Rosemary her share in the glory of convincing you. I'm sure that not even Anthony could have lured her out if she had known that the assault was to be made to-night. Think it over as much as you like, but I don't expect you'll find your argument!"

There was nothing more to say, the matter was settled for the evening, and James became aware of the fact that it was ten o'clock. Moreover, he was in the drawing-room, whereas at ten o'clock, if they were alone, he was accustomed to be in his study. Mary did not want him, she had turned back to her knitting, and she would soon be going to bed. He waited a moment, to be sure that she did not want him, but when it came she seemed quite to expect his good-night.

Nevertheless, Mary did not go to bed. She lay back in her chair and tried, in the interval that he had left her, to bring some pertinent order into her thoughts. She had not only to decide what she should do, but, equally difficult, how she should put the thing to James. She knew that she was not good at sustaining an argument even when she had thought it out carefully beforehand.

She tried to state the case very plainly to herself, James's side and the other side. After all, that was the important thing, it did not matter so much that he should be pleased with the answer he got from her. Just now she had been cowardly; it was only fair to him that he should know what was really in her mind. She had slid too much into the habit of answering James's mood and not his arguments.

As she thought it seemed to her the case against her going was, in substance, Trent's case. He, silly boy, tried to make it a shackle to hold all women. She did not believe in these lofty generalisations, but she doubted, all the same, whether she might not be wise to respect the prohibition for herself. She was not one of the women who were fitted, either by training or by an adventurous disposition to work with men, at men's affairs, on a neutral footing. Men, for her, had been creatures to be pleased and to be cared for, and men had loved her and been good to her precisely because of this attitude of hers. To do what James asked would be to approach them on a different basis, and she felt it was hard she should be asked to risk what she had been so proud of—her successful relations with her husband and her son.

She could see, as she thought it over, that all her life had been passed in this cherishing of individuals. She had learned to study them, to respond to them, to guide herself and them through intricate problems of character and conduct. It had not been easy, she could remember times when she had lost her way. But it had always been this person and that, people she knew, people whose lives she understood. She had never been called upon to deal with them in numbers, as classes, to rule them with rough and ready decisions. Moreover, though there had been limits to her time, her strength, her money, and even, she felt remorsefully, to her good-will, she had at any rate been sure of the principles on which she based her decisions. She had known what she wanted for them all, for James, for the children, for the servants. These waitresses and factory girls were beyond her ken. How was she to know what she wanted for them or what she ought to want? If she found out how could she then count the forces available to help her or discover what barriers stood in her way? If it had been simple to arrange proper conditions it would not have been left all this time for her to do.

She was returning to her old feeling of timidity and aversion when she pulled herself up. She was not, she told herself, looking at the thing squarely; she was arguing as if James had advanced his plan out of sheer wantonness. He had started, and she must start, too, from the fact of her narrowing life. She mustn't pretend that the alternative to agreement was her old round of interests and activities. It was

something less and less important than that. Soon she would be an old woman whose empty house waited for the children to open its doors. James was right, she couldn't condemn herself to that. And if she went forward, if she saved her life from this dreariness, then, James's plan or another, she must take a risk.

She tried now to reassure herself. She knew that she was not a fool; and these terrifying waitresses were, after all, human beings like other people. Their needs were ordinary human needs for health and happiness. It would probably amuse them, poor things, if they knew that their employer's wife was frightened of them!

These painstaking reflections were suddenly scattered. Mrs. Heyham's conscience, always partial to conviction of sin, had flashed upon her a charge of unkindness to James. James's kindness and forethought, his sympathy for her loneliness, the trouble he had taken, the trouble he was prepared to take over her stumblings in the future, all were arrayed against the wife who had never thanked him or shown that she recognised them. It was perfectly true, he had been a dear about it, and she had thought of nobody but herself!

Mary could not have slept with this upon her mind. Two minutes later James, looking up from an article on the latest naval scare, saw her crossing the floor of his study.

"James," she said softly, bending over him, "you must have been thinking what a selfish creature I

am! I never thanked you at all, and it was so kind of you, my dear!"

James made her sit on the arm of his chair. "The absurd old lady!" he scolded. "A moment ago she was worrying because she wasn't clever enough, and now, Heavens above us, she's selfish! She will positively be smothered with gratitude from all sorts of poor creatures presently, and then will be time enough to hand on a little of it to me. Now, are there any more deadly sins to be explained away?"

Mary bent over him until her cheek touched his head. "I want you to promise," she said a little shyly, "promise that however silly I am you won't think the worse of me for it. Please!"

James laughed. "Solemnly, on my honour, you funny old darling! May I die in my shoes if I doubt that whatever you do is the most admirable thing in the world! There, will that suit you?"

Mary kissed him, slipped from his arm and went to the door. "Sometimes," she told him, looking round before her final disappearance, "I'm rather fond of you, James!" The door shut.

James found his place in the article with a smiling face. Germany or no Germany, he felt that this is not a bad world. He liked to see Mary scrupulous in matters of emotion; sometimes it was a little tiresome, but it gave him a feeling that she was dependable. "That's the best of her," he told himself, "she likes to think things out for herself, but she always sees one's point of view in the end." He plunged into statistics. He did not believe in this invasion, but to read of it reminded him that he was

doing his duty. He had said that if any of his men cared to join the Territorials he would arrange about their holidays. It was inconvenient, of course, having them all go together, but he had done it. In this way, as he had pointed out, even the senior men, whose holidays now had to wait, contributed their little sacrifice to England's greatness. We cannot all die for our country, but dear me, that's no reason for not doing something!

James slept well that night.

CHAPTER III

DURING the next fortnight Mrs. Heyham's sitting-room took on a business-like air. A desk appeared in it, a typewriter, and finally a lady called Miss Percival. She was Rosemary's idea, and the theory of her was that one cannot be certain of doing good, even to waitresses, unless one knows something about them before one begins. Miss Percival, who had been secretary to a philanthropic member of Parliament, was to help her employer acquire this necessary knowledge, and then act, so to speak, as a reservoir of information whose tap would be turned if Mrs. Heyham showed signs of forgetfulness or of letting her feelings run away with her

There could be no doubt of the lady's fitness for this task, for away in her past behind the conscientious member lay services to every progressive society in London that wanted investigation done for nothing. And if testimonials can be trusted each of these bodies had relinquished Miss Percival with passionate regret.

Mary waited for such efficiency with certain misgivings. Her kind heart had prompted her to buy a fumed oak desk instead of the elegant sycamore she would have liked, in order that her secretary might feel at home. Anything so ugly must, Mary thought, be excessively practical. But when Miss Percival arrived she did not look like a person who would be affected by the material of her desk. She was short, dark, unexpectedly young, and quite kind

to every one. She even informed Mrs. Heyham that this was the sort of work she had been hoping to get. The only other thing one noticed about her, at first, was that she would not speak, if she could help it, in front of James or Trent. Mary, when she saw that this was so, felt sorry for her, and almost suspected sad experiences. The M. P. was out of the question— Mary had once sat next to him at dinner—but she had no such guarantee about all the queer people there must have been in the societies. But kindness might be trusted to remove any doubts that lingered in Miss Percival's mind, and in the meantime the important thing was that she seemed to have a clear notion of what she meant to do. This was a relief to Mary, who could organise very well when she must, but took no delight in thinking out a plan for its own sake

The first thing, according to the expert's scheme, was to ask Mr. Heyham to give them an account of the business. This he willingly did, at ease in his arm-chair, while Mary looked at him with quiet appreciation. Miss Percival was not present. James, when he told a story, liked to tell it in his own way, and in this case Mary's dead father and mother were involved, besides James's own father, who was intensely alive and sinful in South America. Mary could repeat the important facts to Miss Percival afterwards, and then Miss Percival could make a note of them.

The business came into the family in the middle-age of James's father, who in those days was a plausible, restless fellow, continually initiating

enterprises and continually throwing them up. At this period in his career he was associated with a dubiously virtuous old man called Matthew Clarkson, and Clarkson persuaded his ally to invest some money they had recently acquired in a mineral water factory in East London. It was called the "'Rule Britannia' Aerated Water Co.," and that, as its vendor pointed out, was a very good name to start from. The factory, as they found it, was small and exceedingly dirty, and perhaps for these reasons congenial to Matthew, who developed a habit of visiting the place very morning in order that he might irritate the foreman, and conduct experiments an unpleasant cupboard that he called his laboratory. Meanwhile Mr. Henry Heyham was making the most of this brief life, spending a good deal of mysterious money, moving into a larger house, giving his sons a passable education, and looking about him for a suitable match for his daughter Edith. Even her brothers thought Edith a handsome girl, and in particular she was attractively plump. Henry found it possible before his own financial needs became too glaring to marry her to a wealthy gentleman interested in meat. And thank heaven this is a Christian country where marriage is still held sacred.

He bore up until the honeymoon was over, for he always liked to do things decently, but two days after Edith's return he summoned his second son James, fresh from a London school, and told him, with an almost tearful impressiveness, that he, Henry, was for the moment done for. Honourably done for, mind you, not through his own fault but through the fault of those he had trusted. Not that he regretted having trusted them, he would rather have a mind full of faith and confidence in his fellows even if he had to pay for it than pass through the world crammed with ugly suspicions and for ever taking precautions against his neighbour.

Even without the old man's deprecating look, James would have understood that this was Henry's way for apologising for some gross and culminating piece of carelessness.

But that was not all he had to say. Many fathers, if not most fathers, when they had reached the age of having grown-up sons who had been treated with every kindness, supplied with every luxury, and equipped with an unsurpassed education, would consider—and in his opinion they wouldn't go beyond their rights if they did—that the time had come when the said sons were in duty bound to turn to and support the authors of their being. But he, Henry, was not that sort of man. He would never be a burden on any child of his. On the contrary it had been the object of his steadfast endeavour to provide a safe start in life for his boys, no matter what might happen to their old father. Edith couldn't have been better disposed of, Timothy was doing well with the smartest, most up-to-date solicitors in London, and he now proposed to complete the beneficent work by giving James an opportunity that most young fellows would cut off their ears to get, an opportunity so resplendent, if he only liked to use it, that ten years might see him a rich man, and twenty find him a captain of industry—and this in an age when to be a captain of industry, honest British industry, was the goal of every decent man's ambition. There was much that might be said upon this subject, upon the essential meanness and hollowness of politics, art, literature, the Church, the services, science. medicine, and teaching, regarded as careers. But time pressed. He would put what he wanted to say briefly, simply, without trimmings, as befitted a business man. He proposed to make over to his dear son James his share in the thriving mineral water business known as the Rule Britannia Aerated Water Co. And to whatever quarter of the globe fortune might drive him, to whatever depths of squalor she might plunge him, he would never forget to pray for the immediate, the triumphant, the cataclysmic success of his dear son, his old friend, and the Rule Britannia

James had not known that there was such happiness. He could not speak. His eyes were dazzled by a vision of shining bottles, thousands of smooth glass bottles, crystal clear, through which gleamed splendidly the ruby, the topaz, the diamond, of their appetising contents. Above waved the flag of the greatest of nations, and the distant voices singing a glorious song broke off to acclaim him a captain of industry. His heart was full; for a moment he forgot his anxiety concerning the fate of a parent.

Old Henry, who had only paused for dramatic effect, felt no pain at this lack of piety. Let James rejoice, he went on, and not sadden his days by thinking about him. He had knocked about the world

before now, and if a peaceful old age was denied him he would submit anew to the scourgings of fate. As a matter of fact—here his eye brightened—he had heard of a little affair in South America. There might be something in it or there might not. In any case no good would be served by talking about it now. If matters went well his boys would hear from him. If not—he hoped they would keep a warm corner in their hearts for the memory of their poor old father. And now James had better come along and see to the necessary papers, as he was sailing for Montevideo in a couple of days.

When next his boys did hear of him, two years later, he was lodged in a South American prison. James, who had long feared something of the sort, could only be thankful that it had happened in a romantic continent. None of Henry's family doubted that when Henry returned—if he ever did return—he would have some explanation compatible with the greatest physical courage and the loftiest qualities of heart and head. As a matter of fact when a letter arrived it contained the tale of a maiden in distress so beautiful, so tender, so virtuous, that only a scoundrel could have turned away from her piteous appeals.

Meanwhile James worked hard, for the captain of industry still dominated his dreams. But it was some time before he began to make more than a bare living. Even when he had to a certain extent surmounted his own inexperience he was faced by his partner's refusal to spend a penny on making the factory even decently clean, by the impossibility of

keeping a good class of work-girl owing to the same old gentleman's roving eye, and by Clarkson's Ginger Cordial. This was the result of years of patient and muddled investigation on Matthew's part. He was not satisfied with it yet, he said, and meanwhile he was offended if he was not allowed to call the whole staff away from their work in order that they might conduct experiments with him. This was particularly troublesome because the coadjutor he most favoured was the forewoman, the only person in the place whose tongue was sharp enough to keep the girls in order. It was useless for James to explain that no business carried on in this way could have any chance of succeeding. Clarkson replied that it didn't matter a damn whether it succeeded or not until the Ginger Cordial was ready for the market. After that event it wouldn't be able to help succeeding. And further, he wasn't going to be preached at in his own factory by—young puppies.

That seemed an impregnable position, but Matthew's defences had one weak spot. The passing of the Employers' Liability Act revealed the fact that the senior partner was terrified of inspectors and of the fiendish things inspectors might do to him. He had no knowledge of the law, and only a vivid something in his past seemed adequate to account for his fear of it. Happily in this country we have, besides the clumsy and public efforts of our legislators, the subtle and intricate machinery of Home Office orders. One Julius Trent, a friend of James's, persuaded him to spend a few pounds at a costumier's and a few shillings at a printer's. After

that one of Her Majesty's Factory Inspectors, in an imposing blue uniform, visited Mr. Clarkson several times a week. The old man withstood this onslaught for some time, but when the inspector arrived one day with a printed document which set forth that owing to information and complaints recently received regulations had been issued to the effect that those who were guilty of any breaches of the rules laid down for the safety and good government of the English people, and in particular obstructing or using obscene or filthy language to Her Majesty's Factory Inspectors in the course of their duty, should in future be liable to imprisonment with hard labour without the option of a fine, the old man's courage failed. He undertook to allow the necessary cleaning, he promised to respect a salutary rule just made by the Home Secretary that no forewoman was on any account whatever to enter her employer's private room, he even gave up his laboratory because the same authority had found it inexpedient to permit experimental research into the composition of cordials to be carried on under one roof with the manufacture of mineral waters between the hours of 6 A.M. and 10 P.M. He retired routed to a shed at the bottom of his garden with no revenge but his votes, and the next thing to do was to buy him out before he discovered what had happened.

That took some time, partly because every penny James could spare was needed for repairs and improvements, partly because Mr. Clarkson, as soon as he found that James wished it, showed an obstinate reluctance to being bought out. The Home

Secretary could not exclude him from his own premises altogether, and he still enjoyed an occasional ramble round. Finally James, who was growing more masterful, dismissed the forewoman. That was a blow, for her successor and her successor's underlings did not appreciate Mr. Clarkson's practised smiles. James found him one day examining himself rather sadly in a looking-glass.

The sight of James's reflected face suddenly mingled with an already unpleasing picture roused Mr. Clarkson. Hitherto, he said, he had borne with young Heyham's goings-on in a Christian spirit, but this was spying. Heyham seemed to think that he was cock of the walk, that he'd only got to say the word and every one would lick his boots; well, they wouldn't. And when he, Matt Clarkson, liked to be nasty he could be nasty. And no mistake about it.

Being nasty meant abusing James in front of the hands, jeering at him, or, what was worse, assuming in public that nothing delighted him more than to hear one of Mr. Clarkson's appalling anecdotes. Even the Home Secretary cannot forbid a Briton to make the jokes that please him. Nevertheless in his heart the old man was afraid. He did not attempt to control the business, and when he had made his partner really angry, he would say that he didn't mean anything by it, it was just his way.

Meanwhile James had arrived at a time of his life that he could discuss more fittingly with a wife on the sofa beside him than with a wife on a separate chair. Julius Trent, afterwards such a nuisance, then so charming, introduced his friend James to his parents, and old Mr. Trent took a fancy to the young man. Old Mr. Trent approved of young men who worked very hard and showed every intention of succeeding, and he had been amused by Julius's account of Mr. Clarkson and the factory inspector. He also enjoyed discussing books with James, for in those days James took an interest in political theory. He hadn't much time to think of these things himself, but there were plenty of men who had, and surely some day one of them would produce the simple, gentlemanly, inexpensive solution of social problems that would relieve an overworked business man of further anxiety.

Old Mr. Trent, like many people who have few chances of talking over the subjects that interest them, had invented two or three systems that would abolish bad times and make England prosperous for evermore. The trouble with most of them was that they involved a good deal of compulsion at the outset—before people had learned to appreciate their excellence—and Mr. Trent was against compulsion in any form. It was this that had made him give up his great Malthusian scheme of grading workmen according to their capacity and regulating their families in a corresponding manner. He still hoped that a more enlightened generation might adopt it of their own free will, and to this end he subscribed considerable sums to a Neo-Malthusian journal. But the plan to which he had finally devoted his declining years might perfectly well, if only the Government would leave off wasting their time, be

put into effect at once. It consisted in taking a tenth of the capital of anybody who had got a sufficient quantity, buying gold with it, and depositing the gold in the vaults of the Bank of England. It would not be at all an oppressive measure, for the resulting prosperity and expansion of credit would far more than compensate everybody concerned. After only two or three years he was sure that no more compulsion would be necessary, for here you would be dealing, not with uneducated workmen, blind to their own interests, but with astute financiers and men of business. The only difficulty would be that other countries might get hold of the idea and refuse to sell gold. But let his hearers take heart, recent discoveries all went to show that there was a far greater quantity of gold in various parts of the planet—mostly, by the direct favour of God, British possessions—than one was apt to imagine. If James would glance at these geological maps....

James was not always allured by these problems, but he appreciated Mr. Trent's library and the comfortable, sufficiently cultured air of Mr. Trent's house. The manners that prevailed in it seemed to James very gracious and elegant—they were in any case a pleasant change from the manners of Mr. Clarkson. He also grew fond of Mrs. Trent, who was kind to him, and he fell in love with whatever her mother and her governess allowed him to see of Mary. She was sixteen when he saw her first, very pretty, very quiet, very easily made to blush. She would laugh delightfully, as if she could not help it, at the clever, witty things James said, and

then stop suddenly, and droop her head over her embroidery, until James surpassed himself to make her look up again. They were engaged when she was eighteen, and at the end of another year he felt that he was in a position to marry her. Mr. and Mrs. Trent believed in girls marrying young, while they would still view facts in a romantic light and before they had become unable to adapt their dispositions to those of their husbands. James's only regret was that he could not present himself as the sole owner of his growing business, but old Clarkson persistently demanded not only three thousand pounds for what had only cost him fifteen hundred but an extra five hundred for the formula of his Ginger Cordial. Nobody wanted his cordial, but he would not sell one without the other. That he would sell at all was due to the fact that James was still bent on developing the business instead of considering all the returns as profit.

Neither James nor Mary was ever sure of the motives that led Mr. Trent to make his daughter part owner of the "Rule Britannia." But they believed that the idea must have occurred to him first on the day when he met Mr. Clarkson in James's office. The senior partner's clothes were particular greasy that day, he had been drinking a good deal of Ginger Cordial with a little rum in it to make it more satisfying, and he insisted on showing the visitor some picture postcards that he considered truly comic. Mr. Trent was a fastidious little man, and as an estate agent he had come into contact with some very good people. He asked James at the time

whether he ever saw Mr. Clarkson outside the factory, and James's reply of "Not if I can help it!" may not have seemed sufficiently reassuring. At any rate when James came to sign his marriage settlements he found that Mr. Clarkson had sold his share in the firm and his rights over Clarkson's Ginger Cordial for £3,500, the said rights to revert to him if the said cordial were ever sold under any other name, and that Mrs. James Heyham would in future be entitled to half the profits of the business.

After his marriage James worked harder than ever. Old Mr. Trent made an excellent father-in-law; he never interfered but he was always ready to lend James a hundred or so when mineral-water provided some sudden opportunity for a rich man to become a little richer. James found considerable satisfaction in repaying these loans. Mrs. Trent was sympathetic, helpful when Trent and Laura were born, and an unfailing example to Mary of how a wife should cherish and revere a husband. The Heyhams lived frugally, for the firm was still absorbing every penny that could be spared. Bread companies and milk companies were beginning to make fortunes out of shops for the sale of tea and light refreshments. James did not see why a similar venture should not succeed with mineral water for its basis. The "Rule Britannia" was turned into a private company under the name of "Imperial Refreshments Limited." Mr. Trent lent James the necessary capital and three tea-shops were established.

The tea-shops flourished and their numbers grew. Before long they were the most important part

of the business. They did not provide the market for mineral waters that James had expected, but, though it seemed a little perverse of them, they were steady customers for the Ginger Cordial. This proved to be a heartening mixture, unnecessarily complicated perhaps, but undoubtedly with an interest of its own. In summer it imparted life to our Imperial Fresh Fruit Drinks, in winter, hot, it made clients feel brisk but not aggressive. James hated the sight of it, and its smell gave him a headache.

worked. still. Now he still looked opportunities, still kept an open mind. But it was with the ease and amplitude of recognised success. Worries came and went, weather and government interfered with prices, this man or that turned out bad, neighbourhoods altered, and rivals had bright ideas. But at the bottom the Imperial was sound and everybody knew it. Its methods and its machinery alike were the most up-to-date in the trade. Its premises were spotless, the materials it put into its products were absolutely the best that could be done for the money. And James took trouble to please his customers' minds as well as their bodies. The teashops had begun in a somewhat gloomy fashion; the glass doors between their windows had been darkened with large bills of fare, the upper panes of the windows themselves had been pasted over with labels, and below a Japanese tea-set on one side and some fruit and a boiled ham on the other had been thrown into relief by red plush curtains. Inside there had been bamboo furniture, black screens with gold birds on them, and an occasional artificial palm. But

as James rose in the world his taste improved. With the changes in Mary's furniture at home the decorative scheme of the tea-shops changed too, until now they were models of charm and sanitation. Their walls were white and their paint was black. Customers' hats and coats were massed in places where they did not destroy the effect. The tables had tops that were excellent imitations of green marble and as light as wood to shift—heavy wood. There were casement windows, and in winter the curtains and the crockery were cherry-coloured, in summer they were white with a border of green leaves. Trent thought this extravagant, but James preferred to consider the beneficial effect on the æsthetic natures of his customers. Besides it pays in the long run to be distinctive. Even the company's monogram had been carefully designed to add to the beauty of these favoured places. In short, they looked like shops where you might well have paid sixpence for your cup of tea, and they, were shops, as the posters by real artists reminded you, where you could get a superlative cup for twopence.

The Imperial manufactured their own china, under another name, and held the patent rights of the marble substitute. In the newer shops they were paving the floors with it, green and white. The fact that several other restaurants and tea-shops came innocently to him for their cups and saucers gave James a good deal of quiet pleasure, though he didn't attend to that side of the business himself. Nor, as the china factory was naturally not in London, would Mary be likely to have dealings with it, though they

employed a good many girls. But he could assure her that go where she would, at any time, whether she was expected or not expected, she wouldn't find a corner of the Imperial's premises that she would be ashamed to see in her own house. James knew all about dirt, and he didn't believe in it.

CHAPTER IV

THE next thing to do, clearly, was to visit the tea-shops. James took Mary to the Oxford Circus depot himself. He was particularly proud of the Oxford Circus depot, because the girls wore frilled aprons and green dresses, and the washing-up was done by machines. Their gay attire was a recognition of the girls' good looks—they had been chosen by a manager who was a real lady and had an eye for a pretty face. She explained the thing to Mary:—At Oxford Circus their clientele was superior to most, and the girls came to them not so much to get married, as they came to shops where the customers were chiefly clerks, but because they liked the feeling of being in fashionable life. So they naturally appreciated the chance of looking more elegant than black woollen dresses permit. Only last year one of them had left to be a mannequin at Ormesby's. A gentleman from Ormesby's had been lunching at the depot and noticed her figure. And of course that had made the others more anxious than ever to be smart. It was very natural, and one couldn't be hard on them, especially as the ladies liked it so-they felt more as if they were in Bond Street, though the prices were the Imperial's usual prices—but she did have to say a word sometimes about high heels. Mrs. Heyham could see for herself that it wasn't safe carrying trays up and down those marble stairs with high heels. And then there was the tap, tap, tapping. Besides, high heels give so much trouble with feet,

and they had to think of that, if Mrs. Heyham would forgive her seeming vulgar.

James nodded hastily at this, and changed the subject. He liked to think that the manager looked after the girls' health, but really their feet were not things that he cared to discuss. He preferred to contemplate their trim waists and the clever manipulation of their hair. That was another point in which they differed from the attendants in less stylish places, and Mrs. Creemer, her voice dropped in a manner suited to James's modesty, did not fail to mention it. It appeared that she had said only yesterday, "Miss Perkins, my dear, off with them pads! A simple side parting and a wave over the ear is what you want. Just a touch of black velvet, perhaps, as you're fair, but nothing showy!" She did her best to take only superior young ladies, but you couldn't expect them all to have taste like your own.

Mary would have felt a little overwhelmed by Mrs. Creemer if James had not taken her so coolly. James, of course, met women like this every day. He was their employer, he had business dealings with them, though she had never realised it. There was nothing about James to make her realise it. He lived in this atmosphere, but it did not touch him. Mary looked quickly, almost shyly, at her admirable husband; then she brought her thoughts back to the matter in hand. After all, the woman might be vulgar, but she was also praiseworthy; she seemed to have both a kind heart and sound common-sense. That was a great deal, and meanwhile Mary could

sincerely praise the Oxford Circus tea and smile at the Miss Somerville who brought it.

This visit was a social affair, a mere introduction and Miss Percival had not come. James, naturally, did not always care to have Miss Percival about. But next day investigation began in earnest. Mary chose, this time, a branch in Chelsea, and in the early afternoon she drove there with James's order, Miss Percival and Miss Percival's list of questions. It was a long list and Mary did not feel sure that all the questions were necessary. But she said nothing, for she respected experience and certified ability.

The manager of depot C.L. was a harassed looking lady who received them with an air almost of helplessness. Certainly let them come in, and she would do what she could to tell them anything they wanted to know. Perhaps—brightening—they would sit down and let her give them a cup of tea!

Mary praised the tea as she had already praised it, and as she would continue, steadily, to praise it during the next six months. Then she asked the waitress, a pretty girl of about eighteen, what her name was and whether she was happy.

The girl said that her name was Florrie Wilson. She did not seem to know whether she was happy or not. Pressed, she said yes, that she was a lucky one, she had been taken on straight in Coronation year, when there were the Colonial troops in Chelsea and people coming to see them, so she hadn't had to do her year's washing-up. And then Miss Sower getting ill and leaving she was kept on. She liked Chelsea,

she thought it was gayer than Maida Hill where she lived.

She worked from eight in the morning to nine at night, with the intervals that the law prescribes, and she came and went very comfortably in the blue motor-bus that runs from the World's End. Florrie's mother hadn't at first quite approved of Florrie's going about so much alone in motor-buses, but then Florrie's mother was a real lady, only her health had failed because she was left a widow. And Florrie had come to work in the depot not because she needed work, but because she liked her independence and a bit of fun. She left home at seven sharp, and she got back about ten. She had Sundays off, and alternate Bank Holidays.

At this point Mrs. Black, the manager, intervened and sent Florrie off to a customer. The manager was of opinion, she said, that Florrie was a talker. She preferred, it was clear, that their information should come reliably from her rather than erratically from Miss Florrie Wilson.

Mary, left to herself, would not have submitted Mrs. Black to any very fierce ordeal. She was feeling pleased, pleased with Florrie for looking so pretty and speaking so nicely, and with herself for obtaining so much information in so pleasant a way. She was glad that she had resolved to make this inquiry, it was interesting, more than interesting, fascinating, and it would not be impossible to make a success of it. But there, at her elbow, was Miss Percival, and on the table before Miss Percival was the list. Mary was reminded that they were there to

be thorough and scientific and with the smile of one who does her duty she intimated that Miss Percival's moment had come.

The inquisition began happily. Yes, it was perfectly true that the company only took girls who were not dependent on their wages for their living. Not that they gave bad wages, but you couldn't live as a young lady ought to live on eleven shillings a week, bonus instead of tips, making it up to twelve. The manager thought that was good money, she herself had begun—in another company—as kitchen help at seven shillings, and kitchen work was man's work, not girl's work at all.

Mary thought that sounded satisfactory. If the girls' parents supported them you could set that off against their board and lodging, and that left them with what any of her younger servants would have considered excellent wages. She was surprised when she saw the expression with which Mrs. Black received the next question. Mary had hardly noticed it on the list, but Mrs. Black seemed to think that it was deliberately and pointedly offensive. How did she find out whether the girls were being supported at home or not? She went round to take their characters, just as any lady would, as Mrs. Heyham would herself. And she could assure Mrs. Heyham's secretary that she was just as particular as any lady. How did she know by that that they were being supported?—Well, she used her common-sense. It might be friends of the girls having her on, of course, but she didn't think so. She couldn't be hard on them, of course, she wasn't that sort of woman. In fact, she

was only a plain woman not accustomed to answering questions. All the same she knew, though she mightn't be able to explain exactly how, that there wasn't one girl in the place who wasn't living in a comfortable respectable home. She had worked for the Imperial fourteen years, and Mrs. Heyham might take it from her that she knew the difference between a young lady and a low common girl.

Miss Percival took this down without any change of expression and Mary said kindly that the girls looked very happy and contented. Mrs. Black propitiated, replied she did her best for them, and Miss Percival proceeded to the matter of aprons.

Aprons, it appeared, were a burning subject. Opinions differed as to who ought to supply the aprons, who ought to pay for them, who ought to pay for washing them, and how many aprons one ought to be called upon to wear in one week, supposing one were unlucky with splashing urns and dirty tables. Mrs. Black, apparently, was all for peace. She couldn't allow herself to be trampled on, but she didn't go looking for trouble. Some managers made the girls change if they got so much as a little water or milk down them that took the gloss off, but in her opinion, in Chelsea, there was no need except for real stains. And she must say she did not think that could be called unreasonable. For the other rules she was not responsible, they were the firm's regulations.

Mary was accustomed to regard difficulties like this from the employer's point of view, and she did not think the matter of great importance. Miss Percival passed on to the subject of fines for being late.

Here again it was admitted that some managers were tartars. In some tea-shops—not necessarily the Imperial's—the girls were treated really hard. But as long as the work did not suffer and the Inspector was pleased with her returns Mrs. Black did feel that five minutes sometimes in the morning might be passed over. She knew that she was giving herself away to Mrs. Heyham in saying so, but when a lady asked her a question no one should say that she didn't speak the truth. It occurred to her as an afterthought that there weren't any fines, of course, only part of the eleven shillings took the form of a bonus at the end of the weds if the girls had been punctual.

Mary thought that sounded very fair, Miss Percival nodded, and took it down. Among her other accomplishments was that of taking shorthand notes.

When all the questions had been answered, Mary, whose smile was becoming a little mechanical, rose to go. After all she had come to the tea-rooms in order to make life easier for the girls, not to ruffle the feelings of the managers. Miss Percival rose too, but instead of standing back while Mary said good-bye she turned to her employer with the suggestion that they should now see the washing-up.

Mary had forgotten the washing-up and she accepted the reminder as meekly as if it had been a rebuke. "Oh, yes, please, the washing-up!" she agreed.

Mrs. Black assented with a "Certainly if you would care to, Mrs. Heyham," that, together with the sweep of her skirt as she turned, demonstrated sufficiently that she took her orders from the lady and from the lady alone. She led them downstairs, past the kitchens, and Mary reproached herself for feeling glad that the kitchens were served by men and laid her under no obligation to enter them.

As they went the manager explained that it wasn't every company did things like the Imperial. Raised boards for the girls to stand on, and as much clean water as you liked, and a good big room with varnished walls. The manager, before she rose to that dignity, had washed up in places where you stood in a swamp and rats ran between your feet, and the water was more grease than water and as black as ink.

Mary shuddered, then she felt proud of James. They were downstairs now and the manager opened the door of the washing-up room. For a basement it was clean and light, but it was as damp as a bathroom after a hot bath. And it smelled, of stale food, of dirty water, of washing-powder, of well-worn clothes. Steam rose from the sinks, water dripped from the racks of clean china fixed to the walls, the floor was wet, and the paint on the woodwork glistened. There were six girls at work, two scouring saucepans and kitchen utensils, four handling the cherry-coloured china that looked so pretty against the white walls. Their faces were flushed and their hair hung limp over their foreheads.

"They come to this first," the manager was explaining, "and go upstairs afterwards."

The girls washed thoroughly and methodically. Mary felt certain that when the plates and cups left their hands, they were clean.

"That's what I call good conscientious work," she told Mrs. Black.

That lady brightened. "I do my best, Mrs. Heyham," she replied. "You'll not find a smear of mustard on a plate upstairs once in six months. And so it should be, with the beautiful water we get. And the linen the same, as much water as you like, and open-air drying. Customers say that what they get at home don't touch it."

At that moment Miss Percival, who had been watching one of the girls cleaning saucepans, intervened. "Do you have much fainting?" she asked.

"Never had such a thing!" Mrs. Black stared straight in front of her as if Miss Percival were disembodied. "At least," she added, with the air of one who was anxious to be absurdly truthful, "there was a young girl here who fainted once. I put it down to them silly corsets myself." She turned to Mary, as if to invite her sympathy.

The girl with the saucepans straightened herself and tried to appear thoroughly well. Mary, noticing her, looked round for a chair, but discovered that there was none.

"Oughtn't she to sit down for a minute?" she suggested. She felt sorry for the girl, who looked delicate.

"There again!" Mrs. Black's voice suggested that she was put out—"there's two chairs provided for this room, and if you'll believe me they puts them into the passage! Says they get in the way!"

Here one of the girls turned round. "'Tisn't us that puts them into the passage, Mrs. Black! It's the kitchen as takes them, as you know!"

"And what's the kitchen doing in here?" retorted Mrs. Black. "Anyway, you go along and get one for the lady!"

The girl protested. "It's as much as my life is worth to put my head inside the door!"

Her superior looked at her with that fine irony which only the powerful can afford. "I suppose you expect me to do your fetching and carrying," she was beginning, when a voice from the corner made her turn. By this time the girl with the saucepans had succeeded in making the sink and the wooden racks stand still instead of swooping and whirling round her. "Don't get no chair for me, Mrs. Black!" she urged. "I don't want to sit down. It was only a feeling of giddiness like, and if we gets a chair we'll have them fellows in here after it again!"

This seemed the general opinion of the room and Mrs. Black endorsed it.

"You might have the politeness to thank Mrs. Heyham!" she told the sufferer, and then turning to Mary, "What we have to put up with from that kitchen you'd never believe! Why, the girls don't dare go into the pantry to eat their dinner for fear of their impertinence! And good room as this is, it isn't

a place for eating, with all the steam and the dirty plates. It puts you off!"

"But they oughtn't to eat in here!" Mary looked round with dismay.

It appeared that the washing-up girls were not supposed, strictly, to take their meals in the building at all, they were supposed to go home. But some of them lived far away, so Mrs. Black, if it hadn't been for the kitchen, would have let them have a bit of dinner in the pantry. The company allowed their employees to have food at half price. The waitresses ate their meals in the serving-room, or they could use the cloak-room, but they didn't care to have the washing-up girls about. They felt that what they had been through others could go through. Not that they were unkind girls, but that was how they saw it.

Again Mary felt very glad that she had come. She did not like annoying people and seeming inquisitive, but she was prepared to put up with anything that would really lead to good. And it was clear to her that there was a great deal that a tactful woman could do here. Some place must be managed where these poor girls could eat their dinner in peace, and they ought to sit at their work. She would tell Miss Percival to note those two points.

As they passed through the restaurant on the way out, Mary saw Florrie standing by one of the tables. Florrie smiled—she had an attractive smile—and Mary nodded and smiled back. She told herself that she would remember Florrie's name.

Mrs. Black took them to the door and said goodbye to them with a wonderful brightening and

softening of manner. The gratitude which she expressed with great fervour was clearly not feigned, merely diverted from the providence which had brought her so creditably through a trying time. It would have been easier if she had known what Mrs. Heyham was after. Inspectors she could manage, none better, whether they were enemies from outside or so-called friends from headquarters, but Mary had puzzled her. She oughtn't perhaps to have let on about the girls' dinner, but she hadn't been able to resist the chance of a possible score off the kitchen. Mrs. Heyham herself was all right, she felt sure, but she didn't trust that secretary person. However, it was no use worrying—she banished any remaining uneasiness, when the visitors had gone, by telling Florrie to change her apron at once and never let Mrs. Black see her in such a rag again.

Mary settled herself comfortably in the car. "Of course this has been the most interesting day," she said. "It won't be so amusing when we've been to a dozen of them. I suppose they are all very much alike."

Miss Percival seemed to hesitate for a moment, then she spoke. "It depends a good deal on the manager I think. And in the B depots the wages and hours are different."

"What are the B depots?" Mary was alert to increase her knowledge.

"They're in poor neighbourhoods and open for supper as well. The girls work short hours one day and long the next and have lower wages, 10s. instead of 11s. They get off at five on short days but the work's harder."

Mary smiled at Miss Percival. "You must have studied the subject!" She was pleased to recognise such zeal and initiative.

Miss Percival looked at the note-book that she held in her lap. "Yes," she said, "I was investigating it some time ago—I've worked in two or three teashops myself. It's the only way of telling what the life is really like."

Mary looked at her. This was most interesting! "But how useful—" she began, then she checked herself. It would be better, perhaps, if she did not, at any rate for the present, accept information from Miss Percival. A friend of Rosemary's, she was certain to have theories about what she had seen. And James would rather, Mary felt sure, that his wife formed her own ideas from her own experience. She had better not even ask the secretary whether one of the shops she had worked in had been the Imperial's. Then she herself could not be biassed by Miss Percival's chance remarks. "It must have been very exciting," she finished kindly.

Miss Percival did not seem stirred by the memories of its excitements. "It was interesting," she said, and they talked of indifferent subjects for the rest of the drive.

When Mrs. Heyham, hearing voices, looked into the drawing-room on her way upstairs, she found Laura and Rosemary sitting over the fire. They jumped up. "Here she is!" Laura called to her. "Well, mother darling, I should love to think that you've unearthed a perfect hive of scandals! But I don't really believe that your mind is suspicious enough!"

Mary stood by the door for a moment smiling at them. "I am so glad you've come, my dear," she said; "I have some letters to write that will take a quarter of an hour, but if you can wait, Laura, I will come down and have another tea."

"But that's what I'm here for, darling, tea with you!" Laura blew a kiss to her mother before the door shut behind her. Then the two girls went back to their chairs. "She isn't suspicious enough—if there's anything to find out!" Laura added.

Rosemary laughed. "Miss Percival will do the suspicion. But it isn't a matter of finding out—it's merely seeing."

They were silent for a few minutes. Their minds were full of something else, of the delightful topic that they had been discussing—Anthony's career and Rosemary's future. Presently Laura leaned forward. "Rosemary," she said, "are you simply happy and nothing more, or do you find it all rather queer as well?"

Her shy tone made Rosemary feel a little shy. "How do you mean, queer?" she asked, avoiding Laura's eyes. Laura hesitated. "I think it's the way being in love makes you look at things that is so odd—as if nothing mattered but yourself and one other person and a bundle of feelings—what they feel and what you feel and what they feel about what you feel. It is queer—it's the right word—to find these extraordinary new emotions running all over your life. There doesn't seem anything for them to

have come out of. I don't feel in the least, sometimes, as if they belonged to me—they've just appeared." She hesitated, and then frowned. It was not easy to find words for her meaning. "And yet because of them," she went on, as Rosemary did not speak, "the whole of the rest of the world seems insignificant and far away, and you've become in a sort of way unresponsive, unexpectant to it—it doesn't really matter. Not like the mornings when one used to wake up and think that anything—the most heavenly adventure—might happen that very day! One doesn't even want the adventures—it's like losing a whole lot of tiny delicate feelers, and getting instead of them a sort of anguished sensitiveness to one set of impressions."

She finished on a questioning note, but Rosemary did not look up. This was a discussion that she ought in theory to have welcomed eagerly. Laura was offering her a new outlook, fresh experience she had always deplored the fact that women find it hard to be open or even candid with one another about their fundamental emotions. And now that this chance had come for a frank conversation with her sister she was embarrassed. She hoped that Laura would say more—she was ready to listen, with all the sympathy that she could command, to anything that Laura wished to say. But she could not join in, she could not apply Laura's wisdom to herself. She did not want to know, from Laura, what she was feeling or what she was going to feel. That belonged to no one but her and Anthony. Even remotely, Laura must not influence it. She had rather run blind

and unwarned into the future than lose the privacy and mystery of her thoughts. Laura, after all, was her elder sister, capable of discussing her with their mother. She ignored her question. "You mean," she said, "that you leave off being interested in outside things."

Laura shook her head. "No, not exactly. You don't lose your interest, if it's really the things you were keen about and not the romance and excitement of being keen, but I think perhaps you grow more selfish towards them." She looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"I don't see why!" Rosemary was not of an age to be skilful at understanding other people's halfexpressed subtleties.

Laura became conscious of her sister's reluctance. Rosemary must think, she told herself, that she was complaining! "I suppose," she said quickly, "that it's a phase women tend to go through. A phase of being absorbed in subjective emotional things rather than in objective intellectual ones. What made me think of it is that mother, thanks to your idea, may be going to come out of it. We shall be able to see at last what is really mother and what is only the attitude belonging to what she has been taught. The more I think of it the more splendid I think it will be for her."

Rosemary caught at this. "I am so glad! Only, Laura, did you notice what she said just now? I don't believe she's going to let us see anything at all!"

Laura laughed. "That's her darling conscience. It's father's business, and its black secrets are father's secrets. She won't tell us anything, but the point is that she will change. We have only to wait."

This was not enough for Rosemary. She had been hoping to hear exactly and in detail what Mary thought of the tea-shops and their implications. She had been hoping too, to slip into such talks a few incontrovertible general principles. She was not sure that without some such help Mary might not be carried away by her husband's point of view. "I hate waiting," she said, "it's dull. Trent waits."

Laura laughed.

CHAPTER V

IT was not until Mary, with her Miss Percival, had visited all the depots that she thought the moment had come for a conversation with James. Up to this time she had scarcely mentioned her activities to him. She did not wish to seem precipitate and she had felt, too, that constant references might worry him. But there was no reason now for putting it off any longer and every reason why the little reforms she had thought of should be carried through at once. She was planning, as well as these, a sort of convalescent home, a cottage by the sea where the palest, weakest girls might be given holidays. And she hoped, too, some day to suggest a system by which the girls should take turns to rest during the slack hours of the day. But she did not mean to say anything about that yet. Time enough when she had seen how James accepted the home and her other suggestions. She meant to ask him now for a better

meal in the middle of the day, a nice room to eat it in, and proper regulation shoes. Also, though that might be impossible, where there were long flights of stairs there ought to be lifts for the trays. The matter of wages, in spite of Miss Percival's hints, she did not think important, as all the girls were being kept in their comfortable decent homes. Their wages, therefore, were merely pocket-money and it could not matter much that they had to pay for their fares to and from work and for the cuffs, caps, collars, and aprons supplied to them with the stuff for their black dresses, by the firm. They paid, too, for any food which they ate on the premises; the managers charged them half price for goods which, though not exactly stale, had lost that first exquisite freshness demanded by customers. They paid fines for breaking the rules, and an insurance of sixpence a week against breakages. The firm, its inspectors told Mary, lost heavily over this, but then it was composed of kind-hearted men, and not of ogres.

Mary's investigation was not yet complete for both she and Miss Percival thought that they ought to see something of the girls' home lives. Miss Percival, whom Mary saw to be a suspicious person, did not seem to attach much importance to the manager's declarations that the girls all came from happy, well-to-do homes. But then Miss Percival had seen such terrible things and read so many books upon Socialism that she probably confused the Imperial with less conscientious firms. Mary, on James's advice, had read no books on the subject. James had said that what he wanted were the little

mother's own wise little thoughts, not a hash-up of other people's opinions. And Mary had not formed the habit of going to books for information.

Now that the moment had come for conversation she found herself shrinking a little from the criticism not only of James but of Trent. Trent had regarded her during these months with a disapproving air. He was suffering, Mary thought, from Lady Hester's mother, who, though she sometimes permitted his presence, had a way of successfully repressing his suit. And fondness for Lady Hester was based on just those qualities in her which would prevent her from rising to the vulgar heights of a row with her mother. Mary fancied that this source of irritation was blackening Trent's view of her own behaviour. If so, she did not see that she was bound to run the risk of annoying him further. To have Trent sitting there annoyed from the beginning would make her too nervous to do herself justice with James. She finally chose, therefore, a time when Trent was out. It was an evening when James had said that he had no work to do, and after dinner she collected Miss Percival's careful notes and went down into the study. The study was a more business-like room than her own or the drawing-room, and one less associated with moments of sentiment. She did not want James to be sentimental that night, she wanted him to be earnestly reasonable, to listen to her as if she were a man. She knew exactly what she meant to say, but she was afraid of being turned aside and only remembering her best points afterwards.

