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GARDEN
OATS

ALICE HERBERT

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ALICE HERBERT

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THE MEASURE OF OUR YOUTH
BETWEEN THE LIGHTS—POEMS

.. THE BODLEY HEAD ..

GARDEN OATS

:: By ALICE HERBERT ::

LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
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**TO
"ELISABETH" LAMBERT-BROWNE
BECAUSE OF LOVING-KINDNESS**

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BOOK I
CHILDHOOD

GARDEN OATS

CHAPTER I

I SUPPOSE the earliest memories of nine out of ten children include their mothers. My earliest memories do not. My mother took a step that did more for her in her children's eyes than a lifetime of care. She died young; and light perpetual shines upon her in our hearts. She was very loving, but we could not make her happy, for she loved my father, and he was happy without her. I never "knew" her, which is to say that I cannot remember her. That she knew me more than well her letters show — the infinitely pathetic letters of the one being on earth who can recognise a fellow-being, and not a charming or a troublesome toy, in a babe not twelve months old.

My mother's union with my father was one of the inexplicable earthly blunders which seem to subserve unearthly ends. No doubt, to make a saint of a pretty girl you must take a little sadness. My mother was a saint to start with: but hers was the fugitive and cloistered virtue of the sheltered mid-Victorian daughter of a leading family in India, where, if anything, chaperonage was a more rigid institution, for young unmarried girls, than even here at home. Her father held a high

position under Government, and his daughters saw the outside world in terms of gun-salutes and "flattering receptions," "distinguished visitors," and the like. The local world was either swarthy, subservient and negligible; or it was soldierly, smart-looking and a little vapid and monotonous. A highly evangelical aunt in London had brought up my mother till she went back to her birthplace and "came out." She took back with her a horror of the rather mild gaieties of Calcutta that made even her daily drive down to "the Band" a martyrdom of conscience. Curiously enough, the attentions of the gilded youth who flocked around her mother's carriage did not seem to her of one piece with the other fleshly snares. On the contrary, more than one demure *affaire* was credited to her with reason. One Lacy, a quite frivolous subaltern of means, nearly got so far as an engagement, while my father had his easy victory with her from the first.

There was probably no conscious hypocrisy in the thing at all. The fact remains that it was through her religious sense that my mother was wooed. I have a letter here before me as I write. It is written in a hand that ought to put to shame the modern girl's appalling and selfishly illegible scrawl. It covers five sheets of thin paper, and it is unmodern in its suggestion of leisure, and the importance of "a letter," and curiously modern in its touch of self-analysis and introspective self-reproach. My father, it appears, had let his little lady-love talk to him about the things that mattered most to her. He appears to have been deeply (and, no doubt,

genuinely) moved. Here are a few words from the letter:

"Oh, Aunty darling, I tell *you*, though to others it would seem vain to speak of it, but *you* will understand. Once he had been talking to me at the Band, and so many others were there that we might say anything without being overheard. He listened for so long a time, in such deep silence, that I *felt* I was influencing him, and prayed the whole time for words to be sent me (for oh! it was not in *me* to speak of God with any effect without His help) and after a little he bent his head very low, so low that I thought he could not hear me, for I was in our carriage, and he standing outside. But when I stopped he bade me go on, saying he had not lost a word, and then, Aunty, I saw one tear after another drop on his glove, very slowly, as if one were shed for each thought that crossed his mind. When I ended with the question 'Will you not pray *to-night?* Don't postpone it, go at once. To-morrow you may not feel inclined,' he looked up and then I saw his cheeks quite wet; and he said good-night directly, and while he was shaking hands he looked down and said 'Yes, I *will* pray, I feel I can now' — and then he rode away home. Oh, Aunty darling, though I had been speaking earnestly for God, yet that conversation left nothing behind in my mind but those tears, and that look, and that momentary holding of my hand. I felt I loved him then, and I thought he loved me. And was this the earnest striving to win souls to Christ that ought to fill the heart of a child of God! Oh, Aunty, Aunty, now

have I been unfaithful with the Lord's word! How, instead of leading others to Him, have I drawn them to myself! And yet I did not do it intentionally, and I was glad again for God's sake when he told me some time afterwards that he had gone home and prayed in reality for the first time in his life. You may imagine, darling Aunty, how much such earnest conversation bound us together."