James was detached and good-humoured, perfectly ready to talk things over with her. He seemed to think that it was really very creditable that she should have stuck to the thing like this, and taken such an interest in it. One gets rather too much into the habit of assuming that women do not care about serious things. Well then, to what revolutionary courses did she—dear little person that she was—wish to commit her wretched husband and his old-fashioned business?

She told him that she thought it was a wonderful business—she did. It had touched her imagination, it had filled her with respect for men. This was what men could do when they bent their brains to women's work. Mary remembered her own early struggles with cook-generals on the battle-ground of drillings, the chivyings, tea-travs. the exhortations, her triumph on days when the silver was clean and the cloth smooth and the bread and butter nicely cut. The making of the tea itself had been her own charge, that pouring of boiling water onto measured leaves was too delicate, too sacred, for the hired and casual fingers of a servant. But let a man turn his attention to the matter and straightway, at Chiswick, in the Strand, at Islington, he could command ten thousand tea-trays each with its pretty plate bearing three impeccable slices of brown bread and butter and three of white, with its six gay pastries elegantly set out, with its unvarying, unsurpassable cup of tea. Woman fussed and there was a table, more or less adequately equipped; man considered and he found a formula and a tradition to

which tables conformed in their pleasant hospitality, here or a hundred miles away, yesterday or ten years hence. It seemed to Mary that few tasks could be more noble, more satisfying, than thus to provide a sovereign democracy with dainty and nourishing food. Now that she had seen his great work she could share in the pride that exalted James when he spoke of the bad old times when a single beefy beery meal cost more than you would spend nowadays on a week's supply of stimulating coffee and poached eggs on toast. It was no small thing, and she felt it, to be the wife of a man like James.

James accepted her admiration. It is pleasant, when you show your manhood's work to your wife, to find that she appreciates its greatness. "Found it clean, eh?" he asked her, in a tone that anticipated her reply.

She had not the heart to tell him that perfect cleanliness is inhuman; she relinquished too, her protest against the dubious eggs that made such light sponge-cakes. She must be a woman of business, the kitchens were not within the range of her inquiry. She must not depart from her proper sphere merely because she had seen a kitchen boy sticking his fingers into some dough and licking them clean. That might happen anywhere; it was one of the things that civilised people agree to ignore. So she told James that his business had given her quite new ideas of discipline and method. After all, practically everybody makes their sponge-cakes with eggs that you wouldn't use for boiling. James couldn't be

expected to be quite different from anybody else. We all eat game.

James took that easily. "And now what is it we've got to do if we're not to forfeit the old lady's good opinion?" he asked.

She had made a list on a sheet of paper, and she told him. She began with the little home at the seaside—she knew he couldn't object to that. The only thing he had to do was to promise to keep the places of the girls who were there open for them. She would pay for it—it would be a real pleasure to her—and—she would—undertake—the—whole responsibility.

She watched him anxiously while she spoke, but he was not looking at her. He was looking at the fire.

In the next place, the girls oughtn't to stand so much. Let him ask a doctor, or even the managers—anyone who understood the work and its effect on women—it really was harmful to them, and they ought also to wear proper shoes.

His face changed a little. It would be perfectly easy to make them wear regulation shoes.

The next point was the dinner—and the room where they could sit comfortably. She seemed to see, suddenly, that it was no use mentioning the lifts. That was all, she said.

James sat forward and looked at her. She saw at once that he was not laughing or feeling unduly affectionate. In fact his voice sounded a little sharp.

"My dear little girl," he laid it down, "we can't make a house have a room that it hasn't got, can we?"

Mary looked back at him courageously. "I thought that perhaps you could take a room outside, or perhaps partition off part of one of the tea-rooms. Some of them are very large."

James chose to answer the last part of this remark.

"And that's why the customers come to them, my dear," he told her more urbanely, but not, she suspected, in a really pleasant spirit. "People hate small, hot, stuffy rooms. Imagine yourself passing by the door of two shops and looking in—wouldn't you choose the one that seemed wide and airy and high rather than the one that was poky?"

Mary stuck to her point. "Then the room outside?"

This time he was frankly irritable. "If you knew a little more of business conditions you would understand that what you are asking is impossible. In business parts of London there aren't 'rooms outside' waiting to be rented next to each of our shops. They're not to be had. Space is gold. We have to wait years sometimes before we can get the sites we want for the depots themselves. Do you think we had only to ask to get a frontage on Oxford Circus?"

When Mary had come into the room she had come humbly. She had been prepared to be told that her demands were out of the question and she had not intended to be obstinate or wrangle about them. Now she did feel obstinate, and she felt too, that she had not been fairly met.

"Of course I can quite understand that it isn't easy to arrange," she admitted, "but I think that girls

working as hard as that ought to have some little corner where they can be private and comfortable."

James found himself irritated as he was seldom irritated—even by Trent, or even by the damned fools who wanted him to allow his people to form Trade Unions. "Good Heavens!" he said, "do you imagine I pay them to be private and comfortable! I pay them to do my work! When they go home they can be as comfortable as they please. As long as they are on my premises they ought either to be working or waiting their turn to work—and I'll see that they are!" He almost glared at her.

Mary said nothing. She was astonished.

After a moment James was astonished too. He could never remember speaking to her like this before. It cost him very little effort to admit that he had been hasty. "What a shame," he said, "to fall on the old lady like that because she isn't very experienced in business ways! We asked her for her advice, and now we rate her because some of it isn't quite practicable. I was very bad-tempered, my dear, and I hope you will forgive me. Suppose we talk about one of your other points—you said something about shoes—and sitting down."

Mary did not want to leave the matter of rooms. By this time it seemed to her horrible that when the girls found time for a meal they should have to eat it in a cupboard that served for a cloak-room, at a table in the china room, or standing in the passage. Other firms provided dining-rooms. But when James was looking kindly at her, frankly and generously apologising, offering peace, she could not refuse it

because she, being a woman, wanted to worry her point—to "nag."

She told him with a smile as generous as his, that she would discuss standing, or shoes, or anything else that he wanted.

Here James was at his best, quick, attentive, sympathetic. He praised her womanly insight and expressed his gratitude for the trouble she had taken. He understood at once that the girls' feet ought to be looked after, even on the low ground of self-interest, and he told her that he would fix up with a firm that supplied ward shoes to nurses and see that the girls each bought a pair. As for the standing, she laid great stress on it, so he would stretch a point and give way to her. He didn't believe the girls came to any harm by it and it was a fact that customers didn't like the look of girls in uniform lolling on the chairs doing nothing. If Mary ever noticed, no big shop ever allowed its girls to be idle. A customer who came in when the shop was empty would always find the assistants busy at something, in spite of the Shop Acts. But still one wanted to keep them fresh for the busy times—he'd have a circular drafted, and if Mary liked to look at it before it went out to the managers, she could. After all, he'd heard that they were doing great things in America by studying the workers.

Mary thanked him, and then, as if his amiability were still a little stretched, he suggested that they should defer the consideration of her other proposals, as he had one or two things to see to. So would she, dear old thing that she was, let him kiss her, and then leave him.

She went to him for her kiss, and discovered that he was more upset than she had imagined. His hand trembled as he smoothed back her hair, and he murmured over her head that he was a brute, a savage, a horror to bully the most precious thing in his life. As a rule this emotion of his would have melted her; she would have remembered, with a rush of feeling, that after all a man is only a great child, something very simple and clumsy and pathetic, but to-day she stood apart from his remorse and she found herself laughing lightly, telling him that he was a funny sensitive old thing, and that, if he would only think of what he had promised, he would see that she had every reason to be pleased with herself.

Then she left him, still a little absurdly unassured, and went upstairs to her own room. It was only a quarter of an hour since she had gone downstairs to James's study. Then she had thought of James as the beneficent, all-wise authority from whose words there was no appeal; now she was puzzled about him, thinking him over. Why had he been angry with her—what had made him angry? It wasn't that she had chosen a bad moment, she couldn't believe that it was her manner, for that never annoyed him; why was he angry because she had wanted the girls to have a proper room where they might go? She could understand his rejecting her plan, but not his being angry about it. It was not like him; it did not agree with her conception of him as a man who was not only generous but singularly

patient and just. After all these years she couldn't be wrong about that—it was absurd to suggest, merely because he had shown momentary irritation, that he had an unknown side that his work called out, but that she, so far, had never seen. She pulled herself up. It was not loyal of her to hunt after this fashion for faults in James. He had been a little sharp—for a minute—and it was her duty, as it ought to have been her natural instinct, to forget a trifling occurrence which had pained him already far more than was necessary.

The only serious thing about the whole incident was that she was afraid that now she would not get her room. It was a great pity; she still felt that the girls ought to have it, but she must, she really must, remember that James knew best. There was no other basis on which her enterprise could possibly be successful.

Nevertheless she could not force her thoughts away from the picture of James's frowning peremptory face, and as she considered it, the whole interview took on, more and more, a flavour of oddness, of unreason. She had lived in complete intimacy with James for more than twenty years, and yet she was left to infer his real thoughts, in a moment of significant emotion, from the twitch of his mouth, the key of his voice, the physical symbols by which his body betrayed him hardly more successfully, on this occasion, to her than to a stranger. It was strange that she should have no more direct access to him than this method of inference, of guesswork, this clumsy process whereby a thought

before it can reach another mind must first translate itself into terms of sense. She had read poems that told of lovers whose spirits flamed so brightly that these dark barriers became translucent, shot through with the soul's light, a medium to its ardour. Those beings had known one another as poets know nature, as mystics know God. But such ecstasies were foreign to her, she felt herself to be too prim, too frail, too anxious, for the great fires of the spirit. Her had been—would always experience common experience of common folk. Her wisdom consisted in the building and maintaining of barriers between herself and the sordid, the vicious, the vulgar. She had built barriers round her love, she had kept it fine and pure, untroubled by anything but its own tenderness. She had not asked for ecstasy, she had not asked for knowledge, she had been content to trust. She must continue to trust, she must realise that she did not know her husband, she must let her affection bridge the gaps in her understanding. That was the way of life she had made for herself.

Then from the deep place in her mind where she had thrust it, her uneasiness returned. Why had he been angry? She stirred in her chair, and the movement made her realise that she was still holding her forlorn little bundle of notes. She rose and put them back into their pigeon-hole with a slight feeling of discomfort. To-morrow was one of Miss Percival's days, and she would have to make her admission of defeat. Miss Percival never said much, but Mary's impression was that she cared a good deal about the room.

The proper thing to do now would have been to turn her mind to something else. Unfortunately Mary's knitting did not hold her attention and she did not get as far as finding her place in the novel which succeeded it. Why had James been unreasonable? Why hadn't he met her calmly with his excellent and conclusive arguments? Must she be prepared for a similar reception when she spoke to him about the girls' dinner? She could not banish her troubled sense of his hostility.

While she was wondering, one of the maids brought her a letter. It was a letter in a mauve envelope, unstamped, and the maid said that it had been delivered by a little boy who wanted to give it to the lady himself. But it being late in the evening the maid had sent him away. The marks left by the little boy's finger and thumb on the paper gave some colour of prudence to her decision.

The sheet of paper inside the mauve envelope was white, and the writing was in pencil. It was not very easy to read.

DEAR AND HONOURED MADAM:

I venture to write to you and Mrs. Black the manager at our place you know was kindly give me your address. Or I should not have known how to find you. Honoured madam might I venture to ask you to grant me an interview? I do not want to Take advantage of your kindness only there is no one I can turn to except Mrs. Black and she must think of her place so will you please forgive me troubling you and don't deny me this.

Your obedient servant in great distress,

It was too late to do anything that night—and there might not be anything serious to do. Mary told the maid that she could go. She remembered Florrie; she was the child with the nice smile and the pretty flower-like face whom she had seen in the Chelsea depot six months ago. When Miss Percival came next day they would go to Exe Street together. The only thing to be decided now was whether she should show the letter to James. She decided, after slight hesitation, that she would not.

CHAPTER VI

MARY woke next morning to a feeling of uneasiness, so that she knew, before she could remember why, that she must brace herself to meet a disagreeable day. Then the sight of her maid, trim and composed, looping back her window curtains, reminded her of Florrie's letter. That was bad enough, but she soon realised that she could only turn from it to other anxieties. What had happened to the poor pretty child, what was James thinking, and what was Mary herself going to say to Miss Percival?

She tried to dismiss this last annoyance by telling herself that she was a coward. Miss Percival, as a secretary, could not seem curious about what her employers, in their Olympian privacy, had said to one another, and she must necessarily put the best face on what she was told. But this was small relief to Mary, who had so little need to dread harsh words that she had trained herself to reckon with thoughts. She now felt the weight of Miss Percival's private disappointment more severely than that lady seemed likely to feel it for herself. But after all, this was nothing compared to her disloyalty to James. She had pretended that she did not hear James when he opened her door last night, and he had gone away, believing that she was asleep. She dressed quickly now, to avoid meeting James in her own room. In the dining-room she would be better able to persuade herself that she hadn't, practically, deceived him. Keeping back Florrie's letter she did not consider

deceit; she was accustomed to use her judgment in the matter of shielding James from worry, but the other affected their emotional relations.

In the dining-room she found Rosemary, unexpectedly in time for breakfast. It was one of Rosemary's charming gifts that she could saunter downstairs at noon with the air of dewy freshness proper to an Arcadian milkmaid. Trent was there too, for Trent counterbalanced his sister's masculine carelessness of time by a beautiful punctuality. Their presence shielded Mary from the affection which James, had they been by themselves, would certainly have shown. After her first relief it seemed terrible to Mary that she should be thus welcoming obstacles between herself and the display of James's love. She tried in vain to assure herself that she didn't feel guilty, that her heart beat faster not for James, but for poor little Florrie, that if it cost her an effort to look up from her coffee pot it was merely because she did not wish to trouble her daughter with the anxieties that destroyed her own appetite. She knew all the same that somewhere, in her thoughts, in her actions, she had overstepped an ancient boundary; if she was not yet disloyal she was running the risk of disloyalty. At any rate she was allowing herself, unknown to James, a new attitude of mind which, when he came to realise it, he might not share.

In a moment James would be there! Mary forced her mind back to the table in front of her, poured herself out some coffee, put in two lumps of the sugar she detested, drank it, and then blushed crimson at the proof she found of her own preoccupation. She looked up, instinctively, but no one had noticed her. Rosemary was eating bacon; Trent was reading the Times with an air of kindly tolerance. Trent would dearly have loved to be a Unionist, for the Unionist assumptions soothed his gentlemanly instincts, but he could not see his way to anything but loss from a protective tariff. Trent dealt in luxuries; if he charged more for his cakes his customers would eat fewer. He could picture them, in all their plebeian meanness, eyeing the dish and stilling their appetites with the saw that too many sweet things are bad for the teeth. But the article he was reading did not allude to this cause of stumbling, and his complacent smile turned Mary's uneasiness to a wave of irritation. Why, she asked herself, had she a fool for a son? What was there wrong with him, or with his surroundings, that after twenty-six years of life, with health, with plenty of money, his mind should have acquired nothing from experience but the simple cunning of an animal? She seemed, for the moment, to detach herself from Trent, to see him as coolly as though she were not his mother, pledged to admire him. His fault, poor youth, was that of being slow to receive impressions. He had will and capacity and application, good qualities that came from within, but the walls of his mind had no windows. His dogmas, his attitudes, he took from the children with whom he had been at school; when Trent was an old man his spirit would still be that of boy in lower form. Other women a congratulated her upon having a son so handsome, with such good brains, who would deign to become

his father's right hand and live quietly at home. Other women's sons went into the army, at best, or they brushed their hair back from their foreheads and spent money in ways their mothers couldn't approve, or, having brains, they caused great anxiety by thinking with them.... Mary had always pitied the mothers of these young men, but now, with a pang, she realised that beneath their smoothness they might have pitied her, have thanked heaven that their boys weren't sticks like poor Mrs. Heyham's.

At this point Trent put down his Times and asked her pleasantly for some more coffee. Marv, as she took his cup, felt a wave of self-reproach. What had happened that she should be bitter like this? He was a good boy, a dear boy, as handsome as possible, and as fond of her, and for his affection she had given him secret contempt. She was, as a matter of fact, the luckiest woman she knew. She looked across at Rosemary, to fortify this feeling, and was rewarded by a pleasant picture. The blue dress the child wore showed the clear tones of her skin and the long lines of her chin and throat. Mary loved Rosemary's chin; there was a soft place underneath it where she had always kissed her when she was a baby. The engagement ring Mary hated was out of sight. That was a pretty thing to have at one's breakfast table—Mary felt that she must talk and be cheerful instead of letting the meal pass in silence. "Have either of you seen your father?" she said, to this end.

Rosemary looked up. "He's gone. He had something to see to down at the works. He had

breakfast at eight. And he wants your car at twelve as Trent is using his to-day."

To Mary this came as a fresh proof of her own unkindness. Poor James, away working for them all before she was down, gone without a kiss or a good-bye because he was considerate of her sleep! Gone without a suspicion that his wife had been criticising him and practically lying to him! Mary's impulse to talk passed. She was humbled; she hardly felt relieved when she realised that she would not have to face him until a day lay between her and her deceit.

Meanwhile Rosemary had come to the end of the table and was bending down to kiss her mother. "Good-bye, darling!" she was saying, "I'll be back to dinner on Monday. I'm going for a walk in the Mendips with Margaret, you know. I've never seen them; they ought to be lovely in this weather."

Mary kissed Rosemary and Trent frowned. Trent did not approve of girls going for walks by themselves. At least, if she let them go, Mary should have spoken a word of caution!

Rosemary saw the frown and left the room with a cheerful smile.

Mary followed her. It had not been at all a cosy breakfast.

When she went into her room she found that Miss Percival, that perfect young woman, was already waiting.

"There's something I want you to see," Mary told her, and showed her Florrie's letter. Miss Percival read the letter slowly, without moving the muscles of her face. Then she gave it back. "I'm afraid it looks like the usual thing!" she said, in a voice that took the place of a shrug.

This cynicism affected Mary painfully. "The car is coming in a minute," she said, with a grave look. "I thought we had better go to Exe Street at once and see what has happened for ourselves. I've looked up your notes, and I see that Florrie Wilson is living with an invalid mother who is a widow with some means of her own. She said that her mother is a lady, but I expect that was only her way of saying that they had seen better days."

"Or it might just be her idea of good form," suggested Miss Percival. "One has, after all, in Florrie's walk of life, to be one's own College of Heralds."

Mary looked surprised. Then she retired to put on her hat and to ponder a sentence that clashed with her notions of Miss Percival.

No. 100 Exe Street was a dirty little house in a dirty and depressing street. The few inches of garden in front of it were ornamented with two large white shells and various old tin cans. Its windows were shut, and as much light as possible kept out by torn lace curtains. It did not look like the house of one whose acquaintance with better days had been at all intimate.

Mary would not let the chauffeur ring the bell; she could not be as sure of his manners as of her own, and she waited with Miss Percival for several minutes before anyone in the house responded to her gentle pull. Then the door opened a little, and they could see a strip of a woman with bright red cheeks. She stared at the two visitors suspiciously, then she stared, with more interest, at the car. Finally, when Mary had asked her twice whether Florrie was in, she replied that they could go upstairs if they liked, and see. Top landing, back room. She shuffled along the passage in front of them and disappeared down the stairs that led to the odours of the basement.

Mary dismissed the car, since James wanted it, and went into the house. She wished to think well of Florrie, but as she climbed the two flights of stairs she was assailed by a doubt as to whether Florrie could be a truthful girl. She had said that she lived with her mother in a nice little house, and here she was, apparently a lodger in a house whose stairs were the stalest Mary had ever smelt and kept by a most disagreeable looking woman.

Mary knocked at the door of the back room on the top floor, and a voice that was not Florrie's told them to come in. For a moment, when they were inside, Mary thought that they must have made a mistake, for as she turned towards the window she saw a bed in which a stout woman was sitting, a shawl over her shoulders and some work in her hands. The stout woman however seemed to expect her. "You've come for my Florrie," she said politely. "She'll be back in a minute. Won't you sit down, ma'm? Florrie was expecting you, and she's got the room straight, but she didn't think, being gentry, you'd be 'ere so soon."

Mary stared at her for a moment. She was fascinated. The woman's face was not stout, it was

puffy, livid, swollen. It cost her an effort to say thank you and to find herself a chair. There were only two chairs in the room; Mary took the sound one and Miss Percival the one with a hole in its seat.

Meanwhile Mrs. Wilson continued to address them, but as she spoke bitterness overtook her and her voice reverted to its natural sharpness. "She's gone round to Moses's," she went on. "She seems to 'ave some maggit in 'er 'ead about it's not being safe. I tell 'er it's safe enough, a sight too safe, and we shall be lucky if every stick we got ain't safe the same way soon. So she goes and looks in the winder to see if it's out for sale." Mrs. Wilson's words gathered speed and her crochet-hook jerked rapidly backwards and forwards. "To lose a good place like that, ma'm, with me dependent on 'er, when she might 'a' married a gentleman too! And look at us now-where are we-with 'er character gone, and nothing put by for the rent? It isn't as if I could do anything with me 'ealth so bad, and the pain keeping me awake all night so I don't sleep a wink. And there's no market for crochet now, along of them niggers!"

Mrs. Wilson's shawl heaved, showing glimpses of pink flannelette.

Mary was puzzled. "But what is it that has happened?" she said. "I don't understand. What is Moses's and what has Florrie done? And I thought you and she had money of your own that you lived on? Money your husband left you?"

Mrs. Wilson's reply was not coherent, but Mary gathered that Wilson had never left nothing to

nobody but worry and trouble. What money Mrs. Wilson had she made, a shilling or two a week it would be when the Turks allowed one to make anything. Further, Florrie had lost her place, owing to a bracelet and to a man she didn't never ought to have had nothing to do with. And Mrs. Wilson had once been second housemaid in a very good house, where she had been very differently brought up to what girls were nowadays. The end of this explanation was confused by large tears which rolled down the poor woman's distorted face and needed to be wiped away with the corner of the blanket.

Mary tried to express a reassuring interest while she turned her eyes politely from this intimate and unpleasant misery. Mrs. Wilson mustn't distress herself, Mary was only there to see what could be done. She would find some way out—there could be no doubt about it—it was only a question of taking courage for an hour or so. If Miss Percival had not been there Mary might have gone across to the sobbing so wretchedly, creature who was grotesquely, on the bed, but her volition was paralysed by the thought of Miss Percival alert to take everything down. She looked round her, waiting uncomfortably for some lull in the snorts and groans which were shaking the opposite corner of the room, and tried in this interval of inaction, to collect her impressions and to clear her mind.

The one thing, up to this point, that admitted no doubt, was that poor little Florrie, whatever else she might be, was also a liar. She had deceived Mary, and Mary could not help feeling that she had also

deceived Mrs. Black. James selected his managers with care; he would not have put Mrs. Black into the position she held unless she could be trusted to keep the firm's most important regulations. Very well then, Florrie must have obtained her own post under false pretences,—that legal phrase, slipping unbidden into Mrs. Heyham's mind, seemed to shed an even deeper gloom over the affair.

But as she examined the room where Florrie lived, while the primitive woe of Florrie's mother offended her ears, Mary's hatred of deceit became less uncompromising. It was a small room, and the stains made by damp on the walls and ceiling were freshly reinforced. The window was small, and shut, and some torn muslin was held across its lower half by a sagging tape. There was a varnished table in the middle of the floor, a cupboard at one end of it, and a packing-case by the fireplace covered with odds and ends of bedroom china. The wall-paper was yellowish brown, and on the mantelpiece there were some ancient ornaments and two scarlet paper fans. It wasn't a place, in its dreary stuffiness, where ascetic virtues would make a strong appeal. Mary began to understand why Florrie, armed for the conquest of life by a becoming cap and apron, had invented this romance of a lady mother. She felt that even she herself would have needed something to shield her from the realities of such a home. She scanned the room again for traces of the girl's presence. Florrie's best hat hung on a nail on the wall, and a petticoat hung beneath it, but Mary could see no signs of any other bed. It was some moments

before she realised, with a sense of shock, that pretty Florrie slept in the bed in the corner side by side with the diseased woman who had bad nights.

This was hideous, it was revolting—nothing in the world could make it right! Mary shivered with the intensity of her repugnance. A sudden picture of Rosemary came into her mind. The two girls were the same age, and what gulfs lay between Rosemary and such contact with corruption!

She turned her eyes again to the shameful bed, drawn by the fascination of her own horror. She saw then what her agitation had not let her notice, that Miss Percival had left her seat and was bending over Mrs. Wilson. Miss Percival's reserve had gone; for a moment, as she stood motionless, her shadowed face revealed a conquering passion. Its wide eyes, staring across the room, saw nothing; she was shaken by an emotion that closed the avenues of sense. Then, as Mary's surprise was growing into wonder, the drawn muscles quivered and relaxed, and Miss Percival turned, with a swift movement of pity, to slip her arm round the huddled woman on the bed.

"Poor mother," she said, stroking the swollen hands, "don't cry, my dear, don't cry! You're not alone now; we're going to stand by your Florrie and help her face the trouble. You mustn't be too hard on her; she's a good girl, you know! See how well she looks after you, and how clean she keeps the room! A great many girls wouldn't do that, with the hard day's work she has. She may have done wrong, poor tired little thing, the world's too hard for us all sometimes, but think how pretty she is, and how

bright, and how she's stuck by you and stood up for you! Why, she won't even have it that you're poor and ill; she always tells people what a fine mother she has, a lady she said you were, and that's because she's fond of you, and won't have others look down on you!"

Mrs. Wilson could not have heard half of these rapid words, but they succeeded in changing the current of her thoughts. Her moans ceased; Mary saw her pull the shawl together across her chest and turn to the young woman stooping over her. "Pretty?" she said earnestly. "She's as pretty as a summer's day, my Florrie is! They men's been after her ever since she left school! It's a wonder to me she's kep' straight the way she 'as. But she should 'a' known—" here the unhappy creature was shaken by fresh sobs—"as that swine wasn't after no good with 'is dimon' bracelet! What would 'e be givin' 'er a dimon' bracelet for? A dirty little cur like 'im? Stands to reason!"

Miss Percival smoothed back the hair that hung over the woman's face. "So Florrie took his bracelet, did she?" she asked softly. "But why did she lose her place? Was he a customer? If that's all I'm sure we can put it right!"

But Florrie's mother did not seem able to answer. She covered her face with her hands and bent over her matted blanket. Miss Percival seemed to think it enough that she was crying more quietly, for she said no more, but stood, still with her arm round Mrs. Wilson's shoulder, looking steadily at the wall.

Mary, if she had been alone, could have hidden her own face in her hands for self-contempt. She was the leader in this adventure, she was the mother, she the woman of age and experience, the woman who had taken credit for keen perceptions and ready sympathy. And here she had sat, hard, cruel, disgusted, shutting out kindness and pity from her heart while a girl, her paid secretary, had taken her place. She had despised these poor creatures because their ugliness and their sin were spread before her, but what of the sin, the deceit and pride she had been hiding in her own heart? She had despised Trent a few hours ago because his mind was shut to everything that did not accord with itself, and now what was she doing but thrusting out her own notions, her prejudices and daintinesses to shield her from the suffering that came with a knowledge of suffering? It was nothing unusual happening here; it was unusual to her only because she had escaped her share of the world's misery.... Mary's conscience was always ready to accept a conviction of sin.

But after a time even Mary sought for relief. As she sat stiffly on her chair, her head bent, her hands clasped, rigid with the pain of thought, a little quick idea ran across her mind—the Insurance Act! She caught at it, embraced it with relief. Five shillings a week for life—meant for such cases as this! Her own housekeeping cost her fifty pounds a week, but just now her mind was tuned to a different scale. She smiled, she raised her head, leaned forward hopefully. "Miss Percival, what about the Insurance

Act? Couldn't we get Mrs. Wilson into an approved society? She ought to be getting disablement benefit!"

The sound of her employer's voice made Miss Percival start. She had not been thinking about the Insurance Act. When she looked round to face Mary's hopeful expression she did not look as if her thoughts had been pleasant. "Mrs. Wilson is not an employed person," she said, as briefly as if she had been speaking to a fool, "and anyway, no society would take her with her health like this." Then she turned back to the wall with her look of dislike accentuated. Mrs. Wilson, who had been recovering, groaned feebly.

Mary flushed, and then leaned back again. She would accept the snub, but she must think it over. She could see now that the Insurance Act would not help Mrs. Wilson, but that was only an accident, a matter of dates. It would help the Mrs. Wilsons of the future. Her mind felt eased. She wished she knew more about the Act. She was resolving to buy a sixpenny book about it when her honesty reminded her, uncomfortably, that there was little to ease her mind in an Act which she had done nothing to bring about—an Act of which she hadn't, as a matter of fact, approved. She had obeyed the law, but she felt that it was hard on the servants—she wished she could feel sure that poor Florrie had obeyed the law!

The room was quiet now, Mrs. Wilson had stopped crying, and Mary's mind, confused by the unaccustomed nature of the facts presented to it, and their incompleteness, wandered foolishly between the problem of her own responsibility for the distress of the poor and the probable nature of Florrie's offence. She was also harassed by a recurring recognition of the stuffiness of the room.

She had decided, vaguely, that there must always be rich and poor, because there isn't enough money to go round—though we ought to do more than we do—and also that Miss Percival was probably right, and Florrie had been detected taking presents from customers, when Florrie came in. Mary did not recognise her for an instant—the figure in the doorway lacked the good looks of the girl at Chelsea—then she saw that Florrie was merely looking shabby and ill.

"Good morning, my dear," she said, resolved now, at least, to do more than her duty, "I'm glad you've come back."

Florrie came forward into the middle of the room. Her expression, Mary thought, was almost sullen. She jerked her head towards her mother. "She told you?" she asked.

"Nothing that I could understand. Your mother is very unhappy, Florrie!"

"That you may well say, ma'm, me own daughter treating me like this!" added Mrs. Wilson, who had assumed an air of self-righteousness and freed herself from the shelter of Miss Percival's arm.

Mary spoke hastily to interrupt her. "I am sure you will prefer to tell us yourself."

Florrie took off her hat and put it down on the table. Then she arranged the tips of her fingers in a neat line along a crack in the wood. Finally, without

looking up, she began to speak. "'E's been followin' me 'ome every night for the last month," she said. "Time and again I've asked 'im not to, an' I've tried to run away from 'im, an' once I took the bus, but 'e knew I couldn't go on with that. An' none of the others don't come my way. An' 'e's offered me everything you can think of, jewels an' choclits and take me to the theatre, an' a glace silk dress, an' I wouldn't take one, because I saw what 'e was after, the dirty beast. An' I never 'ad no drinks with 'im, only once an ice off a barrer. That was fore I knew 'im well. An' I've cried in the street, I've been that wild with 'im. 'E knew I'd no one could do anything to 'im. 'E's called at the 'ouse even, an' told 'er downstairs I'd invited 'im! Me invite fellows up 'ere!" Florrie looked up at this. Her eyes were red.

She did not go on for a minute, her hands were trembling, though she was pressing them against the table to keep them still.

The silence was broken by Mrs. Wilson. Mrs. Wilson seemed excited; she was leaning forward, her shawl dragged tightly round her shoulders, nodding eagerly at each of Florrie's phrases.

"Don't you stop, Florrie," she said. "You tell the ladies, me girl. Jus' you tell them what 'e done!"

Florrie looked slowly at her mother, then turning away she told them.

"Then one day 'e came and said I'd broken 'is 'eart, and 'e were goin' away and I shouldn't never see 'im again. An' 'e'd brought me a partin' gift, an' when I'd taken it 'e'd go, only not before. An' I was that bucked at gettin' rid of 'im I was fool enough to

take it. It was a dimon' bracelet in a real leather case. An' 'e said good-bye, an' would I think of 'im sometimes, an' I said not if I could 'elp it, an' we parted. An' mother 'avin' been so bad I took it straight roun' to Moses's that night. I suppose 'e must 'a' followed me, for 'e waits a day or two, till I'd spent the money, an' there 'e was at the corner wanting to know if I were ready to do my part of the bargain. I told 'im there weren't no bargain, told 'im I wouldn't go with 'im for a hundred dimon' bracelets, and then 'e said—" she stopped again.

"You go on—you say it, darlin'!" Mrs. Wilson's excitement was growing.

"'E said I'd stole it, an' if I didn't give it back 'e'd 'ave me put away!"

After that nobody spoke for a moment. Mary was trembling, Miss Percival was white, Mrs. Wilson looked from one to the other of them, nodding her head with an air almost of triumph.

Then Mary remembered that there was more to hear. "My dear," she said quickly, "my poor little girl, you mustn't trouble about that; we'll get the bracelet back, and if you like we'll call it a loan and you can return it when you have the money," Mary did not want to crush Florrie with a sense of obligation—"but how was it that you lost your place? Did the man tell his story to the manager?"

Florrie stood quite still and did not answer. Mary waited for a minute and then glanced across at Mrs. Wilson. The invalid had assumed a piteous expression; she looked back mysteriously and shook her head, but when, after a considerable silence, Florrie still did not speak, she could bear the silence no longer, and she turned upon her daughter. "Now then," she admonished her, "you tell them! Don't you go shirkin' the 'ard part! If the ladies is to 'elp us they must know the 'ole truth!" She looked at Mary for approval.

Florrie, whose attention had been caught by her mother's tone, saw the glance. "Well, then, I won't tell them!" she cried. "I'm not going to! Tell them yourself as you seem to enjoy it!" She flung herself into Miss Percival's chair, her face turned away from them over its back, and Mary could see that her shoulders were shaking.

Mrs. Wilson tried to look shocked. "Well, if she's got one of 'er wicked tempers, ma'm, an' won't tell you, then I must!" she said, "though far from enjoyin' it! Well, then, 'e came after 'er, worryin' every day, till she felt desprit, as she must get the money, so—that I should 'ave to say it—she tried to see if some ole keys we 'ad would unlock the box where Mrs. Black keeps the silver. An' not only they wouldn', but Mrs. Black catches 'er at it, so of course she couldn't see 'er way to keepin' 'er, so now she's lost 'er place, and no character, any foot on the stair may be the police, and we've 'ad nothin' to eat but a cup o' tea since yesterday dinner time and the rent owing, and the Lord 'ave mercy on us, for I don't know what we're to do!"

So that was it—Florrie was a thief. An hour ago Mary would have been shocked by this, now she was angry, giddy with anger. This world in which she had been happy for so long had become intolerable,

and Mary resented it. It was monstrous that these things should happen, and that no one should care. Mary's indignation consumed all thought of guilt or care of responsibility. She turned to Miss Percival with a decision which the morning had not yet found in her. "What are we to do?" she said. "They must have something to eat, and I suppose we'd better get back that bracelet without loss of time?"

Miss Percival agreed. "I wish," she added, "that we could get hold of the man!"

Mary shivered. To face a man like that was more, she thought, than she could do.

Then she went over to Florrie. "My dear," she said, "if you'll put on your hat and show us where the bracelet is, we'll get it back for you, and we must bring a pie or something for your dinner." Mary had a vague feeling that poor people generally eat pork pies for dinner.

Florrie stood up. She looked stupid, as though she did not quite understand. "'E's outside!" she said. "Followed me 'ome."

Mary was startled. She could hardly believe that the unspeakable evil thing was so close. "He won't hurt you when we're with you," she told Florrie, but her heart beat faster. The girl put on her hat and they left the room without another thought of Mrs. Wilson. She was lying back against her pillow, her swollen face pale and distorted, and she did not speak.

When they reached the street Mary looked round her fearfully, almost as though she had a sense of guilt. She felt as if she were taking a furtive peep at an indecent picture. There was no one near the garden gate of No. 100, but some way off on the other side of the street a man was leaning wearily against a lamp-post. "That's 'im!" said Florrie. "'E'll follow us—you see!"

They turned off down the street and Mary knew for the first time the choking excitement of the chase. She would not look round to see whether the man was following, every instinct forbade it, but she could not help wishing that Florrie would do it for her. This did not seem likely; Florrie's eyes were fixed far ahead, and every line of her shoulders expressed an unyielding singleness of purpose. It was extraordinary that she did not seem to mind whether the man were there or not. Even the bold Miss Percival was looking at the ground. Mary's nervousness increased—he might, for all they knew, be quite close to them! Finally, at a corner, she found that she had looked round without meaning to. The man was there, about twenty paces behind. He was little and young and fair and very unhappy, not at all the red, gross creature he ought to have been and that Mary had expected. She covered the rest of the distance in a tumult of nerves that did not allow her to see where she was going.

It was only as they entered the door of a shop that she made an effort to recover her self-command. This, of course, must be the pawnbroker's.

Mary had never been into a pawn-shop before, and she expected to find it an interesting place. It was not. Neither the empty counter before them nor the walls of the compartment that hemmed them in presented any features of interest. The young man behind the counter was not even, as it happened, a Jew.

Meanwhile, Florrie, trembling and intense, had produced her ticket. The young man took it in a perfectly ordinary way. Mary realised suddenly that he was accustomed to pawn-tickets.

"Thirty-five bob," he said.

Mary looked at him with astonishment. She would hardly have been surprised if he had asked for so many pounds. Florrie at her side gave a little soft sob of agonised suspense—Florrie was wondering whether it was too much.

Mary put back the cheque-book she had been innocently taking from her bag, and brought out the necessary money. As she put it on the counter Florrie caught hold of Miss Percival's arm to steady herself. The assistant was gone now and the shop was spinning round Florrie in circles of yellow light. There was a fine dancing halo, especially, obscuring the door through which he had disappeared.

He was not away long, and when he came back he was unwrapping a little parcel. Florrie, shaking all over, held out her hand for it. Inside the parcel was a leather case; the young man, as he handed it to Mary, opened it.

There lay the bracelet. Not even a lady, Florrie felt, could deny its glories. It was a golden snake with a beautiful pattern of scales on its back, and in his eyes there sparkled two small diamonds.

"A pretty thing," said the young man, in a sociable tone. "Real gold, nine carat." Before he had

finished Florrie was out of the shop and Mary was obliged to follow her without replying. It was a corner shop, and Florrie had turned into the little side street instead of the busier way by which they had come. As Mary came out she saw that the fair young man was staring into the window of a tobacconist next door. When he saw Florrie coming he hesitated and then stepped forward to meet her with a nervous smile.—"So you've got it—" he was beginning, but she did not let him finish. "Take that, you muck!" she said, and threw it at him. Then she turned her back on him with a laugh of triumph.

The little man did not seem to have felt the leather case which had hit him on the chin. For a moment he stood still, staring after Florrie, then, suddenly, he pulled his cuff across his eyes.

"She's gone!" he said to himself, and when he raised his head, Mary, disgusted, could see that he was crying.

The little man did not mind Mary. He cried for a little and wiped his eyes again, and then stooped to pick up the bracelet that had fallen out of the case at his feet. He did not look at it, but slipped it into his pocket, and then walked away down the street, still sniffing. He was a miserable little man; Mary, immorally, felt sorry for him.

She was recalled to more fitting sentiments by Miss Percival's voice in her ear.

"Don't you think Florrie had better have something to eat at once?" she said urgently. "She's hysterical!"

Mary agreed, and they moved away to an eating-house known to Florrie.

The interior of the eating-house, unlike the pawn-shop, was full of interest, but Mary forgot to study the people seated at its tables; nor did she drink the milk, which, to put Florrie at her ease, she had ordered for herself and Miss Percival. She was very much puzzled by the fair young man. He ought to have shown forth his wickedness on his face, he ought to have filled Mary's soul with a shudder of loathing, and he had not. She had meant to banish the subject as quickly as possible from Florrie's mind, but she could not help—when Florrie had finished her soup—asking her a few questions.

"Why couldn't he have offered to marry you, my dear?" she said. "Is he married?"

Florrie was feeling better now. She put her spoon down neatly like a lady, and answered with some of her old deference:

"No, he's not married, ma'm, but he's a gentleman. He's a merchant in his father's office and he lives at home and gets a pound a week. His father would have turned him out if he'd married me. Or he would have, he told me so. But I wouldn't never have married 'im. He wasn't my sort." Her attention wavered to the sausages which the waiter was putting before her.

This composed reply added to Mary's discomfort. If the villain who had tried to wreck Florrie's soul lived on a pound a week, he must have saved up to buy the bracelet. Or perhaps he hadn't paid for it, perhaps he wanted to take it back to the

shop himself. Mary couldn't believe that that feeble little man would ever have prosecuted Florrie. She reminded herself that he hadn't been too feeble, all the same, to drive the poor child to stealing. What a horrible tangle it was! She left the table hastily and went to the counter, where she bought eggs and sandwiches for Mrs. Wilson. She realised that she was, more or less, in charge of Mrs. Wilson and suddenly she felt very tired. But Mrs. Wilson's future was a burden that Mary was to be spared. When they arrived on the doorstep of No. 100, they found the landlady was in the hall waiting for them. She was full of importance, of mystery, almost of triumph. She addressed herself to Florrie. "Your ma's been took bad," she said, "just after you gone out. I 'eard 'er shriek, as it 'appened, an' I sent for the doctor. But it wer'n't no good, the poor thing were gone before he came. It's a miracle she lived so long, 'e said!"

Mary was conscious of a great relief.

CHAPTER VII

IT was a day of tears. Poor Mrs. Wilson and Florrie had every right to cry, the landlady had cried because it seemed the proper thing to do, the little man had cried, presumably because he could not help it, and when she reached home Mary had cried without any definite excuse. It was true that she had realised for the first time how gay, how clean, how spacious, her own house was, how refreshing warm water is, and plenty of soap, but a sensible person need hardly have made these an occasion for weeping. As a matter of fact she was crying where a more energetic woman would have rejoiced. Miss Percival, though she was coldly above the weakness of tears, had taken Florrie home. There was a spare bedroom in her flat for which she didn't consider Florrie too immoral, and in it the child was to spend the day which, in this industrious age, is sufficient concession to the filial grief of the lower classes. Afterwards she was to be apprenticed to a friend of Miss Percival's who was a dressmaker. Mary would pay for her support, for the necessary instruction, and for the funeral. The dressmaker was a lady with theories and perfectly able, said Miss Percival, to cope with such a poor attempt at a thief. Mary ought to have been gratified at the good her money was doing. Even Mrs. Wilson might be said to have come well out of the adventure. She herself had admitted that since heathens in Asia had learned to make crochet lace their rivals in England must feel themselves better dead; and as far as this one case

went Mary agreed with her. The coarseness, the subservience, and the cruelty of Mrs. Wilson had shocked Mary. That being so, there was no one for whom to feel pity but the unhappy little man, and as a right-minded woman she knew that he deserved heavier punishment than a passing pang of sorrow. He was a wicked little man. Nevertheless she cried very heartily, and only recovered her self-control when she remembered that James might well be home early and would certainly be upset by visible traces of tears.

She did not now dread the return of James; the unwonted emotions of the day had exhausted her capacity for worrying herself. Florrie's cruder troubles made the subtleties of her former uneasiness seem a little ridiculous. She forgot that she had meant to greet James with a special compensating tenderness; she only felt a little excited when she realised that for once she had something of real importance to talk to him about.

But James had not forgotten. As soon as business released his mind he remembered that he wanted to be particularly loving. He hadn't had a chance that morning of kissing and reassuring poor little Mary; all the more reason to hurry home now and put an end to whatever thoughts might still be distressing her. He knew from experience that Mary, with no other imperative claims on her attention, let her mind dwell too long on such trifles. She would suffer all day because she had done or said something that had left his mind when the first thought of his day's work entered it. He had always

tried to be very tender with her, since she was so harsh with herself—his last night's bad temper had been inexcusable. He could not imagine now what had provoked it. Nothing that she, poor darling, was responsible for, but that wouldn't have kept her—he knew her—from persuading herself all this time that it was entirely her own fault and nothing to do with him.

He hurried through the last batch of waiting papers, and decided to forego even his walk home. It was a sacrifice, because he felt in need of exercise. Instead he drove to a florist's and bought some roses. When he had first become able to afford it he had bought Mary rings. She had charming, slender fingers, and he had a taste for rings. But after some time he had noticed that though she thanked him delightfully she seldom wore them. She was afraid, she said, of losing them. So he had been forced to fall back on flowers. The dear little thing was fond of flowers.

He bought enough flowers to-day to satisfy five or six ladies of Mary's size. It was one of the troubles of being rich that she could, undoubtedly, procure roses for herself if she really wanted them. But he liked to think, so strong was the instinct that had made him give up his walk, that the roses he gave her were different from those that she merely ordered.

She was in her room when he reached home, and when he had thrown aside the florist's wrappings he went up to it. He didn't want to give her just an immense unwieldy roll of paper. She was to see, as soon as she saw him, the beauty which he had chosen to be the token of his love. She was leaning on the mantelpiece as he came through the door. There! Red eyes!—just as he had thought!

She seemed perfectly pleased, however, with him and his roses, and her mouth, as she lifted it to be kissed, had no wistful droop.

"How lovely, darling!" she told him, and rang the bell. "I particularly wanted some to-day. I've had no time to get any and the others are dying. And I'm so glad to see you so early, because really, James, it has been an extraordinary day, and I do want to hear what you think of it all!" She looked at him anxiously.

He stroked her hair, and then put a finger beneath her chin. "I don't think I like you to go through extraordinary days if they leave you looking like this—tired out, and red round your dear grey eyes! But as you are in this state it's quite right to tell me all about it!" He made her sit down on the sofa and sat down by her.

Mary, for once, was too full of her tale to notice that he looked a little disappointed. She did not usually entrust to a servant flowers that were his special personal gift. It was quite right—as he had said—that she should be eager to give him her confidence, but he had wanted to-day to be welcomed for himself, affectionately, intimately, not merely as a friendly audience. Nor did her story, when she told it, astonish him as much as it astonished her. He was accustomed to the idea that the lives of the poor are often tragic, and he was

angry with these people for dragging Mary into their sordid affairs. When she came to the account of Mrs. Wilson's death he interrupted her.

"Poor little mother, no wonder you are distressed! You're not accustomed to these painful occurrences. But there's one thing I must say, you're not asking me, I hope, to take the girl back?" He softened the effect of his speech by stroking her hand.

Mary relieved his mind. "Oh no, of course I understand that you couldn't."

He might have left it at that, but it seemed a pity to waste arguments he had ready. "Because even if it were not for her dishonesty, my dear, a girl who had lied in that fashion would have to go. After all, the inquiries we make are just as much for the girls' own sakes as for ours. We owe it to those who come from decent homes that they shouldn't be asked to associate with girls of a lower class. From our point of view of course this business of the man, and of her having tried to steal, is a complete justification of the rule. The whole thing must be gone into. I'm not sure that the manager is free from blame. She ought to have reported the case. I'll send someone down to Chelsea to-morrow."

Mary gave a little cry of dismay. "Oh, James! please don't let anyone get into trouble through me! It would be dreadful! They'd think of me as a sort of spy! I shall never be able to do anything for them again!"

James did not see her point. "The getting into trouble, my dear, is my affair. And as for spying,

surely this young woman doesn't imagine that you and I are dissociated, that you have secrets from me? She had no business to go to you at all, I didn't send you there to stand between thieves and their punishment, but as she has, she must take the consequences!"

This was impossible! James must be made to see—anything rather than this! "James!" she took his chin between her hands and turned his head towards her so that he was looking her in the face. "James—don't you understand? She came to me because she was in despair. She didn't think of me as Mrs. Heyham, only as someone who could help. And I'm not asking you to take her back, or to show anything but the most extreme official disapproval. What I've done for her I've done as a private person, because I was sorry for her. You mustn't—I can't have my sympathy turned into the means of disgracing poor Mrs. Black!"

James looked down for a moment on her urgent eyes, on the distressed quiver of her mouth. Then he turned away, pretending that he did not feel the faint pressure of the fingers that lay against his cheek.

"My dear," he said patiently, "I admit it's an awkward position for you, but put yourself in my place for a minute. You aren't asking me to take the girl back, I know, but you must see that you're asking something far more important. Mrs. Black is a manager, in a position of power and trust. I must know whether she has been deliberately winking at a serious breach of the rules. You can't expect me to

leave her there without even knowing whether she is deceiving me!"

Mary tried another tack. "I don't see how you are to find out!"

"That's not the point. The point is that I must try. Even if I find nothing it will frighten her."

Mary did not speak, and after a moment he went on. "You know me well enough to know that I don't like punishing people. I had rather they did their duty honestly and simply, so that I could reward them for it. But on the day that I began, from whatever to comply with abuses, to overlook corruption of this sort, the downfall of the business would begin. It is Mrs. Black's duty to see that the girls she employs are of good character and come from respectable homes. We don't take girls whose wages are their only means of support, for obvious reasons. Still less do we take girls who are supporting other people. Of course, we make it up to those we employ in other ways: they don't come to us merely to earn a living, but that is not the point. The point is that either Mrs. Black's methods of inquiry are at fault, so that she has allowed herself to be deceived, or that she has become party to a conspiracy to deceive the firm. It's clear that something is wrong, for she had no right to dismiss Wilson for theft without reporting the case."

Mary, bewildered, tried to gain time. Perhaps it had been reported without his noticing it.

James smiled. "We don't dismiss people for theft every day, my dear, and when we do we make a full enquiry. It is only fair to the culprit. Besides a trouble of that sort is often a sign of something wrong."

"Perhaps she was sorry for Florrie—she knew that if she reported her Florrie would be ruined. It's a great responsibility, James, and after all she hadn't actually stolen anything."

James turned to her again, but not, this time, to study the entreaty of her face, he wished to give force, on the contrary, to his own attitude. "Really very logical, Mary! vou're not The only responsibility of my managers is to perform the duties that I pay them for. I undertake that my employees shall not be dismissed unjustly, and it is for me to decide whether or not they shall be prosecuted. And as for not actually stealing, I gather from you that by the girl's own admission she was caught in the act of trying to open a cash-box. Five minutes later she might have opened it. For all I know she did-you'll hardly ask me to place much faith in the word of a person who lies so fluently. You told me that she told lies even to you, and her story of the man and the bracelet strikes me as a pure fabrication. It's exactly the sort of story such a girl would be likely to invent; if there was a man and a bracelet at all she probably stole it from him. If she was innocent, why was she so much afraid of being charged? It's not probable, to say the least of it, that an honest girl would commit a real theft—and a theft on her employer—in order to escape being charged with one that she hadn't committed." Mary did not speak, and, after a moment, he left the sofa and walked over to the window. There he felt more at ease; the near presence of her emotion had troubled him. It was creditable emotion, and though in this case he could not give way to it he would deal with it as gently as he could. His face cleared, "I understand your feeling, little mother. You are sorry for her, and you don't want it to seem that you have taken advantage of her confidence. But if you think it over you will see that the results of my action can't now affect Wilson, and I undertake that your name shall not be connected with the matter in any way. You can't seriously have thought that I should bring you into it. And as a concession to you I am prepared to behave with every possible leniency towards Mrs. Black. Beyond that I think you must leave it to me."

Mary looked up at him as he stood dark against the waning light. Her protest against his words was mingled with the excitement of a discovery. She had been right last night—the mood she had chanced upon had neither been an accident nor unimportant. It had sprang from some deep essential in his mind. To-day it was overlaid with patience and with kindness, but none the less it shut him away from her, made him impervious to her entreaties, insensitive to whatever truth might lie in her point of view.

She felt now that she had suspected all her life the existence of this baffling quality. It was what she had feared when she had not wished to touch his business life. She had not only been afraid of herself, she had been afraid of him. As she had known him he had made her, their children, their relation to one another, the pivot of his life; here she was discovering another principle of loyalty, another axis round which his judgment and his ideals might revolve. He didn't misunderstand her now because he wished to wound her, or even because he would not take the trouble to examine what she said. Her wishes, potent as they were, had run counter to something stronger than themselves—she had not merely then to persuade him, she had to overcome his resistance.

Her mind was so busied with this thought that for a moment or two she did not speak. James, believing that she was considering the force of his words, did not hurry her. Then she made one more attempt to reach him.

"Perhaps I didn't explain very well, James. I didn't mean that what I minded was Mrs. Black's knowing that I had betrayed her to you, if it turns out that I have. I should mind that, because it would make all these women hate me when I only wished to do them a kindness. But what I mind most is being used, in actual fact, as an instrument of misfortune, as the channel of your displeasure—you force me to become a spy in fact, whether anyone knows it or not. And, you know, I resent it, I'm not prepared to be made use of in such a manner. It's a thing between me and you James, not between me and them—" She stopped, her eyes fixed on his face for some sign of comprehension.

James turned away a little, evading her gaze. "I'm very sorry," he said, "I'm exceedingly sorry. I had no more idea than you that this unhappy position would arise. Normally one couldn't have supposed

that information of this sort would come into your possession. But since it has I do not see that I can be expected to disregard it. This girl must have known perfectly well that in telling you she was as good as telling me."

"I don't suppose, poor little thing, that she thought about it!"

James was annoyed. It seemed to him that for Mary after what he had said, to call Florrie a poor little thing was to display a wilful, provocative obstinacy. But he had determined not to give way to irritation, so he said nothing. After all, these lying impostors were new to Mary.

Mary, meanwhile, thinking the matter over, had resolved to make one more effort. She too got up, as these things are more easily said when one is standing, and went over to him. "Will you do one thing for me," she asked, "will you, before you take action, consult Trent, and let me, if I want to, tell him what I feel about it? I'm almost sure, though I don't know why, that he will agree with me."

James paused. Then he took her hands. "Yes," he said, "I'll do that, if you'd like me to. But look here, little woman, you put it to yourself fairly. Have you, even for a minute, tried to look at this thing from my point of view?"

Mary looked down at the floor for an instant's reflection. What he said was perfectly true. She had made no attempt to consider his position. Then she looked up and met his eyes. "No," she admitted, "I haven't."

He said no more, but kissed her and left her to think it over.

It did not occur to him that his leaving her would annoy Mary. He had acted instinctively upon the principle of making the most of an advantage. Moreover, he was tired, he had had a long day's work, and he had not expected to find an argument of such gravity awaiting his return.

Mary, unfortunately, was annoyed. She had not finished telling James about her adventures, and it hurt her to feel that he took no interest in what she had been doing. He would have taken all the interest she could wish if she had made them into a funny story; he liked what he called her witty way of commenting on events, but as it was true and important and serious he only considered its possible effect upon his business.

She tried to conquer her displeasure by telling herself that this was very natural. If a man has worked hard at a business for thirty years one should not be astonished that it has dominated his mind—one should be grateful if he has any mind left to be dominated.

Mary set herself to consider this, so that she might turn from her sense of personal grievance. What would she feel if she had spent the years of her working life serving, not individual people, whose happiness was a simple and obvious end, but an elaborate machine? In James's case the use of the machine was easy to see, people must be fed, and in some ways James fed them better than they had ever been fed before. But that, and he would have

admitted it, wasn't the reason why he fed them. He had provided tea-shops because he saw in them the chance of a business opening. Other business men jumped just as eagerly at a chance to make cotton blankets and paper boots, even the tea-shops encouraged women to gad about and spend money instead of making their jams and jellies at home.

He didn't do his work to serve the country, after all, if James hadn't built his shops one of his rivals would have built them instead,—but neither, Mary felt sure, did he work purely from a love of money. He liked money, but he had as much money now as he would ever care to spend. He liked a beautiful house, and a beautiful garden, he used a car to make journeys more convenient, he liked all the things that join with these to make life run free from hampering anxiety. And it cost money, immense sums of money, to have fresh air and flowers and cleanliness and books. But these, after all, did not provide a bottomless pit for wealth; in Rosemary's ideal state—Mary smiled—they were to be the common pleasures of the crowd. And these were, on the whole, all that James wanted. He had not been vulgarised to the point of demanding a hundred servants or jewels in the heels of his women's shoes.

He worked, in the long run, she supposed, for power, and for the flush of success. He did not trouble very much about ultimate aims, he found happiness in the achievement of transient immediate ends that sprang up in the course of events, and were accepted without question. Chance had thrown him into a factory; being there, he made the best of it and

proceeded to think in terms of factories. He wanted a clean factory—an efficient factory—a larger factory—then some tea-shops, some more tea-shops, more and more, this site, that site, a distinctive appearance, a reputation for the best tea—so it went on. Of course he came to care about it, to depend on its success. Of course he came to regard the human beings who worked with him as factors in its success. He saw it as an end to be furthered for its own sake, not as a means to the building up of happy lives—though he liked, of course, after dinner, to dwell on its national usefulness.

It was all very obvious, she had known it all for years, but she had not, until that moment, taken it into account. She had thought of the business remotely as the source of their income, as a career for Trent, and immediately as a source of worries, a disturber of James's meals. She had never considered it as a great influence on James's mind, teaching him to look away from the primitive things of life to which women sit close, teaching him to think first of methods, of institutions, of organisations, the moulds and forms into which human emotion and energy are poured.

That was what Miss Percival must have meant when she talked of a man's world. It was a world that cared more for things, for arrangements, than for people. Women didn't come so easily to care for things. She thought of women she knew who were restless, and whose husbands gave them diamonds to keep them quiet. They had no children, or the world had taken their children away from them, spoiled

them perhaps—or, worst of all, they had lost the gift of loving. There they were, unhappy—not that it mattered much to anyone. They had no work, no broad enthusiasms, to carry them over their personal failures. She had felt the poverty and insecurity of that when she had given Laura and Rosemary a better education than most girls of their class. She had trained their intellects to give them a second, a firmer hold on life. And they, having got it, were of opinion, that they should have more. They wanted, through politics, to regain their hold on a world that the modern craving for size and complexity had taken away from women. She had never troubled to follow them there. She had said that she wanted a vote because James believed that she ought to have one, and Trent believed she ought not. Anyhow, that, for the moment, was a side issue. What she was faced with now was this discovery that James and she held different points of view. He wanted the business to be a success, and, to his credit, an honest success; she wanted that too, but she wanted more that it should make the people who worked for it happy. How were they—James and she—going to surmount these opposing attitudes?

As she wondered she was overcome by her old timidity. The best thing to do, probably, would be for her to drop the whole thing. Already she and James had been more divided by it than she could remember their having been by anything. They had differed before, but not in this fundamental way. It wasn't worth it—better let all the girls in London be

overworked than lose the happiness of her love for James.

She might have acted on this impulse, so much was she afraid of her own reflections, if she had not remembered that, as a matter of fact, half of the business was hers. It had been given to her, and she had enjoyed its profits for years. She had left it to James, and he had been willing that she should leave it—to his eyes it was a man's, not a woman's work but then she had not realised that anything more than James's brains were needed. Now it seemed to her quite probable that her brains were needed too. She was responsible whether she washed her hands of it or not. She wished with all her heart that her father had given James the whole concern. Then she need have had nothing to do with it. But he hadn't, he had given it to her; she would not gain anything worth gaining by being selfish.

She differed from James; very well, then, she differed. She must accept it. But she needn't differ irritatingly, ignorantly. As long as she had meant to let her own ideas follow her husband's, she had refrained from seeking information from other people. Now that she saw that she and James might very well not agree she decided that she had better know what she was talking about. When Rosemary came back she would find out the names of some books. After all, something might come of this—if she were forced to dispute with James she might find a closer relation to Rosemary.

Meanwhile James was losing his temper with Trent. There was no sensitiveness in Trent that need be considered, a little sarcasm did the young man good, and James was ruffled at having to consult him. However, he had said he would, and no use would be served by putting the matter off. If Trent had wanted his father in a better humour he needn't have entered the door at the moment when James was passing through the hall.

"Trent," he called, "come into the library for a moment!"

Trent came, lamblike but dignified.

"Your mother has unearthed a pretty condition of affairs at C. L." James had his back to the fireplace and his chin in the air.

Trent was attentive. "Yes?"

"The manager—name of Black—there engaged a girl called Wilson, who seems to have had no references but a bedridden mother without means, and subsequently the girl tried to steal money out of the cash-box, says she got herself tangled up with a man, pawned a bracelet he gave her, or she stole from him, and wanted the money to redeem it because he threatened to prosecute her. The girl wrote to your mother, who went down to see her, and found her living in one room with an old woman and almost starving. I suppose your mother is seeing after her now, but the point is, what are we to do about Black?"

Trent did not understand why he had been brought into the matter. It was not the sort of thing that would normally have needed any discussion. "Why do you ask me?" he said.

"I told your mother I would."

That did not make things any clearer.

"My mother has some definite idea as to what should be done?"

"Your mother does not want anything done."

"About Black?"

James did not answer for a minute. Even if Mary had not been convinced by his arguments she might have kept up a decent pretence of agreement—she need not have sent him to Trent to explain that his father and mother had fallen out. James couldn't imagine now why he had been such an idiot as to undertake this unpleasant task. Mary was not, as a rule, so careless of his dignity.

"I don't find you very intelligent this evening," he said.

Meanwhile Trent had had time to understand.

"When you said 'unearth' you meant 'unearth by accident'—I see—" he began.

"What the devil does it matter how she found it out?—it certainly wasn't by accident. The girl came to her and told her—you can't call that an accident!"

Trent squared his shoulders with the priggish, dogmatic air that his family disliked in him. "I can quite understand that my mother doesn't want to get the woman into trouble," he said.

"Don't preach at me, sir!" would have relieved James's mind, but it would also have been to admit himself in the wrong. He drove back the tempting phrase.

"Your mother never wants to get anyone into trouble—that's not the point," he retorted. "The point is"—he spoke with a vague, oppressive sense of

repetition—"that I am in possession of some valuable information about one of the managers—and I am asked to become an accessory to at least one crime, possibly to a number, by ignoring it!"

Trent laughed.

"Well, what should we be doing but acquiescing in deceit and dishonesty?" James was furious.

Trent told himself that his father was showing signs of age. He was behaving absurdly, a thing he did not often do. Trent was not offended or frightened by this ridiculous conduct because he felt himself safe on ground where his judgment could not be challenged. Trent had received an education which enabled him to know when a thing was honourable and when it wasn't. He felt perfectly sure of himself.

"Quite so!" he said. "But look at the other side of the thing for a moment. If Wilson had been a lady you wouldn't have doubted that what she said was said in confidence. We shouldn't have felt it possible to act on it."

James said nothing.

"As a matter of fact," his son went on, "if it had been anyone but my mother I shouldn't have thought much of that. We don't treat our work people as our social equals for the best of reasons. They aren't. And they wouldn't understand it if we did. I've very little doubt that Wilson meant to get Black into trouble for dismissing her."

James stirred—why hadn't he thought of that?

"But as it is I think we had better do nothing. We don't want to make my mother feel that she has been forced into an act she considers cruel, or even dishonourable. After all she has no experience of these people; she doesn't understand that the standards of cultured society don't apply to them. And really, it won't make much practical difference. We've only got to keep an eye on Black. If she's up to anything we shall soon catch her out. After all, Wilson's story isn't to be relied on there more than anywhere else!"

"But this isn't a question of Wilson's story, your mother saw the girl's home for herself!"

"Oh, well, as I've said, it needn't make any difference. I'll tell Forbes that he must give special attention to C. L. I don't think there can be anything much wrong. The returns are all right!"

James conceded the point. "Very well, very well," he said in a tone of dismissal, for he did not wish to prolong a disagreeable encounter. He wanted to tell Trent that he despised him for his manners, his morals, and his point of view, but his own manners would not let him. Moreover, in a sort of way, Trent had got him out of a difficulty. What he had said about Black was perfectly true, and it would be a relief, for once, to give way to Mary. When Mary considered a matter a point of honour she was as tenacious as he would have been himself.

Nevertheless it was an unpleasant business. As he sat thinking in his chair, after Trent had left the room, he realised how very unpleasant it was. Trent had lectured him in that damned superior way that roused all James's worst feelings, James himself had lost his temper, and Mary was probably sitting up

there telling herself that her husband was a monster. And the thing that was to solve it all was Trent's assumption that the working classes weren't fit to lick his boots. James knew better. When he first went to his factory he had known a good many of his workmen intimately. They had their code of honour—James felt at this moment that it was as good a code as young Master Trent's, any day-and he had always flattered himself that they knew him for a man of honour, too. But this wasn't a matter of dealing as one man to another. For one thing Black was a woman, and though one does one's best to be generous to women it is not possible always to be square with them. But what was really the main point was that James was hardly, in this, a private man. He represented the business, the prosperity of the business. And the business had the right to demand honesty from all its employees, and constant, unswerving efforts from him to secure their honesty. Mary and Trent didn't seem to see that there was a principle involved. Mary was unable to look beyond the softness of her own heart—nobody expected Mary to understand business life, but she might have trusted him—and Trent thought nothing mattered as long as Black was found out before long. Meanwhile what of the impression in the minds of all the people who knew that the firm was being hoodwinked? No, no, what they ought to have had was a thorough inquiry, and then have shown mercy to the culprits afterwards.

This was only one trouble, but for all he knew it might be the first of a series. His faith in Mary's

judgment was shaken. She ought to have realised that this was a matter for him. Perhaps after all his hands would be strengthened by following out a scheme that had been in his mind for some time, and turning the business into a public company. One is in a very satisfactory position when one represents not merely one's own opinions but the all-powerful interests of one's shareholders.

He was considering this plan with a fresh interest when he was interrupted by the dressingbell.

CHAPTER VIII

ON Monday, after tea, Rosemary sat in her studio and knitted. Not long ago her studio had been the schoolroom, and its name now was little more than an attempt to make the best of its northern aspect. There was an easel in a corner and in a drawer somewhere various sticks of charcoal and tubes of paint, but the room was used chiefly, when she troubled to think of it, as a field for Rosemary's decorative instinct. Just now its walls were cream, its paint dark purple, its furniture very subtly purple and blue. This was an arrangement which gave many opportunities. When Rosemary was feeling brilliant and worldly and successful with life she could put on a rose-coloured dress and dominate the colour scheme, or, if she were restless, she could be ultramodern and temperamental in orange and dark green. This afternoon she was knitting in the coat and skirt she had worn on her walking-tour and the undominated, looked a trifle Rosemary always carried knitting on a walking-tour. Landladies who did not think well of young girls tramping about in couples would grow friendly when they saw the knitting-needles. And Rosemary was anxious now to finish what she was doing before she had forgotten all about it.

Anthony, when he came in, found her pulling out a row of stitches. His attention was drawn to this because she would not allow him within reach until the affair of getting them back was safely finished. Then he received his greeting, but Rosemary's mind was with her wool. After a question or two she went back to her knitting. "Bother the thing," she said a minute later, "I'm getting it wrong again!"

Anthony sat down on the hearth-rug and asked her, in a tone that did not call for an answer, why, in that case, she troubled to do it at all. He was slightly annoyed. If it had not been for her idiotic fancy-work he could have sat on the arm of her chair.

Rosemary did not knit with the grace that comes of skill, and now, since she was deeply preoccupied, her air was impersonal and unreceptive. She might have been more glad to see him, Anthony thought. Nevertheless she was lovely, and, he reminded himself, her lack of sentimental pretence was one of the things he most admired in her. It was so unlike Gladys. He had been in love with Gladys before he met Rosemary, and whenever he had said that he felt anything Gladys had always felt it too, only rather more intensely.

At this point Rosemary, the fresh difficulty surmounted, began to amplify her grievance. "Why are one's hands so inadequate?" she said, clicking off a plain easy row. "Why do they go on making mistakes after you understand exactly what to do? It's awfully annoying being beaten by a thing like this knitting—the pattern is perfectly simple." She reached the end of the row and looked across to him, frowning a little. "Why should I care about knitting?" she went on, "I believe being engaged to you is making me womanly, old Tony!"

Anthony, hands round knees, imparted a little information. "You'd have got womanly anyhow," he

told her. "It's a way women have. But I don't see why you should waste your time knitting. An intelligent being, say a man, wouldn't be bothering about mistakes, he'd put in the time inventing a knitting-machine. You can prove this if you go into any big shop. The proper department is replete with knitting-machines. And how many men knit? They smoke their pipes and think. But you go tangling up wool with two clumsy needles—I withdraw that if you think it's unkind!"

This row was complicated, and Rosemary did not look up. "Knit two together," he heard her say.

"Listen to me please," he urged. "As for your hands being silly, it's you who are silly to put them to such uses when you might be letting me hold them. Being held is one of the things hands were made for; knitting is not. And having your hands held is one of the things you were made for, and you know it."

Rosemary stood up and put her knitting aside. Then she held out her hands. "All right," she said, "here they are. Only if I don't finish that wretched thing quickly it will just lie about and get dusty."

Anthony pulled her down on to the rug beside him and then made himself thoroughly comfortable.

"Put your head on my shoulder," he advised her, "if you're not feeling affectionate. And kiss my chin once or twice. I want you to feel affectionate because I've something to say to you, and a nice woman is swayed by her emotions." Rosemary straightened herself at once. "What ridiculous plan have you got," she asked, "that you can't trust to my calm judgment?"

Anthony looked straight ahead of him, at the fire. "It's a very good plan," he said, "it's an excellent plan, and I've given a good deal of thought to it. I think it's time we got married."

He did not turn, but her shoulder was against his, and he felt her stiffen. "Why—particularly?" she asked.

"Oh, general reasons. As a matter of fact it's your duty to be pining to marry me, and I think it's rather giving in to you to tell you reasons, but I will if you like."

Rosemary believed that life is a serious thing, and she could not now help him to be flippant. "Yes, do!" she said, and Anthony honourably tried.

"Wouldn't you agree," he began, "that the art of living is largely not going on with things after you've had the best of them? When things begin to shrink instead of expanding, you ought to change them—don't you agree?"

Rosemary was looking down at the floor. "But why has our engagement begun to shrink?" she asked. "I don't think it has."

Anthony put his arm round her and pulled her so close to him that she could not see his face. "Do you really want to know—are you quite sure you want to know—won't you just take it from me?" she heard him saying.

"No," she said, "I'd rather you told me!" She was not afraid of knowing about life, she reminded

herself, her cheek safely against his coat. She hoped he would always tell her everything.

He was silent for a moment, and then he drew her closer still. "You see," he said, "Rosemary darling, I want you so much. I used to be happy just because I loved you and you loved me. I liked to be with you, and talk to you, and argue about things and feel that we were great friends. But now I seem to have lost all that—" He hesitated.

Rosemary did not speak, and he went on. "It isn't that I love you less, only it's different. I love you more—I think about you all day, I can't help it, I keep seeing you, and remembering how beautiful you are, and how jolly your hair is—and all that sort of thing."

"The fact is, young woman," he went on, "you've become an obsession, do you see? A poet would be delighted if he lay awake all night thinking of your eyelids, but I'm not a poet. And if I can't do my work properly what's to become of us?"

Rosemary still said nothing, and the lightness died out of his voice. "I hate it," he told her, "it's perfectly beastly. Even when I'm with you I'm wondering all the time whether you really love me, and when I'm away from you I'm simply miserable. I know it's idiotic, but I can't help it. And it's spoiling everything, it isn't the way you ought to be loved. It's greedy and ugly. I suppose really you're too fine for me. But I feel as if once we were married it would be all right again."

He turned, trying to see from her face what Rosemary thought, but the room had grown dark, and the fire threw confusing shadows. She did not move; he supposed she was thinking about it in her lucid, reasonable way, when suddenly he heard her whisper, "Tony—darling—I can't! Don't make me!"

His sense of disappointment was so immediate and so strong that he jumped to his feet. He could not sit next her, touching her, when they were so deeply divided. He picked up a bowl that stood on the mantelpiece and pretended, in the dark, to examine it.

"It's all right," he reassured her, "it's quite all right, old darling. Even if I could, I wouldn't make you do anything you didn't want to do."

But Rosemary was on her feet now, appealing to him. "Tony, let me explain—you explained to me—of course I'll marry you if you feel we must—it isn't that I don't love you. It's Laura. It's the change in Laura that has made me afraid of getting married."

She put her hand gently on to his arm, but he moved in a way that was meant to show that he had not noticed it. "Laura seems to me very happy," he said, unable not to argue, "happier now than she was before she married."

"Oh, I know she's happy—I'm not afraid of not being happy"—she could not bear him to think that—"but she's grown so soft, Tony, and she used to be so keen. It's just as if she were drunk with happiness—it has got the better of her. She's not herself any more. I can't explain, because I don't understand what it is has changed her, but it has made me feel that marriage is dreadfully important.

It does things to you. It alters you. It's a terrible risk."

She paused, hoping that he would help her, that he would agree with her, but he said nothing.

"I've always thought that however much I loved anyone I should love them proudly, as a free person, as an equal. And I thought Laura was like that too—and now she's horrible, she's abject—I've seen her looking up at Harry like a dog!"

Another thought came to her, and she flushed. "That white thing I was knitting is for Laura's baby. She was pleased when I told her I was making it. But, Tony, if that were going to happen to me I'd die rather than have people know, have all those women chattering about it and fussing over me and bringing me cushions and telling me to keep my feet up. If you didn't tell them they'd guess—it's indecent."

He looked up quickly. "We could go right away," he said, and stopped. She had turned to the mantelpiece, and her face was hidden on her arm.

Anthony felt very much to blame. He turned up the electric light, as a sign that the time for commonsense had come. "Darling," he told her, "I've said so—you shall do just what you like! I oughtn't to have bothered you—I ought to have remembered that you're so young! But it is all right, isn't it? I mean, you do love me?" he went on, made anxious by the heaviness of his heart.

"Aren't you sure?" he pressed, as she did not speak.

His tone had loosed a tumult of misgiving in Rosemary's mind. He was hurt, she had hurt him—

the idea brought with it a sense of intimacy. Perhaps she had been wrong to be afraid—he was Tony, not Harry, not just a man. She had not meant to hurt him. Perhaps she had been giving words to thoughts that she ought to have left in their vague confusion, indefinite, disregarded. She had let herself be afraid. but what she owed him was love and belief, not fear. Perhaps this fear was one of the hard things women have to conquer. Perhaps they all felt it, but they were braver than she was. If she let him go now, his hopes bruised, his desires rejected, wouldn't she be guilty of treachery, wouldn't she be throwing away her great opportunity? If you love freely, proudly, she told herself, you don't rule your love by your fear. If she was really Tony's equal, his mate and his comrade, why was she afraid? She had given herself to him, and she could not, because she was a coward, take her gift back again.

She went up to him, and put her arms round his neck. "I love you better than anything else in the world," she said, "and I want to marry you."

Anthony looked down miserably for a moment at her flushed face. He knew that she was excited, exalted, moved by a sudden impulse. But why was he to pay less attention to this impulse, this mood, than to the mood that had gone before? The main thing was that she loved him. He put his arms round her, unable for the moment to find speech. "Little Rose," he told her at last, "I will be good to you, honestly I will. I do want you so badly, and if you love me I can't feel that it's wrong!"

Rosemary, trembling and clinging close to him, found that she was crying.

She dried her tears hastily, left him, and went back to her chair. She took the knitting on to her lap, but forgot to go on with it. She was glad she had done what she had, but she had not, all the same, left off being afraid. It did make a difference being married—it must. It had made, people said, "a woman" of Laura. She didn't want to be a woman. she thought. Most women were cowardly creatures, lazy, ridden by feeling, immersed in their own little pools of happiness or discontent. She liked girls, she liked being a girl, ignorant and adventurous, with nothing in her life about which she could not speak and be honest. When you married the most important things in the world were private, secret things, you shared them with one other person, you lost your sense of the freedom, the spaciousness, of life. Laura had said that once, even Laura hadn't lost what she'd lost without regretting it. It wasn't that she didn't love Tony, she loved him so much that she was happy to be giving up everything for him, but she regretted herself, the self that was soon to be changed into a wife and a mother. She liked the world, she liked adventures; a wife is shut away from adventure, a mother shuts the world away from her children. She consoled herself by thinking that every woman who marries young has had these thoughts.

Meanwhile Anthony fidgeted. He was never easy under prolonged sentimental tension, and he did not want to think now of the scene they had just been through. He wanted, leaving that as a background of general exultation, to talk about a house he had seen that morning. It was to let; he wasn't sure that it mightn't do. But he realised that while Rosemary's expression remained what it was it would be extraordinarily tactless to talk about the house. His nerves were a little upset, and the house obsessed him, he could think of no other topic. As he sat silent, looking a little gloomy, he tried to make out from the front of it how many rooms the house would be likely to have. The rent was £70. With the rates that would be £95.

They were both glad when the door opened and showed them Mrs. Heyham. Mary had come, a little nervous, to find out from her daughter the names of books that she would do well to read, without, at the same time, discussing the subject or giving rise to any thoughts that were critical of James. She greeted Anthony kindly, and would have kissed Rosemary, but Rosemary's cheeks had flushed too lately under other kisses, and she did not approach her mother in a way that made this possible. Mary understood the refusal, and her own cheeks reddened. She had been hoping that these new interests of hers would bring her nearer to Rosemary.

For a moment they all waited, then Mary sat down and asked whether the walking-tour had been a success. She had forgotten, quite suddenly, the careful arrangement she had made of what she was going to say. Two days ago she had wondered whether she shouldn't tell Rosemary everything, but finally she had decided that she would not. Florrie's story was not easy to tell, and she found, besides, that she was shy of exposing her own doubtful and troubled mind. The child, with her different ideas, might dislike her mother's emotions, resent her confidences. She had clinched the matter by recalling the loyalty she herself owed to James.

So at last, when she had gathered courage, she began very carefully, "Do you remember, darling, six months ago, when we thought of my starting this little investigation, you offered to lend me some books?"

Rosemary remembered. "Oh, yes—you didn't read them, did you?"

Mary was prepared for that. "No, I didn't. Your father and I thought that as I hadn't time for studying the question seriously I had better begin with an unprejudiced mind. But now I've seen a certain amount for myself I should like to know what more competent people think." She smiled.

Rosemary knew this tone of her mother's, knew it to mean that Mary was reserving something, probably the most important thing. The tone chafed her now as it had when she first understood it, as a child. Why had her mother never spoken of what she was doing?—Rosemary supposed that she must have given some promise to her husband, or to Trent. "How stuffy it all is," she told herself, "never any honest discussion! Always secrets and hiding things in corners!" When she answered it was in the slightly stiff tone with which she always met what seemed to her a disingenuous excess of tact.

"I don't know of any books on waitresses particularly, mother, only books on women's work in general. I can get the facts for you if you like. But what is wrong with the work is long hours, too much work, consumption from going home in the cold after the hot shops, and bad wages!"

Mary was taken aback. It had not occurred to her that there was a definite body of opinion on the subject—hostile opinion. "Oh—how do you know?" she asked.

Rosemary had been too much disturbed that afternoon to feel tolerant now. "She has been six months looking at it," she said to herself, "and she doesn't see yet what a rotten life it is. Shall I get like that, shall I lose my wits and my senses when I've been married twenty years?" "Oh, I don't know," she answered. "I know a woman who works among them, and every now and then there are articles in the papers about it—"

"I've never seen any, dear!" Mary felt that in some way she was on her defence.

"You wouldn't have, they'd not be in the *Times*. Of course, you can't rely on them altogether, but they're fairly accurate, and about a year ago I felt curious about it; I wanted to find out how our money was made for us, so I went to one of those bureaus where they look things out for you. I never said anything to you because you none of you take me seriously." Her voice had become softer as she realised that her mother was really distressed.

She finished, and Mary bent forward, eager with a point. She had not meant to speak of the thing,

much less argue about it, but when she saw Rosemary seriously in error, she forgot that it might be imprudent to open a discussion. "Why did you say bad wages?—I have always understood that twelve shillings a week was good wages for a woman. My servants would think it good."

"So it is," said Anthony, who had left the hearthrug and was standing behind Rosemary's chair.

"And you must remember that all these girls are provided for at home! They're not really earning their livings!" She was not defending a mere argument, she was defending James!

"That doesn't make twelve shillings fair pay for a whole week's work! Suppose their fathers are earning two pounds a week, or even four-two hundred pounds a year—couldn't they spend a little more with advantage? Whether they'll let us or not, nothing gives us a moral right to feed our girls on their fathers' money!" Rosemary's inner excitement was turned now into this congenial channel. She had never had a chance of talking about the matter with her father, and when she had turned on Trent he had refused with contempt to discuss that or anything else of importance with her. Laura had been vaguely sympathetic, with a mental reservation that father couldn't possibly be cruel to anyone. Now at last Rosemary could speak the truth. She would have said more if Anthony had not pressed his hand heavily on her shoulder.

"But why do the girls go to it," cried poor Mary, "if it's so bad? There are always girls waiting to be

taken on! And how can your father pay his people more if nobody else will?"

Anthony's hand pressed even more heavily. "Twelve shillings is a good wage for women, Mrs. Heyham," he said. "I don't know what the average is since the Trade Boards, but it's far below that."

Rosemary understood that she was behaving badly. "I don't suggest that father could pay more than he does, mother darling, I haven't the least idea of what he can afford. I don't suppose he can—that's the point of a competitive system!"

Mary looked at them, young things with whom lay so much of her happiness, and knew that they were trying to console her. She saw, too, that she must stop the discussion at once. Hadn't they already dragged into it him whose very existence made all discussion wrong? "At any rate," she said, and she smiled, "you can lend me some books. Perhaps when I've read them you won't feel that I'm so ignorant!"

Rosemary jumped up and went to the bookcase where she kept the works that had inspired her own social wisdom. She pulled out a row of them, easy ones, free from technical allusions, and brought them to her mother, who took the "These aren't difficult" without wincing. As she went towards the door Rosemary jumped up and kissed her. "Mother darling," she began, and then she did not know what to say. It was her duty, the duty of every decent human being, to tell another human being the truth! But Mary was content with the affectionate gesture and went away happier.

When the door was shut Anthony was able to show his disapprobation. "Don't be detestable, Rosemary," he said, "you hurt the poor old lady! Lend her books if she asks for them, but it's not your business to tell her those particular things!"

"But, Anthony—I'm sorry if I was too hard—I was excited I'm afraid—but isn't it everybody's business if she wants to know and can't see them for herself?"

"Somebody's perhaps, not yours! Look here, Rosemary, you read everything, and you've found out things in the last few years that it hurt you to know, but aren't you glad you found them out for yourself? Wouldn't you have hated your mother to tell you?"

Rosemary looked down. "But if I hadn't found out for myself I should have felt that she ought to tell me!"

"That's not the point—she probably saw that you were finding out. What I mean is, wouldn't you rather she arranged for you to know than that she told you, intimately, herself?"

Rosemary was honest. "Very much, very much rather! I couldn't bear to talk to her about—that sort of thing. I can't even talk to her honestly about you——"

"Well then"—she ought to have seen his point before—"if your mother observes the decency that should govern intercourse between different generations, so should you. These things aren't facts to her. They're deeply concerned with her emotional life!" Rosemary left that. Possibly he was right on a basis of sentiment, though she still felt that social facts were not things you ought to be secret about. But her thoughts had gone back to their earlier occupation. "Tony," she said, "when I'm married will there be things people won't speak the truth to me about?"

He answered her frankly. "Plenty of things—but I don't know if there'll be more of them than there are now!"

Rosemary turned to him as he sat, now on the edge of the table. He looked very handsome and kind, and clever, and young, but she thought too that he looked a shade too sure of his own knowledge, too contented with his supremacy as a man.

"I'm not going to be that sort of wife, then," she warned him. "I'm not going to make a little warm deep hole for our life together, like mice making their nest in the dark. I'm going"—she pressed her hands together—"to have none of these secrecies and loyalties that grow up round people—like laurels in front of basement windows—and shut out the air and the light. I shan't pretend to everyone that you're a little god. I despise women who go on for years pretending they don't know that their husband is a drunkard. I shan't feel that just because I'm married to you I ought to admire things I should hate if I weren't. I'm not going to be loyal to you, Tony, and worship your likes and dislikes. I'm going to be loyal to what is beautiful and brave. I think marriage ought to complete one's life, and make it wider and finer, not narrow it down to mutton and dusters and one

little particular set of people. It would, if only most women weren't so lazy, and such cowards. Whenever anything happens to them they make it a reason for slackening their hold and shutting their eyes. They're growing up, or they're marrying, or they're not as young as they used to be, so they leave off doing the things they like, and they leave off being interested in anything that's a trouble. Well, I'm not going to! I love you, Tony, more than I can tell you, and I love, but one's life, one's soul, is the most important!"

Anthony saw that her face showed a slight anxiety. He slipped off his table and knelt beside her, smiling. What a brave fine thing she was, how charmingly pugnacious, and what a child! He would not have dared to marry her if he had not felt sure that he could make her happy. It was when she talked like that he was most pleased with the love he felt for her. He knew then that it was not a young man's greedy passion for a creature that is beautiful and untamed, but the noble enduring love of one human being for another. His confidence showed in his eyes as he looked up at her. "Little Rosemary," he said, "don't give up anything you want to keep! You needn't be loyal to anything but yourself! You're not like your mother, remember. She married without knowing she had a mind, without wanting liberty. Marriage is different now, and if it weren't, you and I would be different."

Rosemary let her hand close on his. "I suppose so," she conceded. But in her heart she wondered whether Laura hadn't told herself the same.

Meanwhile Mary, in her room, Rosemary's books before her, was setting out to conquer an understanding of the social system. It was exciting, this search for knowledge, it was wonderful to think that there was something she desired ardently, and she had but to read a few books, to think a little, and she would find it. All her life she had been ignorant, and content to be ignorant. She had never thought that she might, herself, go seeking after truth. But now in the confusion of received opinion she had resolved, splendidly, that she would form an opinion of her own, form it not by comparing the facts that were brought to her but by thinking based on facts she had discovered for herself. She couldn't pit James against Rosemary, or Rosemary against James. If the responsibility was hers she must use such brains as she had to cope with it. After all, were not wisdom and learning there for her as well as for another?

She sat down to *Women's Work and Wages* with the enthusiasm of a girl of fifteen who is allowed, at last, to begin learning Greek.

CHAPTER IX

DURING the next few months Mary renewed her youth. She had never known before that it is delightful to possess, specifically, an intellect. It was not that she had altogether neglected this faculty, but its use had generally come in the form of worrying over something. Now she found an instinctive pleasure in addressing it to the understanding of abstract problems.

She had been looking forward to this autumn for other reasons, because at the end of it she was to become a grandmother, but a little to her surprise she found that it was not the new dignity, profoundly as it stirred her, that took the chief place in her thoughts. She had expected to be carried backward by Laura's motherhood to what she had felt to be the flowering-time of her own life. This should have been a season of memories, of echoes, of a faint, pleasant sadness. She had thought therefore that she could watch the withering of her own present with resignation now that her daughter's happiness had come, she had believed that she could relinquish the future without sorrow now that a little new inheritor was waiting to enter upon it. Perhaps when she looked at Laura's child she would see again the youth of her own eyes, or her own smile.

But as the autumn went by she found that respond as she might to the past her hold on the present had never been more eager. It was a matter for relief, not for the melancholy she had imagined that the nursery of her line had passed from hers into Laura's keeping. She felt free as she had never felt free before to come into contact with life, to try experiments with it. There were no children to guard from misery, from ugliness, from dangerous ideas.

A long forgotten curiosity woke in Mary and urged her to see for herself what the world was like.

One after another, simply, she read Rosemary's books, finding in them not so much facts and arguments as symbols of new freedom and a new exultation. She realised from them, for the first time, that there are passions in life other than personal love and personal ambition. She recognised a passion for knowledge, for adventure, she experienced a passion of sympathy for the poor.

She was not aware that she was reading the books for their emotional effects. It did not occur to her that she was not approaching the sources of wisdom in the most detached, intellectual spirit possible. She was anxious to be thorough and she applied herself, like a clever child, to tomes culled from the London library on account of the correctness of the titles printed soberly across their backs, the "Principles" or "Elements of Economics." She accepted the methods of these volumes with engaging good faith and watched eagerly for their smallest lapses from a rigid consistency. She made copious notes on the theory of money, which she found evasive, for it had no bearing that she could see on the problems in which she felt genuine interest. She struggled with what seemed at first sight the needlessly complex and technical procedure of banks. She prepared herself to pounce instantly,

when she found it in pamphlets and newspapers and other lax vehicles of popular thought, on the least whisking tip of the tail of the wages fund theory. But in her heart, if not consciously, her attitude towards such accumulations of learning was tinged with a kindly toleration. It was characteristic of men, she thought, to spend such an amount of energy on what were often verbal differences, to pursue their points, through a wealth of subdivided nomenclature, to a distance from concrete usefulness that would have made any practical person slacken. Men did become excited in that fashion over purely unimportant things; one knew that when once they started arguing a wise woman bowed to the storm and escaped if she could. She had realised this in early youth, on an occasion when James and her father and Julius had argued for hours about the month in which one fish became seasonable. particular They had exhausted their knowledge of geography, of biology, and of travellers' tales, they had ransacked their memories for the dates and the menus of dinners, they had discovered in the recesses of the past hitherto unproclaimed intimacies and conversations with fish merchants and with sailors. And when her mother, in a naive belief that what they required was wisdom, had laid before them the agreement of cookery books and even fresh evidence brought by the maid from the fishmonger's round the corner, they had not shown gratitude but had embarked on a fresh discussion as to the modifications, if any, imposed by these cold facts on their various previous statements and theories. Mary had felt then that her

kinsfolk were dears, if a little noisy, and she felt now that the professors were wonderfully clever, if a little verbose. After all, if you are a professor, and paid for it, you must fill in your time. So she did not trammel her soul, even if she burdened her memory, with the strict rigour of their conclusions.

She tried once or twice, when some work dealing in more concrete fashion with the conditions of the poor had moved her beyond silence, to talk about her reading with Rosemary. But Rosemary shrank a little from her mother's enthusiasm, from the exhibition of her intimate emotion. Her mother she couldn't help recognising the fact—was very and though she regarded this crudity, solemnly, as a necessary stage in poor Mary's development, she did not enjoy contact with it any the more for that. It made her impatient, it disturbed the slightly romantic element in her affection for her mother. She herself had read the books a year ago, glowed over them, shuddered at the condition they revealed, and inspired herself with a definite belief in Socialism. That being so, it was useless to go on feeling idle emotion when one might be persuading one's friends to join the Fabian Society. Rosemary imagined that she disliked emotion that was not serving some definite useful end. If Mrs. Heyham had come to her and said, "I too am a Socialist, what would the committee of the Fabian Society like me to do?" Rosemary would have hidden sincere delight beneath a great show of cool common-sense, have taken her mother to meetings, and introduced people to her who would undertake her future education.