Alas! the earnest conversation bound them permanently together, and then ceased with some abruptness. My father probably did not indulge before his wife in the particular style of wit which later he excelled in, at the expense of most of the Mysteries: but those tears soon ceased to "fall, one by one upon his glove." It was his earnest, bewildered and disappointed little helpmeet who took her turn to shed them. Perhaps her happiest time was also her most harassed: when she was in poverty and a welter of prayer-meetings at Clifton, among the Plymouth Brethren, her shabby child beside her, and supplies from India unaccountably delayed. The first years of married life on a small income must have been a trying novelty to the luxuriously brought-up girl. The first baby, the deep disappointment of the spirit, and finally, too long a dose of a dripping station during "the rains" were all too much for her. She came "home" with her heart affected by rheumatic fever and half broken with disappointment. The Brethren received her as if she had been of their nearest kin, fed and clothed her child and gave her a home until the tardy money came at last. "Aunty" opened her arms to her; and,

altogether, those years, however full of hardship and wounds to a pride that would never let her appeal to her parents in Calcutta, must have been more congenial to her than any of the seasons whose gaiety weighed down her conscience in her girlhood. My father joined her in England eventually; but her weird-looking circle, with its strange shibboleths, aroused in him such levity that the grateful woman could not bear it. She even, to avoid it, agreed to be taken off by her momentarily attentive husband to the South of France: and there on the Pyrenees, in a village of which, among my acquaintance, no one appears to have even heard, I "saw the light."

I saw too much light at the very outset; for an intelligent nurse took me out in the full glare of sunshine with nothing to cover my baldness. An immediate and violent sunstroke attacked me. It is the custom for my family and friends to be very clever and funny about this sunstroke. "That accounts," and so on; and it is mine to give the wan smile of suppressed irritation and murmur "*You are unkind!*" or some kindred inanity. The fact remains that I believe that sunstroke to have had some undoubted lasting effect. I fancy that few people are further from what is called insanity than I have always been; but a certain ardour of both flesh and spirit that has persisted with me may somehow be the result of that far-off sunshine on the slope of the hill where the tasselled mules came jingling over the ridge from Spain. I have a mental image of that place that makes me dread to visit it. It is as beautiful to me as a fairy landscape mirrored in a stream. I see the moun-

tains, steeper than any on a human map, the mules against the deep blue of the sky-line, the little gabled inn. I hear strange cries . . . To go there and to find a Railway Hotel would be an absurd but real grief and loss to me.

My birth was the last untowardness my mother was called upon to endure. From that day the mischief round her heart increased with steadiness, until, when I was one year old, she died in the arms of the devoted pious aunt — her greatest comfort, I believe, upon this earth. Her children were adored by her; but her anxiety for their souls by far outweighed her natural joy in them. In fact, the natural joys were in themselves a thing of evil to my mother and her school. Born, it would have seemed, for a life of love and sunshine, her creed could see no beauty there. The beauty that she saw elsewhere probably atoned for more than all. One thing has often stirred me to a tender sort of laughter. There was nothing, except perhaps cruelty, that my mother loathed and feared more than “papistry” in all its branches. Yet the spirit of the Blessed Curé d’Ars, with his refusal to smell a rose lest earthly pleasure should corrupt the singleness of his devotion, must have kissed my mother’s spirit, had they met. No nun had a clearer vocation — had she only known it. There is little doubt that matrimony, with its bewildering mixture of self-indulgence and self-denial, both equally “dutiful,” and motherhood, with its inevitable vicarious ambitions and conflicting worldliness and other worldliness, were a bewildering experience to a girl who burned “to