But Mary had not become a Socialist, the Socialism in Rosemary's books had slipped unheeded from her mind. She had been accustomed all her life to dwell upon the importance of individual action, and she had no experience of any need for collective effort that might emerge in a world of great affairs. She had governed her family, for over twenty successful years, by such appeals as she could make to their ideals and their better natures. It did not occur to her now to criticise this attitude, and the principal conviction she gathered from her studies was a heavy sense of personal responsibility. If things were bad then employers must sacrifice themselves to make things better. She couldn't doubt that they would, if they only understood how bad things were. And then when the men saw the masters really striving for their good they would learn to co-operate with those set over them and gradually the world would improve. Everybody nowadays, professors and Socialists alike, united to praise Trade Unions, so Mary was sure that they must be excellent things though at times she felt a little anxious about them. But, after all, clever men like Trade Union officials would soon see when an employer was doing his best—Mary imagined the labour leaders of England with their eyes turned constantly to James.

Poor James, the fact was that he was so busy with his work that he hadn't time to read these books; he didn't really understand what the lives of the poor were like. He had practically admitted that when he asked her not to read for herself. He hadn't, as Mary had by now, spent day after day visiting the

homes of working-people. He had heard about it, of course, but that isn't the same as seeing it for yourself. Mary pictured a quickened, a glorified James, urging on a great employers' movement for raising the standard of national life. She felt sure that even James did not know how magnificent he could be. She had not formed any clear plans of what she would say to James or even of what she wanted him to do. Those would come later, when she had read more, and when she had gathered more experience. She would like, she thought, to work for a little on one of the great organisations that study and benefit the poor. One ought to see the poor as a whole and not only in the glimpses she obtained from the visits she paid with Miss Percival. But after all the chief thing was a change of attitude. James would think of the plans—that she could safely leave to him. Her task was to lead him to realise for himself that the people really needed his help. She had no doubt that he would begin with his own workers, but it was very probable, all questions being so fearfully tangled together, that it would be more complicated than she supposed.

There were bad employers, and the fact must be faced. Mary had known people who were unkind and people who were untruthful and dishonest—though it was generally because they had been badly brought up—but everybody had good in them somewhere. She could hardly conceive an employer so bad that he wouldn't respond to James at the head of an army of enlightenment. They didn't know; if only they knew, they would be different.

It was this optimism that Rosemary found hard to bear. It did not seem credible to her that a woman of forty-five could be so simple. Naturally Mary said nothing to Rosemary about her plans for James, and it seemed to the girl that her mother was going to do nothing. She felt thwarted, because she had been forming hopes. She herself was nobody, but if Mary, the wife of a well-known employer, would join the Fabian Society, or even the Independent Labour Party, it might do some good.

Meanwhile Mary was a little worried about Laura. She had found Laura crying one Saturday about nothing at all. Harry had gone off for the day to play golf with some friends. Golf was good for Harry, who worked hard in the week; Laura herself had suggested that he should go. But Mary felt that Harry was perhaps taking things a little too much for granted. She had always been afraid that he was a selfish man. Everybody couldn't, of course, be as unselfish as James, who would have gone off with a shower of protestations that left Mary comforted. She had always considered herself lucky, erected James in her mind as a shining exception, and admitted that a certain amount of selfishness was natural to other men. Now, seeing Laura unhappy, she wondered if it was. It seemed proper that she should venerate James, but she hadn't brought up her clever, beautiful daughters merely to please ordinary men like Harry.

James, when she mentioned her fears to him, took them lightly. It was natural that Laura should cry just now, Mary didn't remember perhaps, but she

used to be fanciful herself, though he didn't think he'd treated her badly—he paused for his hand to be squeezed.

Of course, Moorhouse was a man of the world, not a very sensitive fellow, perhaps it didn't occur to him to adapt himself to women's ways at these times. After all, every woman, so to speak, has children, it's nothing unusual. He didn't suppose that Moorhouse was unkind, but he wasn't the sort of person who makes a fuss. Probably he felt that he was in the way, thought it would be kinder to clear out. Mary might make a point of seeing a good deal of Laura, who, anyway, had chosen her own husband for herself and must make what she could of him. James had never, in his life, seen a young woman more in love. He preferred the old style, on the whole, Mary's style. He had thought that perhaps Laura was giving herself away. "If a woman lies down at a man's feet," he finished, "she's likely to get trodden on when he's thinking of something else. Laura can't expect Moorhouse to be ill too, whenever she can't play golf. I've been afraid sometimes that she's given to making her own unhappiness!"

It hurt Mary for a moment that James should talk of Laura like this, then she was ashamed of feeling a little secret glow. How much James loved her, how much more he loved her than he loved anybody else! Her splendid James! She let her head fall, with a sigh, to its accustomed place on his shoulder. Poor Laura, quite possibly James was right, and it was all fancy. In any case she would feel differently when she had the baby.

Meanwhile, however, it was clearly Mary's duty to see her, and if possible to cheer her up.

Laura, when seen, was not easy to cheer up, if only because she refused for some time to admit that anything of the sort was necessary. She lay on a sofa and told Mary, in careful detail, what she thought of the works of Dostoevsky. She did not blame Harry because he did not care for Russian novelists, but merely stated the fact. There was a shade more feeling, perhaps, in her subsequent declaration that he did not seem to care for babies either.

Mary chose hastily between, "He will when he has one of his own," "I expect he is too shy to admit it," and "Most men don't, they only like them when they begin to talk." The last seemed most likely to be true; she could not imagine Harry either shy or a baby-lover. So sorry did she feel for Laura that she added, "You'll be glad enough presently, you know, that he isn't always up in the nursery upsetting the nurses and trying the most appalling experiments on the poor mite. Men have no instinct about babies. Either they think that because they grew up the baby will grow up and the more it eats the faster it will grow, and want you to feed it whenever it cries, or they insist on having its toys sterilised every time they touch the floor. I always think one should be thankful when a man keeps to his own department."

Laura, who was moving restlessly, did not seem in a mood to profit by these reassurances. When she spoke it was in a grudging voice. "I gather that men think it all rather unpleasant," she said. "They're brought up, aren't they, to have rather horrid minds in some ways. It's funny—we don't find it unpleasant when they get wounded in battle. But then I suppose we're trained to sympathise with their experiences, and they're not trained to be interested in ours."

Mary, though she felt more sorry than ever for Laura, was a little shocked at this. It was bitter and it was unjust. It certainly looked as though Harry's mind might be rather horrid, but as for men—James had been extraordinarily sympathetic, and so, Mary felt sure, had been the husbands of most of her friends. Of course they were not interested in the minutiæ of these affairs. Mary herself had realised instinctively that a decent woman keeps the great experiences of her life to herself. If she feels them deeply she expresses it in her altered outlook and in her character. She does not talk about her emotions, nor exhibit their details. Unless, poor thing, she is terribly unhappy, and then one wishes she wouldn't. "That gives us the advantage," she told her daughter, "of knowing men better than they know us."

Laura did not, in her heart, wish to discuss her uneasiness with her mother. She wanted her mother to think—what was, after all, the truth—that Harry and she loved each other very much, and were perfectly happy together. She did not like Harry's attitude towards women, but then he seemed to have known so few women who were worthy of anything better. She turned the issue of the conversation. "Oh, do you think we do?" she said. "Look at the women in men's books and the men in women's!" There was no need to develop this ancient argument.

Mary thought it over. There was no doubt in her mind that most of the wives she knew understood their husbands thoroughly, thus sparing them the trouble of understanding their wives. It was obvious; one took it for granted. But one did not put one's husband in a book—not as he was. It would be treacherous. If Mary had written a book its hero would have been not James, but the glorified creature that lay hidden in James. What a hero he would make! "Of course," she said to Laura, "I suppose it is difficult for women to know what men are like when they are together."

Laura was busy accusing herself of having grumbled about Harry, and she said nothing.

"It's very nice that men are so talkative," Mary went on, to break the silence. "Their lives are exciting, and, I suppose, as they're not forced back upon subtleties, they find ours dull." Mary was not at her ease talking in this fashion about men. When she thought of them as a sex it was kindly, with a mingling of forbearance and admiration. They were not to be criticised, but gently influenced in the right direction. Nor could she be candid upon a subject that led her constantly to consideration of James.

She left Laura with a feeling of misgiving. It wasn't right or natural that Laura should be thinking of such things. It must, in some way, be Harry's fault—Laura was such a fine creature. Even if she loved Harry too much, too passionately, as James seemed to think, so that she was defenceless against him, there shouldn't have been any need for her to defend herself. Perhaps she was a little

undisciplined, with more discipline she might have borne it better—whatever it was. But after all one came back to this, it was not right that she should have anything to bear.

Mary was glad now of the element of serenity, of detachment, that she had sometimes regretted in her love for James. She respected love too much to lose herself in it. It had never been for her a new vision, a mystical flame, but a safe shelter and a tranquil happiness. When she thought again of Laura her heart sank.

She arrived home to find that Miss Percival was waiting for her. Miss Percival had been to see how Florrie was getting on at her new work, and she reported that Florrie was doing well and being a good girl, but that there was a man sending notes to her of whom Miss Percival's friend didn't quite like the looks. He might be all right, but then on the other hand he might be up to no good.

Miss Percival's demeanour seemed to indicate that good was the last thing any such man would be up to.

A flicker of protesting thoughts rose in Mary's mind. Why did men exist? Why couldn't they be trusted? Why couldn't they keep away from girls? Why did girls ever want to have anything to do with them? Always these troubles on account of men! She told herself, with necessary sternness, that it was all perfectly natural, and it was to be hoped that some day Florrie would marry some nice man and settle down happily. Not that a workingman's wife has much chance, after a bit, of doing anything happily.

Perhaps Florrie would marry above her—but to do that the poor child must run such terrible risks. She might get fond of one of these men—Mary wouldn't have answered for Florrie if once her emotions were thoroughly roused. Not that one wanted her to marry without being fond of her husband—why was it that life was so difficult for poor girls?

She forced her thoughts back to the conversation, for she noticed suddenly that Miss Percival seemed to be waiting for her to speak. "Is there anything to be done? What can we do?" she asked.

Miss Percival shook her head. "There's nothing to be done. Of course," she went on, "it ought to be as safe for Florrie to have men friends as it is for your daughters. Only men, especially rich men, don't want it to be."

Mary looked at her with some surprise. Miss Percival did not usually produce opinions of this sort; something must have upset her. Here was this attitude of resentment again! First her daughter and then her secretary! Really, the poor puzzled lady felt, it almost looked as if men must be dreadful people.

In the meanwhile she turned her attention to Miss Percival, who was reporting on two girls whom Mary had sent to the seaside because they showed a tendency to consumption. They were getting along very nicely at the seaside, but the doctor did not think they ought to go back to the tea-shop.

"Not even if we provided them with thicker things to go home in?"

Miss Percival allowed that it might make a difference, but one would have to go on supplying the thicker things for the rest of their lives. And meanwhile more and more girls would be wanting them.

It looked a little as if Miss Percival were in a bad temper that day.

Nevertheless her argument was sound, and Mary knew it. The girls couldn't have afforded proper clothes even if they had kept all their wages for themselves, and most of them didn't. Not what Mary would call proper clothes—women's garments are apt to be so shoddy nowadays.

The truth was, they ought to have higher wages. But then it was quite possible that the business couldn't afford it. Those pretty tea-shops were expensive to decorate, and expensive to keep up. Of course, it paid to have them pretty, because customers preferred them to other tea-shops. Mary supposed that it wouldn't be possible to get the whole trade to agree not to spend so much on decoration. Probably some of the employers didn't care two pins about their girls' wages. They were men, they didn't understand. And now the big drapers were all starting tea-rooms, and taking away custom.

If James could have afforded higher wages he would probably have given them. But—she felt her way to it slowly—that didn't relieve her from the duty of finding out. James had admitted that he didn't know as much about the girls as he would

have liked when he set her to make inquiries. After all, even James was a man.

CHAPTER X

EVEN when she had made up her mind to speak to James, Mary did not find it easy to do so. She believed that she had long ago put aside, estimating it at its right trivial value, James's reception of her last efforts to discuss the subject. It would be ridiculous, unkind, to store up such slight evidence. But she found now that the incident seemed to have left behind it a permanent unwillingness to run any risk of its repetition—an inclination to let sleeping dogs lie. It was as if she feared something, like a ghost, in which she did not believe.

What kept her back, she tried to persuade herself, was not this intangible fancy but the robuster growth of her own vanity. She was afraid, very much afraid, of appearing stupid, clumsy, ridiculous, before James. James had always treated her as something precious and charming and delicate, he had respected her feelings, her instincts, her intuitions, and she had always tried very hard to enable him to do so. But now she was bringing him not a quick feeling but a position laboriously built by reasoning. How could he respect it when he knew how slender, how untried its foundations were?

This thought haunted her. She tried to dismiss it by reminding herself that it was selfish. Half the business was hers, in the last resort the responsibility was hers. These girls had a right, if it was true that they weren't being justly treated, to everything of hers that might help them—her brains as well as her kind intentions, even, if necessary, her costly

dignity. She believed that they were not receiving an adequate return for their work. She did not believe it simply because she had been reading books about poverty; she believed it because she had seen for herself that their wages would not secure their health and their well-being. The books had only given her the use of her mind with which to consider the facts she knew, the right words, the right outlook, the right appliances.

Nevertheless it was a fortnight before she could force herself to interview James.

He saw that she was nervous as she sat down opposite him and expressed her wish for a talk, and in his heart he was a little pleased at this proof of her admiration. But he remembered, too, that he hadn't been very kind to her the last time they talked together, and he resolved not to hurry over his answers but to give her pathetic little ideas every chance of impressing him favourably.

"Well, the old lady!" he said, in a very kind voice, "is this the great outburst?"

Mary shivered a little and smoothed out a fold in the lilac satin that lay across her knees. As a matter of fact it was the great outburst, but she wished he had not spoken of it like that.

"Yes, I suppose so," she said. "I've wondered a good deal whether I'd trouble you, but there really is something I want to know, and I felt that you would wish me, as it's serious, to ask you about it." She looked up at him. James's face was bent to hers with grave attention.

"Of course I wish it," he assured her. "I hope you will never shut me out from your perplexities. What is it, my dear?"

She kept her eyes on his, though it was difficult, because she wanted him to feel that she was facing him squarely. "Would it be possible, with the business as it is now, to pay the waitresses higher wages?" she asked.

James lay back in his chair and stroked his beard. He considered her question not because he was in any doubt as to the purport of his answer, but because he wished her to have a full and satisfactory explanation.

"No, I don't think it would," he told her at last. "That is to say, I should not feel justified in running the risk that such a course would entail. I don't mean that it would be actually impossible, at this moment, to raise their wages by a shilling, or even two shillings, a week. But you must remember, it would not be like parting with a capital sum, it would be a constant drain on our resources. The business is, I think, efficiently organised, and the girls already do a fair day's work. We can't do with less of them. There's no way, so far as I can see, in which we could extract a return for the extra money."

"The girls' health would be better, they would stay with you longer—be more attached to you," Mary put in, as he had paused.

He answered her with the same weighty deliberation. "I can't think so, my dear—not to any great extent. They are earning as good wages with us as they could at any other unskilled trade, better in

fact. The majority of them leave us to marry. An employer of unmarried female labour cannot expect to keep his workers for long, and of course there's no possible doubt that they would spend most of the extra money on feathers and evenings out. But I want you to consider this for a minute. At any moment the price of our raw materials may go up. Or the union may get hold of our cooks and persuade them to strike. More than half our people are not waitresses you know, and I don't see how you'd explain to them why they shouldn't get more wages too! Or one of our confidential employees may embezzle a large sum of money. It's a sound business principle to be prepared for any disaster that might occur. Then when it does occur you need not exhaust your powers by worrying about it."

Mary moved uneasily in her chair. "I felt sure that this must be the case," she said presently, "because you would give as good wages as you could afford. But, James, I've been looking through my accounts, and I find that in the last twelve months you've invested for me over £10,000."

James nodded.

"And then there's the amount that goes to Laura and what you keep back for this house and Kings Leigh, and Julius's allowance."

James agreed. "Yes, of course." He did not know what she was driving at.

"Well, wouldn't that be enough, even if we didn't touch Laura's and Julius's money, to make a substantial increase in their wages? I would willingly

give it for that!" She bent forward, her hands tightly clasped, her eyes fixed appealingly on him.

James succeeded in avoiding any display of emotion. "You understand, of course," he said slowly, "that this would mean a change in our way of living. I don't know that I could keep up both houses on my income alone." This was not true, but Mary hastened to assent. "Oh, yes, I quite understand that it would be as much your gift as mine, James,—more in fact, because, you know, these big houses are a nuisance to run. It would really be a holiday for me. I hope you don't mind my proposing it—I have been seeing a good deal of the girls lately, and I am certain that the money is really needed."

James still wished to gain time. "My dear," he told her, "of course I don't mind—on the contrary I'm glad to understand how much you have the matter at heart."

Mary looked at him gratefully. He was not angry. How kind he was! How easy he had made her avowal! Of course she didn't expect him to consent at once, but if he gave himself time to consider the matter fairly she knew that his generous heart would respond to her appeal. How interesting it would be, how delightful, if she and James could join together in brightening the lives of those poor girls! She looked round her in the ease of her relief at the polished surfaces of the great room—the morocco, the mahogany, the glass doors of the bookshelves, the silver and brass on James's desk—and noticed how they reflected the light of the fire. What an

amount of servants' work there was in this room alone! She would be happier in some smaller place.

Meanwhile James was assuring himself in vain that it would be far the best plan to postpone his answer for a day so as to give it an added solemnity when it came. His instinct for quick speech, for action. overbore his decided unaccustomed prudence. It was James's habit to disconcert his opponent by a rush of talk while he himself made certain of his next move. Nothing flusters a man more, James considered, than to brush aside his attempts to explain himself. But now the arguments, the things he could say to Mary, were springing up, were marshalling themselves in his mind, demanding expression. His endeavour to treat her as a comrade failed before the essential need that her foolish ideas should be crushed. He fidgeted for a moment, and then broke out into words

"My dear," he said, in a kind and soothing voice, "I hope you won't think me prejudiced or ungenerous if I don't agree to your plan straight off, without considering it." Here he looked across at his wife. The fixed, bright regard of her eyes changed, as they met his, to painful appeal. If he had given himself time to think the evident depth of her anxiety would have checked him. But his mind was not free, at the moment, to consider her point of view, and he went on. "Of course I am prepared to give the matter every possible consideration—I've the greatest respect, as you know, for any idea of yours, little mother,—but I've no doubt that it has already occurred to you that if such a very simple measure

could solve modern industrial difficulties someone else would have hit on it!" He smiled indulgently.

Mary clasped her hands and her lips moved, but she did not speak, nor take her eyes from his face. She wished he would not answer now, she was afraid of his words and of their effect on him. James did not like going back from what he had said. But she knew that it would be no use trying to interrupt him.

"You see," he explained, "a business is not just a process of making money. It's more than that, it's a thing in itself, an organisation, an entity. You won't misunderstand me I'm sure, if I put it a little fancifully and say that it has a life of its own, almost an individuality. It's a thing that we shape to our own ends I'll admit, and that we make use of, but we can only do that by respecting the essential laws that govern its working. We can't interfere with it suddenly from the outside and expect it to make no difference. Now consider your plan, my dear. You want to take about ten thousand a year from the profits of the business and use it to increase wages. You say that the money is yours, and that the whole thing is purely a private affair. But it isn't,"—his hand came down heavily on the arm of his chair— "it's nothing of the sort! You understand, of course, that if you once adopted such a procedure you would have to stick to it—"

"Oh, yes, indeed—" She was so anxious to reassure him that she even broke in on his sentence.

"Very well, that would mean that a business that used to make, let us say, £30,000 a year suddenly becomes a business that is only making £20,000 a

year. Now you know such a change as that can't take place without its affecting more people than just you and me. We'll put aside the few shares held by your relations, and we'll put aside the girls. I've no doubt Rosemary would like nothing better than to live in a garden suburb and be a heroine to all her Socialist friends. Though of course there are Hastings's people to be considered. Still we could manage to give Rosemary enough to live on. And Laura is a comparatively wealthy woman. She could do just as well without the allowance you make her. It never did your mother any harm, my dear, having to go to your father for money, and it wouldn't do Laura any harm to go to her husband. But I want you for a moment to think of Trent. He has his faults, but all the same he is a son we can be proud of. And I don't suppose it has occurred to you that if we do as you suggest we shall make it absolutely impossible for Trent to marry the woman he's in love with."

He paused, and Mary felt that he expected her to say something.

"I don't—" she began. "Why—" but she could not frame a coherent thought.

"I'm sure you must see," her husband went on, "that it makes all the difference to Trent. He has told old Lady Iredale what his position is, and what his expectations are. Even so, she doesn't think he's a good enough match. Well, it won't increase her approval if she's suddenly told that he's worth potentially £10,000 a year less!"

Mary said nothing. She had thought of this money as their private income—hers and James's—

not as so much prospective importance and eligibility for Trent. "How horrible money is," she thought, "how it crushes you!" Then with nervous quickness she turned her thoughts back to James, who had more to say.

"There's another aspect of the matter as well," he was telling her—it seemed to him that there were twenty other aspects, all equally conclusive. "I think I've seen you reading some Political Economy lately. In that case you will understand"—his glance bore down on her as though defying her to doubt that the very essence of Political Economy was distilling itself through his lips—"that there comes a period in the growth of every private company when its directors have to consider carefully the question of calling in more capital. You cannot say in modern commerce, 'we are big enough, let us stop here.' Nowadays, with the present commercial system, a business must grow or die. But if it is to grow, we who are responsible for it must be able to seize every opportunity, occupy every vacant position, leave nothing to chance or to our rivals. The fact is, my dear, I have been meaning to tell you, if ever you did speak to me on the subject, that in my judgment the moment has come when the Imperial should be turned into a public company. I am quite ready to discuss the matter with you in detail and of course the whole thing is still in the air. But sooner or later some such step will have to be taken. And then don't you see the difference it will make if we go to the public with a £20,000 profit instead of £30,000? This money that we draw is not simply profit, Mary, it's

credit, it's reputation, it's success! 'Why,' people ask, 'does the Imperial show a much smaller profit than other companies with the same number of branches?' You say, 'They pay higher wages,' and people throw back at you 'bad management.' I'm not a sweating employer. I pay my hands as well as anyone. I don't give them charity, I don't give them higher wages than they're worth, because I don't believe in money doled out in that fashion. I don't mind paying higher wages if my competitors will do the same. But no man can carry on his business with a millstone of unnecessary expenditure round his neck—" He pulled himself up with an effort. "Do you see, my dear?"

Mary longed to be able to say that she saw, that she took his word for it and was satisfied. She knew that if she still stood out it would make James angry, it would make him feel that she was unreasonable. But she had not yet stated her case—it was her duty to the girls to do her best!

"Of course," she said, "I hadn't thought of all that; you see, I'm not fond of the business in the way you are, James dear. I'm afraid it has been only a process of making money to me. But there is—you will, won't you, think of the other side? I don't blame you in any way, please don't think I have any idea of that sort!" She paused for an instant—a fear born of nothing she had consciously realised was rising to the surface of her mind, breaking it, blurring its images, throwing her back on herself. Then the disturbance passed, and with an added hesitation she went on, "Those girls do need the money, James!

They work very hard, and I can't feel that they are getting a proper return. They often go home exhausted, and they don't have good enough clothes to go home in, or good enough food when they get there——"

James, whose disinclination to hear Mary arguing was hardening to impatience, found it impossible not to interrupt her, for by this time his own stock of arguments had replenished itself.

"My dear," he said, "I know how good your intentions are, and believe me I feel for the girls, though perhaps not as deeply as a sympathetic woman does. It isn't really there that we differ, that is why I said nothing about it. Everyone admits, nowadays, that the condition of society is far from perfect, I'm with you there; but when it comes to a concrete remedy I can't help feeling that I understand the position better than you do. What good would it do those girls if we gave them more wages and Harris got all our trade away, by undercutting us? That is just what he'd do when he heard we had raised wages. The girls wouldn't thank you for depriving them of their livelihood. No, no, my dear,"—his voice by this time had become falsely good-humoured,-"what you're up against is not the sins of the Imperial, it's poverty in general. If those girls' fathers were better paid—and for that they'd have to be worth more wages—the girls would have happier lives. You're overlooking the fact, you know, that we don't pretend to support them entirely. And yet in spite of that we pay better wages than many other trades. You're trying to use your money

the wrong way. You can't remedy poverty by stopping up little holes here and there in a sieve. You must go to the root of the matter, you must extend the principle of insurance, and then you want trade schools and that sort of thing. If these girls want better wages they should go into service, then there would be fewer of them to compete for other posts. This question of women in industry is very serious!"

He could have gone on for some time, but Mary felt that she could bear it no longer. "James!" she said, "let me speak for a moment. I can't argue with you, I can't explain, I never could, but in spite of all that you've said, I still feel that it is wicked and unjust to live as we do while we are paying these girls so badly. I'll think it over again if you like, but if I don't change my mind will you let me give the money back to them? I beg you to—I make no reserves, James, this is the most important thing I have ever asked you. If you refuse me I believe that it will make a serious difference in my feelings towards you." She ended, trembling and breathless, on a sob.

James stared at her, a mask of severe disapproval. "I can't think," he said, "that you realise what you are asking. You want me to give up my private judgment, to place myself entirely in your hands! I have no choice but to refuse." He got up from his chair and walked to the mantelpiece, turning his back to her. "And when you think it over more calmly," he went on after a minute, "I am sure you will see that I am only doing my duty in putting

the welfare of the business before this verysuddenly-arrived-at conclusion of yours!"

Mary got up too and went to him. "You're angry with me," she said, and was about to lay her hand on his arm when she checked herself. She did not want to appeal to his instinctive affection.

James turned round at once when he heard her voice, brisk again now that she showed signs of yielding. "My dear little woman," he said, "I'm not angry with you in the least, I haven't the slightest doubt that you are perfectly sincere in your opinion. And you'll remember that when we first discussed this matter we agreed to differ. Well, I agree, and all I ask of you is that you shall agree too."

Mary felt as though she were a sheep and James a very large and efficient sheep-dog. "I can't!" she brought out at last. "I feel too deeply about it."

James turned back to his mantelpiece with a jerk. "Then we must differ without agreeing!" He wished to see the matter disposed of.

Mary moved back a step, and then, as his eyes were still turned away, she stood silently looking at him. This was James, this man in front of her, bending over an ash-tray. That face was the face that she knew best in the world. When he was younger she had often smoothed out that wrinkle on his forehead, and told him that if he frowned so deeply it would make his look cross. He had worn his hair differently then, too, in the past that they shared together. This was James—the man that she loved—the only man that she had ever loved. She loved him—she told herself again—wasn't that enough—

wasn't that the only thing that mattered in spite of all this froth of disagreement and discussion? Wasn't she being a fool to endanger her love by irrelevant outside things? She longed suddenly to kiss his face again, to throw her arms round his neck as she had thrown them when she was young and beautiful, to feel, if she couldn't know it, that James loved her better than anything else in the world.

She moved forward and lifted her hands, and then she remembered that however closely she held him that would not be true. She knew now that James did not care first of all for her. He cared first for his work, for the business. It was natural that he should put first what had cost him such great and such continuing effort. He loved her, he felt certain of her, but when she interfered with the business she was a nuisance.... Here again she pulled herself up. It was not time yet to give way to such thoughts as these. She must still think not of herself but of the girls—how could James be expected to listen to a woman who pleaded her cause so badly!

"Of course," she said presently, "it must be very difficult for you to think that a woman can understand anything about such matters."

James interrupted her at once. "My dear Mary, it's just because you are a woman that your ideas interest me. I assure you that if this scheme had come from a man, I shouldn't have considered it for a moment. I should simply have said, 'My dear fellow, you're talking nonsense!"

Mary did not feel able to determine whether this was true or not. She was feeling tired and very cold. "Then you have settled absolutely?" she asked him.

He hesitated for a moment, and decided to laugh. "Yes, my dear, I have," he told her, and then, with one finger, he stroked her cheek.

"You needn't have done that!" she said, and burst into tears.

James found himself, for the moment, very much at a loss. What had he done to make her behave like this? He had been extraordinarily patient with her, it couldn't be that. She wasn't a person who usually cried because she had made a mistake! Then light came. The fact was that like a good, dear, tender-hearted little goose she had planned a great sacrifice, and she was disappointed because she couldn't carry it out. Women were like that, and in her chagrin she didn't quite know what she was saying. Poor little mother!

Without any more ado he went up to her and drew her into his arms. "My little darling," he told her, "listen to me! Try now to put all this perplexing thing right out of your mind. Lift up your poor worried head—yes—like that—and look at me. How can you look at me when you're crying? Yes, that's better! I'm not as handsome as I was, little woman, nor as young, but I love you more then ever. I want you to forget everything else now, and just to remember that I love you. Is that all right, little silly thing? Have you remembered it yet?"

In the warm circle of his arms, too tired to resist him, Mary smiled.

"Then say after me, 'James, I love you!" She said it, and then, defeated, let her head sink on his shoulder.

James bent over her. This unexpected uprising of hers, her daring, her provocation, seemed to have coloured and intensified his impression of her. He saw her more clearly, he thought, than he had ever seen her before—funny brave little thing. He tightened the clasp of his arms. "Twenty years ago," he said, "I would have picked you up and carried you off without mercy—but now—" He paused. A sudden regret rose in him for the brutal strength, the boldness, the imperious desires of youth. "Well," he went on, "now I'm an old man, and Mr. Trent might meet us on the stairs, so you must run along by yourself, little sweetheart." He pushed her away from him gently, and held her for a moment at arm's length.

Mary collected herself as best she could to face his glance, but when he saw her he was shocked into solicitude. "My dear, you're white—I can feel you trembling—this has been too much for you, you'd better go to bed at once!" He led her to the door. "Shall I come up with you?—No?—then kiss me first—just affectionately—and show me brighter cheeks in the morning."

He shut the door behind her with a sigh.

Mary went slowly upstairs to her room and there sat down. She did not even remember that James had told her to go to bed. She was tired and shaken, but she knew that she must do her best to think.

It would have been easy not to think but merely to feel, to be unhappy without understanding why, and to find comfort in tears. This quiet resignation, this acceptance of failure, would have been for her a natural and a familiar notion. Only by a violent contraction of her consciousness could she turn from it.

Even then long minutes passed by before the desire for mental life, for action, came back to her. She sat in a heavy stupor, unable to check or to consider the images that formed themselves in her mind. To one idea, she told herself, she was holding fast—the idea of some hard, yet undiscovered duty that lay before her. "I must," she said presently, "I must." The spoken words recalled her to a sense of the present.

She moved to put some more coal on to her sinking fire. Then, with an effort, she made herself face the question of facts. What had happened? Where was she? What had she got to do?

To begin with, she had failed in her interview—not only in the achievement of her object but in the manner of her attempt. She had imagined herself watching James very carefully, suiting her speech and her behaviour to the mood she discerned in him. She had not done that. She had not even been able to watch herself, she did not know now what she had said or left unsaid, except that she had felt at the time that everything she said was wrong. As for James, his mood was a blank to her, it had baffled her, repulsed her, thrown her into confusion, but she had no key to it. She had hoped for a clear, close

argument, for a fair interchange of opinion, for a new understanding of James's point of view, a sharing with him of that harvest of thought and emotion which she had been gathering together in her soul. Instead their intercourse had been a muddle, a hostile muddle. Then James had kissed her—how horrible it was!

She knew now that she had not expected James to accept her actual scheme. She would have been content if he had thought kindly of its spirit. Then, his sympathy engaged, she had hoped that he would bring forward a plan of his own, as much more just and wise than hers as James was greater and wiser than she. She would have received it joyfully, they would have worked at it together.

But James had not shown kindness or sympathy, except on the outside, in his manner. He had left her to struggle with her difficulties alone. He had thrown her back again on her own poor resources, her single wit, her feeble perseverance, the strength she valued so low. With these she must make shift—in spite of James.

For a moment, here, her thoughts scattered in confusion. She could not bring herself to think coolly of defying James. She got up from her chair and went over to the window. Behind the curtains, for a moment, it was dark, then her sight cleared, and she could see the branches of the trees in the square moving slowly across the lamplight.

Tired as she was she longed suddenly to change her dress, to be rid of her satin and lace and to go out into the echoing streets. She would walk quickly along in the night, a shadow passing unnoticed under the lamps, until she came to the country, to some great open space where only a passing cloud could shut her out from the black sky and the stars. The wind would blow round her, blowing clean air from the uplands and the sea. There in the cold and the loneliness her soul would be free; it would not be the soul of a rich woman, or of an ageing woman, nor the soul of James's wife. All these weary things would have slipped from it, discarded, put aside, and she would rejoice in her nakedness, a voice crying out to God.

For a moment she stood there, hands clasped and eyes straining through the darkness, then, with a shiver of fatigue, she went back to the fire. Who was she to speak with God?—she had never loved Him! She had loved James, served James, and now she knew that the love of James's life was not for her.

She set herself, angry with her own exaltation, to realise this. There was nothing monstrous about it, she told herself, nothing more strange, nothing more unbelievable, than that she had been a fool. James cared for the thing he had created, for his achievement, his title to respect in the eyes of the world. Any man can marry a wife, any man can beget children, but James had built up this business with the strength of his manhood, and now the business made James a powerful man. She kept him happy at home—he was kind and not very critical, any gentle honest woman could have done that. And now, when she was trying, with what ability she possessed, to be more, to think, to feel, to respond to

the world in an individual way, James had no welcome for this new personality. He left her either to deny it or to find its scope and its place for herself. Why shouldn't he?—what right had she to expect more?—to suffer?

The poor lady found herself unable now not to cry.

Presently a footstep on the stairs made her remember that she must go to bed. She sponged her smarting eyes and rang for her maid. With the woman, coming quietly and confidently into the room, Mary discerned the spirit of everyday life. After all, she felt, while Penn was taking the little black velvet ribbon from her hair, after all she was not left to the dulness of empty sorrow. She had work to do, an object for her desires. Somehow she must get the money back to those girls. She fell asleep at last revolving her philanthropic plans.

CHAPTER XI

JAMES dressed next morning in an atmosphere of doubt. As soon as he recognised this he disliked it extremely; doubt of any kind was uncongenial to his simple, impetuous mind. He could not, looking quickly back over what had happened, find any particular reason for blaming himself, but as the unhappy little mother had been upset he was ready to admit that somewhere, on some delicate point of sentiment, he had erred. It was a confounded nuisance; he didn't quite see, what was more, what line he ought to adopt to put it right. When women get ideas into their heads they are often—a wise man will recognise the fact—as obstinate as Mercifully this seldom happens. Most women's minds move with certainty only among the small values of social life where one can give way to them with a shrug of the shoulders. Here, however, the unusual had happened and something would have to be done. In the intervals of dressing he pictured to himself. with smile, poor Mary perched a precariously on the back of her great high horse of Utopian justice, imagining, brave little soul, that she could control such an ancient deceiver of man. It was a pathetic conception, and a trifle disquieting, for if he knew Mary she'd be thrown off before she came off of her own accord.

He sighed as he caught sight in the glass of the curious ungraceful gesture of a man who is tightening the knot of his tie.

These ideas were in the air—even one's womenfolk weren't free from them. Mary had certainly caught this excitement from Rosemary—he had been, perhaps, rather blind not to foresee it. Trent had foreseen it all right, for what that was worth. Well, Rosemary would be marrying before long, and then her influence over her mother would be interrupted—James could not conceive of Mary's somebody's defying him without sustaining influence. In another year Rosemary would be busy with her natural duties and Mary would have settled down to happy evenings for the girls or something equally harmless. His line—that quick way out of a difficulty which he always sought—was to hang the idea of a public company over Mary's head, and suggest to Rosemary that it was time she made her Hastings happy—James didn't believe in long engagements. He might, too, turn Mary on to some sort of convalescent affair by the seaside—she had suggested one herself, he remembered. He wished he had thought of referring to that last night—then she would not have found him unsympathetic.

It was Tuesday, his early day, when he went to East London, and he did not expect to find anyone down to breakfast. Mary, after an illness she had had two years before, had been forbidden to shorten her sleep. However, Rosemary, for purposes of her own, was also up early, looking as delightful as she was accustomed to look in the morning.

James kissed her with the pleasure which this act always inspired in him, and told her that he was glad to have somebody to pour out his coffee.

"Though I imagine it won't be for very much longer," he added.

Rosemary did not allow this attack to ruffle her pleasing tranquillity. She considered that emotion is wasted on the ordinary commerce of life. "I wanted to speak to you about that, father," she told James. "Anthony and I think we would like to get married soon, but of course it depends upon you. Tony is making £400 a year now, and he doesn't think you will think that sufficient. I know nothing about it, I'm afraid."

James accepted this challenge. "Oh, no, you wouldn't. You modern young ladies take an interest in everything except your own business. Do you intend, may I ask, to go on knowing nothing about it after you are married?"

Rosemary turned calm eyes upon her father, who was helping himself to some kidneys in his most brisk and efficient manner. "Oh, no," she told him. "I expect when one's got to do it, it will be quite interesting, only I don't think—do you?—that it's worth giving very much time to beforehand. As a matter of fact I am having cooking lessons. I could grill your kidneys for you better than this."

James was delighted to hear it, and assured her that he would be glad to know of any definite amount that she and her Anthony would consider sufficient.

Rosemary didn't know, but in any case she would prefer not to take more than Anthony was earning.

This conflicted with James's common-sense. "If I may advise you," he told her, "take what you can get. You know that we are giving Laura £1000."

Rosemary considered a moment. "After all, Tony will soon be earning more," she conceded, "and we could always do good with it."

"Tip our waitresses with it," suggested James.

Rosemary looked up. There had been something brutal in her father's voice. She had long ago decided that he could be a brute if he liked, though he seldom was.

"No," she said, and waited for him to say more.

James could not easily resist a quiet concentrated attitude of attention. "That's how your mother wants to spend her income," he went on, "as I daresay you know."

Rosemary flushed with interest. "Does she?—I didn't know—how perfectly splendid of her! Do you think she really will?"

James grunted, evading the question. "Oh, then it wasn't you who suggested it?"

His daughter shook her head. "No, mother never—hardly ever—talks to me about that sort of thing. And it isn't what I should have suggested if she had. I should have advised her to give it to the Women's Trade Union League, and tell them to spend it on forming a waitresses' union. Then she would benefit all the girls in the trade. I don't think it's much good tinkering with a business here and a business there. But what is so splendid is that mother should want to give up the money, that she should have thought of it all by herself!"

"I'm not going to discuss your mother with you," said James, whose memory, in discussions, was short. "And I'm not going to give you a thousand a year to spend in fomenting discontent among my employees, if that's what you mean by doing good with it. But if you'll send Hastings to me, I'll discuss the matter with him. It seems to me, my dear daughter, that the sooner you're safely married the better."

He grunted again and went back to his breakfast. For some minutes they continued to eat their food in silence. Rosemary never argued with her father if she could help it. They were generally on excellent terms, for she found him amusing, indulgent, and on the whole much more enlightened and civilised than one had any right to expect from a father. She was fond of him, and she enjoyed his stories, his quick superficial accounts of his impressions. But he wasn't a person with whom she would ever have become intimate, she had decided. if she had met him casually in the world. He lacked, she felt, the detachment and reserve she admired in her mother. She did not mean to judge him priggishly. She sometimes reminded herself, if she thought she had been harsh, that before very long some other young person would contemplate her failures as a parent with equal detachment. But she did not realise the pitiful nakedness, defencelessness, of a parent's position. There was no wonder in her mind even as to what poor James was thinking now. It seemed natural to her that life should present itself to her and to her mother under

aspects that James could not approve. She knew that he did not like her own ideas, he never had, although he had been charming about them. There was no essential reason, that she could see, why he should like the ideas of her mother. She was busy now planning an interview with Mary. Whatever small support she could give would be at her mother's service. Rosemary admired courage, and she admired all action dictated by principle—she was stirred to find her mother so admirable.

Meanwhile James was thinking no less intently. The whole thing was a nuisance which, lest it should worry him, must be dealt with as speedily possible. The public company idea was the thing. He would see his solicitors and he would speak to Trent. As a matter of fact a little extra capital would come in very well just now. It had seemed to him for some time that a great deal could be done with picture palaces. Trent was perfectly capable of running the present business by himself, and he, James, was getting a little bored with the monotony of it. The time had come for a new development. Why not cinema shows with your tea and a biscuit free, as that was the custom, but cakes and pastries charged for? There could be intervals when dainty little cakes would be handed round. People who were taking other people out would be certain to buy them. In the evening there could be sandwiches. He'd run the cinema part under another name, and only announce that the Imperial had the contract for the catering. The tea they gave you at most of these places, he'd been told, was undrinkable; he'd look in some

afternoon and try for himself. Naturally these odd and end companies wouldn't do the thing as well as the Imperial. If he decided that this was a good idea there'd be no sort of difficulty about raising the capital. Their finances were more than sound. He could practically float the thing at any figure he liked—as long, that was, as Mary didn't land him with a strike on his hands. What an extraordinary world it was—James didn't know what was coming over women!

However, this plan would fix Mary right enough, as far as interfering with wages went. Of course he couldn't prevent her from giving away her own money, though he could discourage it. But they had always lived far below their income—to spend less than he had was for James a matter of pride—she could give away a good deal before it really mattered.

The idea of action, of taking risks, of starting something new, restored his normal good humour. He wasn't a fossil yet—they needn't think it. His picture palaces—if he decided to have them—should be as up-to-date and as characteristic as his teashops. They should be really dignified—to begin with—in the way of architecture—no tawdry stucco and white paint. It was worth getting in a good architect for a uniform elevation. Their own young men could fix it up for each particular site. There is something about a good architect's work that you don't get in any other way. Besides, there is patriotism. It would be pleasant to feel that his fronts were well thought of, say at the club, whose

members talked a good deal about architecture. He was a poor man when he started the tea-shops, but even then his taste had been good. One secret of it—given good taste—was to see to the whole thing personally. He'd run over to Paris and choose his own films—no agents for him. And he'd look at those new American patents for coloured pictures.

He finished his breakfast and said good-bye to Rosemary without any ill-feeling. Poor child—he could afford to be good-natured. He could not seriously doubt his ability to manage a couple of women. Most men would have harangued them, lectured them, put their backs up. James preferred to preserve the amenities of life while out-manœuvring his opponents. Scolding was a woman's game, a fool's game, it never paid. If a man couldn't be the head of his own house without making a fuss about it he deserved what ignominy came his way. James went upstairs in excellent spirits to kiss Mary goodbye.

He found her still in bed, and he kissed her with the decision of an affectionate husband and the caution of a man who does not want to get fluff from the blankets on to his clothes. He was glad to see her looking better, she mustn't do too much to-day, and he hoped she felt as fond of him as he did of her. She was a vain old thing with her mob cap—personally he liked to see her hair even if it did look untidy. Nonsense—who minded if it was a little grey! He stroked her cheek with his finger and was off. The room seemed to echo with his voice after he had gone.

Mary did not get up for some time. She was feeling tired, and on Tuesdays she generally had breakfast in bed. Besides, she had still to take stock of what she was going to do. She knew that through the long hours of the night, as she lay awake, she had pondered defiant plans of incredible daring and yet so simple, so just, that only tyranny itself could refuse consent to them. But now in the morning it was different. It struck her, now, as monstrous that she should have thought of flouting James. His authority, for her, appeared as an ultimate fact. If he refused to increase the girls' wages the matter was settled. But her own perception of justice and iniustice—she saw that clearly—was also ultimate fact. The money belonged to the girls and it must be used for them. Her task was now to think of ways and means. She had even come to feel that she might do more with the money by controlling it herself than by doling it out in shillings to ignorant girls. As for James, whatever happened she must preserve her personal relation with him. It could never again perhaps be quite what it had been, its foundation of confident ignorance was gone. But what he was prepared to give her still was all that he had ever given her. He had not changed. She could still, if she chose, be as much to him as she had ever been. And she felt this sunny morning extraordinary thirst and hunger for his love, for his tenderness and his esteem. When he had come just now into her quiet room she had realised suddenly how strong he was, how much his strength and his buoyancy meant to her; how precise, how small, how

rigid her life would have been without them. She had found, too, she thought, in the pain of their recent intercourse, a new sense of the intimacy of marriage. She lay, after all, very much at James's mercy, and he at hers. It was no small thing, the affection that urged them to ease the strain for one another. As she went through the day she touched at a thousand points little whims of James's, little trivial extensions of his personality. She met them with sympathy, with tolerance at worst, because they were his. Under her care, in her hands, he moved freely, he grew as he pleased; his delicacy, his sensitiveness, were safe. This favouring atmosphere she had provided consciously—it would have been her duty to do so, even if it had not been her pride—but she understood now for the first time that James. whether consciously or not, must have performed the same offices for her. If her growth had been pruned and trained, her character disciplined, it was by her own set purpose, in accordance with her own conscience, not by any harshness or cruelty of outside pressure. She could see, she told herself, the sort of repressed little woman she might have been, the narrow, dragging, timid creature a dearth of kindness might have made of her. She had had full measure of kindness all her life, it was only this kindness, this, impunity from attack that made her able now to consult her own nature and believe in what it told her. She did believe in it, she could not but be loval to that, but she could—she must—in addition be scrupulously loyal to James. James's wisdom, his deliberate decisions, must come first;

her own little vanities and disappointments, her unrestrained longings, fell naturally into a second place. As to the practical question, she would tell Miss Percival that this money was at her disposal and they would soon think of something to do with it. It was clear that a hundred things needed doing—they had only to choose. Then she could throw herself heart and soul into whatever it was. She told herself that she would probably cease to worry when she was back at her familiar business of organising and had left this difficult region of decision behind.

It was a day on which Miss Percival did not come until the afternoon, and Mary, after she had dressed, spent the morning pretending to read a pamphlet on the dangers of street trading. She agreed with the pamphlet, and for the moment she found agreement a relief. Soon after twelve Rosemary came into her room. She had, she informed her mother when she had kissed her, been out with Tony trying his electric motor-bicycle. It was quite different from all other motor-bicycles and very much better, because Tony had invented a new kind of accumulator that was very small and light. If it worked it was going to revolutionise all sorts of things, not merely motor-bicycles, but it wasn't really quite finished yet, so it couldn't be a matter for wonder that something had broken down. Tony had had to come back by train in order not to be too appallingly late at the office, and she had had to get an old farmer to shelter the motor-bicycle, and then come back by herself. He had been a dear old farmer, and he had produced a charming daughter, a

little person with pink cheeks and black hair. She and Rosemary had smiled at each other with the friendly pleasure young women feel in one another's beauty. Rosemary wished she knew more about engineering, it was the subject of all others that she found most difficult. She never could carry three dimensional ideas in her head.

Rosemary had thrown down her hat, and was sitting now on a stool at Mary's feet, looking up at her while she chattered. It was not often that she talked like this to her mother, freely and childishly, without any thought of effect or consequences, and Mary's heart grew light as she listened. This wise young Rosemary was a child still, a dear, happy child; love-making and lovers' vows had not checked the development of her mind or impaired its freshness. Her mother could laugh without a second thought at the old farmer's astonishment, at his scorn of a woman left in charge of a motor-bicycle, and at the sad plight of that distinguished and ingenious machine stowed away between a harrow and a dilapidated cart.

"I know all the little boys in the place will be trying to make it go," Rosemary was saying, "and Tony will be dreadfully cross, but it was the best that I could do." She did not seem afraid of Tony's crossness.

After she had finished neither of them said anything for a moment or two. Then Rosemary, overcoming a sudden unusual shyness, put her hand on Mary's arm.

"Mother, father says you think you feel we're taking too much money from the business. Tony and I think so, too; I mean, we'll willingly take less allowance than father has offered us, if it'll make things any easier for you." Her glowing face, upturned, wore a look of passionate sincerity. "It's so splendid of you, mother—don't think me horrid—you know that anyhow I couldn't love you more than I do, but it is so—so jolly to feel we're on the same side." She dropped her eyes hastily.

An impulse surged through Mary to stoop and take the child in her arms, to press her cheek against her daughter's cheek, to tell her, now that she could, what a world of unsatisfied love had been satisfied by her words. But she was afraid of Rosemary's shyness, of her own shyness, she was afraid of this Tony who might ask what "your mother" had said, and how she had taken it. The impulse was checked—she could find no words detached or restrained enough, and when she did speak she only brought out a little absurd denial.

"My darling, I'm afraid I'm still a conservative old thing, you young socialists are too revolutionary for me, but I certainly do feel that something must be done."

She paused, and Rosemary, with a gleam in the eyes her mother thought so beautiful, broke in on her. "Don't talk like father, mother, you're not an old thing, you're young and you're brave, and you're a darling!" She came closer and laid her head against her mother's knee.

Mary could say nothing, but her hand trembled with tenderness as she laid it on her daughter's hair.

Rosemary spoke first. It was pleasant to her to find herself in such intimate, such affectionate accord with her mother, but she was not accustomed to accept or enjoy an emotional state without analysis and a following out of its implications.

"I don't suppose we should agree about the exact thing that ought to be done," she began presently, "but after all it isn't that that matters. Tony says I'm hopelessly dogmatic, and I do feel that I know the best thing to do, and I can't really see why other people shouldn't agree with me. Of course I know I've got to refrain from trying to make them, but still"—she sighed, and arranged herself more comfortably on the stool—"I can't help feeling I'm right and they're wrong. But after all, I tell myself, it's the feeling that's important. If enough people want to alter a thing badly enough it will be altered in the long run." She ended on a somewhat doubtful note.

"What is it you want me to do, little daughter?" Mary smoothed back a tress of fine brown hair as she spoke.

The light touch on her forehead seemed to soften Rosemary's desire to impose her conclusions on the world. "Honestly, mother," she said after a moment's thought, "I don't want you to do anything. I want lots of people to give money for starting a waitresses' union, but I want you to do what you feel you ought to do. You see, I didn't suggest the whole thing to father simply because I wanted you to be

free, to see for yourself and trust yourself—do you mind my talking like this?" She broke off suddenly.

Mary was conscious of confused emotions, but not, so far as she could tell, of minding. She laughed.

"I suppose it was partly just my curiosity," her daughter went on relentlessly, "but mostly it was because I loved you, and because I had a feeling, that day when I told you about Tony, that you were much stronger, much more important—I don't know how to put it—than anybody knew. And I think too that I wanted to prove to myself that marriage isn't a grave—that one can come up out of it." She ended, and sat quietly looking down at the carpet.

Mary did not answer her, no answer seemed necessary. She had been conscious all that morning of some queer disturbance in her mind, a check to her reasoning, a deepening and strengthening of her emotion. Now when the moment came for speaking to Rosemary she felt suddenly detached from herself, lifted above the thoughts that troubled her. Down there James's Mary, Rosemary's Mary, struggled with plans and decisions, with things that were good or bad, and kind or cruel. Here, where she was, these values fell away. She had drawn back into some state of her being too simple, too fundamental, for the labels and measurements of experience. "They are names," she thought, "love and pain, sorrow and happiness—tricks of thinking, empty, arbitrary...."

Presently she noticed Rosemary's voice, a quivering sound that came towards her from a long way off.

"Mother, it's time I told you, Tony thinks that he and I ought to get married—do you mind very much?—will it hurt you?"

Mary felt Rosemary's warm skin now against her hand. A moment later she heard herself speaking. "My dear, why should it hurt me? Be happy. If it will make you happy, why should I mind? After all—" She did not finish her thought, she had not the strength or the will, she felt, to go on speaking.

A moment later she became conscious of a confusion of noises. A bell rang—she was certain of that—then someone was touching her. She roused herself to take in what her maid was saying. "Fetch Dr. Tanner at once, I should say, Miss, and shall I telephone to the master? Her hands are like ice——"

Mary could not quite make out whether she was succeeding in speaking or not. She was perfectly all right, she wanted to tell them, there was no need to worry James. She only felt a little giddy. She must have said something, for she realised later that Rosemary was reassuring her. They would see first what the doctor said—now they were going to carry her on to the sofa. She felt a vague pleasure, after a period of extreme discomfort, at finding herself on the sofa.

By the time the doctor came Mary was feeling better, and the doctor himself did not think there was anything serious the matter. He had always suspected Mrs. Heyham, he told her, of being one of your nervous high-strung people who will not listen to advice. She must go to bed for the rest of the day, and she must be careful. We have all of us to be

careful when we aren't as young as we were—she mustn't excite herself, and she must eat more, she was thin; he would tell Mr. Heyham, when he saw him, to keep her quiet.

"Careful—careful—careful"—with a hundred voices whispering the word in her ears, Mary, when she had been put to bed and fed on beef tea and toast, fell asleep.

She woke, later on, with a sense that something was happening in the house. She did not remember that she was ill, or stop to inquire why she found herself in bed, but rang the bell to discover what this disturbing thing could be. A moment later the door opened cautiously, and James appeared. At the sight of his face she understood at once. Of course—she hadn't been well, and James was upset about it.

"My darling," she told him, "I assure you I'm perfectly well—come and kiss me——"

James came to kiss her, guarding an unusual silence. He had so much to say, that if he had spoken at all he would have spoken too much. He had all his fears to tell her—his regrets, the remorse with which he remembered that he had had to be firm with her the night before. He did not blame himself—what he had said had been necessary, and he knew that he had not said it unkindly. Nevertheless he felt remorse. Poor little thing, wasn't it his duty to keep her well and happy, and wasn't she, on the contrary, lying here ill? Very well then—James's heart was full as he sat down on the bed by her side and took her hand in his.

Mary, whose sudden moment of lucidity had left her feeling giddy again, was nevertheless impressed by his silence. Poor James—he must be suffering! She touched his arm with her free hand and looked up at him anxiously. "James," she implored him, "please, please don't think this has anything to do with you. I'm not ill at all really. I was just feeling rather tired!"

James, who had been staring across the room, turned round to her. "You're not to talk, little thing, and you're not to think either. Hold my hand, and be still and go to sleep!" He spoke with a new, a compelling authority. Mary willingly laid aside the burden of speech and lay looking peacefully at the ceiling. The light on the ceiling was mellow, it must be late in the afternoon. She wanted to know the time, but she did not want it enough to turn her head towards the clock. With James so close to her there was really no need to know anything.

James, who had seen her face relax at his words, was prepared to sit by her all night. She could not have appealed more directly to his love and tenderness than by showing him, as she had done with her eager grasp on his fingers, that she found rest and comfort in his presence. As he waited there with his wife, debarred from talking to her, James thought her over, and among his thoughts, though he did not know it, was a new conception of her. She was a queer little thing, and brave, he recognised that there was a fine element in her obstinacy. She would do what she thought right, follow out her dreams and her foolish big ideas and not care if she suffered for

them. He saw her suddenly under the type—familiar to him in obituary notices—of a lofty, restless spirit wearing through its frail envelope of flesh. James was not often mistaken in a man whom he had decided to be capable and honest, and he thought himself therefore a good judge of character. This description of Mary pleased him. He must take great care, he told himself, of his little idealist. He must see that she didn't break her bright wings over the hard facts of life. He must teach her that she wasn't just her own to wear out and throw away if she pleased.

He'd already spoken seriously to Rosemary, when he came home and found out what had happened. He'd speak to that secretary too—he never could remember the woman's name—and tell her that she wasn't to let Mrs. Heyham get tired or excited. Perhaps Mary would take the doctor's warning to heart of her own accord, take it to heart somehow she must and should. He'd think it over before he decided, and he wasn't sure that it wouldn't be better to stop this philanthropic business altogether.

At this point, before he could tell himself that he had thought it over, the maid came in with a cupful of something on a tray. Mary, roused from her comfortable indifference, regarded it with dislike. It was some sort of thick white stuff which had been carefully prepared by the cook according to the directions on the tin, and Mary felt certain, as soon as she saw it, that she would not be hungry again for several days, and that meanwhile there was nothing

in the world so difficult and disagreeable as the task of swallowing this pasty, ignominious preparation. Every inch of her quivered under the impulse of resistance. "No, James, I can't," she told him as he took the cup.

James, bending towards her, was confirmed in his fears that she was really ill. As a rule she ate with indifference any dish that the rest of the household liked, though she sometimes expressed in private, as though she were ashamed of them, faint likings for muscatel grapes and for some little dry biscuits James used to bring her home from an Austrian café. He could see now that she was working herself up. "Now, my dear," he said to her, in the tone that he judged would be the most effective, "we've got to feed you up, you know. I don't know what this is, but it's what the doctor ordered, and I expect it contains as much nourishment as a pound of beef-steak. Will you drink it, or shall I feed you with the spoon?"

Mary's anxiety for her sheets reinforced her recognition that James meant to have his own way. She held out her hand for the cup, though she was nearly crying, and drank as much as she could. Then with a little sob she put the cup back again. James examined it doubtfully, the beverage was not finished, and he did not feel certain that she oughtn't to finish it. But something in her face made him merciful. "Well, I'll let you off this time," he told her, "but I'm going to see that you eat every scrap of your dinner. If you're not good I shall telegraph for a nurse. Now, shall I have my tea brought up here, or would you rather not watch me eating?"

So it was only tea time—and they had sent for him. She turned puzzled eyes towards him, the problem seemed too complicated for her single solution. Then a way out presented itself. "I think I'll go to sleep," she told him, "if you don't mind."

He said something, but she did not remember what.

Next morning, when she woke, Mary's brain had cleared. The doctor came and went, and after his visit everyone else appeared with smiling face and told her that she was all right, that she had simply been run down, and that all she had to do was to stay in bed for a day or two, and take great care of herself. "At Mrs. Heyham's age," the doctor had said to James, "she can't be too careful," and James had taken precious possession of the phrase, though he would have been the first to scout its importance if the doctor had used it of himself or of Mary's charwoman.

"Now mind, no worrying," he told his wife, "and I've wired to that secretary of yours that she's not to show her face here for a week."

He nodded cheerfully and hurried away, for he had stayed late at home in order to hear the doctor's verdict.

Mary let him go without showing him the indignation that she felt. She was forty-six, at an age when a man is considered in the prime of his life, and they wanted to treat her as though she were delicate like a child or a bent old woman. It was quite natural, a great many wealthy women let themselves be treated like that. She herself had been

far too apt to talk of herself as old, to behave as though her faculties were decaying. As she lay in bed with a bell under her hand and her maid in the next room attentive to her slightest signal, Mary realised that her attitude to life had changed. A year ago she would hardly have struggled when they tried to rivet upon her these chains of infirmity. She would have given up, gracefully, what they told her to give up, she would have avoided worry and avoided excitement and remembered to be careful. She would have begun to feel the weather, and soon have found herself with a regular system of good days and bad days and indifferent days. Her friends would have pitied James, and told one another how well she bore her failing health. She could see herself, simply, without hypocrisy, slipping into such a state. She was not strong with the robust and hardy strength of some fortunate people, she was easily made to feel tired, and to look a little pale. She had only to think about that and to be alarmed about it, to get Dr. Tanner to give it a name, and mention it with an air of resignation to James, and the walls of invalid habits would build themselves round her.

But she wasn't an invalid, she told herself, she was strong, she had more force than ten of these flourishing women. She was forty-six, but her intellectual life was only beginning. She felt, as she looked at the magazines provided by James's forethought, that she could not spare an hour of it to illness. She did not shrink even from the task of making James agree with her. She was feeling very fond of James this morning—who could help it who

had seen the cheer on his face after the doctor's visit?—but she was not feeling emotional about him. As a concession, to avoid fuss, she stayed in bed, but she rang for Penn, and told her to find the pamphlet on street trading. It was not until she had finished the pamphlet—without, it is true, gaining any very clear understanding of its contents—that she recalled, as one recalls what has happened in a dream, Rosemary's voice announcing that she was going to be married.

CHAPTER XII

MARY soon realised that she had never before made so serious a mistake as the mistake she made on the day when she fell ill. James was now armed at every point against her. Whenever she showed any sign of restlessness, he replied, with perfect honesty, that she looked tired, or that she was too thin. Until this moment James had not cavilled at his wife's lack of amplitude. She was one of the thin sort, and that about it. But now visions presented all themselves to his mind of Mary looking really plump and fit, and he began to fed that she was not doing her duty when she did not live up to these delightful fancies. He scanned her anxiously every evening when he came home, and if she did not look fatter than she had when he kissed her good-bye in the morning, he shook his head. "This won't do, little woman," he would say, "you've been tiring yourself!" It was no use assuring him that she did not feel tired in the least. He only looked at her critically and shook his head again. If he did not make more of such a serious offence it was because he felt sorry for her. When he thought about it he could see that it must be very galling for a woman to lack an essential feminine charm, and he did not want to hurt the poor little thing's feelings. It was tiresome and obstinate of her, all the same, not to take more care of herself. He decided once, as he looked down on her from his station in front of the fire, that some motive of delicacy had made her accept her leanness, as a nice woman accepts her age, without a struggle. On the

whole though he was glad that she had had this little attack of nerves. She hadn't been well, poor little thing—that explained her somewhat hysterical behaviour about the business. He understood now, and he would know if ever she mentioned the matter again that she must not be taken too seriously.

Under these circumstances the amelioration of the waitresses' lives proceeded slowly. James had suggested that when Mary was well enough to attend to it she should start a seaside home. It would receive convalescents all the year round, and in the summer those girls who for some reason or other did not wish to spend their holidays with their excellent respectable families. It was a good suggestion, there was no objection to it, but it did not, for some reason, release Mary's enthusiasm. The idea of curing convalescents was not as stimulating as the idea of improving the conditions that made them ill. Miss Percival too, usually so skilfully indefatigable, did not seem to be giving the best of herself to the new scheme.

Mary had grown, from force of being well served, to like Miss Percival, whom she identified moreover with her own impulse towards a more interesting life. She had gone so far as to say, in Miss Percival's presence, that she thought some plan might be found for giving the waitresses higher wages. And now that James's attitude forced her to switch her activities into another direction she felt that she owed her secretary some explanation of the change. It couldn't of course be a perfectly truthful explanation—one is not expected to be truthful about

one's husband. But it would prevent Miss Percival from feeling that her employer regarded her as a mere hireling who obeys orders she is not expected to understand. The explanation, skirting the edge of the truth with a nervous deference, had stated that Mary had asked Mr. Heyham if it would be possible to raise the girls' wages, and had been convinced after going into the matter with him that it would not be possible. But in order to show that the firm did not grudge the money Mr. Heyham had himself suggested that they should spend it on the girls in another way—he did not bind them, but the way he thought the best would be-Mary had drawn for Miss Percival as glowing a picture of the poor convalescents recovering their rosy cheeks as her imagination and her command over words could supply.

Miss Percival, who was seated at her desk, had not answered at once. Instead she had drawn a beautiful lady with curling hair on her pad of blotting-paper. Then, in a startled tone, as if she had just awaked, she said, "Very well, Mrs. Heyham, just as you wish of course. Have you decided yet where the home is to be?"

Mary had not decided, but she thought it must be somewhere bracing with a pier and a band, and plenty of nigger minstrels. "It won't do to choose a place where they would feel lonely," she conceded.

Miss Percival pushed her chair back from the desk and sighed, then, swinging round sharply, she stared straight at Mrs. Heyham.

"She is very much disappointed," Mary thought, as Miss Percival did not speak. "It's natural of course, she is young, probably she hasn't learned how seldom one can do what one wants in this life." She started, for Miss Percival was speaking. "Just as you think right, Mrs. Heyham," she was saying slowly.

Mary, who knew that she was doing what she thought right, nevertheless felt uneasy. Miss Percival obviously considered her wrong, and Miss Percival was a clever young woman, entitled to respect. One of the suspicions to which she was prone crept into Mary's mind. Suppose the thing she wanted most was not to help the girls, but to keep on affectionate terms with James? Suppose, after all, that she were only following her inclinations—Miss Percival's voice, severe and scornful, interrupted these accusations.

"After all, the great thing is to decide on something and do it," she said.

Mary acquiesced. That was as good a way of putting the matter as any other.

"I don't suppose we shall be able to do very much for a week or two," she told her assistant, "because Mrs. Moorhouse—my married daughter, you know—will be needing me. But you might find out what you can about places not too far from London, and you might get information about other homes, and see whether it would be best to build for ourselves, or buy some houses and alter them. And we must find out, too, what accommodation we are likely to need."

She did not speak with her usual brightness, and Miss Percival did not reply with her usual alacrity. For a moment the two women looked at one another. Then Mary, rising hastily from her chair, said that she did not think she need keep Miss Percival any later that day.

After that the secretary maintained an attitude of superior kindliness. She was sorry for Mary, she seemed to say, for Mary was an amiable person, if a trifle faint of heart. She understood Mary's difficulties and she meant to stand by her. But not even her affection and her loyalty to her employer could make her play the part of a hypocrite. She did not approve of this holiday home, she thought it a base surrender and a waste of money as well. She was not going to pretend, by words or by a delighted energy, that she did approve of it.

This was not as bad as it might have been, and Mary, since Miss Percival, after all, was ignorant of her true reasons, felt grateful for even so much tolerance. But she could not, any more than Miss Percival, throw herself heart and soul into the carrying out of James's scheme. She had meant to do this; she had not planned any grudging acceptance, but she was not able, with Miss Percival there to remind her of them, to ignore her own convictions. The home was, and she knew it, a miserable compromise. She turned with relief from discussions about its site to the business of collecting Rosemary's trousseau.

Here again she was in the position of having to force her emotions. She did not, in her heart, believe that Rosemary was old enough to marry, experienced enough to know or to value the freedom she was losing. She would not need age or experience, unhappily, to make her regret it. But Mary could not very well assert herself to make Rosemary unhappy by postponing the marriage while she herself was guarding her own happiness by giving way in so cowardly a fashion to James. She told herself, therefore, that her feelings were the feelings natural to every woman who sees her youngest daughter leaving her; they were selfish feelings, and she, like every other mother, must put them aside. If they had any value it was their private value, as emotion, for her—she would not have wished at such a moment to feel nothing or only to feel what was pleasurable.

She bought Rosemary's garments then to the accompaniment of an emotional conflict that tired her, but was at least interesting, whereas the holiday home, a wearisome affair, reminded her only of her failure to convince James.

Moreover, buying Rosemary's clothes had an interest of its own. Mary had not felt really happy about Laura's trousseau. Laura, whose intelligence was always admirable, had known exactly where she wanted to go and what she wanted to buy. Laura could see at once, when clothes were displayed before her, which of them would make her look charming and which would not. This was all very well for dresses, Mary had always respected Laura's taste, but when the same principle was pushed further it had seemed to her a little alarming. That underclothes should be becoming was the last

service she would have asked of them. Mary liked linen that was finely woven, voluminous, and carefully sewn. When she had bought it she took a pride in it and hoped that it would last her for years. Of lace and such transparencies she disapproved, except for the narrowest edgings. She explained to Laura that they would not wash, but however well they had washed she would not have liked them better. It seemed to her unnatural and distressing that a young woman should look, as Laura looked, more delightful without her full complement of clothes than with them. If she had not feared, by doing so, to put ideas into Laura's head, she would have protested. But it is not easy to discuss these things with a young girl, especially in front of shopassistants. When Mary had said, in a lowered voice, "Don't you think, my dear, that that lawn is a little too fine—I shouldn't think it would wear very well, would you?" Laura had replied, calmly and frankly, "Oh, don't you, mother?—I think it will look rather nice!" Such innocence—or on the other hand, such command of one's information—intimidated Mary. On one occasion only had she protested and carried her way. It was when Laura, who must have been unaware, poor child, of what she was contemplating, praised and asked the price of a black crêpe-de-chine nightgown. Even then Mary might not have risen to a veto if the deplorable garment had not been labelled "enhancing."

With Rosemary it was a very different matter. Rosemary's shopping was guided by principles, and so long as she was determining what these principles should be Rosemary was very much interested in it. In the first place she determined to buy none but hand-made linen, partly because weaving linen by hand provides a fuller and more fruitful life for the worker than weaving it by machine, partly because it is cheaper in the end to buy what is more expensive in the beginning. And as a poor man's wife—she reminded her mother—she must think of these things. In the second place she would buy æsthetic dresses, because what has never been in the fashion cannot easily drop behind it. This would be a great economy. In the third place she would not buy her clothes haphazard, guided merely by fancy, but would choose just one or two colours and stick to them.

All this was excellent and Mary was cheered to find Rosemary displaying such practical commonsense. It was true that the hand-woven linen was extremely expensive—but then it was stout, and Mary had the pleasure of seeing it made up into garments that would last Rosemary until she grew old. No lace, only the most charming and costly hand embroidery. It was true that there are so many occasions on which one cannot wear æsthetic dresses that Mary found herself, when Rosemary was not there, ordering a considerable number of tailormades. Rosemary was generally not there. When she had made a comprehensive survey of the enterprise and delivered her instructions to Mary she preferred to leave the dressmakers to fit her as best they could—she liked her clothes loose—and to wander forth, alone or with Anthony, searching in unlikely

places for antique furniture. It was true, also, that the one or two colours began to multiply.

Anthony had read somewhere that a woman's clothes should match her eyes or her hair. That meant greeny-brown tweeds, and possibly liberty satins. White and cream and navy blue do not count. Then Rosemary always liked one dress of a particular green in the summer and another dress of a particular purple in the winter. And Laura thought that the child was at her best in lilac, while Mary thought that she never looked so fresh or so young as in a certain shade—rather difficult to obtain—of gentian blue. But Mary liked to think that the dear child, while she was learning the limits of her income, would not at least have to bother about clothes, and on the whole she welcomed these unexacting cares. She did not wish to contemplate, more than she could help, a situation which had already exhausted her powers of self-deception. She had struggled for some time to persuade herself that she was not a coward, that the holiday home was not a waste of her money and energy, and moreover deliberately intended by James to be such a waste. Miss Percival's eye, bent constantly on her with an expression of weary tolerance, had been too much for her. She had taken next the desperate step of avowing to herself that she was a coward, and excusing herself on that ground from the display of any vigorous qualities.

She was a coward, and it wasn't any use pretending that she could ever be anything else. She might have settled down comfortably enough to this conviction if only she could have been certain that it was true. She had undoubtedly behaved like a coward, but what disturbed her, what sent her running to shops and sempstresses, was the insistent dread that somewhere at the bottom of her heart there was still a remainder of courage. There might even be, she feared, sufficient courage to enable her to reopen the whole affair. Perhaps the future would find her brave, after all. Perhaps she was not going to settle quietly down to the base abandonment of her waitresses—the thought sent the blood to her heart and set her trembling. It could not be possible that all her long misery of decision had decided on nothing, that the travail of thinking must be begun again. She exhorted herself to stand steadfast, to harden her heart in selfish docility, and she was able to believe that she had succeeded when she found herself thrilling with the tenderness, love, and joy which are proper to a woman who finds herself a happy grandmother.

Laura's baby provided her with a real respite, a happiness that needed no analysis and provoked no doubts. He was a marvellous boy, extremely handsome and positively the very image of James. He might so easily have been like Harry—it would have been distinctly a waste, because there were already several Moorhouse grandchildren—and he had chosen to resemble James. It was clear that he meant to develop into a child of exceptional intelligence.

James, who had cast one hasty glance at the infant's cot, said that women always see these

likenesses, and was very much flattered by it. He bought his grandson—who was to be called, when Laura could decide between them, either Jakes or Giles—a collection of silverware, and told himself that an era of feminine peace and contentment would now set in. Harry, who was handsome and vain, said that he was glad the poor little beggar had the sense not to look like his father, and added that he had never pretended to feel any interest in babies. But Laura was far too ill and too happy to mind what Harry said.

For two or three weeks Mary's thoughts were completely engaged with Laura; she could give her mind to nothing away from Laura's room. It was as a matter of fact a delightful room—Laura loved beautiful fabrics and graceful furniture. Mary had thought how pretty it was when she sat waiting outside its door on the night the baby was born. She had come there, although she knew it was foolish, because she had already waited so long downstairs. She had heard the baby cry, but no one had come out of the room to tell her about it. She had tried to picture the struggle that must be going on inside, to remind herself of the tasks that were imprisoning, for hours, the doctor and the nurses. She had tried to turn her thoughts to the new love that she was to feel for Laura's child. But her tired mind had failed her. She could not keep it fastened on her future happiness, or on the busy figures that she knew to be near her on the other side of the dark, shining door. Try as she would they had slipped away, and then the room had been empty, warm and green and quiet,

with its curtains moving softly in the wind. Even while dread stirred in her mind it had seemed impossible that a beautiful woman should suffer in such a room.

It was late in the night, and she had left her chair and propped herself in a corner to alter her position, when the door had opened on a long panel of light, on a wave of sound, and one of the nurses had come out. She had not looked round at Mary, but had run quickly downstairs. There was a bright stain on her apron.

The nurse had disappeared; Mary, pressed against the wall, had neither moved nor spoken. She could not see, she could not even think; her mind, her will, seemed to have dissolved in fear. The sound of the hurrying feet had died away. There was no noise now in the room.

Then, before thoughts had come back to her, the nurse had returned. This time she had noticed Mary in the corner and thrown her a hasty reassurance. "It's all right now—there's no need to be anxious—a beautiful boy!" The door had closed behind her.

After the first confusion of her relief, the first disorder of her joy, Mary's mind had moved swiftly. This, she had told herself, was the weft on which women's lives were woven, moments like these of terror, of suffering, of ecstasy! Beside what Laura was feeling now the best that the world could give women must seem dim. What did it matter then if they turned away from the great problems of life, if they were content with narrow ambitions, with timid thoughts, with foolish dreams? All that was

nothing—under it there lay this savage splendour of pain, this sacrifice that was their justification. By pain—helpless, ignorant, idle though they might be—they paid for the joy that life had given them.

Presently, towards morning, Mary had been called into the dressing-room where the nurse had been tending the baby. The little creature had lain on her knee, grave, motionless, dignified, in the clothes of his nation and his century. Mary had lifted him with anxious care. Here in her arms she held the strength, the desires, the ambitions, of a man. This light burden was born a master of the world, heir of the world's experience. He was born a master of women; all through his life women would minister to him and obey him, and he would accept their service as his right. She herself, as he grew to the power of his youth, would be to him a mere waste product, a body that had outlived its usefulness. As she bent to kiss him she had wished, for an instant, that he had been a girl.

She was not allowed to see Laura until next day, when she was told that she might sit by her bed, but must not excite her. It was enough for both of them; she did not want to excite her—she had never been on exciting terms with Laura. Their attitudes to the surface of life were too different. But here in the pretty room differences passed them by, they were content to be near one another, to exchange insignificant words, to see one another's faces light up when their boy was brought into the room. Mary knew that this pleasure in her presence, this need of her, must pass, and that then she would come no

nearer than she had come before to touching the problems and interests of Laura's life. Her own mind, too, would answer the call of other duties. But for these few weeks she was happy. James, watching her, felt perfectly satisfied.

CHAPTER XIII

TIME drew on towards the wedding, and James's contentment increased. He felt very well that autumn—his summer holiday had agreed with him and he was vain of his vigour at an age when many men are already a little wearied by life. Fate, too, was treating him kindly. Mary had settled down, Laura's child was a boy, and a very fine boy, and here was Rosemary marrying an exceedingly decent young fellow who was bound to get on. Moreover business was booming. James went down to his office every morning in an excellent temper. He had made up his mind now that he would carry his cinema project through. He had consulted the various people in whose advice he had confidence and matters seemed to be shaping very well. He was not looking to the new company for enormous profits—if it succeeded he would make his money through its effect on the Imperial. He meant to keep all the Imperial's ordinary shares in the family. If he was excited about the new company it was because he had always had a liking for neat and amusing inventions, and he saw himself now with two or three interesting years ahead of him, years during which he could complain that he was being worked to death, and astonish his admirers by the unclouded brilliance of his business capacity. Of course the changes he proposed would bring him in two or three thousand a year, but this did not mean so much to James—who, at bottom, had a sense of the values of life—as the fact of success itself, the fact that his

influence would be extended, that his name and the name of his business would be spoken and heard with more respect.

As for Mary, he would distribute her money between various classes of shares in the two undertakings, and once she had grasped powerlessness of a shareholder he could rearrange her holdings if he wished. Not that he anticipated any more trouble from Mary. The last few weeks had shown her where her heart lay, dear little thing—as if anybody who knew her could have doubted which she would choose when it came to an issue between babies and Socialism—and James saw happy years ahead for Mary as well, with two daughters to counsel and two families of grandchildren to adore. She would need, of course, to be petted for a week or so after the wedding. It might be a good thing, if he could manage it, to take her away for a little trip somewhere. Why not? Why shouldn't the old people have their honeymoon as well as the youngsters?

The days passed pleasantly and rapidly—he felt too good-natured even to make a fuss about Rosemary's absurd arrangements for the wedding. Rosemary said that she was going to be married by a registrar, and that she did not wish to have anybody there when it happened. She regarded the marriage ceremony, she informed her father, as the ratifying by the State of a private contract. One did not invite all one's friends to come and cry when one had a document stamped at Somerset House. But if she and Anthony were allowed to go out in the morning by themselves and be married with crossing-

sweepers for witnesses, she did not object to a party in the afternoon to say good-bye to her friends.

"Very kind of you!" said James, but he refrained from saying more.

To this programme Mary wanted to add a family lunch—she did not feel that she could sit idle in the house all day, waiting for afternoon tea, and as James would be at home she would be debarred from tiring herself by helping with the preparations or the packing. But the idea of the lunch pleased no one but Mary's aunts. Even James said that if they were not to have the regulation affair they might as well get off as lightly as possible.

As a matter of fact, when the morning came, James did not care to sit idle about the house either. Rosemary had slipped away after an early breakfast, and there seemed no reason why he should not run up to the office for an hour or two. Mary took advantage of his absence to tire herself a good deal altering the arrangement of the wedding presents. She had insisted on displaying the presents because when people have been kind it is only right that they should have the pleasure of seeing what they have given.

In the middle of her unnecessary alterations a dreadful idea occurred to her. Suppose Rosemary and Anthony had refused to have witnesses because they did not mean to get married at all! Suppose they had decided that marriage was contrary to their principles, and were only pretending to marry in order to save their parents' feelings? It was the sort of thing, she had heard, that Socialists did. She tried

to dismiss the idea from her mind, and for a time she succeeded, but when neither Rosemary, Anthony, nor James appeared for lunch, her fears returned. It seemed incredible that she actually did not know whether Rosemary was Mrs. Hastings or not. She could not eat, and she returned to the presents, where she made herself miserable for another hour. She had already imagined Anthony lured away from the unhappy girl who was not his wife by a tall dark woman with green eyes when, to her joy, she heard James's voice in the hall.

"Hullo, you two, married?"

Rosemary's voice answered him, clear and excited, "Yes, I suppose so—but I don't feel married a bit! The old man was perfectly charming. He shook our hands and told us he always tried to give the young people a good send-off. Here are my marriage lines—Tony said that as you weren't there he must have a certificate to protect his reputation."

Mary sat down suddenly, overcome by ridiculous relief. They were still talking and laughing outside, but she did not hear what they said. A moment later James came into the library. He saw at once that she was looking pale.

"Really, Mary," he scolded, almost vexed, "you are not to be trusted, are you? You promised that you would not do anything to tire yourself, and here you are as white as a sheet. Come upstairs at once, little mother, and rest on the sofa, and I'll sit by you and keep you amused until it's time to dress."

"But, Rosemary—" said Mary.

"She's gone out to give Giles a kiss from his married aunt. I hoped you were lying down, and I told her not to disturb you."

He took her hand to lead her from the room, but Mary, moved by a sudden impulse, threw her arms round his neck. "James—my dear—I do love you so!" she told him.

James, surprised and pleased, stroked back her soft hair very tenderly. "Little thing," he said, "we've not done badly, have we, to love one another like this for so many years? If the young people are as happy as we are they won't have much to complain of." He would have liked to say more, but he never felt in the mood for making love so soon after lunch.

Mary, quite satisfied, let him take her upstairs and put her on the sofa. She made him sit down on it too, where she could play with his fingers, telling him that he ought to be glad, really, that she wasn't a fine big strapping wife who would want all the room on the sofa for herself.

James looked down on her affectionately. "I'm glad," he said, "that you're just exactly what you are! I wouldn't change a scrap of you." They both laughed.

Then Mary told him how silly she had been before he came in, how she had pictured Anthony led to destruction by sinuous ladies with raven locks. "They would have to be red-haired to tempt you, James," she added. "I don't believe you'd look at a temptress unless she had red hair!"

James bent towards her, his handsome face bright with affection. "Since I met you, little mother," he said, "I don't believe I've looked at another woman. Your hair is the only hair in the world for me!"

Then, as he gazed at her, Mary saw a change come over his face. His mouth fell open a little, his eyes left hers, he lifted his head. She could see that in that moment James had remembered something.

Tired and overstrung as she was she could not control the fantastic terror that shook her. "James," she cried, "tell me quickly—why did you look like that?"

James turned back to her. His face expressed nothing now but surprise. "Look like what? I don't understand you, my dear." Then he got up from the sofa and walked across to the window. "They've got a fine day for their wedding-day," he added.

As he left her Mary's bodily strength seemed to go with him. She sank backwards against her cushions trembling. "Don't speak! don't speak!" she whispered to herself, but she had lost control over the forces of her mind. Fear, too strong for her, spoke through her lips. She called him, "James!"

James swung round sharply at the unfamiliar ring of her voice. "My dear, what is the matter? I—

She interrupted him. "If I ask you a question, will you tell me the truth?"

James came back to the sofa and stood beside it, strong and authoritative. "Listen to me," he said, "you are working yourself up, about nothing at all, into a state of hysteria. You must remember that in another hour your guests will be here. Shut your eyes

and try to calm yourself. I am not going to answer any questions at all."

But Mary still stared at him, his words had not reached her. "James," she said, "you must tell me! Have you ever been unfaithful to me?"

Her question, though he had been expecting it, came to James as a shock. But he answered her steadily, "I have never loved anyone but you."

Mary clasped her hands. "No," she said, "I don't— James, you haven't answered my question!"

James, standing by her, thought rapidly. He had been a fool to give any answer at all. He had not meant to, but the words had come to his lips, and for an instant he had thought they would fulfil his purpose. Now he must tell her a lie. But he knew in his heart that a lie would be no use—his folly had answered her. He looked at Mary. Her terrified eyes, wide open, were searching his face. After all, she had a right to ask her question—he turned away from her without speaking.

Then it was true—Mary pressed her hands over her mouth as if she were preventing herself from screaming. For a moment her mind seemed a mere confusion of struggling passions, then, from life-long habit, she made an effort to command it. "I must be brave," she told herself, "and just—it must not be more dreadful than it need——"

But she could not find any courage or any justice in her heart, she could find nothing but horror. It was impossible—it was unbearable. She tried to think calmly, but James's tread as he walked about the room seemed to break down her attempts

to reason, to excuse, to lift herself above mere bitterness and suffering. She closed her eyes, but a moment later she opened them again, because the sound of his feet had stopped.

James, as he walked, could only abuse himself. Fool!—he'd been worse than a fool! He could not imagine now what had kept him from speaking, what had made him drag out all this. It was only a chance that he had remembered it—red hair. Now he would have to explain, to tell her about it, or God knows what infamy she would be imagining! But what good would his explanation be—how could he make her understand? When a woman knows as little of evil as Mary....

His heart sank, he felt a sudden fear of the unknown. By his minutes of hesitation, of silence, he asked himself, what had he done? He turned suddenly, and glanced across at the sofa. As he saw Mary lying there, her eyes shut and her face contorted, he was shaken by a wave of nervous anger. Why was she carrying on like that? he thought, in the phrase of his boyhood—she had insisted on asking her question, why couldn't she take the answer like a man? An instant later he was horrified with himself for his brutality. How could he be thinking of anything now but of how to make it easier for her? What had he better do? He went to the sofa, and as he looked down on her, she opened her eyes. For a moment they faced one another, but their gaze meant nothing—each was too tormented to find access to the other's thought. Then James spoke. "I think, if you don't mind, it would be better if I told you," he said; "I don't want you to imagine——"

Mary still looked at him without knowing why. "Yes, I think so," she agreed.

James did not find it possible to stand there, staring like that. He started again on his restless walk. "It was a woman I'd known—before I knew you—she wasn't a bad sort, I always felt kindly towards her. She came to me years afterwards because she was in trouble, hadn't any money, and asked me to help her. She was very unhappy because she felt that she was getting old, and that she wasn't as beautiful as before, and I—really—she seemed to expect it—I didn't want to hurt her feelings—" He had been going to add, "It seemed so natural," but he pulled himself up. A sudden horror had seized him of himself, of what he was saying, of the conversation. It was appalling that he should be speaking to Mary of things like this! It was indecent.

The story, the simple facts, restored some of Mary's self-control. She could realise, as a definite event, what in the abstract had seemed incredible. She drew a deep breath and tried to face the position. "Then you never cared for her?" she asked him. James turned round again. "Of course I never cared for her, I never dreamed of caring. Didn't I tell you that I have never cared for anyone but you!" It seemed to him just then that his not having cared for her was of vital importance. Whatever else Mary did not realise she must realise that. "I'd forgotten all about her, until you reminded me." Good God! that

he should be standing there, in front of Mary, justifying himself!

Mary shivered. She did not disbelieve James, but what he said seemed to her incredible. How was it possible to do what James had done and not care? It did not occur to her to feel sorry for James, for his discomfort and his humiliation, but she found herself for a moment pitying the woman who dwelt in so monstrous a world. To be a woman of whom a man could say, "I never dreamed of caring!"

Then a new doubt assailed her. "When was it?" she cried. "Oh, James, was it anybody I know?"

But James could bear it no longer. Every instinct of self-preservation urged him to stop her questions. And he did not want her to know when it had happened. She would not understand. "I don't think I need tell you," he said. "She wasn't much of a woman, but who she is, is her affair, and the other is mine."

Mary did not understand him. "How do you mean, yours?"

James did not answer at once. The whole discussion still seemed to him unnatural and disgusting. But since she insisted on probing into the thing he might just as well, he told himself, state his case. "Look here, Mary," he said, "I don't think we shall do any good by talking about this just now. I don't think it will help either of us. But the reason I won't tell you more about it, is this. That whole side of my life is a side that you have never wished to think of or to know anything about. You have had your own standards, and you have simply taken it for

granted that I should live up to them. You have never even doubted, I imagine, that I found it easy to live up to them. Well, I respected your delicacy, I never obtruded anything on you that you did not care to know. Don't you see, Mary, you can't, now, simply because I am at a disadvantage, expect me to break down a barrier which we have chosen to keep up all our lives. You may say that I deceived you, and that you have a right to know the truth. Well, I did conceal it from you, but my concealment was the price I paid for your immunity from contact with evil." As he spoke, the theme developed in his rapid mind. He went on-"Those untroubled ideals of yours, your moral sensitiveness, they're not things that survive a knowledge of the ugly, cruel side of life. Well, we agreed, it seemed to me, that you should enjoy them, that I should prevent them from being taken from you. In some ways they are a luxury, luxuries have to be paid for—" He stopped, because he could see that Mary was not following what he said

She had tried to follow, she had tried, as a mere matter of fairness, to consider what he had to say. But she had not grasped, in the beginning, what he was talking about, and she had soon lost the thread of his words from mere weariness. The last thing that she wanted was to argue with him. She could not argue—she would only say things that she did not mean—they would squabble—it would all be vulgar and horrible! She wished he would go away now so that she could cry—give way—not have to think. She could not think about it—

She started, for someone was knocking at the door. A moment later her maid came in, discreetly radiant. "I've put out the lilac dress, ma'am," she said, "and it's close on half-past three."

Mary stared at the woman until she heard James say, in his usual pleasant voice, "Well, my dear, I'll leave you to dress. If I see Rosemary I will send her to you." Then, with an effort, she smiled too, but she thought to herself as she rose slowly from the sofa that it was easy for James—he was accustomed to lying.

When Rosemary came in ten minutes later she found her mother completely absorbed, to all appearances, in the process of putting on the lilac dress. For a moment she did not turn round to greet her daughter; when she did Rosemary was shocked by her white face. "How she minds!" she thought, felt then she a sudden shyness embarrassment at the idea that her mother should mind. They kissed one another then and Rosemary disengaged herself and stroked the satin of her mother's sleeve.

"I love you in fine clothes, mother," she said,
"you are one of the people who can wear them. You
ought to have big flounced skirts and a stiff
stomacher embroidered with pearls."

Mary did not answer. She had seen Rosemary's hesitation and she could not trust herself with speech.

A few hours ago she might have spoken to some purpose—she might have warned the child, have told her what men are like, what marriage is. But now it was too late. Rosemary was married. Beautiful, fresh, untouched as she was, she belonged to a man, and in an hour he would take her away into his cruel man's world. This lovely child whose body Mary had made, who only a few years ago had lain, a little soft laughing thing, on Mary's lap, was to be at the mercy of a man—she was to see the whole of life through his love—her children were to be his children. She would give herself to him, and in return, if he chose to sin, he would lie to her. One of James's sentences, distorted, came back to Mary's mind,—a woman's purity of thought, her serenity of soul, is her husband's luxury—he likes to have that sort of woman about his house—

The tumult of her mind was stilled for a moment by Rosemary's voice. "Won't you sit down, mother darling—you've been standing too much, you're trembling. You'll have to stand presently——"

But Mary would not sit. She preferred instead to go downstairs and see whether everything was ready for her guests. Rosemary followed her, feeling a little indifferent and detached. One ought, she told herself, to get married without telling people, then one would not have a tiresome day like this, all odds and ends and fussing. She wished she had not let all these people come to stare at her—even the hired footmen looked her over as though she were a horse at a show. Regarded reasonably, it was a disgusting idea. If one were to imagine a country where all weddings were private, what would the inhabitants think of our barbarous customs? One ought to get married on a mountain, or a cliff by the sea, and

smell the fresh wind instead of pink roses from a florist's shop—though even pink roses were better than the millinery that was coming.

When they went into the dining-room they found Anthony. He was standing by the buffet, eating an enormous ice, while the maid who had served him looked on in an attitude of romantic adoration. At the sight of him Rosemary's dissatisfaction sank away. His absorption in his ice seemed to her, suddenly, the most charming, touching thing she had ever seen. What a baby he was—coming into the dining-room to eat ices before anyone had arrived! What a ridiculous boy he looked with his bright fair hair!—As she walked towards him she felt that there were tears in her eyes.

Mary saw their friendly greeting and turned away, swept by a bitter anger and jealousy. It seemed to her horrible that Anthony, the man, the pursuer, the captor, should be eating ices. He might at least have had the decency to exult over his prey. To Mary at that moment the whole world was a vast sacrificial altar raised to the lust and the cruelty of men. She did not remember that only yesterday she too had thought Anthony a friendly and delightful creature.