love One only and to cleave to Him" (if I may twist the divinely human into the overtly divine to suit a literary end). It would have been instructive to watch what would have happened, had she lived, when my sister and I were grown up. As things were, I imagine my sister to have been already more or less sacrificed,—“consecrated” would have been my mother’s word. “I am determined,” she wrote once to the sympathising “Aunty,” “that my child and I shall show the world by our dress that we are *what* we are—pilgrims and strangers here, with no abiding city.” What my sister’s pilgrim garb consisted in I cannot accurately say, but one photo represents her with her soft hair dragged back from her forehead in a stumpy pigtail, and a long frock hiding her pretty eight-year-old legs. The frock gave a vague impression of being rusty black . . . The effect upon our minds, too, and our fortunes—they are hard to gauge. We grew up in her light and in her shadow for some years to come, for friends of hers, who thought like her, assumed the care of us. But after that I hope her spirit could not see: unless it saw the end and understood.

After her death there came a time of wandering for me before I joined my sister at the house in Clifton of the dear old maids to whom we were a legacy of limited profit (my father paid a pound a week for each of us) and unlimited love and severity. I cannot remember much about the wanderings. Now one aunt, now another, plied me with bread and milk and “did” my hair in curls; for the rest of my mother’s family was

sadly worldly, as my photos while they harboured me will show. Lace socks, and velvet frocks, bare knees and careless curls—the mark of the beast is over all those tell-tale early photos. I have often thought that, in these days of plays without words, a book without words might well be written. There might be a silent gallery, convincing as no description is convincing, and consisting of the photos of a human being from the cradle to the grave. How the social stratum, the income, the sumptuary laws of the household, would be evident, in early days! And later how the individual emerges! The pose, what worlds it tells! The dress chosen for perpetuation: the lines of the face: its expression, and the lack or presence of self-consciousness: and then the modifications of the years: the gradual predominance of one characteristic over another. . . . It is a fascinating subject.

The halcyon days of worldliness, probably little appreciated, passed quickly over my infantile head. At four years old—my first clear memory—I found myself, curiously enough, in my father's charge, and in that of a meek and sandy-haired governess supplanted by a delightful soldier-servant whom I doubtless bullied. Poor thin Miss Wilmot! The memory of her is one of those that very faintly hurt me across the years. I was the quite unconscious means of doing her a wrong that may have been a very serious and lasting one. The servant was called Johnson, and I used to tell a tale—pure fabrication—of Miss Wilmot and the whisky, which my father kept in what was called “the cheffonier.” “John-

son, Johnson, where's the whisky?" the poor anaemic, all-too-temperate soul was reported by me as saying daily: whereupon Johnson would (still in my shameless tale) bring forth the whisky from the cheffonier and Miss Wilmot would tilt it to her pale and virgin lips — and drink. Not until years had passed did I even know that it was purely on account of this utter fabrication that the poor lady (probably under thirty, though I thought of her as aged) left in haste and in tears, and kissed me but coldly at parting.

She had probably had the same beatific vision with regard to my father that inspired most single women of her class who came in contact with him. The attraction that a father exercises is probably always a mysterious thing to his daughter. As soon as I grew old enough to notice it, my father's charm was marvellous to me. The facile gallantry of his manner seemed so very facile, the insincerity so obvious. Also, he was dapper rather than impressive, and (I remember) actually took as a huge compliment the suggestion that he wore a corset, a waist like any girl's being his most cherished asset. Still, his voice was a sweet baritone, both in speaking and in song: and his vast impressionability to women probably drew out its own response.