A few minutes later cousins began to arrive, and Mary, found herself standing by the drawing-room door, talking. "Well, Mary," all her old friends began, "to think—" and to one after another of them she answered, "We're all so fond of him!" "Yes, I'm sure they'll be very happy."

The pretty room, Mary's room, was filling with people, people who had come there to laugh and look animated and say stupid things because Rosemary was married. It did not matter much now what anybody said, one could not hear it. It seemed to Mary that she was screaming, but as nobody noticed her she supposed that she could not be talking louder than anyone else.

Behind her left shoulder she could hear James's laugh. He was talking too, everyone was telling him how well he looked. She heard him say, "Yes—both gone now—it makes a man feel old—" and a sudden wave of misery made her tremble. What did it matter to James—what were daughters to a man! It was she who was old, she who was left lonely and desolate, left to James who stroked her hair and lied to her.

There were fewer people coming now, and she crossed the room to speak to Anthony's mother. Anthony's mother was sitting on a sofa, calm, superior, but triumphant. Her eye travelled slowly over the chattering crowd with an air of august approval. "See what a fuss these people make," she seemed to say, "how they dress up, rejoice, invite their friends, because their girl has succeeded in catching my son! See how they have decked out the fortunate creature herself so that she may seem beautiful and pleasing!" Mrs. Hastings was a tall lady with a dignified nose, and she bent over Mary when she had made room for her on the sofa. "How charming dear Rosemary looks!" she began. "Her frock suits her so well"—the garment in question

had been chosen by Laura—"everyone is saying how ridiculously young they both are——"

Mary followed the lady's imposing eye to where, between groups of people, she could see Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Hastings. It was true that they both of them looked absurdly young. Something in Rosemary's flushed laughing face sent the blood to Mary's heart. She was a child, only a child, and here in this hot, noisy room she was saying good-bye to her freedom. And there was nothing, nothing that anyone in the world could do—Rosemary was married!

Mrs. Hastings, having received no answer to a further remark, turned round again to survey her hostess. "Hysterical, poor woman," she thought. "She has never struck me as a person with much strength of will—one of your clinging little women." "I am sure they will be very happy," she said, in a voice that was certain to arrest attention, "for I have always thought that Tony would make an excellent husband."

An excellent husband—of course! What more could any woman want—an excellent husband like James! Mary smiled faintly. "Oh, yes, I'm sure, and they are so very fond of each other," she answered.

At this point someone else came up to Mrs. Hastings and Mary was able to rise and to go in search of Anthony's principal uncle. Rosemary's future depended on him too, for he was the head of Anthony's firm. As she looked about the room Mary caught words and sentences from the roar of conversation that echoed back from the walls and the

ceiling. All these people were busy over their own affairs, their clothes, their engagements, their gossip. They did not care—Mary wished suddenly that there had been a wedding in church. That, at least, would have been serious, she could have prayed for her daughter. Then she laughed at herself. What good would praying have been? Her own mother, who believed in God, had prayed for her every day, and yet she could not spare her this——.

The important uncle, who called Mary, "My dear lady," told her that she looked thoroughly worn out.

At last the moment came when she was to bid Rosemary good-bye. As she kissed her, Mary felt an impulse to throw her arms round Rosemary, to hold her fast, to defy them all—it seemed impossible that she should go away like this, while everybody laughed and looked curious and pleased. But even while the thought was in her mind she found that she had let the child go, that Rosemary was kissing James. "Of course—he's her father," Mary said to herself.—A moment later Rosemary was gone.

Then Mary had to say good-bye to her guests, to thank them for having put on their best clothes and made their well-meant noises. They all decided, and told her so, that she needed a rest and a change—weddings are trying affairs. Finally, last of all, Harry and Laura said they must get back to Giles.

"Do lie down, mother dear," Laura said, "and we'll see you and father at dinner later."

Mary had forgotten that they were dining with Laura—it seemed now a very good opportunity for separating herself from James. She didn't think that she would come after all, she told them, she would probably go to bed early. But James would come.

James assented. It seemed to him, too, an excellent idea.

For a moment they all stood at the door, looking at the disordered room. The floor was littered with the pink petals of the florist's roses, and on a chair lay a white fur scarf that some woman had forgotten.

"I'll come round to-morrow and help you cut up the cake," Laura told Mary, kissing her.

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "What we want in weddings," he said, "is a little decent grossness!"

Laura turned to him. "Come, Harry, I can see that mother is exhausted—" As they went, James on their heels, Mary laughed. Harry knew that he was the captor, right enough.

CHAPTER XIV

MARY'S household were relieved when they learned next morning that she did not feel well enough to see anyone or to leave her bed. James hoped that she was thinking things over and growing to see them in a more reasonable light. Trent thought that all women are always the better for a rest. The servants welcomed an interval between excitements of the wedding and the discipline of their mistress's eye. Mary herself was not so pleased. To feel ill is in itself unpleasant, and though she was glad that she need not yet resume the routine of her life she would have liked to have something to think about. She tried to read books and then, as books seemed uninteresting and were troublesome to hold, she endeavoured to fix her mind on cheerful subjects. Giles was a splendid boy—big for his age already and growing finely. Dear Laura was very happy, and everybody said that her looks were improved. Rosemary had looked lovely and was having beautiful weather—Mary's prejudice against Anthony had lessened in the night. But these dutiful attempts did not succeed. Her carefully chosen thoughts no cohesion. seemed to have persistence; they melted away, even when she repeated them aloud to make them impressive, and left her with the nervous sense of fear that heralded—she soon learned to recognise it—a return to the problem of her relations with James. She did not want to consider them yet; it was not fair, she told herself, to give scope to the pessimism that comes of lying in bed, but even when she had made every allowance she could the more she considered them the less hopeful they seemed. There was left to her, now, no ground at all on which she and James could take a common stand. There was no aspect of his life of which she could think with pride or from which she could take comfort. James, however she looked at him, was a failure, a sham.

She did not wish to pass judgment on James, to be unkind and unforgiving. She would forgive as soon as she could, she would do her best to make herself forgive. But it wasn't easy, she told herself, as she moved uneasily under the bed-clothes, to forgive such a deception as James had practised on her. It was not so much the actual lies he must have told, the smiles, the affection, the attitude of candour he must have assumed—what she resented was the false conception of himself that he had forced on her. She realised now that she had not, in her heart, forgiven him for the surrender she had already made. Believing herself bound by the fact that she was James's wife she had put aside her judgment and her conscience, she had renounced her wonderful adventure into the world of fact, of knowledge, of ordered thought. She had shut herself again into the narrow circle of her emotional life, she had tried to live again, at second-hand, through Laura's feelings, James's feelings, Rosemary's feelings. That James as a husband might remain unblemished in goodness and wisdom she had resolved to know nothing of James the public employer.

James for his part had not so much accepted her sacrifice as not noticed it, and now it was wasted. She knew now what her husband's goodness and wisdom were. He was neither honest, nor loyal, nor pure—he was a loose man, stained, unscrupulous; a man—she told herself this because it made her suffer—a man no better than the men who preyed on Florrie Wilson. He had dishonoured the most sacred and intimate thing in her life. He had given a strange woman the right to jeer at her, to despise her as a wife who was not able to keep her husband. Even now, though she wasn't likely to be a person who lived in her memories, James's mistress might sometimes remember and laugh to herself. "He fell so easily," the red-haired woman could say, "I hardly needed to hold out my hand!" Perhaps she had felt sorry for Mary.

For a moment Mrs. Heyham lay rigid, holding this picture in her mind. Then a dread of her own thoughts came so strongly upon her that she knew she must get up, ill or well, and find a way to banish them. She would send for Miss Percival, she told herself, and talk to her. She would tell her that she did not mean to go on with the Holiday Home. Perhaps Miss Percival would have something to talk about. She might have been reading an interesting book. She would not tell Mary, at least, that she looked as if she needed a change, or ask her whether she wasn't feeling lonely.

After making her resolve Mary lay for a moment or two longer without moving. She was certainly feeling tired, though she told herself now

that the matter went no deeper than feeling, and she wanted, before she left the subject, to make one more effort to think kindly of James. But the nearest that she could come to kindness was an absence of hatred, a cold instead of a passionate disgust. She was not angry with him, she shrank from the intimacy of anger, but she told herself that his personality, his presence, must not affect her again. She would think of him as an indifferent person, far from her life. There was a certain relief in the conviction which came to her that this was possible. She felt herself, in a queer, cold fashion, free of him.

She did get up after lunch, and just as she had finished dressing she became aware of pleasing wails in her sitting-room. She opened the door quickly and saw, before she was noticed, Miss holding Giles while Giles's nurse Percival condescended to stand by. The secretary's face was not as a rule expressive of passing emotions, but now for the second time Mary saw it transfigured. Any girl can feel a sudden tenderness for a kitten or a pretty baby, but it was not tenderness that had broken down Miss Percival's smooth reserve. Mary could see that, but before she could decide what emotion it was that had made this profound disturbance the nurse had turned to her.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, I didn't see you!" Mary smiled at her. "How well baby looks, nurse! He is a credit to you. And how happy he seems with Miss Percival. She must have had plenty of practice in holding babies."

Miss Percival started, and while the nurse acknowledged with the air of one who confers a favour that he did look happy, she came forward and held the baby out to his grandmother. "He is a beautiful boy," she said, in what Mary believed was not quite her normal voice.

Mary was glad to take Giles into her arms. He at least stood for the future, for promise, for hope. There was no more blemish yet on his life than on his charming little body. She bent over him and kissed the sweet-smelling shawl that sheltered his ridiculous head. Giles seemed to share her contentment, for when he had blinked at her once or twice he went quietly and confidently to sleep.

The three women stood for a little looking down at him while the nurse talked in a whisper of his strength, his beauty, and his accomplishments. "I'm certain he knows his mother already," she said, and Mary answered, "And you too, nurse, I expect he knows you, too!"

The nurse saw fit to confirm this expectation. "There have been times when I've thought so," she assured them. "I've never seen a more intelligent baby, and a boy too, girls are generally sharper than boys!"

"Yes," said Miss Percival, "one of life's false beginnings, a tragedy we don't mind because it's always there."

Mary and the nurse both looked at her, Mary with surprise and the nurse with disapproval. There was something, to the nurse's mind, very betwixt and between about a secretary.

Mary, as there was nothing else that she wished to say, asked carelessly what Miss Percival had meant. The nurse looked down at her cloak. She would not, in Mary's place, have encouraged any future expression of what might well turn out a deplorable opinion.

Miss Percival put her hands on the table behind her and leaned back on them a little before she spoke. "Oh, I don't know," she said then, "but most young women seem to me such spoiled thwarted things. Girls, if they've had any sort of chance, are fine creatures. I think they may seem hard from the outside, but in their hearts they long to be noble and pure and spiritual, only, poor things, they don't know what nobility and purity are."

She paused, but Mary, holding Giles a little closer, gave her a smile that encouraged her to go on. "Well, we don't exactly tell them, do we?" There was a freedom, a recklessness, about Miss Percival's choice of words that struck Mary as unusual. "Because after all, they're here in the world to please men, and most men wouldn't know what to do with a really noble wife. So we lie to them, and tell them to mind their manners, and our clear bright eager little girls learn to chatter at tea-parties. I've watched it again and again. As they grow up something seems to go out of them. The pressure is too strong I suppose. They can't stand up against what's wanted of them." She stopped suddenly, though the pitch of her voice had not suggested an ending.

This time Mary did not look up. Miss Percival's words had taken Mary back, to the youth of her own

daughters. Surely Rosemary had not been spoiled! To-day Rosemary was Tony's wife—She stared at the baby without seeing him.

Meanwhile the nurse too was considering the problem of girls. It was one of the wise arrangements of Providence, the nurse felt, that most girls did want to be good, else who'd help their mothers look after the house and mind the younger children? If they turned, later on, into giggling gawks whose thoughts ran on nothing but the men, Providence had surely designed that too, or no girl with a good place and her self-respect would be fool enough to marry. Still, in one way, now that it was put to her, the muse could see that it was a pity. Life was very different when you came to it from what you had thought it would be. The nurse could have married where she pleased herself, for she was a kindly, good-looking woman and she had saved. But she had not wished to run the risk—a man might seem steady enough while he was courting, and when you were married he'd take to drink or waste your money, or run after other women. There wasn't, if you looked at it squarely, much good to be got out of men, misbehaving themselves or pestering you for something.

Then her thoughts went back to the great day of her life, the day on which she had been confirmed. She had come home and knelt down by the bed she shared with her sister in a passion of gratitude and devotion to God. And when her mother had called her for tea, she had found that the boys had drawn a vulgar picture on the back of the beautiful card she

had been given by the lady from the Church. Her mother had given the boys a clout on the head, but they had called her a sneak and a dirty mean beast and her day had been spoiled, and after that she had gone into service.

At this point she remembered suddenly where she was. It was startling to find that she had been so carried away, and the sense of surprise made her feel a need for action. She stepped forward and told Mary, decidedly, that she ought to be taking Baby home. As she went out she looked curiously again at Miss Percival. Miss Percival was quite right—women in this world have a poor time of it, especially when you consider that men will be just as well off as their wives in the next, but it wasn't for a paid dependant to say so.

Left alone, Mary and the paid dependant did not speak for a little. Then Miss Percival turned to her employer with a movement of decision. "Mrs. Heyham," she said, "I've been meaning for some time to tell you that I think I ought to resign my position."

Mary was very much taken aback, "Oh, why, Miss Percival?"

Miss Percival did not seem to find a ready answer, and when at last she spoke, it was with an unusual effect of hesitation. "I don't feel as if I am serving any useful purpose," she brought out.

Mary sat down and asked her companion to take a seat. She did not feel convinced, from Miss Percival's tone, that this was her real reason, and she wanted to know what the real reason was. "I can't agree to lose you in this light fashion," she said, "we must talk it over. As to a purpose, you are earning your living!"

"Oh, but, Mrs. Heyham, I don't feel that I am," she was told. "I do nothing."

"You do more than you think—in any case, won't you let me decide how much you do?"

Miss Percival shook her head. "It's true," she admitted, "that I have to earn my living, but I've always determined to earn it, if I possibly could, by doing something useful. I came to you because I thought I should hear about tea-shops and things from a new point of view, and because Miss Heyham—Mrs. Hastings—said it was possible you might wish to carry out some reforms. And now I think I have learned all that I shall learn."

"And the reforms have come to nothing!" Mary finished for her.

"Well, there are plenty of people who could do the work for the Holiday Home better than I should. You really need someone who is thoroughly keen about it." Miss Percival spoke with a tinge of reluctance, as though she were trying, by her frankness, to urge herself on.

Mary was aware by this time that she would be exceedingly sorry to lose Miss Percival. She had grown fond of the capable young woman, and she felt that at this moment she was more than ever in need of unromantic capacity. Moreover—it had not occurred to her before—there was now no reason why the question of the waitresses should not be treated on its merits. It would be as well, she told

herself bitterly, if somebody gained something from the ruin of her happiness.

"As a matter of fact," she said, "I was going to tell you, when you sprang this mine upon me, that you must prepare yourself for being worked very hard. I am not going on with the Holiday Home, and I haven't given up, though I know it looked as if I had, the matter of wages. If you desert me now, Miss Percival, you will be deserting on the eve of a serious engagement. I never wanted you more."

But Miss Percival still seemed doubtful. "There is another difficulty," she said, "but it's personal. I can't very well explain—" She looked at Mary anxiously, as if she would like to say something but was afraid of its reception.

Mary gathered that Miss Percival's mind was troubled. She leaned forward kindly. "Tell me anything you care to if it's a difficulty," she said; "we have worked together for more than a year now, and you ought to know whether it's likely that I can help you!"

Miss Percival laughed, and Mary thought the laugh was strained. "There'll be no question of your wanting to keep me when you've heard what I've got to say," she said. Then she looked Mary in the face. "The fact is, I came here for a definite purpose, and I'm going because I can see that I have made you very unhappy. I came here to make you unhappy, really, but not in this way. When your daughter told me what you wanted me for I thought that here at last was a chance of getting something done. I meant to open your eyes, to make you understand the

connection between your luxury and the sweating of those underpaid exhausted girls. Of course, you might have been a fool or a coward, or a painted lady, but I thought that if you were a decent woman you couldn't see these girls suffer and fold your hands again and do nothing for them. So I came, and when I saw you I knew it would be all right, so I stayed. But now I can see you are ill, and terribly unhappy. I don't feel that I've done wrong in edging you on. There was a chance that those girls of yours might gain by it, and of course, so far as that goes, you rich people deserve to be unhappy, but I can't stay and watch you!" She jumped up from her chair, and went to the mantelpiece, where Mary could not see her face. "Of course, I don't pretend that you wouldn't have found out a good deal for yourself," she went on, as Mary said nothing, "but I feel that I've stood at your elbow the whole time, underlining it all and rubbing it in, never letting you miss things, and now I think that perhaps I was the wrong person, and I've done it the wrong way. I ought to have helped you more, and tried to think out with you what ought to be done and how we could best set about it. But I left all that to you. I haven't helped you at all. I told myself that I didn't want to bias you, only to show you the truth. But it wasn't that really. I was angry and I gave way to my feelings. I expect we could have persuaded Mr. Heyham if I had made you take me into your confidence. But I couldn't bear that you should manipulate him and be tactful with him. I hated him, I wanted you to fight him, and

hurt him, and get the better of him. And of course he has won, and the person who has been hurt is you."

Mary stared at her painfully, but she could only see the back of Miss Percival's head. "Why do you hate my husband?" she asked.

Miss Percival's reply came slowly. "I don't hate him particularly. I hate all men when they're powerful and using their power to be cruel to women. And that's most of them—nearly always, whether they mean to or not." She turned abruptly. Her face was white, and to Mary, attending to her closely, it seemed strange. It must have owed its look of firm intelligence, Mary felt, to some trick of self-control, for now that this was broken by emotion Miss Percival looked crudely, pitiably young. "I have tried not to feel like that," she was saying, "I don't want to hate them. I know-I've told myself over and over again that hate is ugly, and clumsy, and sterile! I've tried my best to tear myself free of it, but I haven't ever succeeded. It only comes back again. I hate them—I hate them from the bottom of my soul."

Mary looked at her almost with respect. There never had been in her own muddled life, she felt, a passion as compelling as this. It was wrong, it was deplorable, but it had the dignity of defiance and revolt. She became conscious of a sympathetic excitement that was dispelling her weariness, filling her again with the warmth of life. In the face of Miss Percival's rebellion she could not be afraid any more that she herself would lack courage to protest.

"You must have some reason," she suggested, "this sort of feeling does not come of itself!"

Miss Percival shook her head. "I don't know how it came," she said, "though I could find a hundred reasons—I can see a fresh reason in every man I meet! When I look at their faces in the street, in a 'bus, anywhere, their mean stupid faces—men who get their ideals out of the halfpenny papers, men who think about money on an office stool all day, and then go home and treat some woman as an inferior—I wonder that any woman has ever loved a man. They're ugly, they're greedy, they're coarseminded!" She shuddered, and crossed her hands across the front of her throat. "I hate them for everything," she said, "for their cruelty, for their insolence—look what they've done! They've taken the whole world and made it theirs; everything we have in it is only ours, now, because they choose to give it to us. We haven't even a right to our own children. And if we don't like what they give, if we loathe it, if we're in anguish, they don't care. They're not interested in us, they don't want to know what we are in ourselves, or what we think of our lives, it saves them trouble to call us mysteries. They're our masters, and they're strangers to us; they're our masters, and if we show that we are unhappy, they're bored! To one another they're civilised people, but to us to whom they've denied their civilisation they're savages,—arrogant, intolerant, vain, angry with anything that disturbs their comfort."

She paused for a moment and let her hands fall to her sides. When she spoke again, she spoke more

slowly. "But what I hate them most for isn't that—I despise them for what they are. I hate them most for what they've made of us. We love them and their children, so we are at their mercy. We have always tried to fulfil their plans for us, to be the kind of women who would please them. And see what has pleased them—see what they've praised in us! I don't mean working-women, but women whose husbands can afford to have the kind of wife they like. Look at most of us, narrow, uneducated, barbarous, trivial, content to let life go by while we humour from day to day a man who looks down on women. If we've an instinct for order and organisation we use it to see that the cook keeps the kitchen clean, if we love beauty we embroider tea-cosies or hunt in shops for pretty dresses, if we've more emotion in us than our man has an appetite for we're allowed to work it off, sensibly and with moderation, in a religion he doesn't take seriously. If we were like that in our hearts it wouldn't matter, but we're not; in our hearts we have pity and love and understanding. But men are more cunning than we are, and stronger, and they've all the money—and they use the best that is in us, our religion, our love, to degrade us— Indeed it's time that some of us hated men!" She stood trembling for a moment, then she turned and laid her face against the cool marble of the mantelpiece.

Mary had meant, when the secretary stopped, to say something in protest. What Miss Percival had said was exciting and courageous, but it wasn't fair and it wasn't true. It is one's duty to be fair. But the tired gesture with which so much anger came to an end, the droop of Miss Percival's defiant head, made Mary forget her protest in compassion. "Poor child," she said, "poor child!" and crossing the room she put her arm round the secretary's shoulders.

The young woman did not move for a moment, then she yielded, and Mary found herself soothing a passion of tears. She was surprised, but after a minute she was not puzzled. If Miss Percival's emotional nature had been so stirred by holding Giles it was because, in the past, she had loved a baby. If she hated men it was because, in the past, some man had been cruel to her. Probably her lover, the baby's father, had deserted her. For some reason it did not occur to Mary that Miss Percival had been more than essentially married.

She was wrong. When presently Miss Percival recovered her self-control and moved back a little from the shelter of Mary's shoulder, she explained. "I beg your pardon," she said first. "I have behaved disgracefully. It was baby, I'm afraid. He seemed such a jolly little creature on my arm—I have wanted one so, and I never had one. I am married really, you know, only I don't live with my husband."

Mary did not feel angry with Miss Percival for having deceived her. Instead she moved forward as if to comfort her again, but the secretary, who was wiping her eyes, pretended not to see the outstretched hand.

"That was what made me bitter in the beginning, I suppose," she said. "If men cared for anything but their own pleasure and freedom they would not let people like my husband marry girls of eighteen." She checked a final sob and crossed the room to the table where she had left her gloves and her leather despatch case. Then she came back to Mary. "I know of a very good secretary who wants a place, Mrs. Heyham," she said. "She is a most capable woman, with every qualification."

Mary broke in on her. "But, Miss Percival, are you really sure that you need go? I really meant it when I said that I never had needed you more. And now that I know your real opinions it makes things so much simpler."

Miss Percival shook her head. "I'm afraid it's no use, Mrs. Heyham. After what I've said to-day you wouldn't be able to trust me. You see, I know myself that what I feel isn't just. I'm twisted—I can't be fair—I take things too hardly. I'm afraid I'm no good really except for finding out abuses and stirring people up. I hate shifts and compromises. No, I must go back to investigation. Besides I've never worked for a private employer before, and I don't like it. I can't go on taking wages from Mr. Heyham that he wouldn't pay if he knew what I feel about him. Most people can accommodate themselves to any abuse as soon as they know the doer in private life. I can't—to me a big employer who sweats his workers is just that. When one of the girls is ill and gets into trouble I feel that he is directly responsible. I can't shrug my shoulders and put it all on to the system. Please, will you let me go now? I'm sorry I've made such an idiot of myself. Of course, I know I owe you a month's wages in lieu of notice."

This brought Mary to her feet. "My dear Miss Percival—of course not!" she said, and then she paused. What the secretary had said was true. Mary could not feel comfortably sure of her again. One does not want a secretary who indulges in outbursts of undisciplined hatred, however sorrowful may be the past that has given rise to them. Besides, what Miss Percival had said of James applied also, in some measure, to Mary. Even if she had handed over her judgment to James she was still responsible. "I'm afraid you're right," she said at last, "I suppose I must let you go. I'm exceedingly sorry to lose you— I shall miss you very much. You'll tell me, won't you, how you are getting on, and if I want to engage a fresh secretary, I'll write for your friend's address." She held out her hand.

Miss Percival shook it. "I'm sorry to go," she said. "You have been very kind to me," then she turned away and went quickly out of the room.

Mary drew her chair nearer to the fire. She felt cold again now, and confused and disappointed. She had hoped to find strength and support from Miss Percival, and now Miss Percival was gone. She was gone, and she had left Mary nothing but another picture of suffering and evil. Mary did not know what Miss Percival's story had been, but to change her as it had clearly changed her, it must, Mary felt, have been abominable. There was something wrong about this question of men and women, something twisted and wrong underneath the comforting appearance of everyday social life. She had always known that there are wicked men and terribly wicked

women, but she had always thought of them as outside, exceptional, far away. Now, everywhere she looked, she saw ugliness and suffering and sin. She did not know why it was so, she was ignorant, and she felt suddenly that she did not want, she could not bear, to know the truth. It was morbid, horrible, far removed from the decency, the kindliness, the order, of an honourable life. Why should she fill her mind with thoughts like these, with suspicions, with guesses at vice and ugliness?—it was only now, it seemed to her, that she realised how odious, how degrading such thoughts were. She would never be able to get back, she felt, to her normal dignity and sanity. Suddenly, though she had not been thinking of him, she was swept by a wave of anger against James. It was James, while he pretended to love her, who had dragged her into all this!

At this moment her maid came into the room. "It's the master on the telephone, ma'am," she said, "and he wants to know how you are. He rang up this morning, ma'am, but I thought you were asleep."

Mary waited for a little before she answered. James was parading this affection, she supposed, either to impress the servants, or because, after all these years of deceit, he had grown into a mechanical habit of gallantry. She told Penn to thank Mr. Heyham for his message and to say that she was up and feeling better.

The door shut behind the woman and Mary was alone with her injury. That very evening, she reminded herself, she would have to meet James. If he was bent on maintaining a show of smooth

appearances he would certainly come to her even if she stopped in her room. But she had not decided what she would say when she saw him or how she would behave. She had changed—she knew that and with this change they would both have to reckon. The sum of her pain and grief was not merely an anger or a disappointment, something had grown hard in her, she thought, which before had been facile. But how, she wondered, was she to put her feeling into words that would make it clear to James? To make James hear she would have to say something set terms, something in something that she could repeat in the same words when he had finished talking—she would have to stand up, she could see, to flood after flood of talk. And she had nothing prepared and definite, nothing but her sense of outrage, of detachment and loss. She could not face James and say to him, "I see you with different eyes. My compliance towards you, my happy acceptance of you, have gone!" That would mean nothing to a man like James. And yet if she did not speak, if she let him even for one evening impose his own attitude and take hers for granted, he would run away with his advantage and refuse her, ever afterwards, a chance of meeting him fairly. Now, he did not know what he had to expect from her—to a certain extent he was open to what she might say—but once he had made his assumptions no words of hers would ever penetrate them, and something must penetrate. They could not live any more as they had lived. She had given herself up to the old James, hidden herself in him from her own

conscience and from the world; now they were separate.

The clock struck, and its four strokes reminded her that Julius Trent, her vagabond brother, was coming to see her. He had been in town for the wedding, and had said that he would look her up early that afternoon. A talk with Julius meant probably a talk about money, but Mary felt to-day that to be in the presence of his affection was worth more than a little money. She had always believed that Julius was fond of her, although he was so very unlucky. Julius's work in life was to show other people how they might manage their business more efficiently than they did, and as far as his profession went, he told Mary, he didn't do so badly—it wasn't that. Unfortunately his instinct, so just and true where the affairs of others were concerned, could not be trusted to an equal extent in his own. Whenever Julius backed a horse the horse lost—pulled, Julius said—and whenever he promoted a company it went bankrupt before his genius for efficiency had had a fair chance of coming into play. In circumstances he came to see Mary two or three times a year, generally with some scheme in his pocket for reorganising the Imperial which he offered her free, gratis, and for nothing from her affectionate brother. In her heart Mary was deeply attached to Julius.

He did not come, this afternoon, as early as she expected him, and when he did come he seemed subdued and did not produce any scheme. "How are you, my dear?" he said. "You're not looking up to

much." And then, having settled himself in a comfortable chair, he stared thoughtfully into the fire.

"How is Milly?" Mary asked him. Milly was the lady to whom, Julius said, he was engaged to be married. She acted in provincial companies and while they were trying to save enough money to marry decently Julius in the intervals of business followed her about the country. Mary had offered once to call upon her when she was near London but Milly, it appeared, was proud. She wasn't going to be called upon until she could receive Mrs. Heyham in a house of her own—being a lady, really, the conditions of provincial touring galled her.

Julius nodded. "Ah, yes, poor old Milly!" He looked, Mary thought, a little nervous.

"I hope there's nothing the matter with Milly?" Mary asked. "I thought she was getting on so well!"

Julius coughed and fidgeted in his chair. "Fact is," he said, "I've something to ask you! Now, don't you start thinking it's money this time, it isn't! No, poor old Milly and me are going to do it at last. She's come into a little money and we're going to be married next month!" He looked anxiously at his sister.

Mary hastened to congratulate him. "My dear Julius, what delightful news! I am so pleased! What is it you want to ask me? Do you want to marry her from here, perhaps? You know I'll be only too glad to do anything I can!" It would not matter a bit now the girls were both married, and James had decided long ago that any marriage would be better for Julius

than this trailing about. They both believed that responsibility sobers a man.

He shook his head. "Thanks, old girl!" he said. "It isn't that. It's rather difficult to explain. You see-well-now she's going to get married Milly wants to make a break with it all. She doesn't want everyone to know that she's been on the stage and we've been engaged all these years. She says it makes it look as if we weren't getting on, and it makes her feel old, do you see? So the idea is that we've only been engaged since the spring, and her name isn't Milly, it's Esther. She's dropping her old name; you see, it was sort of half a stage name. Well, what I wanted to know was, could you play up to that? You can't think how it would please her! She's rather a sensitive little woman you see, and she can't bear being crossed. Just to call her Esther and to talk as if we'd only met this spring—she'll tell you all about her father and all that— Of course I know it sounds ridiculous, but actresses you know, well they have their whims and there you are!" His anxiety, by this time, was unconcealed.

Mary laughed. "Why shouldn't I if it will make her happy? Of course I will!" She felt herself very tolerant, very sympathetic towards people who were hoping to be happy. Poor old Julius! If after all these years he still wanted his Milly why shouldn't she help to make things easy for him?

Julius breathed deeply, leaned back, and crossed his legs. "You always were a bit of a brick, Mary!" he told her. "You can't think what a load that's taken off my mind! Not that you're likely to meet Esther for a bit; we're going to be married in Liverpool, and then we're off south for the honeymoon. But I just thought I'd put it to you at once!" His look was now as cheerful as his smile. It had been as a matter of fact an awkward moment. Since he had first told his sister of his romantic engagement to Milly Milns that lady's name had come in useful for several young women who had replaced her in his affections although he had never been engaged to them. Running up north or down west to see Milly had been a delightful reason for not being always where one was expected to be. Now that he was engaged again, this time in a business-like fashion, to Miss Esther Moss, he would have dropped the legend of Milly, if he had not, only six weeks before when there had seemed no chance of the excellent Esther's yielding to him, accepted a cheque from Mary to give poor little Milly a rest by the sea after a serious illness. It was only fair to Mary, he thought, that she should believe she was getting something for her money. Otherwise she might feel that the rest by the sea had been wasted. That would be a pity, for though Esther besides her charms had a satisfying income he had found her, so far, the sort of woman who manages her own affairs. For that matter he wasn't a man who would care to depend altogether on his wife.

"How is James getting on with the reconstruction of the business?" he asked now. "He seems pretty cheery about it. I offered him my help—for nothing, too—but he said he had got it all practically arranged!"

"The reconstruction?" Mary asked, puzzled by his change of subject. Julius stared at her. "The reconstruction of the business—turning it into a public company. You can't mean to say that he hasn't told you yet."

Mary interrupted him. She didn't want Julius to think that James kept her in the dark. "Oh, yes, of course he told me—I'm rather stupid about these things—what does a reconstruction of that sort exactly mean, Julius? What is it? What effect does it have?"

Julius grinned. "Well, it's a way of making money, that's what it is. Suppose I have a business that's making twenty thousand a year and is worth £250,000 and I want to make a little money out of it! Well, I have articles written about it to say how good it is and puff it up a bit, and I explain that if only I had £100,000 or so to extend it a little it would soon be making forty thousand a year and it would be worth £500,000. And with luck I get a lot of people to buy it from me at that valuation, and give me a salary as well as managing director and off I go and put the money into gilt-edged securities. And there I am you see, very comfortable, nothing to do but keep the shareholders quiet for a year or two until something turns up trumps. Not that James is the sort of man to take them in," he added, determined to do the handsome thing even though James had refused to make him a director of the new company.

Mary thought this over for a moment. "You sell it for more than it's worth," she said.

Her brother demurred. "For what I can get—perfectly square and above-board—legitimate business. Of course it depends a lot on how the shares are placed on the market. That's what I said to James when I saw him the other day—" His face clouded a little at the memory of his interview with James.

Mary hesitated, and then decided to get what information she could. "What happens to the staff?" she asked, "to the employees, the people like our waitresses?"

Julius shrugged his shoulders. "Out of the frying-pan into the fire, poor devils. Must get dividends somehow. Depends a bit on whether the shareholders are patient or not. Interests of the shareholders come first, of course." He sighed. Nobody could hold sounder views than he. James had been unreasonable about the directorship considering where the money came from. There ought to have been one of the Trents on the Board.

Mary considered this slowly. "If the capital is larger and the profits are the same the dividends will be smaller," she said. "I see. So there is a temptation to get it back out of the wages."

"You may call it a temptation if you like. There's nothing else to get it out of, in a properly run business," her brother agreed. "Mind you, those girls only spend their money on finery. If they were to save it now for when they get married it would be another matter. Well, well, it's a hard world!"

Mary turned the subject to Julius's plans for his wedding and for his subsequent life with Esther.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN her brother had gone Mary sat for some time trying to adjust her ideas to the new situation. She had not, until now, taken James's plans very seriously. James had so many plans. But if Julius was right these particular plans were plans no longer, they were arrangements.

She did not trust Julius, when it occurred to her to call his word in question, but his phrase "the interests of the shareholders" struck her as familiar and significant. There was very little in the way of long hours and low wages and bad conditions that the interests of the shareholders would not cover. She could see too that a managing director whose pockets were well lined with the shareholders' money might feel himself under an almost quixotic obligation to restore the prosperity which he had endangered. "The interests of the shareholders"—how smoothly, how easily, it would come from James's lips, and how conscious he would be, as he said it, of his virtue and honesty!

If she was right and if Julius was right he must not be given a chance of saying it. She would have to find courage and strength enough to stop him. But first, before she spoke to him about it, she must collect some reliable information. She could not go to James and defy his wishes on the strength of some casual remarks made by Julius. She would go to the London Library, when her head was not aching so badly, and find out there if there was anything written upon the subject. She could not remember anything to the point in the books that she had read. It was a pity that Miss Percival had gone; even Rosemary and Anthony might have helped her.

She was leaning back in her chair, tired and in pain, when she was again interrupted by her maid, half hidden this time by an elaborate basket of flowers. A young man from the office had brought them, she said, and a message from the master that he was sorry he would be kept late.

Mary could see that the young man had chosen the basket himself, guided probably by the florist's assistant. It was wreathed with pink satin ribbon elegantly fringed, and over the edge of it fell trails of smilax enriched with gardenias. Mary told Penn to put it down on a table in the corner. How tactless James was, she thought, to treat her like this! What good did he think he would do, except to his messenger? She could imagine the pride of the young man from the office as he chose the flowers with the strongest scent. Perhaps some day, when his salary was raised, he would go to a suburban shop and buy a basket of flowers as like it as he could for a little girl at the Hammersmith Alhambra. She called her maid back from the door-she would go to bed now, and think about dinner in bed.

James, meanwhile, was getting through his work as fast as he could in order to see Mary before she went to sleep. He felt extraordinarily sorry for Mary. He couldn't bear to think of the bad time the poor little thing must be having. The night before, and

that morning, he had been angry with himself and therefore a little inclined to be annoyed with her. He had been a fool to tell her the truth, and she had behaved in a melodramatic and hysterical manner. But his anger with himself, under the pressure of business, diminished to an occasional uneasy pang, and his kind heart filled instead with solicitude for Mary. Women are hysterical creatures—one must take it and leave it at that. The thing had been a nasty shock for Mary, a very nasty shock indeed. He must be patient with her poor little attempts at scolding and make things up to her in every way he could. She had convinced herself, probably, that he didn't love her. Well, he had got to show her that he did. Women, he told himself, respond to affectionate violence. His policy then was to overwhelm her with love. He had neither the time nor the inclination to search his heart in any thorough manner, but he accepted easily enough the standpoint that he had been to blame. Of course he had been to blame. There could be no doubt about it, but that was no reason for worrying himself. A little patience, a little tact, and it would all come right. It was not for him to take things too seriously—poor little Mary, bless her, would do that for both of them.

He could say this the more cheerfully because to his honest belief he had not been to blame in the least. He had felt himself at the time to be behaving in a perfectly natural manner. He and Greta had been good friends once, he couldn't have snubbed her and wounded her pride. He was a kind man, he could not keep all his kindness for Mary. Afterwards he had known no protest of conscience that had not been settled by the necklace which was now Mary's favourite. Men are men, and Mary, if she only knew it, was a damned lucky woman. He had obeyed the promptings of his good nature in being decent to poor old Greta, nobody had been hurt by it, certainly not Mary-in fact for some time afterwards he had felt particularly fond of her. Her horror when she had heard of it, he saw now, was of a piece with her reluctant, fastidious approach to the sensual side of life and of human nature. As far as life and human nature went he regarded her views as altogether unsound, but he approved of them as the views of his wife and indeed of the wives and daughters of all decent men. It was this ignorance on the part of women that made decent men feel tender and chivalrous—he had always tried to be chivalrous towards Mary. Now, unhappy little creature, she was suffering, actually ill, because of his blundering tongue. She was paying now for her years of comfortable blindness. Well, that was wrong. There was a great deal of sin and misery in this world, but Mary was one of the women who, by common agreement, are relieved from suffering their share.

He was unable to imagine now why he had hesitated to lie to Mary. It had been a shocking lack of self-control. His real remorse for having made Mary suffer he mistook for an admission that he had been to blame in the beginning.

In his lunch hour, and when he paused for a belated tea, he wondered what he could do to comfort her. He particularly wanted her comforted because in a day or two he would have to ask for her consent to the reconstruction of the Imperial. It was an appalling nuisance that the two matters ran together like this. He decided finally, supposing she were in bed, to have dinner before he saw her, for he was aware as a general principle that one is never at one's tenderest and most persuasive between one's dinner and a hard day's work.

When he was cleaned and comfortable, fed and soothed, he went lightly up the stairs to Mary's room. At the door he paused for a moment. "Poor little thing!" he thought. "Now, you brute, be kind to her!"

Mary had heard his footstep, and had quickly turned out the light. He could not see, as he leaned over the bed, the anxiety on her face.

He felt for her hand. "Little mother," he said when he held it, "have you forgiven me?"

The sound of his voice, though she was waiting for it, made Mary start. When he had spoken she lay still for a moment confused and surprised. Why did he speak like this, what was going on in his mind? She could not tell in the least, she felt, what feelings were prompting him. She wished he would let go of her hand, the insistence of his touch was unpleasant. "I don't know, James," she said at last, "I have tried to!"

He sat down on the bed beside her and with his other hand stroked her cheek. "If you were to try a little harder," he asked, "couldn't you forgive me? Even although I don't deserve it?"

Mary moved her aching head further from his hand. She could not think, she felt, with these cigarscented fingers against her face. "Yes,—I can forgive you, at least I think so," she told him, her whole mind bent on an effort to be honest, "but even if I forgive you, it will still be different."

James bent nearer her. "What will be different, little wife of mine? My love for you has never been different!" Then, as she did not answer, he slipped one arm under her shoulders and lifted her until her head lay against his neck. "Do you remember the last time you were ill?" he asked her, "how you said that I could take the pain away? The things that matter will never be different, Mary,—this isn't different!" and he kissed her softly.

For a moment Mary lay still. After the jar of pain which his movement had caused, it seemed so simple, so natural, to lie in the circle of James's familiar arm, to feel his kisses on her tired face, that for a moment she accepted it; then as his clasp grew tighter she realised what she was doing. She was accepting the warmth and comfort of his caresses exactly as he himself had accepted the kisses of the other woman. James felt her body stiffen. "Please don't kiss me," she said, "I had rather you didn't."

Her words shocked him, and he put her down. From her cold tired voice he realised that something was different. He got up from the bed and without thinking, mechanically, since the darkness oppressed him, he switched on the lamp of the bed.

Mary gave a little cry and covered her face with her hands, but not before James had seen it, white and ravaged, surrounded untidily by her ageing hair. A deep discouragement came over him. He felt as if the tie which had held her to him had slipped from his hand. The figure which lay quivering in the bright circle thrown by the lamp was unfamiliar and repellent, he could not imagine it as the body of his friend and his lover. "I beg your pardon," he said, "is the light too much for you? Shall I turn it down again?"

Mary moved her hands; he could see her dark eyes between them, and their puckered lids. "Yes, if you don't mind," she said, "my eyes are aching!"

James pressed the switch again and she was hidden. He stood still for a minute, his discouragement turning already into a practical perplexity. "You mean, I suppose," he said at last, "that you don't love me any more?"

Mary tried to answer truthfully. "I don't know," she said, "I expect I shall love you again when I've got more used to it, but I don't know if I shall ever love you like that!"

"My love doesn't matter then?" he pressed. "After all these years you've grown indifferent to it?"

Mary did not answer. She did not wish to say anything hard or bitter, but as the memory of his love rose before her she could see it only as a long tyranny, a hypocrisy, an exaction. James's discomfort deepened. "You women are not very merciful," he said.

Mary's thoughts were blotted out by a sudden rush of misery and impatience. If only James would go away—what use could there possibly be in talking like this! It was with an effort that she forced herself to answer him. "I'm sorry, James," she told him, "but I can't help it."

He fidgeted for a little with the edge of her quilt, but no fresh way of approach presented itself. Before Mary's obstinacy his mind seemed heavy. She was not in a state, he told himself, when she could be reasoned with. "Perhaps you'd rather I went?" he asked her, his uneasiness showing even in his voice.

Mary was not in a state, either, to notice the tones and inflections of people's voices. She assented at once. "Yes, please, James, I would—I really am sorry."

"Good-night then." He spoke quickly and turned away without waiting to hear whether she answered. Outside the door his doubt rose coldly before him. "I'm damned if I know what to do!" he said, and went downstairs.

Inside, Mary lay sobbing with her face in the pillow. Now that she had sent him away she was sorry for James. For a moment she saw him, not as her erring husband, but as a man who had asked for forgiveness and been refused. Then her sorrow turned to resentment again. If she had been cruel it was he who had made her cruel, it was he who had robbed her of her love for him!

As the night passed her tired mind became incapable of coherent thought. The image of James faded to a dim figure, menacing and oppressive, that would not let her rest or sleep. She had never longed for anything, she felt, as she longed for sleep. It seemed the last effort of James's tyranny that he should deny it her.

She slept towards daybreak, and was awakened next morning by Penn bringing her hot water and her letters. There was still no news from Rosemary, but on her breakfast tray, when it came, she found a note from James.

"I will not worry you to-day by trying to see you," it said, "if you had rather not. But if you are well enough I should be glad if you would fix a time for seeing me to-morrow, as there is a most important business matter I want to discuss with you. I hope you have had a good night, and are feeling better."

It was signed with his initials.

Mary stared dully at the familiar writing. So far as she could see it was meant as a threat. She could think of no other motive, for it seemed to her evident that James could, if he liked, have delayed the interview. The letter, on its face, could not show her the nervous impatience which had made the poor man take any positive step rather than admit, by doing nothing, that he was baffled.

If Mary had been another business man James would have cursed her and put her out of his mind until the moment had come for decisive action. But she was not a business man, she was his wife; his whole moral universe was sensitive to her behaviour.

He could not believe in the depth and reality of Mary's feelings. He saw her merely determined to get her own way, and moved by a woman's natural love of scenes. To him the effort she had made, when she gave up her scheme for increasing the waitresses' wages, had seemed perfectly natural. He had imagined that his arguments had shown her how foolish she had been. He had no time himself for brooding over emotions, and he felt no sympathy for people who did. Now, laboriously, he thought out a test for Mary. If she sulked because of what he had done, it was tiresome, but she was within her rights. If she allowed such a thing to affect their business relations she would be palpably, outrageously in the wrong. He was not aware, unfortunate smarting man, how greatly he longed to put her in the wrong. The idea of a business interview, which she could hardly refuse to grant, revealed itself to him merely as a means for making her treat him in a normal manner. He would be very kind and patient, and after a little she would forget that they weren't on their usual terms. He would give her, to begin as well as end with kindness, a whole day to recover herself and to get rid of her headache. For a whole day he would allow this wretched state of things to go on. For a whole day the head of the house would remain downstairs in disgrace, deprived of the pleasant greeting and intercourse that were his by right. If he had ever known anything of Mary that could hardly fail to impress her, and the scheme, as he would unfold it to her, could hardly fail either to touch her imagination. She would be pleased by his proposal to give all the girls a day's wages to celebrate it. He need not worry, everything would come right, but he could not shake off an annoying uneasiness.

Mary, meanwhile, was unaware of his chagrin and his penance. In twenty-four hours, then, he was going to force on her another discussion—in twentyfour hours the fight would begin again. The talking, the appeals to her feelings—she seemed to remember nothing of her life with James but endless hours of talking. And this time the talking would be of vital importance. Somehow, before it began, she must ensure that she should not give way. Somehow she must arm herself. And she did not even know where to look for her information. Miss Percival was gone, even Rosemary and Anthony were gone. It was impossible that she should make up her mind in a day, and a day that might well be interrupted, if James's spirits rose, by baskets of flowers.

It became very plain to her that the present state of affairs was unendurable. She must do something. She could not remain like this, lurking in her rooms, quivering with the dread of hearing James's hand on the door. She must have, for one thing, more time time to recover herself, time to decide her duty towards the girls. She must have quiet too, in which she could think. For the last few months she had thrown herself, deliberately, on her feelings. Well, this was what her feelings had done for her. Now she must think, not with the happy excitement of the autumn, but slowly, painfully, confusedly, she must think herself out of this tangle of suffering. She must shut out the feelings that clamoured at her mind, anger, disgust, probably, if she knew it, jealousy; she must detach herself, she must consider herself as if she were another woman. It would not be easy to do. She had cherished her feelings, loved them, indulged them, until they were not easy to deny, but no other way would be fair either to herself or to James.

To succeed she must relieve herself from the burden of fear that lay on her as long as she was in James's house. While he might come upon her at any moment her feelings were her master. She could not but shrink from him, she could not see the lilies and the pink ribbon of his basket without disgust. She must go away. It was not a new idea. It had been in her mind the day before, and that morning when she awoke. Then she had put it aside as too strange to be worthy of scrutiny. Now, after the added pressure of James's letter, it did not seem strange, but familiar and feasible. "I could do it," she told herself. Then for a moment her thoughts seemed to stop, to shrink in fear. When the fear passed she knew that she had decided. She would go.

Now that her decision was made its grounds came very clearly before her mind. There was no other way of escape from the ugliness of foolish, wordy quarrels between her and James. She could not think and make an important choice under such influences. The harshness and resentment of dispute would warp her judgment and twist her estimates.

A knock at the door made her start violently for fear lest it might be James who had changed his mind. The door opened on a maid who had come for her breakfast tray, but the start, with its accompanying pang of fear and dismay, was the best of reasons, Mary felt, for carrying out her decision. And yet even now she knew that it was not her only reason. She did not go as some women might have gone, desperately and in despair. She had suffered, and been afraid, but she did not go broken or

maimed. She had chosen to go, she went of her deliberate will; below the sharp sorrow of her wounded love new life was stirring. She rang for Penn to dress her, and while she lay waiting this faint excitement grew. Never for a moment, she thought, had she been free. Now she was to know freedom.

While she was being dressed she put everything from her mind but the details of her plan. Practically there was no great difficulty. Rosemary was gone. Laura did not need her. The issue lay simply between her and James. As for what she should do, she must stay in London to be near the information she needed. She would not be longer than she could help in a hotel where people come and go, she would find a tiny furnished house or a little flat. She would live very simply; it would not be right, she felt, to pamper herself while she was doing such an unusual thing.

When Penn's ministrations were over she left the house on foot and walked to Oxford Street, where she took a passing taxi. She had decided to go to a house agent from whom she had once or twice taken houses for shooting and summer holidays. She would not need to give him another reference, and James was not likely to make a search for her that would involve asking questions of house agents. At the thought of a search she felt a little quiver of fear, then she forced herself to think again of the matter in hand. Until she was safe in her flat she must consider nothing else but getting there. At the house agent's she told the young man behind the counter that she wanted to take, as soon as possible, a small furnished flat in Chelsea. It was all very simple. Chelsea, in February, seemed lavish of furnished flats, all small, all delightfully situated, all ready for her immediate occupation. Even when she had rejected the handsomely furnished and the cosy she left the office with a substantial bundle of permits.

The first flat that she visited had often been let for short periods, and it seemed a little weary of the life. The second had shelves for photographs and vases hanging down the back of its cottage piano. The third looked on to a garage, the fourth was both expensive and unusual, but she decided that it would do. There was very little furniture in it, for one thing. For another, it reminded her of Rosemary.

The lady who showed it to Mary was younger and more friendly than such ladies are wont to be. She was Mrs. Jenkins, the porter's wife, and she had a sister who for twelve shillings a week would come in every day and do for Mrs. Heyham with pleasure. The sister herself would willingly have taken less, but Jenkins had his ideas on the subject. He had his ideas, it seemed, on several subjects, for his wife went on to explain that she hoped that Mrs. Heyham would not want a hot meal in the middle of the day, as the hour before half-past one engaged all the skill of both ladies in the preparation of dinner for the porter.

Mary thanked Mrs. Jenkins and returned to the agent's office. She had chosen a flat, it appeared,

whose owner was in London. The agent would telephone through at once, and find out if she would accept Mrs. Heyham's offer. If she did accept, as the agent thought she would—Mary had made no difficulties about the price, and had offered to pay the first quarter in advance—and if, further, Mrs. Heyham was willing to let the firm make the inventory for both parties, there was no reason why she should not go in, if she wished it, that very afternoon.

Mary was willing to let the firm do anything that would spare her a night at a hotel. She had never been alone at a hotel, and she was afraid of meeting people she knew, of being stared at when she went to engage her room. With house agents, and their inventories and documents, on the other hand, she was familiar.

The agents produced the form of agreement in use on the estate, and Mary signed it. She would come back, she told the man, at half-past three. That, she thought, would allow her an ample margin of time before James came home, and it would not be too late for a respectable woman to arrive at a hotel if the lady to whom the flat belonged should resent being hurried. Meanwhile she could pack and then write her letter to James.

Her packing did not take long. She decided to take very little with her, as she did not want Penn to think that she was going away for more than a few days.

The letter, when she sat down before her desk, was as difficult to write as she had expected. Mary

could write charming notes, and her correspondence had been much valued by her aunts in her younger days for the clever amusing way in which she told funny stories about the children. But she had not the habit of expressing her conclusions in written words or of stating an argument. She would have liked this letter to James to be a close expression of herself. She would have liked it to soften the shock it must inflict by a manner of wording that should recall her to him at her most normal, her kindest, her most familiar. "It mustn't seem excited," she told herself, "I must write as if I were doing the usual sensible thing,"—but she knew that she was asking too much of her own skill.

"My dear James," she left it at last, "I am sending this to the office so that you need not let the servants know what has happened. When you get home you will find that I have gone away. The reason that I am going is that I want to think things over and decide what I ought to do before I see you again. I want to decide freely, for myself, and when you are with me I cannot think. You said I was cruel—I don't want to be cruel, but when we are talking together I can think of nothing but not giving way to you against my will. It is very difficult for me to resist you when you are there. I have decided to go to-day because you ask me to let you see me tomorrow. I suppose what you want to see me about is turning the business into a public company. I am very sorry, James, but I cannot consent until I know a little more about it. I don't believe it will be for the good of the employees. I want to find that out before

I talk it over with you. And I think too, that I was wrong when I told you that I would give way to you on the question of wages. I thought then that it was my duty to give way because you were my husband. Now I feel that perhaps I ought to have thought first of my duty to the girls. I want to decide that too before I see you again. And besides that I do not think, after what you told me the other day, that I could go back to our ordinary life together just yet. You would want me to, and we should quarrel about it and grow bitter towards one another. It would be so terrible if that happened. But if only I can have time to think it over, I feel that perhaps I shall be able to see a way out. It will all come to seem more ordinary and I shall not mind so much of course. You will feel that I ought to have asked you first whether I might go. I couldn't, James. I felt that I could not bear another argument so soon. And I should not have changed my mind. I will send my address to the bank so that they can forward letters. I shall have gone from Victoria before this reaches you."

A regard for the dignity of the occasion made her sign it with her whole name.

It was the sort of letter, she told herself as she sealed its envelope, that a school-girl might have written. In her own mind she had discussed the matter until reason lay piled upon reason and explanation upon explanation. But her words, laboriously chosen, seemed, when she had read them through, to have lost their meaning. It was

impossible to guess how much of her thought they would make clear to James.

It was three o'clock now, and Penn came to tell her that the car was waiting. She looked hastily round the room, and her eye fell upon the unhappy basket which had seemed so desirable to James's clerk. As she went down the stairs she wondered why its ridiculous pink ribbons had made her angry. She would have done better if she had laughed at it. Well, she was going now! There would be no basket in her room to-night.

She told the man to drive to Victoria and there she put her luggage in the cloak-room. Then she took a taxi to the house agent's office. The house agent received her with smiles. All was well. The owner would sign the agreement, and the agent's men at that very moment were making the inventory. Mrs. Heyham could have the keys, he should say, in under an hour. With such a modern style of furnishing the inventory was not a lengthy matter.

Mary had to think carefully before she decided what she should do next. She must take her luggage away from Victoria, she decided, before she sent James's letter. He was certain to ring up the chauffeur and ask where she had gone. And she might just as well, with an hour before her, get something to eat. She had had no time for lunch.

She fetched the luggage in yet another taxi, and then entrusted the letter to a district messenger. He seemed young and irresponsible for so grave a task—she found it difficult not to tell him that he must be particularly careful. After that she drove to a rival tea-shop and ordered poached eggs on toast, with the taxi ticking extravagantly outside. When the eggs came their whites had a curious crumbling consistency, and she wished that she had ordered something else. But she ate them, for she did not like to hurt the attendant's feelings. James was proud of the eggs that appeared upon the Imperial's tables.

Mary was sorry that the rules of this company did not allow its damsels to receive tips. She would have liked, if only by a lavish scattering of such things as tips, to ensure some good results for her enterprise.

The agent's clerk, obliging man, had the keys ready for her, and with them an assurance of his best attention at all times, and particularly if Mrs. Heyham should happen to be thinking of a house in Scotland again this summer.

Mary thanked him and told him she would certainly not overlook his unrivalled selection. He smiled at that, for he had been wondering what had induced such a wealthy lady to descend to a flat in Chelsea. He supposed that she must have lent her town house to a friend for a month or two, and then found that she wanted a place where she could sleep when she came up for shopping. He thought out the matter with unusual care because if there was anything wrong his clients would blame him, he felt, for his incautious hurry. He was so far justified, at any rate, that the bank had honoured Mary's cheque.

When Mary and her cab reached Cheyne Mansions there was at first a slight difficulty over the luggage. The taxi driver was tired of being kept waiting outside shops and offices while Mary transacted business, and he did not offer to carry her things upstairs. Jenkins, his wife said timidly, was out. Finally, since he was out, though it infringed all regulations, she allowed the luggage to go up in the lift. They were not really, she explained, more than what you could easily call hand luggage. Mary's desire to be lavish was again checked. It was too bad of the taxi driver to sulk on his seat instead of offering to help with the things. He was, besides, a man with a face that did not invite generosity. She gave him an extra shilling.

Mrs. Jenkins's sister Guinivere was waiting for Mary in the flat. She was a smiling child of sixteen, and Mary was glad to see her fresh little face. They unpacked together in a friendly fashion, and then Guinivere—they called her Winny at home, she said, her name being Winifred, but Mr. Jenkins thought Guinivere more suitable for service—asked Mary what she would fancy for dinner. Mary would fancy anything that Guinivere could cook nicely, and the young lady departed in high spirits at the prospect of choosing a magnificent chicken. She had long desired to try her hand at a chicken—when such dainties graced the board of Jenkins she was never allowed to touch more than the vegetables, and the bread sauce.

When the door had closed behind Guinivere, Mary went into the sitting-room which had reminded her of Rosemary. This was the moment when, according to her arrangements, she should have sat down on the odd-looking sofa and begun to think. That was what she was here for, to think in quiet. She could not have asked for more in the way of quiet, no one seemed to be stirring in the flats, even the street beneath her windows was empty of noise.

Nevertheless she did not want to think. The calm judicial mood she had meant to evoke escaped her. Instead she felt restless, she wanted to explore her flat and see what there was behind all its doors and in all its cupboards. She wanted to examine the orange-red furniture in the sitting-room, and to decide whether she liked the extraordinary patterns that were painted in gold and silver on its hangings. She could consider nothing else, she felt, until she had considered the room. Something about it was certainly Japanese and yet it wasn't Japanese in the least. She wanted to open all the flat's windows too, and put her head out and look up and down the street. It was in vain that she rebuked herself. This was not like the other furnished houses, it was her adventure, her defence, her stronghold, where nothing mattered but her own will. It was her will now to be foolish and frivolous, to enjoy, as far as she could, the little sensations that were offered her. She could not, though she wished it, feel adequately solemn.

When Guinivere returned with the chicken, Mary was still wandering through the rooms, looking at their astonishing decorations. It was pleasant to help Guinivere lay the table under the pretext of learning where all the things were kept, it was pleasant to hang anxiously with her over the gas cooker, wondering when the moment had come for

the chicken's release. It was pleasant to agree that the little bit of burn could not possibly affect the flavour.

After dinner there were the things to put away, just to see that she remembered their places, and the books on the dining-room bookshelves to look through—it was not until nine o'clock that she remembered her letter to the bank. That changed the current of her thoughts. She realised that although she was restless she was also very tired. She realised, too, that James had read her letter, that he was moment struggling with at that emotions her letter had caused. A new fear occurred to her. He was probably very angry—she could not tell in the least how angry he might be. His anger seemed suddenly real to her. Even in the security of her silver walls it made her tremble. Even here he could hurt her. Supposing, to punish her, he intercepted her news of Rosemary. She did not know where to write to Rosemary. Before this fresh anxiety, slight though it was, the last of her excitement disappeared. She went into her bedroom, worried and dispirited, looking forward to a wakeful night. She was astonished when she woke next morning to remember that she had not even heard the funny clock strike ten.

CHAPTER XVI

JAMES received Mary's letter, by a happy chance, just as he was about to ring up his solicitors and ask them to send him some papers that he wanted to show her next day. When he had read its first few sentences, he asked for the messenger boy, but his clerk told him that the boy had already gone. As that was so, he told the man to get him a taxi—he could very well finish the letter on his way home. While he was waiting, he walked up and down his room. "This is nonsense!" he told himself. "This is nonsense—it must be stopped at once!" He got into his taxi without being aware of any other feeling than his determination that it must be stopped.

The light in the taxi was bad, and Mary's sloping writing seemed difficult. He realised that he was not understanding what he read, and when he had gathered the facts of the affair he put the crumpled sheets back into his pocket. Then he pulled up the window of the taxi—the early spring day was cold. Already the other, the emotional aspects of Mary's conduct were forcing themselves upon his mind, but again and again he wrenched his thoughts away—he must look at it now, he insisted, simply in the light of something that had to be stopped. Over a growing consciousness of disaster he kept his attention busy with the familiar spaces and buildings that he passed, and with the people in the streets.

As soon as he reached home he sent for Penn. "What train did Mrs. Heyham catch?" he asked her.

Penn did not know, Mrs. Heyham had left for Victoria at three. But she could ask Lang.

It would be ten minutes before the chauffeur came—James went into his study and took out the letter again. But even now he could not understand it. She was angry with him about Greta, he supposed, and to revenge herself she had determined to refuse her consent to his scheme. Then she had been afraid, she had not dared face him, so she had run away. He felt the tide of his anger rising to meet the anger he imagined in her. He could not doubt for a moment which was the stronger and the more effective. It was difficult to believe that she could have been foolish enough to provoke him like this—

At that moment he heard footsteps on the marble floor of the passage and he tried, instinctively, to resume the usual calm of his expression. But the muscles of his face, stiffly contracted, would not relax. He faced Lang, coming in at the door, with a deep frown.

"What train did Mrs. Heyham take, Lang?" he asked again.

"I don't know, sir. We got to Victoria at about 3.20 and Mrs. Heyham told the porter to take her things to the cloak-room."

With a great effort James made himself smile. "That's all right," he said; "then she is probably going by the later train, as she arranged." He thought rapidly. His letter had reached him at half-past four—she had probably handed it in soon after four. It was nearly half-past five now. After what she had said in the letter, it was unlikely that her luggage

would still be there, though she might, of course, have been bluffing.

He wondered for a moment whether he would go to Victoria himself, but he was too angry. He'd be damned if he'd hang around any cloak-room for her. "What's Heyham doing—looking for his wife?" She should come back without that.

He turned to Lang. "Go to Victoria at once," he said, "and find out, if you can, what train Mrs. Heyham took. The man in the cloak-room may know at what time she came for the luggage. If it is still there, wait until she comes and tell her that I have been obliged to change my plans and cannot leave London to-night. If Mrs. Heyham decides to come back, bring her home—if not, see her comfortably into her train."

Lang looked intelligently at his master, as if he were memorising these instructions. Then, with his usual, "Yes, sir," he went.

When the door had shut, James, without seeing it, looked slowly round the room. He had become aware of a curious light, giddy sensation. His mind seemed to be inactive, open, and blank. Suddenly his blood rushed to his head and he found himself trembling under a storm of rage.

For a moment he thought of Mary as an angry peasant thinks of an animal. She was his—his possession—his woman—and she had defied him. Words came to his lips that old Clarkson, years ago, had used of the factory girls, but as he stood there with his hands clenched and his red, distorted face thrust forward, he could not even speak them

coherently. Presently the inhibiting pressure of his wrath grew less, and he turned to stride rapidly up and down the room. His anger, as it became clearer, had not shrunk, but only grown more vindictive and more intense. He saw Mary now as an embodiment of greed and treachery. Was she not, after all, Julius's sister?—he had been a fool to marry into such a family! All these years he had toiled at the business, working as much for her as for himself, and now, after taking all that she could get, she was angry with him, and for her revenge she ruined him. This was her answer to his years of love and care. He had loved her—he shivered with humiliation when he thought how abject he had sometimes been, how he had respected her, hung on her moods, twisted himself into ecstasies of sentimental gallantry! He had treated himself like dirt, because he had been afraid of wounding her damned delicacy—while she, in all probability, had been laughing at him! It had amused her to see him making a fool of himself over her imaginary fine feelings! She had been so sure of him that she had dared to tell him to his face that she did not love him!

He had adored her, and she, all the time, had been leading her own life, her double life, throwing him enough affection to keep him blind when he was at home. As soon as it suited her, she left him, left him to tell his son and his daughters—to tell everyone—that his wife had run away. Left him to explain why she had seen fit to do such a thing. He shuddered again with hatred and disgust.

At last, tired of walking, he threw himself into his great arm-chair. Mary imagined, no doubt, that he would forgive her. Forgive—he struck the arm of the chair with his open hand—while there was blood in his body, he would not forgive. She should come back, and she should sign the papers, and then, after that, he would live as he liked—treacherous—treacherous and cold-blooded! She had left him to explain to Trent, her prig of a son, why she had gone—

His anger mastered him again, he could not breathe properly, he bent over the side of the chair that he had gripped with shaking hands. When he tried to rise it seemed to him, for a moment, that he could not.

At this he became alarmed. "Mustn't go on like this!" he told himself, and instantly his muscles relaxed and he fell back in the chair, while rings of light seemed to shift before his eyes. When he sat up, wiping his hand across his wet forehead, he had collected himself, his anger was finally under his control. He was able to think about what he had better do, what he should say to Trent, what Lang would have found.

He left the chair and walked slowly to his desk. His desk, broad, massive, designed and equipped solely to serve his purpose, reassured him and gave him back for a moment his sense of dignity. With its smooth leather under his arms he could not doubt of his success—he had planned so many things at that desk, and compelled so much success. There were a hundred reasons why Mary should return at once,

before anyone knew, if only he could get them in order. His head was full of them already—they crowded upon him. There must be a hundred ways, too, of forcing her to come back if only he could find them. He had merely to think, to set his brain to work. Unfortunately he did not want to think. He wanted to be angry, to give full scope to his indignation, and to find that the sheer force of it had brought her back. Since his childhood James had respected his anger. It was an important weapon, dreaded and deprecated by thousands of human beings. And since it was always effective he had lost the habit of calling it in question or asking himself whether it could be unjust. Now it seemed strange to him that, angry as he was, nothing happened. If Mary had been there she would have been terrified by his anger; now, simply because she had gone, because there was a little space between them, it was nothing to her. He did not understand clearly what was the matter, but he felt an odd sensation of discomfort, of discouragement, of frustration. He sought in his mind, vaguely, for some violent thing that he could do—something that would prove his power. Then he brought himself sharply back to the matter in hand. "What's wrong with me?" he thought. "Why am I doing nothing? By this time I ought to have decided what I mean to do!"

His discouragement deepened and with it grew a fear of this strange incapacity. "I'm not usually like this," he thought—if only Mary had been there, there was so much that he could have said to her! But she was gone.

He made a last effort to think of some way of finding her immediately. He could put the screw on to the manager of the bank and make him give up her address—he could set detectives to find her. But he did not care for either of these plans. The manager would not like going back on Mary, nor did he believe in any but the acquisitive powers of detectives. Sooner or later of course Mary, being a woman, would give herself away; meanwhile he must wait.

He must wait—impotent, tortured by his own useless rage—the notion appalled him. He was not a man who was accustomed to wait, to suffer—every force that was in him struggled against the idea. Then, as he could still find no immediate solution, his alarm returned. The state of affairs was wrong, unnatural, something must be the matter. "Perhaps I was too angry," he thought, "I have upset myself!" He walked to a small mirror that hung over a side table and looked at himself in the glass. He looked tired and shaken, he decided, and with the thought came a sensation of weakness and fatigue. He turned away from the mirror and went back, mechanically, to his desk. "After all," he thought, "I am getting old—I can't stand these things as I used to!" It was a moment before he grasped the significance of the words.

Then his hatred of Mary blazed out again. That was why she had done it—he was old—she had taken advantage of his age—ten years ago she would not have dared to defy him! She had left him, as he saw it now, with the callous indifference of youth.

She was younger than he—she had not borne the burden of ceaseless work! She was a woman, she worshipped strength—to her he was merely an old man, whose strength was leaving him.

Then he made an effort to restore his own confidence. Mary was wrong—she would find out her mistake—only that morning he had felt as young as ever! But he could not deceive himself, he knew that ten years ago he would have taken action instead of wasting his time among ideas. "Here I sit," he thought; "I tell myself that I must do something, find something to do, and still I sit doing nothing!" He was seized again, as he had been seized the night before, with profound despondency. Something was wrong, but its causes lay outside the habitual action of his mind. He sat on, not attempting now to cope with the stream of thoughts that passed before him. He missed, though he did not know it, Mary's audience and her sympathy.

At twenty minutes past six Lang came back with the car. He had done his best, he said, to make the man at the cloak-room attend to him, and the man had admitted finally that he believed, though he wasn't sure, that Mrs. Heyham had fetched her luggage about an hour after she put it in.

James nodded, and Lang went. In another half-hour Trent would be back from the works. He took Mary's letter from his pocket and read it again to see if there was anything in it that he could not show to Trent. The boy, after all, was his partner. He would have to have an explanation of some sort. Plausible explanations of Mary's flight began to develop

themselves in James's mind. He did not want Trent to know about Greta—Trent was such a prig. But as the clock struck half-past he decided, in a sudden access of impatience, that he would go out and leave the letter behind him for Trent to find. He would have dinner somewhere where there was a crowd of people. He couldn't face a tongue—tied meal with Trent staring at him across the table, and the servants coming in and out of the room. He couldn't face, either, Trent's surprise and his damn-fool questions. The boy was all right when he'd thought a thing over, but he wasn't quick.

He wrote on a sheet of paper, "I will talk this over with you after dinner, J. A. H.," and put it with the letter into a large envelope which he addressed to his son. Then, leaving it on the hall table, he went upstairs to dress. If he had dinner early he would be less likely to see anyone he knew.

Trent, when he came in, a little tired, picked up the envelope and tore it open on his way upstairs. He read James's note with a feeling of impatience. Some difficulty had arisen, he supposed, in the way of the new company. Trent did not share James's interest in the new company. The scheme was his father's. It did not afford him the pleasure of admiring his own ingenuity, and it seemed to him that the new arrangements tended to lessen his importance. He would be on the Board of the new Company, but only as one director among many, and he had not been able to follow his father's sudden delight in cinematographs and the building of cinema palaces. He had agreed to the scheme because it would make

him, if it went well, a richer man, but he sometimes grew tired of discussing and praising it. He glanced, now, at the other envelope, and it was with a shock that he recognised his mother's writing. James had not spoken to him of Mary's attitude, and as the months went by he had forgotten his fears. Now they revived, and with them came a slight feeling of superiority. "I knew there would be trouble," he said to himself as he went into his room.

Trent's room was carefully furnished and tidy. Even his golf-clubs and his riding boots seemed evidence less of enjoyment than of the gentlemanly nature of his pursuits. Although he would have to dress in half an hour he changed his shoes, washed his hands, and brushed his hair before he sat down in a comfortable chair to read Mary's letter.

He read it through slowly, after his first start of surprise, and then, as he could not remember a word of it, he read it again. He was amazed—his mother had never seemed to him that sort of woman. He had always thought of her as a good, charming woman, a woman he was very fond of. Now she had done this astonishing thing—he realised, for the first time, that his mother and father were not merely parents, that they lived lives of their own, like his and his friends'. "My father can't," he even admitted, "be a very easy man to live with"—he could see that Mary had been very unhappy when she wrote her letter.

But there his sympathy ended. Mary was a wife, she had no right to behave as she was doing. Trent had always felt very strongly that upper-class Englishwomen, in a way, are sacred; sacred to the

noble task of maintaining the ideals of English men and children. He had never doubted that any woman whom he might love would recognise the force of this obligation. He was very fond of his mother—it was most perplexing! He tried to think the matter over calmly. Whatever had happened it was absurd to suppose that she couldn't do all the thinking she liked while his father was at the office. If, as the letter seemed to indicate, there was some emotional difficulty between them, that only made matters worse. In such a case an open breach was not only wrong and foolish, it was indelicate. If what she really wanted was time to get used to the idea of selling the business then she had still no right to run away and take counsel of strangers instead of discussing the affair with her husband and son. She was hopelessly in the wrong, even when one looked at it, as he was doing, from her own point of view. When one thought of the consequences of her action—

He left his chair and began to walk, like his father, up and down the room. Walking, his thoughts came faster and less coherently. Why had she done it?—it was a terrible thing to do! And in what a false position it left them all!

Even he would suffer—why, more especially he! With a pang he remembered Lady Hester. If her family knew that his mother had done such a thing they would not let her marry him, however much money he made. For a moment the poor young man stopped, appalled, then he resumed his pacing.

Hester had probably never heard of such a thing as a mother who ran away!

It was impossible that his mother could ruin his life, and ruin it for a mood—a whim—she must not do it, she must not be allowed to do it! She must be brought back and made to feel how unbecoming—how shameful—her behaviour was; he felt a slow, irresistible anger rise in his heart. His mother was disgracing herself, she could claim no mercy. She had rejected her duty to her husband and children, she had put herself outside the scope of man's generosity. He had a right to be angry with her, he said to himself; he did well to be angry!

For a few minutes he was exceedingly angry, then his thoughts began to move in a different direction. Trent, like his mother, took an interest in the processes of his own mind. After all it was no use his losing his head. Anger was foolish and undignified—he sat down again, deliberately, as if to prove to himself by controlling his muscles that he could also control his feelings. His mother had taken leave of her senses, but that was no reason why he should not show self-control. This was a crisis in his life; he must behave wisely, generously!

He tried hard as he sat there, unfortunate youth, to decide on a wise and generous line of conduct. But all that he could think of were his ruined hopes, his wounded feelings, the cruelty and treachery of what Mary had done. He did not feel generous, he felt deeply vindictive. He wanted to be wise and calm, but his resentment seemed to press on him, depriving him of the power of ordering his thoughts.

He felt a desire to punish his mother, to make her suffer in return for the suffering she was causing him. He struggled against this feeling, but he was astonished by its strength. "It is extraordinary," he thought, "I am not a vindictive man; I have every wish to behave well, and yet when my whole desire is simply to be just I am prevented from thinking clearly by this primitive instinct of revenge! It is true then, after all, that civilisation is only a cloak for barbarism!" This, in its way, was satisfactory. To the end of his life Trent would treat himself with more respect as a person, under the surface, of untamably savage instincts. But even this interesting discovery did not remove the oppression of his annoyance. When he finally found relief it was in an outbreak of indignation against women in general. He was not worried by any need to be just towards women in general. This was what came—his thoughts ran easily—of women interfering in men's affairs. This was what came of women setting themselves up to be judges of life and conduct without balance or judgment or experience; they lost their heads and everyone else had to bear the consequences. His mother, doubtless—he felt less angry with her already—had been led away. She had talked things over, in the gabbling indecent fashion women have, with some of her friends, possibly with that ridiculous secretary. They had sympathised with her and persuaded her to behave like this. Possibly even Rosemary had known about it. All women nowadays were filled with the same spirit of presumption and ingratitude. His mother had merely been a little more

rash, a little weaker, than the others. The whole thing came, he went on to explain to himself, of educating women and encouraging them to express their absurd opinions. His mother had been carried away by the feeling that half the business was hers—that, of course, was her father's fault. Now, although she knew nothing whatever of business, she was not prepared to let anything pass that did not meet with her approval. She had obviously got some idea of responsibility into her head—as if a woman would be responsible for an enormous modern business. There were women who mixed themselves up in business, of course, women who were thoroughly unsexed, and the others didn't understand that and were wild to imitate them. Look at Rosemary and her economics!—Laura, too, had been nearly as bad until she married. He was going on to conclude that early marriage and no education was what was right for women—a woman, to Trent's taste, was enough when she was healthy, pretty, affectionate, and tactful—when he remembered that no one had ever educated his mother and that she had indubitably married and married young. He was forced to admit that now these impossible ideas had got into the air there was no telling whom they would not attack.

He dressed, at last, without having forgiven Mary, but with his good-humour towards himself restored by this proof that he could conquer his impulses and face misfortune in a philosophical spirit.

Soon after he had left the dining-room and settled himself comfortably in the study, his father returned. James had had an excellent and encouraging dinner, and he walked into the room with the brisk, bustling air of a man who is prepared at every point both with plans of action and explanations of them. He dropped into his particular chair and selected a cigar before he spoke. Then he glanced suspiciously at his son. "You've read your mother's letter, I take it," he began.

Trent replied that he had.

"Well, what do you think about it?"

Trent waited a moment before he answered. He could see that his father was uneasy—probably, then, there had been some sentimental dispute between his parents, and James was afraid that he would question him about it. He chose his words carefully. "I don't think my mother can quite realise what she is doing," he said.

James was greatly relieved. He nodded. "We must remember," he conceded, "that your mother hasn't been at all well lately, and the excitement of the wedding was probably too much for her!"

Trent agreed with him. They looked at one another, and then James turned to the ash-tray on the table by his side. There was not yet, however, any ash upon the tip of his cigar. "In a way, of course, my dear fellow," he said, "if this gets about you are the greatest sufferer."

Trent moved uncomfortably. He did not care to be reminded of his possible sufferings.

"Of course," his father was saying, "the position, if it becomes public property, makes me look very foolish. And it is extremely inconvenient to have the

arrangements for the reconstruction hung up like this for want of your mother's consent. Only yesterday Mansfield and Sir Ezra Swiney agreed to be on the Board of the new Company. But in the long run that hits you as hard as it hits me, and in other ways your prospects are affected in a way that mine can't be." He leaned forward towards his son in a solicitous, fatherly manner. Trent's answering, "Yes," was stiff.

"Now just for the present," James went on, "I haven't got your mother's address. I've thought of a way by which we shall probably be able to get it in a day or two, say a week, but meanwhile there's no time to be lost. Your mother says that the bank will forward letters—I think on the whole, if you agree with me, that you'd better write at once and point out to her what she's doing. It is no good at all my writing or I would. But if she gets a letter from you explaining that this attitude of hers makes your marriage impossible, I think it's ten chances to one that she'll change her mind. She's fond of you, Trent, and when she's in her right mind she's a good mother. Besides, I expect she's feeling a bit scared now that the thing is done. If I were you I would write to-night."

Trent leaned back in his chair and looked at the ceiling to avoid the compelling affection of his father's eye. He rejected an impulse to refuse indignantly, and considered the matter as thoroughly as he could. Consideration did not make James's plan seem more attractive. It was undignified, it was beastly—Trent had never written such a letter in his life, and he could not imagine himself writing it. A

letter is a thing that one can keep—he thought of Mary reading his entreaties over again afterwards, when the urgency of the affair had died away perhaps showing them to Lady Hester-"This, my dear, was what brought me back!" Trent, in defence of his own dignity, was capable of a certain amount of imagination; moreover, in the depths of his heart he felt that emotional pressure of this sort was unfair. Before dinner he had been prepared, so he thought, to use any possible means of bringing Mary back. Now that he was asked to dirty his own fingers he felt a little sorry for his mother. James was talking very calmly now and in a very kind and reasonable way, but Trent had worked with his father for some years, and he would not have cared, himself, to face such a home-coming. After all, Mary had gone away because she thought she was acting right, and James had not given any clear account of what it was that he had done to make her go.

Meanwhile James stared at his son. "Damn the boy!" he thought, "I wonder what it is that makes me always rub him up the wrong way. Well—" he said, as Trent did not seem inclined to speak.

Trent sat up and looked at him. "Do you know, sir," was the most tactful way he could put his objection, "I doubt whether my writing would be very much good? My mother has gone away, as far as I can see, because she wants to think business matters over—she must have considered the effect it would have on my plans before she went. To bring her back we must persuade her that what she is doing isn't right."

"She can hardly imagine that it is right to ruin your prospects." James's tone was becoming less smooth.

"I think," his son went on, "that we ought to write a letter, either from you or from both of us, as you prefer, to say that for her own sake as well as for ours we must ask her to come back, but if she comes we will guarantee her reasonable time and opportunities for satisfying herself about the reconstruction." That seemed to Trent a very handsome offer.

To James, already in conflict with his temper, it seemed merely aggravating. "Nonsense!" he said, "you don't realise, my dear fellow, that the thing is practically arranged. I can't keep eminent business men like Sir Ezra hanging about from day to day while your mother makes up her mind!"

"I had no idea that my mother took up that point of view," Trent suggested. "It seems very sudden!"

James had no answer to this. He knew perfectly well that he had run into the affair with his eyes open. He had known that Mary might very well object, and he had disregarded this knowledge. "I'm afraid she must have been reading Socialistic stuff," he conceded. "It gets hold of women." He fidgeted a little in his chair.

Trent threw himself back again. Then his father was to blame! He had seen this coming and he had taken no steps to meet it. He had not even consulted his able son. "Arranged or not, I don't see how we can get on without my mother's concurrence," he

threw out. "It seems to me that we are in a thorough mess."

James glared at him. "I have suggested a plan by which I think your mother's concurrence can be obtained!"

Trent did not answer. He did not mind issuing his commands to women, but whining to them and badgering them was another matter. It did not fulfil Trent's idea of decency. But he knew that this obscure feeling which he could not name even to himself was the last thing in the world to appeal to his father.

"Well," James urged him, in tones of growing impatience, "I should really like to know why you don't think my scheme would be very much good."

Trent's own judicial calm gave way before this insistence. All right then, his father must have it! "I don't pretend to understand the ins and outs of the affair," he said slowly; "you haven't told me, and I don't ask any questions, but it does seem dear to me that the issue lies between my mother and you. So far as it affects me as a partner, I am willing that my mother should have time to make such a serious decision, otherwise I prefer, if you don't mind, to keep out of it as far as I can; certainly I would rather not involve other people."

James, since his dinner and the birth of his ingenious plan, had forgotten the general aspect of the affair and concentrated his mind on the task of persuading Trent. At this defiance, however, the thought of his plight and his grievances broke through the surface of his immediate intentions. This

was what Mary had exposed him to—this sort of snub from his son! James cared more for Trent than he let himself admit, and the young man's attitude wounded his vanity. Trent would prefer to keep himself out of his father's and mother's affairs!

"Certainly you may keep out, my dear boy," he began disagreeably, while he felt his way towards something really scathing. "Whether you'll save your skin by keeping out is another matter. You will agree," he added in default of a better phrase, "that if you don't think your own interests are worth looking after there can be no earthly reason why I should bother about them!"

Trent broke in on him, "Oh, certainly." The last thing he wanted was that James should make emotional capital out of his unfortunate affections.

For some time they both sat there covering their silence by activity in attending to their tobacco. James was feeling sore and disappointed. He had expected Trent in this matter at least to see eye to eye with him. He had looked to Trent for comfort and moral support—two things which he had become accustomed to finding at home in seasons of stress and confusion. He could not understand now why Trent was hostile. It wasn't that Trent approved of his mother's action—Trent, the young puppy, took a far more high and mighty line about women than James had ever done. His mind moved wearily amid the tangle of Trent's possible motives. The boy might be acting from laziness, priggishness, cowardice, mere pig-headedness. In any case he was a damned young fool who didn't care a rap for his father. James

leaned heavily back in his chair and cursed the man who had sold him his cigars.

Trent, too, was puzzled and upset. He had hoped to impress his father with his courage and commonsense, he had hoped to cheer him up. Actually, on the contrary, they had got no nearer to friendly sympathy than ill-tempered bickering. "Am I in the wrong?" he asked himself. "Ought I to write the letter?" Every instinct told him that he was right. His mother was wrong to go away as she had gone, but if they were to plead with her at all it must be by reasoning with her, by pointing out her duty, not by working on her feelings. Trent didn't want her return made a favour to him that he would have to carry for the rest of his life. Nor was he going to drag Lady Hester, even by remote allusions, into such an affair. He was right, and his motives in refusing his father were of the noblest, but, even so, things were unsatisfactory. He did not want to fence with his father, using his brains to wound the old man instead of to encourage him. It occurred to Trent, dimly and for an instant, that in all probability the old man did not want to wound him either. What was it then that irritated them and made them quarrel?

At this moment the door opened and the parlour-maid announced Mr. Julius Trent.

Julius came in with a smiling face. He had come to see Mary eventually, since the evening was a time when she might be found alone in her drawing-room, but as his purpose was to borrow money—Mary had been very kind the day before, and an old creditor whom Julius had forgotten had sent in his bill that

morning—he thought it more politic to say a few cheerful words to her husband first.

"Evening!" he said; "evening, Trent my boy! How are you all? Settling down again, I suppose. Any news of the young couple?" He included them both in the benevolence of his greeting.

The last person James wished to see was Mary's brother Julius. "Good evening," he said, without shaking hands. "No, we've heard nothing yet."

"And how's poor little Mary?" her tactless brother went on. "Didn't seem very well when I saw her yesterday—upsetting things, these weddings." A joke—a mild enough joke—was on his lips, but he checked himself. A dull straight-laced lot, Mary's family. Even as a boy, James had been one of the plodding sort. He helped himself to one of James's cigars.

"She wants to see me, I think," he went on, as nobody answered. "Is she in?"

James was thinking as quickly as he could, so quickly that he forgot to be annoyed with "poor little Mary." In spite of their old friendship James had never grown used to this reprobate who spoke of his wife in familiar terms. Yesterday,—Julius, annoyed at not being made a director, had been saying things to Mary about the sale! "No," he said slowly, "I'm afraid she's not in."

Julius stared at him. Mary out alone at this time of night! "Oh, I suppose she's gone round to Laura's," he suggested. "Women never grow tired of talking things over. Will she be very late?"

If it really had been Julius who had been making mischief, James was thinking, Mary's brother or not, he would smash him! He stared heavily at his guest, but did not speak, and after a minute Trent felt obliged to say that they did not know.

Julius pulled out his watch. It wasn't yet half-past nine. He was not going to waste an evening with people like James and Trent. "Oh, very well," he said. "I expect to-morrow will suit her just as well. You might tell her from me, that I'll look in to-morrow morning." He smiled brightly again as he took another cigar.

But at this smile James's fretted self-control gave way. "No, I will not!" he said. "Mary will not be here to-morrow morning. Your sister, my good Julius, acting in a manner which you probably think very natural, has run away!"

"Run away! Mary! Mary!" said Julius, putting the cigar into his pocket, and automatically helping himself to another. "Well, I'm damned!"

Neither of the others spoke. Trent was annoyed with his father, and James was annoyed with himself. "What on earth did she want to run away for?" Julius went on. "She seemed quite happy yesterday!" His indignation grew. "Well, I must say that's a pretty thing! A woman of her age running away from her husband!" Where was he to get his money from now? "It's disgraceful, a shameful way to behave, never heard of such a thing— You needn't think I approve of her, James, I can tell you I'm damned sorry for you!" All the same, he told himself, it was almost worth losing the money.

James left by his wife! Jaw-your-head-off cock-a-doodle James! Not that that excused Mary. "Perfectly disgraceful!" he went on, with enthusiasm. "I wonder if she's joined the Suffragettes? There's no saying what the fair sex won't do nowadays. Mary, too, of all women. Well, I'm disappointed in her. And if I see her I shall tell her so— If I were you I should put my foot down. If once you give in to this sort of thing——"

James crossed the room and took his brother-inlaw by the arm. "The best thing you can do," he said to Julius, "is to clear out and keep quiet."

Julius looked at him and then at Trent. "I'll keep quiet enough," he assured them, "for my own sake. It's not the sort of thing I should care to have Esther know." Then, rubbing his arm, he made for the door. "Of course I can quite understand you're a bit annoyed," he said when he reached it, "I should be angry myself."

James turned his back to the door's closing.

Trent returned to the chair he had left when his uncle came into the room, and James, after a minute, followed his example. There was nothing that either of them cared to say. They would have to see Julius next morning and find out how much it would cost to keep him quiet, otherwise matters were much as they had been.

For nearly an hour they sat there, busy with unprofitable thoughts.

James was wishing that he had kicked Julius. To kick Mary's only brother would, in some small measure, have relieved his feelings. It would, at any rate, have been something that he could do. Of all Mary's offences this was the worst—that she had left him with no one and nothing on which to wreak his anger. She would go, heaven knows where, carrying his name at her mercy, while he must remain at home, baffled, thwarted, pestered by busy-bodies—

This was his mood when his idea came.

To Trent's surprise a joyful light appeared on his father's face. James left his chair and went over to his desk. "I've got her," he said. "It's worth it! I don't care what it costs. It's not for nothing I've subscribed so long to the party funds! When she comes back she shall find herself Lady Heyham! She's my wife still even if she has run away! And if she makes a fuss about it I'll call myself Sir Archibald!"

Just then the maid brought in some letters, among them a picture post-card for Mary from Rosemary. Five minutes before James would have considered that Mary didn't deserve to have letters sent on; now he was so pleased with the thought that he could alter her life whether she had gone or not that he handed it over to Trent to re-address.

CHAPTER XVII

MARY spent the next day reading *The Shareholder's Guide to Company Law*. She did not remember much of it when she had finished, but her aversion to James's proposals had increased. Once she had sold her part of the business in return for money or shares in the new company she would not

be able to do anything—if she had read the book aright—without standing up at a General Meeting and delivering a speech. Of that, she felt, she was incapable. There would be not only James to fight, but the new shareholders. She pictured them as stout hard men who would laugh loudly at her. For a few moments she held this pleasant little nightmare in her mind and it decided her. Well then, she must not give way to James, she must refuse to sell.

It was easy in her queer, gaily coloured flat to feel capable of such defiance. It was less easy to think coherently about what James would say. With the thought of him and his offences her mind became confused. She could not envisage him calmly, she could not forget how different he was from the James whom she had loved. She decided that she was not prepared to consider him, and until the evening she put him, as far as she was able, out of her mind.

In the evening a large envelope came from the bank. It bore Trent's writing, and she opened it fearfully to find nothing inside it but some letters and the post-card from Rosemary. Rosemary, in Italy, was having lovely weather and getting on splendidly—as Mary put the post-card down she felt a kindlier feeling towards James. It was generous of him to have sent on her letters. It occurred to her suddenly that with all his faults James had always been generous to her, and often sympathetic. Whatever credit was due to him for that he still deserved—the fact that one is deceiving a person does not make it easier to sympathise with them.

Next day when she awoke in her room,—Chinese blue, sea-green, and indigo, not the colours she would herself have chosen for a bedroom, but stimulating in the early morning,—she came to the conclusion that she had been a little unjust to James. She had taken it for granted that ever since his fall his whole relation with her had been built up of fraud and hypocrisy. Now she could see that she had certainly been wrong. For a month or two James must have suffered from a waning uneasiness, after that he had probably taken his guilt for granted. If he had been kind to her it had been because he was naturally kind. She need not feel that she had been insulted by every different instance of his affection.

She was astonished with herself now for not having understood this before. She had made the discovery of his fault, she reflected, at an unfortunate moment. The more she thought of it, the more sure she felt that James had not let his adventure alter his affection for his wife. The different planes of James's being were unconnected, his mind was not logical. She reminded herself that she had not lived with him for twenty-seven years without getting a glimpse of his attitude towards his business. The business—she turned over restlessly—the business was a problem less easy of solution. For James's infidelity she had simply to forgive him, and within a week he would have forgotten it. But his business was his life.

She must, she told herself, be more energetic. She must not trust to the chance thoughts of the moment. She must sit down on the red and orange sofa, absurd as it might seem, and make herself think, or she would find herself sliding into some plausible position that had no solid reasoning to support it. And by and by she would need solid reasoning—when it came to explaining her conclusions to James. If she could not think yet, she could read, and read she must.

As she became more intimately acquainted, in the week that followed, with what the London Library could tell her of our industrial system, she found her conception of her problem alter. She could laugh now, a little drearily, at the thought of James heading a band of willing but ignorant employers. The facts she learned now were not different in kind from the facts she had known when she invented that pleasing legend, but her attitude towards them was changed. She had not to fit them into her ideal notion of James. Not that he, in this new light, appeared any more a harsh or dishonest man than the majority of the gentlemen who direct the creation of our country's wealth. In some ways, indeed, he seemed even better than they. He might treat his employees badly, but he did not cheat the public. To Mary, that seemed, on the whole, the lesser virtue, but she recognised that to James it might fairly be a cause for pride.

James did not consider himself a cruel employer, and he did not consider himself, either, a hypocrite or a man of loose morals. He seemed to himself, as he seemed to other men, a generous and honourable person. To her, and by her standards, on the contrary, he did not seem so, and the world respected her standards too. She was a good woman,

with a good woman's point of view. The world does not like to see a woman uphold immorality, or starve her servants in order to make money. Nevertheless, when James did these things, she was bound, according to the world's judgment, to forgive him, or give way to him, as the case might be. Men praised her stricter standard as long as she applied it to nobody but herself.

For a moment of one darkening winter's afternoon it seemed to Mary that men stood before her, stripped of all but their wickedness, as they might have stood before Miss Percival. Men's chief demand of women was that they should be pleasing when men had time to think of them and quiet when men had not; to this end then women were to keep themselves busy practising a morality too exacting for men themselves. It would be a sad world without virtue, therefore let others be virtuous—from a business point of view an excellent argument. The poor lady paced her room in the painful agitation of one who discovers that he has played the part of a dupe.

But she could not believe, for long, that the whole fabric of her morals had been raised in obedience to a conspiracy. She was not virtuous, after all, because men imposed virtue on her. She had never wanted to be anything else. She could not bear, knowingly, to treat people cruelly, and as for sex, one husband and one family had occupied her fully. She was free now, but the life that was left to her could hardly be troubled by any such adventures. James, on the other hand, had not been so quietly

content with virtue. She remembered now, though she had not attended to it at the time, a long defence that James had tried to make. She, he had said, had never attended to what he wanted, had never known or cared. She had merely assumed that his wants were like her own.

It was growing dark, and the city below her great leaded window showed black and yellow. She stopped her pacing to turn on the light, for she needed in her confusion the gay reassurance of the beautiful room. The light that collected its shining colours seemed to illumine her distress, making it less formidable, though not yet, alas, more clear.

She sat down in one of the painted chairs and smoothed the habitual grey silk that covered her knees. She was trying to remember what it was that James had said. He had said that lies—the lies he had told her—were the price he had had to pay for her comfort of mind and ignorance of evilsomething to that purpose, at any rate, her memory was not exact. That, of course, when she thought it over, fitted in very well as part of the theory. Virtue and innocence are artificial, to be preserved only by ignorance of the world. Women, therefore, if they remain virtuous, must sympathise with men's temptations while carefully refusing to understand them. A man cannot help being tempted—that had been the burden of James's excuse—and there may come a point, of course, when he is but human. A woman, on the other hand, presumably can, since no temptation must be too strong for her. A good woman, obviously, is not tempted; if she felt the

desires of men she would be, at heart, a wicked woman, not the sort of woman that James would have cared to marry. So he had married a good woman, and her goodness had gone to make things hard for him.

Mary, who detested cynicism, was dismayed by these thoughts.

Roughly, though, she told herself, they were true. James had certainly liked her to be the type of woman she was. He loved her for it, he preferred her even to his less ignorant though equally virtuous daughters. Mary wondered what Rosemary thought of it all. Mary, at Rosemary's age, had thought of nothing—Rosemary had probably reduced the whole thing to a theory. She had certainly horrified James on one occasion by saying that our divorce laws are scandalous; probably she believed in free love, whatever that might be—it was not a thing that Mary had ever pictured to herself. Fortunately it was not of much importance what Rosemary believed—she was a dear, good girl under all her modernity and could be trusted not to act on her convictions.

Mary had hardly had time to take comfort from this reassurance when a new possibility occurred to her. Supposing—impossible though it was—that Rosemary could not be trusted! Supposing she behaved exactly as James had done, that she became the mistress of another man after her marriage without telling Anthony. From one point of view the cases were parallel—whatever codes the world might accept for a man, Mary would never have married James if she had thought that he was free to

deceive her. What would James have said to that? her lip curled at the thought of his hypocritical horror; it was only afterwards that she asked herself what her own attitude would have been. Deceit, of course, is always terrible, there can be no doubt of it, but she couldn't doubt, either, that she would have forgiven Rosemary. She would have forgiven her and she would have thought Anthony a brute if he had not forgiven her too. She would have advised Rosemary, as a matter of course, to tell Anthony well. James had told her. He had told her when he might have lied to her. She would not have believed him, but she could hardly have insisted against his denial. Unwillingly she faced a further question would she have counselled Rosemary to tell Tony if she knew beforehand that he would not forgive? Might not she have said, even though she knew it was wrong, "It's all over my dear, you must think of the future now, and not of the past?" Tony, of course, might have divorced Rosemary—and she had run away from James.

She jumped up and went over to the window—"Very well then, very well then," her thoughts ran, "but where is your standard? Where is the basis of your judgments? How can you say, in the face of this, that you have not been cruel? What would you think if Anthony treated your daughter as you have treated James!"

Mary sat down again on the low window-ledge and looked out into the darkness. Far below her lights were moving in the cleft of the narrow street. She did not see them, or London that lay spread out towards the east. Where was her standard then, how could she decide? It had seemed easy enough to judge men and women, their virtues and their sins, but in the narrow circle of her own life justice eluded her. She had been angry with James; she had only thought of shielding Rosemary from an irresponsible and cruel world. James, after all, she told herself in excuse, was a man, a master of life. Men had made the world to please themselves, James should not have needed her protection from it. But this argument was not very convincing. James had not created modern morals: in such a sphere he was decidedly a person who took things as he found them, and if that was a sin, she, until now, had sinned as well as James.

She tried, for a short time, to reconcile her opposing points of view by the discovery of some subtler, loftier moral rule into which they might be harmoniously absorbed. She could not believe that she, a good woman, a fair-minded woman, could ultimately treat so differently a husband who sinned against her and a daughter who sinned against another person. It was only reasonable, she told herself, to assume that some reconciling system existed. This is not, after all, the first century of man's sojourn on the earth, nor his first attempt at building a civilisation. Somewhere the wisdom of the ages must have evolved a rational and merciful attitude towards human sin.

Mary searched her experience for this attitude but she did not find it. Her acquaintances, on the whole, went no nearer to discussion of the matter than scandal, and Mary was not able, looking back, to find any ethical system beneath their judgments. They forgave the people they pitied and the people they feared—anyone, in fact, whom they wanted to forgive—and they condemned the unfortunates whose affairs were mentioned when they were in a mood for condemnation. The more she thought of them, the more sure Mary felt that she could not have exposed her daughter to their comments. She must find, she decided, some more stable body of opinion, less tainted by laxity and recklessness of thought.

She sought in all seriousness, only to be shocked by the perversity and frivolity of her own mind. She knew very little about the ethics of mankind, and the first really definite system that occurred to her was that of the Mahommedans, who believe—she did not really know much about the Mahommedans—that a man may do as he pleases, but a woman who sins should be shut up in a sack and thrown into the Bosphorus. That came pretty near on the whole, she concluded, thinking it over, to our own English practice, though perhaps, since it was more drastic, it might be more effective in securing womanly virtue, but she did find herself able to accept it on that account. Then there were the Puritans—she could fairly take them as representing the theory of good people to-day. Anyone who disobeys the moral precepts of the English churches should, if not executed at once, be punished and made miserable for the rest of his life. There was something to be said for such a stringency, if only it

could be enforced—Mary wished she knew more of the state of morals under the Ironsides and Oliver Cromwell. If we all really believed that, she wondered, so that all virtuous or cowardly or prudent people acted upon it, would the world be the richer for the triumph of their hatred and contempt? Would the groans of its backsliders be truly edifying? Then she stopped herself. She was being unfair again. The churches were always ready to rejoice over the sinner who repented—was it repentance, then, that she must ask alike of James and Rosemary before she forgave them and hid their wickedness from the eyes of the world?

For a moment she thought that she had found what she was seeking, then her spirits sank. How could anybody possibly tell whether James had repented or not? He would say that he had repented—he would even believe it—but what would he mean more than that he could not bear to see his Mary unhappy and did not intend, if he could help it, to hurt her again? James was not a man who ever repented, he merely put provoking matters out of his mind. And she could not imagine him comforted, either, by the rejoicings of the Churches.

For the first time she felt fully the deficiencies of her early education. She did not even know what her parents had learned from their lives—her mother, of course, had been a really nice woman, but her father must have held views of some sort upon so important a question. She had always thought of him as ennobled and distinguished by the breadth and the abundance of his views.... It was not long before,

from the dim confusion of the past, a memory of her father came back to her. It had been an accepted fact that Mary never understood any sentences that she might overhear as she passed the half-open door of Mr. Trent's study, and since she was a modest and loyal girl she had not understood them, but now she remembered clearly her father's thin, amiable voice explaining to some friend whom she could not see that Christian morals were the invention of astute and envious monks. Monks had no use for a happy and virtuous people: they needed a race of sinners cowed by the fear of hell. Otherwise what place was there for the Church's ministrations?

She did not believe that this could be true, she deplored the accident that had presented her with such an example of her dear father's thoughts, but that a good clever man like him could believe such terrible things seemed to show that the whole question must be in confusion. She did not suppose, in that case, that she was likely to solve it. If everyone were alike, to begin with, and everyone could marry, and marry young, and all marriages turned out happily, then there would be something to go upon. But as it was she did not find in her own thoughts the least germ of a solution.

She did find, however, a growing shame at her own harshness, a realisation of her own ignorance. It was not only Cromwell and the Turks about whom she knew nothing. She knew nothing of modern men, or modern life, she did not know the force or the nature of love, or what place there is left for it in a driven and burdened world. She did not even know

why her own husband had deceived her. And she did not believe that she would ever know. Now that she was released from the strain of her wrath against James, from the rigidity of her injured virtue, she decided, with an immense relief, that she might put the whole matter from her mind. Rosemary and her friends might study things of this sort, might draw their conclusions from evidence that to Mary was unimaginable. Rosemary was a modern woman, fearless of truth. To Mary truth was less than reticence. She could not, she realised, discuss such subjects frankly, even with herself. It was her duty, therefore, since she shrank from the knowledge without which judgment is only prejudice, to admit her own ignorance and be merciful. She saw now that James, even while he deceived her, had not been a monster but a human being, acting as human beings act—because they are kind, because they are afraid, because the small words and deeds of everyday life have made a chain for them. There was no need for her to be angry with James. The existing state of affairs might permit him, though he was her husband, to sin, but it had also enabled James to give his wife twenty-seven years of happiness and freedom from care. In all those years she had not bought her right to be angry with him by a single sacrifice, or a single protest. To keep her happiness intact James had disabled his clerks from marrying and driven his girls on to the streets. She had not even cared to find out that this was so. And when, at last, she had known, she had not acted. She had argued a little with James, and then given way.

When her ignorance had disappeared she had found another method, wifely obedience, of shutting out the thought of suffering. In the beginning, she remembered, she had not wished to follow James's suggestion because she had been afraid that he and Trent might come to think badly of her. They had thought badly—and she had been terrified. The girls might be crippled by standing or die of consumption, but she, whose profits they made, must keep James's good opinion. Let James deceive her, however, let him give another woman a little of the love and the money he had promised her, and virtue gave her strength. She hated him, she was furious with him, though she tried she could not forgive him—it had been simple to forgive him his sins against others!

Her thoughts ran easily down the familiar channels of self-reproach. About James's sin she had not been able to think either justly or coherently—she had struggled in vain against the repulsion she felt for such a subject. But now, when she had only to blame herself, the power of her mind came quickly back to her.

She could not doubt, she decided now, that in the matter of the girls she was more to blame than James. His attitude, that had seemed to her so callous, was due she thought now to a fact beyond his control, the fact of his being a man. For men, after all, are not like women. They have different ideals and different standards of value. They do not think as women do in terms of health and happiness, but in terms of knowledge, of riches, of power. She checked herself and went through that again—she

must build up her argument carefully for she was dealing now with unfamiliar notions. A clever man is more, she told herself, than a person, a husband, a father, the centre of various personal relations. He is the guardian, the vehicle, of an idea. He wants to impose this idea of his on his environment, to work it out, to see it take form; and for a man success in his career, in his chosen enterprise, is justification. If he has no career and no ideas at all he deceives himself, and makes himself hot and happy playing games.

He does not trouble to think—it is not his business to think whether what he is doing serves the race or not. He wants to do something, and do it better than other people, and have his friends congratulate him and his womenfolk make a fuss about it. No-Mary pulled herself up-no, that was unjust, she was letting herself lose touch with her real thought! A man likes success, who doesn't? and he likes a little petting, particularly if one allows him to pretend that he despises it. But in the end it is not petting that sways him. He has a need to impress himself on the world that he finds outside him, an impulse that drives him to achieve his ends recklessly, ruthlessly, through any depth of suffering and conflict. She must be very just, she told herself, she must be serious, and not assume that little air of half-amused toleration with which middle-aged women are apt to dismiss the turbulence of men. She had often assumed it, in order perhaps, she thought now, to save her temper, but this was not an occasion for its use. For it is just by means of the qualities that

are often so irritating, their tiresome restlessness, their curiosity, their disregard for security, for seemliness, even for life itself, that men have mastered the world and filled it with the wealth of civilisation. It is after this foolish, disorganised fashion of theirs, each of them—difficult, touchy creatures—busy with his personal ambitions, that they have armed the race with science, dignified it with art—one can take men lightly, she told herself solemnly, to protect oneself from annoyance, but one cannot take lightly the things that men have done.

Women, however—this was the thought that had stirred her to begin her thinking—women are not divided by all these different aims. Their single end, poor hampered things, is the service and the care of human beings. Amid the magnificent confusion of man's conquests, in a world whose riches and beauties man has turned to plunder, they do what they can to love people, to feed them, to keep them healthy and happy.

It was exactly plunder that she meant—she told herself after a minute's consideration—for what are women, after all, but mere camp-followers, dragged up and down the world, allowed to exist and to carry out their work in the interstices of man's enterprises, even permitted to enrich themselves, if they can, by stealing a little here and there from the vast accumulations of his loot, but without power to influence the campaign, to choose the enemy, to choose the issue, even to decide the order of the day's journey? It is no wonder, poor things, she thought, forgiving them in advance, that with their

children to rear and their men to humour they have not been able to heal the wounds of these preposterous battles, that in a land littered up with bricks, with iron, with food, with stuffs, with books, with pictures, with tools and machinery, with all the wealth that men—brilliant acquisitive creatures—so love to produce, most of the people who live among these riches are denied an access to knowledge and lack the simple necessities of health. It is no wonder, but the point that she wanted—she made very sure of it—is that this business that has not been done, this task of distributing and administering, is not men's but women's work. Men care for things, for their splendid complicated expensive things, women care for the happiness that can be got from them. There are women, of course, who don't, women like magpies, who have absorbed men's ideals without doing the work that makes them honourable—she made the concession hastily, for it suddenly occurred to her that hers would hardly be a man's view of women—but after all one can put such people aside. In her own life Mary had always put them aside, regarding them as the affair of men and not of decent women. They were spoiled, poor things, and doubtless not mainly by their own fault. There are men who prey on the world, one can match the two sets of them against one another. To protect the poor and the helpless is women's work, and if they neglect the task there seems no reason—the London Library had not been reassuring—to suppose that it will ever be properly done.

She turned back to her concrete example. James, for instance, had conceived his business and brought it into being like a man. It was not his fault that he had to build it according to the conditions of modern commerce. It was not his fault that he had not a natural tenderness for the girls' weak lungs, their flat feet, for the varicose veins in their legs. A man like James was impatient of weakness and stupidity, impatient, therefore, of poverty and helplessness. His workers were his material—his instruments—his troops; all men's games have, after all, she supposed, an analogy to their great game of war. Men enjoy a fight, they had rather get things by fighting, and when one fights someone is sure to be hurt. No, these poor girls in the restaurants were not James's charge, but hers, and she had neglected her charge as idle women neglect it everywhere.

Mary reached this point in her thoughts with a certain satisfaction. The matter was now quite settled in her mind. She did not so much believe the conclusions she had come to as feel that this was her way of looking at things. Others might look at them in a different way, but for her, henceforth, that part of government that consists in helping the weak and protecting them from the strong was to seem part of woman's general task of clearing up after men. She understood now why James had not been pleased when she tried to undertake her neglected duty. Man never is pleased by the sight of woman's work. He hates having his study tidied, he hates meeting the housemaid on the stairs, the primitive routine of infant life makes no appeal to him. He does not like

to think that his wife could possibly clean a rabbit. It is not logical of him, but there it is—in future she would not expect from James any glow of enthusiasm over the details of her work, she would be content with his general pat of appreciation when he found it properly done. Many a woman has been content with less.

Nor was she dismayed, as well she might have been, by the inadequacy of which she convicted her sex. We are all inadequate, and what she needed was a reason for being inadequate no longer. She had found it, she was delivered now, once and for all, from her doubt and her cowardice, from her ridiculous dilemma of a virtuous person helpless in an evil world. She had been, in her passive way, as evil as the world. She found the reflection bracing.

It was not until the next afternoon, when she was taking her walk by the river, that she began to wonder why she had been wicked and what were her excuses. It was a sunny day, the people on the Embankment walked cheerfully and the seagulls seemed to be enjoying themselves as they screamed over her head. The cold bright air made her thoughts—she imagined—unnaturally clear. herself, of course, had been trustful and ignorant, so had her mother been, her grandmother, and in her grandmother's generation all really nice women. But women had not always been ignorant—in the days when they gnawed bones and lived in caves they must have possessed at least a rough practical knowledge of everyday life. In the Middle Ages, too—that was the next period of English history that came at all easily to her mind—James, a good burgher, or perhaps a farmer, would have expected her to look after his workers, after the maids, in any case, and the apprentices. She would, she thought a little wistfully, have liked doing that! It would have pleased her to plan and arrange for the big household, and have all these girls and boys growing up round her and all their careers and love affairs to watch over. And she would have liked to be a skilful woman with half a dozen crafts at her finger-ends, a woman with legitimate prides, with a reputation for that,—spinning, weaving, this preserving, baking,—all the things that James and his friends were doing in factories. Even if her children had left her there would have been her trades to carry on. And it would, too, she told herself, have been very much more amusing for the children to grow up in such a community than in an elegant and empty modern home. There were now no interesting domestic crafts to watch, no apprentices to play with, no population of maids or clerks or journeymen to distract the eye of the mistress of the house. Instead, a strip of one side of a straight street, servants one hardly spoke to tucked away in the dark, and dear mother in the drawing-room never too busy to realise that the children were not where they ought to be and were making too much noise. Of course that was an advantage-Mary's loyalty stirred-a busy mother cannot devote herself all day to her children. But memory was too strong for loyalty—a busy mother has at least a certain intelligence at her disposed. Mary's own dear mother had not been intelligent.

She left that part of the subject hastily—she did not wish to think ill of her mother but she certainly had not succeeded with poor Julius. Mary was fond of Julius, but nobody could admire his character.

She turned her thoughts, rather, to the reasons for this change. Men, of course, had wanted to make fortunes out of women's industries, and with their usual success they had invented machines that would do it. And women, protesting probably, and being called fools for their pains, had let them go. The workers had gone into the factories and it was not a time when ladies could follow them there. Ladies, after all, were people of no education, and the idea of their responsibility had not occurred to them. Then, of course, there had been Napoleon. Mary had always disliked Napoleon and she was pleased to attribute this extra blame to him. He was a person, as she saw him, who had butchered the sons of a million mothers without in any way making it up to women as a husband or as the father of wonderful children. This Napoleon had looked upon women in the way a man of his nature would—as trifles and possessions, and the English nation had hastened to copy him. Only being Englishmen they had grown sentimental and called their wives angels and shut them in drawing-rooms. From their point of view, one must admit, it was a pleasant arrangement. A woman with nothing to do all day would naturally be ingratiating and affectionate in the evenings. And there of course had been the Revolution—it was with both delight and surprise that Mary recalled these historical facts. A year ago,

she felt, her thoughts would hardly have moved with such an easy boldness. The French Revolution ideas of equality were in the air—only in this country we do not level down but up. The middle classes must have enjoyed seeing their wives lead the life of a fine lady without, of course—Mary thought of Lady Hester's mamma—a fine lady's idea of herself or her challenging eye. It was all very natural. And then there had been the Queen and her babies and her crinolines—one could not expect women to be energetic with such a weight of cloth dragging at their waists. So they had gone on indulging their husbands and making them badtempered until by and by their children had revolted, and now-she felt a little thrill of excitement-she was revolting too!

Well—she put it to herself—it was perfectly right and proper! They had had a hundred years of drawing-rooms. And in spite of photographs and Nottingham lace and new kinds of light and new-coloured dyes and stuffs the rooms of a hundred years ago were probably prettier. It was no wonder that they were tired of staying in them. She, at any rate, was tired of hers. She was not a fine lady, she did not care for a fine lady's life. She was an ordinary middle-class woman, who preferred doing practical work to being kept in the house to be beautiful and mysterious and tender and all the rest of it to any man with half an hour to spare.

She had reached the Vauxhall Bridge Road now, and she turned back. She was surprised at the resentment that she discovered in herself when she

thought of this aspect of the life she had led. She and her personality had simply been there to soothe them when they preferred her, as a comforter, to their pipes! She knew that she had not seen the matter like this before, and yet this was not, she felt convinced, a new resentment. She must have disliked her position all along, if only she had known it.

Well, there was no need to resent anything now, she was not poor Miss Percival, she had finished with the cause of her anger. In future she would have a life of her own, work of her own, and importance greater than the importance of her smiles or of her sympathy. It would not be, as a matter of fact, a question of smiles! For the first step towards her new activity would be telling James about what she meant to do.

This thought made her walk a little faster, but walking faster did not make the thought more pleasant. She would have to face an appalling scene with James, and probably a great many scenes after that. He would not give up his own way without a struggle. A fortnight ago, when she still hated James, she would not very much have minded his scenes, but now she had forgiven him, she had let herself feel fond of him again, she had deliberately stirred up her gratitude! She almost wished that she could take cover, just for the first impending interview, behind the dislike that had protected her when she ran away. But she could not do that-even on general grounds it is not right to dislike people if in any way one can manage to make oneself like them. And she owed it to James, moreover, to approach

him in the kindest mood compatible with firmness. She had caused him, by her behaviour, quite enough discomfort and chagrin already. For the same reason she must not keep him waiting. She must write to him as soon as she got home and tell him that she meant to come back again.

She walked home without enjoying either the river or the sun.

CHAPTER XVIII

MEANWHILE the unfortunate James was feeling lonely. He was a hasty, not a vindictive, man, and his anger soon ceased to afford him company. He missed his wife and he missed Rosemary; as for Trent, he felt that Trent regarded him with suspicion. The boy's prospects were to some extent in peril through his father's conduct of this wretched affair, and try as he might, James could not think of an attitude that would make Trent's doubts of him seem absurd or wrong. He did not live, during these ten days, in a cheerful household, and he could not seek consolation among his friends for fear they would ask him questions about Mary. He still had hopes for the future—James's future was not in the habit of turning traitor—but the immediate present was certainly depressing.

Amid this gloom he had one pleasure—he could contemplate his future knighthood. There he had Mary, damn her! There she was done! There was nothing she would hate more, he believed, than to be Lady Heyham—your ladyship—the wife of an

undeserving and unromantic knight. Well, if she wanted her feelings considered she should not have run off in the way she did. In this at least she was helpless and at his mercy—his sense of supremacy was soothed.

His anger had also another enemy. He was anxious, against his will, about Mary's safety, and worried about the safety of their secret. Heaven knows whom Mary mightn't have found to be her confidante! She wasn't accustomed to managing for herself; if she hadn't found anyone she might well be in difficulties and too proud to admit it. It was her own fault, of course—if she was unhappy she deserved it—but his generosity could not remain unstirred by the thought of Mary struggling alone with the problems of a callous world. Her head was not made, he felt, for the task of thinking things out, a task which even he himself had refused as too hard for him. At the same time it was becoming daily more necessary that she should finish her thinking and come home. The friends with whom he had discussed his scheme would be wondering why he did not get on with it. If he had had no means of finding Mary, he might, in despair, have taken to hating her, but in a few days more he hoped to be able to discover where she was. He had found her pass-book and he meant, when sufficient time had elapsed, to send it in. She was accustomed to making payments by cheque, and sooner or later she was likely to draw a cheque to the manager of her hotel. And if he could not track her by her cheques he thought that he might track her through her bills. She

paid them in the middle of every month, and in another week the accustomed date would have come. It was unlikely that she would change such a habit as this merely because she happened not to be at home. He would go presently to one of the shops where both he and she were well known, and ask if Mrs. Heyham's bill was paid. If not, he would pay it and tell them to return her remittance, if it came, to her town address. If the bill was paid, he would ask on what date she had paid and from what address the money had been sent. He could explain that some of her letters seemed to have been stolen on their way to the post. It might not work, but he was inclined to think that it would. The bills were coming in, and he forwarded them carefully to show that he expected her to deal with them herself. This being so he hoped in a few days to be in a position to open negotiations, and as the need for her return became more urgent his idea of the tone that he should take was modified. He did not believe that he was any less angry with her than he had been at first, but from a tactical point of view it would be no use, he told himself, to say many things which he had morally a perfect right to say. He must go softly and, injured and indignant though he was, he must endeavour to move her by arguments rather than threats. He had not the least intention of sacrificing his rights or his dignity, but although he did not admit it to himself he was tired of his rage and the thought of compromise relieved his nerves. He told himself that she had, after all, one valid score against him, and it might be as well, on the whole, to cancel their personal injuries.

It was in this frame of mind that he came home, on the tenth day after Mary's flight, to find her letter waiting in the hall. He had meant, if a letter came, to recognise her writing with complete indifference. That little offering at least he would make to his dignity. He was annoyed with himself, therefore, when his body seemed to grow tense, to prepare itself, at the sight of the small white envelope. He picked it up with a frown and carried it into the library. Clearly he was an old fool!

He tore the envelope at once, with the gesture, he tried to persuade himself, that he would have used for the opening of any ordinary business letter. It bore the date of that morning, and was headed by her address.

"DEAREST JAMES:

"To-morrow, unless you've some reason for preferring me to wait a few days, I am coming home. I only hid myself here in order to think in quiet, and I believe I have decided the questions I wanted to consider. In the first place, James, about our personal relations, I feel that I was wrong. I did not want to hurt you, or to revenge myself, but as a matter of fact I was hard and uncharitable. I was ungrateful too, I forgot all I owed you and only remembered the wrong you had done me. I was miserable, and I forgot that I loved you—I did not realise that even my suffering was only the other side of love. Now I want you to forgive me and to let me forgive you, and to agree with me to bury the whole thing. I have thought it all over,—why you did it and what my share and blame in the matter was, and I see that I

was angrier than I had any right to be. But please, James, if you don't mind, I had rather not discuss it with you. I had rather that we neither of us mentioned it again."

So far so good—James looked up from the letter. He was pleased that Mary had forgiven him, and he had not the least desire to discuss the matter. His dominant feeling was one of great relief. Only that morning he had been saying to himself that he couldn't be expected to stand this sort of thing indefinitely. If Mary chose to go off and neglect her duties she couldn't complain of what he might do in her absence. She need not think that whatever sort of fool she might make of him he would go on taking it lying down. Now he was glad that his protest had gone no further. She was coming home, and the sentimental values of his position were unimpaired. He could greet her and feel fond of her, if he chose, without reservations. As for forgetting the past—it was clearly the best thing, on the whole, that he could do. She had had no business to go, but no particular harm had come of it. And, after all, she had been an injured wife and a fuss was within her rights. He had got off with only ten days of it and with a minimum of scenes. On the whole he was decidedly pleased to cry quits.

The rest of the letter was more serious.

"As to the business, I am afraid that I have made up my mind not to consent to the sale. I have thought it over very carefully, and if I haven't asked anyone for advice it is because I felt sure you would rather I decided entirely by myself."—James grunted.—"It

isn't that I doubt the soundness of your schemes from the point of view of making money, but I cannot consent to anything that will make it more difficult to obtain proper conditions for our employees. It is hard enough, as you explained to me yourself, to do anything for them when no one would suffer for it but ourselves, but it seems to me that if there were outside shareholders to consider, it would become impossible."

James looked up again. He was making a hasty search for an argument that would prove that employees in public companies are necessarily better off than those who are employed by an individual master. He did not find the argument he desired, and he returned to the letter.

"I don't want you to think that I am blaming you, James, or that I think you are a bad employer. I know our girls are better treated than plenty of others. All the same, the work is too hard for them, and they are not paid enough. But the person I blame for it is myself. I have been taking half the profits and doing absolutely nothing for them. You have done your work of building the business, and done it splendidly, but I have neglected mine. If I had taken an interest in the girls from the beginning, as I should have done, it would not be necessary to make an upheaval now. But late as it is I feel that I must make it. Now that I know what their lives are like, I cannot live happily without trying to alter them, and that can only be done by altering the conditions of their work. I haven't decided this because I am obstinate or because I want to get my own way.

Believe me, I would far rather come back to you without a shadow of difficulty between us. But it would not be right.

Mary."

James put the letter down. It was final. She had done her worst. For a moment he was filled with pity for himself. His scheme was ruined! The wonderful scheme of which he had been so proud! Those columned cinematograph palaces of his dream would never be built—they were doomed by a woman's caprice. The builders and painters they might have employed would go empty away. The public that might have enjoyed his first-rate films would continue to enjoy the films of other people. The money that might have made him a rich man would continue to flow into other people's pockets. And all because Mary— He pulled himself up. He must think, and think quickly, not of his grievances but of what he had better do. There must be some way among all the devious ways of commerce of getting round a mere woman's decision. He could, of course, leave Mary out of it and carry out his projects by himself. He could sell his share of the business to the Afternoon Tea Company, or he could persuade Mary to buy him out. Then she could wreck the Imperial with her damned philanthropy if she wanted towithout him to manage for her she would wreck it fast enough, whether she tried philanthropy or not.

For a moment or two he turned over these possibilities. They would dish Mary all right, as far as her schemes of coercing him went, but that, as he considered them, seemed their only attraction. For one thing everyone would want to know why he had given up the Imperial and Mary would no doubt supply an explanation. That wasn't good enough for a man well known to have a liberal mind. In the next place he could not afford to smash the Imperial, as Mary would certainly smash it. She would never allow herself to be guided by Trent. The Imperial was his life's work, it stood for his life's credit besides it was one thing to invest in this new venture with another business safe and sound at his back; it was a different thing to go into it, at his age, when he might come out a beggar. No, Mary had got him cornered. His only hope, it seemed, was to appear to consent to her plans and then to wear her down. Plans of hers were certain at some point to be impracticable.

He was cornered, but he could not believe it. As he paced the floor his brain worked feverishly—as actively, with as great a strength and sureness, he felt, as it had ever worked in the great days of the Imperial's expansion. It was impossible that he, with his brilliance, his reputation, his knowledge of business, could be brought to a stop by a scruple of his wife's. He went back to the thought of deserting the Imperial—he was proud of the Imperial, but he was also wearied of managing it. It had been all right

while new openings were presenting themselves every day, but now the thing had established itself in a routine. For twenty Marys he wasn't going to spend the rest of his working life like an old horse at a wheel....

What he wanted, he told himself, was an idea—one of his famous ideas. He had always before, in moments of crises, been able to depend on his wits—why should he fail himself now! He must have an idea, if only to present it to Trent when Trent came home....

The idea, when it came, was so little the idea for which he had been hoping that he did not welcome it as it deserved. But in ten minutes he had almost accepted it. It was new, it was interesting, it was exciting. Mary, it seemed, was set upon making him one of your model employers. Very well then, let them be the most model employers in England, the most blatantly, spotlessly, ostentatiously model, and then he would go into Parliament as the nation's hope. That could be his reason for dropping his other scheme. He had been persuaded at last, he could say, that it was his duty to stand. And in a way, after all, why shouldn't it be his duty?

"For of all the political problems that vex our age, what is more pressing and more difficult than the urgent problem of labour? It cannot be postponed, gentlemen, it cannot be ignored! The recent strikes have brought it home to the heart of every honest Englishman. And how is it to be solved, apart from violence and class hatred and mob law—which as my hearers know are not a solution—

except by a new spirit on the part of both employers and employed? A less grudging spirit—a less material spirit! And moreover, like all movements that are worth anything, this change must spring not from the ignorant masses but from the enlightened few. We, if only to shame them by our example, must take the first step—" He was already deep in his speech when Trent came in.

James turned to his son with a benign and serious air. "I've had a letter from your mother, Trent," he said, "and she says that she is coming back to-morrow!"

Trent halted for a moment midway between the fireplace and the door. Then, continuing his way, he answered soberly, "I'm very glad to hear it. Does she say what she has decided about the reconstruction?"

"I am sorry to say, my dear boy, that she refuses."

For a moment neither of them spoke, then James went on— "She wishes certain reforms to be carried out which would hardly be agreed to by the shareholders of a public company."

Trent nodded. "Rosemary's Socialism!"

But James did not agree. "Well, of course," he said, "it's very easy to call a thing socialism merely because it's inconvenient, but after all a great deal depends upon the way in which it is done. At bottom, Trent, I'm not really convinced that some of your mother's notions aren't just! One's ideas get fixed, you know, one's too apt to look at things from one's own point of view!"

Trent stared at him. "Do you intend to put these notions into practice then? And what about the new scheme?"

James's mild air rebuked his son's impatience. "The new scheme, I'm afraid, must be abandoned for the time. And as for these reforms, I don't tie myself down to any particular plan, but I intend to devote a certain amount of attention to the health and the conditions of our employees. After all"—his voice became brisk—"there are more ways of attaining an influential position than money alone. And I take it that what you really need, my dear fellow, in your own affairs, is not so much more money as a more important name. I say 'you need' because I feel that as the responsibility for this situation rests to a certain extent with me, it is particularly my duty to see that you do not suffer by it."

Trent moved uneasily. He always disliked his father's serene assumption that he could not manage his own affairs for himself. He would have shown his dislike more definitely if he had not known that as a matter of fact the assumption was more or less true. Lady Hester's mamma had recently forbidden her to write to him.

"Well," James went on, "I've been thinking it over, and I've almost determined to go into Parliament. First we'll reorganise the business—put it on to a more philanthropic basis. Then I'll attend to that knighthood, and at the same time start work on a constituency. After all I'm not a bad speaker, when it comes to speaking, and I really feel that we business men don't pay sufficient attention to politics. One

owes, after all, a sort of duty to the nation. When I have put our relations with our employees on to a thoroughly sound footing, it seems to me that my presence in Parliament might have a real, though of course, only a small, value—-"

So that was it! Trent permitted himself a moment of irony. "It's very good of you, sir, to adopt such a strenuous career on my account, though I've not the least doubt that you'll make a success of it. But as far as I'm concerned, of course, the effect depends upon what side you are on. The Iredales are naturally Conservatives."

James was taken aback. "Well, well," he said, "it's a great pity that our leisured classes are so bigoted. They'd have far more real power, believe me, if they looked beyond their immediate prejudices! Look at this land legislation! Should we ever have had it if more of our landowners were Liberals? Still, of course, that doesn't help you, my boy." He thought for a moment, and then his face brightened. "After all," he said, "I'm not going into this as a party man. It's a definite mission something, in its way, above party. There might even be advantages in starting the thing from the least likely quarter—I don't want at all to create the impression that I'm attacking the established order. My ideas are definitely constructive. Now that you put it to me I'm not at all sure that it wouldn't create less ill-feeling—though of course there's their damnfool protection— And the knighthood—no, I'm afraid it wouldn't do!" he sighed.

At that moment the clock struck half-past six. A new idea occurred to James. "Look here," he said, "I'd brought home these papers from Carter's to look over—but I've thought of something that I want to do. I'd be very grateful if you'd go through them for me—if there's anything I really ought to see I'll tackle it after dinner."

It was one of Trent's good points that he did not object to work, he believed in efficiency and perseverance as James believed in energy and enterprise. He nodded. "Certainly, I'll go through them as soon as I've changed—" He went over to his father's desk.

James left the room without saying anything more. In the hall he met one of the servants, and with her he left a message that Mrs. Heyham might possibly be in to dinner. Then he went out and took the first taxi he met. If there was to be reconciliation, he considered, it was foolish to put it off until the morrow. If he was going to see Mary again he might just as well see her gladly and at once. He was feeling glad and perfectly forgiving. His new excitement left no room in his mind for anger or bitterness. The idea of Parliament delighted him. Thirty years of business is enough for one lifetime, and Trent could manage well enough with an occasional prod from his father. James was not a very ambitious man. He did not imagine himself Prime Minister. But he liked to think of his maiden speech—the House would surely listen attention to one who came not as a professional politician, but as the very voice, so to speak, of England's backbone—a solid successful self-made business man, and one, moreover, who was unassuming and not without a certain personal charm. He would be popular in the House, he felt it. It did not occur to him that his ideas of labour conditions might be a little old-fashioned.

It was not until the taxi drew up that he turned his mind seriously to his interview with Mary. He did not look forward to it with any anxiety. It would be all right, he told himself as the lift mounted, particularly as she didn't want to discuss things. She had been ill when he saw her before, but now she was well— The dear little thing, in a few minutes more it would be all right again!

Guinivere showed him into the sitting-room. Mary was lying on the sofa, and as the door opened she turned towards it. Her face, when first she caught sight of him, expressed nothing but surprise. She half rose—then he saw the look of surprise change to trouble, almost to fear. Poor little thing—poor little darling—she was afraid of him! He crossed the room and took her into his arms. "Ridiculous little mother," he said, "why did you look at me like that? I've not come to tell you anything more dreadful than that I love you!"

Mary clung to him. "Oh, James," she said, "haven't you?" and for a moment she was satisfied with his kiss. Then her doubts returned, she drew herself a little away. "But did you read my letter?" she asked. "The part at the end, about the business?"

James kissed her again. "Oh, yes, I read it," he told her, "and this tyrant of a mother of ours is going

to have it all her own way. The girls shall have a nurse apiece and a lap-dog as well, if the money will run to it, and you'll dress in black serge and I'll wear a celluloid collar. Seriously, we can't sell the business if you object to it, and I feel that I've no right to coerce your conscience in the matter of wages. I won't pretend that I'm not disappointed at having to give up my scheme, but to make up for it and keep myself amused I'm going to become an orator and stand for Parliament. How will you like that?"

Mary smiled up at him. "I'm sure you'll be splendid," she said, "you speak so well—but, James—just tell me first—aren't you angry with me at all?"

He interrupted her. "I have been angry with you—I'm a bad-tempered creature, and I must admit that I was awfully angry. But now that's to be all over, isn't it? We've come back to one another, just as if I'd been away on business." His arms tightened round her. "Look up at me, Mary—I love you, my dear, more than I love anything in the world!"

When he had finished kissing her he told her to put on her hat. "I've come to take you back to dinner," he informed her, "and we've only just time. Trent and I have had dinner alone quite long enough. The young woman who let me in can pack your things and I'll call for them to-morrow. I'd like to see this place in daylight—do you know, I'm not sure this scheme of colour wouldn't be worth trying in some of our new shops. It's quite original—I'll tell

young Price to come along and have a look at it. Are all the other rooms as weird as this?"

Mary went into her room to put on her things, but her fingers trembled so that their pins and their buttons were almost too much for her. After all that had happened James still loved her, and she loved him again. The resentment that had lain so heavy on her, the doubt that had stifled her, were gone. He loved her, and she could respond with joy to his kiss. She looked at herself in the glass and smiled happily. The soft appeal of her youth was gone; no other man would ever care for her now, but James cared.

She heard the door open and turned towards it. Again it was James. His eyes were bright and he was holding out his hands. "My dear," he said, "I'm impatient, I can't lose sight of you!"

In another moment he was bending over her, kissing her soft hair. "James!" she said, but she did not go on; instead she found herself crying on his shoulder.

James held her more closely. "Cry away, little thing!" he told her, "I really believe that you are fond of me!"

She raised her face for a kiss. She was fond of him, but she knew that it was not that that had made her cry. Her tears were for her vanished youth and its young, foolish love.

In the taxi on the way back James held her hand and told her how much he had missed her, and how all his schemes had lost their savour without his old darling there to encourage him. She must promise to encourage him in every possible way when he made his appeal to the terrible elector. She must sit on his platform at meetings and smile at his workers in her own irresistible way and be in the Ladies' Gallery when he made his speeches. It was part of James's charm that he never said pretty things without meaning them, and Mary listened to him in a state of glad confusion. Underneath her content, she knew, there was something else, some question unsatisfied, but this was not the time for attending to it. This was simply the time for being happy—she had earned her right to be as happy as she could. She lay against James's shoulder and sighed with happiness. "We're home now," he said, as the taxi turned into the square, "and do you know, from the moment you cross the doorstep all this great adventure of yours will sink away like a dream!" She did not agree with him, but she forebore to shake her head. The taxi stopped—there were the familiar steps, in a moment she would see the servant's familiar face. The entrance hall was more like a dream, she thought, in its tall ugliness, than the queer red and orange room that they had left to the windy night. But she was glad to see her house again, her ordinary house.

On the table in the hall lay a letter from Rosemary. "There's no time to dress," James called after her as she carried it up the stairs. "Dinner's ready and I've some work to do afterwards." She made him some answer, and escaped to her room.

The letter was short.
"MY DARLING MOTHER,

"I just wanted to tell you how extraordinarily happy we are. It's ridiculous that everybody can't always be as happy as this.

ROSEMARY."

Here was a rosy world! Here, if she wanted it, she could seek her youth! Then she sighed. Would Rosemary, she wondered, wake at last from her dreams as she had done, or were things different now, did one never, now, forget the world in love? She must not dawdle, she reminded herself. James was waiting! Mary washed her hands and went downstairs.

In the dining-room Trent kissed her protectively. He too had missed her although he seldom saw very much of her, but he thought it more tactful not to tell her so. He watched her plate, however, during dinner, and advised her on one occasion to alter her choice as the savoury was particularly good. James, who liked to sit next her when they were alone instead of at the end of the table, watched the uncertain glance of her eyes, her quick smile, and the slight unsteadiness of her hands.

"It was rather sudden," he thought; "she's worked up—the poor little darling." He laughed and made jokes and told them election stories.

"Trent wants to make a Tory of me," he told her. "What do you think of that?"

Mary was surprised—her wits were not ready. "But I thought Trent was a Liberal!" she said.

James leaned back in his chair and twisted the stem of his glass. "There you are, Trent—what do you say to that?" He looked pleased.

Trent let his eyelids droop. "It seems to me," he said, "that our party names have lost a great deal of their old reality. But in some respects I am certainly prepared to support the present Government." In some respects he would have been, as a matter of fact, prepared to support almost any Government. It was his instinct to be on the governing side.

Mary looked at James. He thought he could see that she was a little tired. "Well, well," he said, "we won't distress your mother with talk about politics now. There's no need to decide at present; we must see to the business first."

He turned to Mary for the grateful smile which she immediately gave him.

After dinner she went upstairs to the drawing-room as usual and walked to her customary chair. James had a little work to do, but he had said that he would come in and see her when it was over. She had hardly sat down, however, and taken up the knitting that was waiting in the work-box where she had left it, when the door opened and James appeared at it. "You're sure you're quite all right?" he said and smiled. "I thought I'd just have a look at you—to feel sure I've got you safe, little thing!"

She managed to answer him. "Quite safe, my darling!" Then the door shut, and she could hear him whistling cheerfully as he went downstairs.

He had got her back and now he was content. For a moment she listened to his footsteps, then she rose to her feet in a vain protest against the tears that were running down her face. She had everything she could want, she told herself, and yet for a second time, absurdly, she wept.

What she hoped, after all, she admitted presently, was impossible. She had hoped for her old blind worship back again in answer to James's love. She could not have it back, it was gone, and she was afraid. She had covered herself from the world with James's strength, with his assurance and his love for her. His kindness had been her shelter from suffering, from truth, from life. Now these gifts of his protected her no longer; she stood alone.

She walked over to the window and pulled the curtains aside. The street before her was empty under its shining lamps, but across the square, through the bare tossing boughs of the trees, people moved down the pavement, talking and shuffling their feet. Two taxis ran quickly past them, blotting them out, but when the noise had stopped Mary knew that they were poor people, men and women. As she listened to them her mood changed. After all, she was not alone. Close to her were millions of her fellow-men, huddled together in narrow streets because they too were afraid of being alone, afraid of silence, of the cold empty night. And they had brought with them the fruit of their knowledge and of their labour—they had brought their suffering, their ignorance and helplessness.

She leaned forward a little, resting her arms against the glass. There about her lay the great violent city, and beyond it, beyond the downs and

the dark sea, down the curve of the world its other cities rang with the pain, the defiance, the glory of man. Now she too was to share man's task and his inheritance. She had left her ordered house for the clamour and promise of life....

Behind her the lights burned steadily in the big gay room. Outside a man laughed and the wind lifted the branches in the square.