After Miss Wilmot's tragic routing comes the one filial experience of my life that is normally pleasant to look back upon and touched with gratitude and affection. My father taught me himself. His military duties were nominal, consisting, so far as I could understand, in visiting a fort on Cork Harbour daily and receiving and

signing a report on the state of the garrison there. Nowadays, the question "Is all well?" upon the telephone would represent his daily work. I may have got this wrong, but it is what I gathered at the time and what he never contradicted later. There were a good many hours to play about in, and my father played about in them and gained great popularity in certain charming houses where his gallant and governess-subduing manner was exchanged for a quieter and more deferential tone: and in his leisure time he taught me reading: and he was the finest teacher I have ever met: he made the thing a treat and a delight: he suggested that there was no such fun in the world as learning reading. The idea of "reading without tears" would have amazed me. Why collocate such wide-apart ideas? Who could cry over such a game?

It was a story, I remember, full of spice and naughty children, illustrated as you went along. First came A, a very solemn fellow, with a pointed hat and a black belt. He had something very humorous to do with Mrs. B, a lady who was so fat that she stuck out above the waist and under it. C was a wicked child who stooped her back and never tried to hold herself well—so unlike the present writer, who was a *soldier's* little girl. How well I remember the slight emphasis just here, and the immediate and rather conceited drawing upright of the pupil's little back and flattening of her shoulders! To this day, when I feel myself stooping, I can hear the rich and laughing voice: "A *soldier's* little girl"—poor "soldier"!

I gratefully attribute my permanent physical joy in the physical acts of reading and writing to the delightful way in which they were introduced to me. Arithmetic—the third rudimentary “r”—was spoilt for me by the senseless manner of its teaching which came later. Under a clever, sympathetic woman, when I was fourteen, it suddenly became a thing of shapely beauty and a trial of wits. Above all it became the symbol of the things enumerated. Up to that time the figures in themselves appeared to me as torturing objects, unnecessary and unmeaning, invented to waste the time of people who wanted to be learning ringing verse by heart, or reading almost anything but geography, which again meant nothing earthly to me, being presented not as the romantic story of the covering-over of our mysterious globe but as a sort of second arithmetic, much the same as the first. “The population of the world is one thousand millions,” or some absurdity to that effect, I used to murmur painfully, wondering even then if a baby were not possibly being born at the moment who would indubitably bring it up to one thousand millions and one, unless some senile body consented to breathe his last breath in absolute simultaneity with the baby’s first.

My Irish days did not last very long. I have very few remembrances of them, though one or two stand out—the lessons, first of all, and then my portrait, painted by a pretty Lady Hilda something. I am supposed to have grown angry with her and to have wrenched an earring from her ear, splitting the delicate lobe—an ugly anecdote, which I disbelieved with

dark resentment for some years. Then came a little symbolical experience of the kind that a child remembers long.

A small girl, Meg, whose hat was tied with tartan ribbons underneath her chin, was often in the places where I played, and used to talk to me. We fell to boasting, I remember, of our courage, and of what we both could bear, and "never cry a bit"! A tallish boy once joined us at our boasting. He had a cane and flicked it as we talked. At last our arrogance got on his nerves.

"You'd soon cry out if I hit hard with this!" he said; and gave a nasty little cut at the air with his whistling cane.

"I shouldn't!" I said stoutly.

"Hold out your hand, then," said the horrid boy, "no, not that way — the knuckle-side. Anyone could bear the other way."

My pride swelled high in me. I held the "knuckle-side" out bravely and the boy began. At first, to do him justice, he struck lightly: but the fierce contempt, mixed with relief, in my expression taunted him to bully me. He increased the sharpness of the strokes, saying each time — "Does *that* hurt? *That* hurt? *That*?"

"Not a scrap," I answered, with a trembling lip, and kept it up, and my miserable, red, small hand extended. Without my knowledge, tears were stealing down my cheeks.

"You're crying, anyhow — ho, ho!" the monster suddenly shouted: and treacherous Meg, who had been

watching with fascinated sympathy, fearing for her own little knuckles, joined in with shrill derision.

"Ho, ho! You're crying, anyhow!"

The *débâcle* was the unkindest cut of all. For nothing had I borne the cane and kept my hand heroically steady. For nothing had I lied (this aspect did not trouble me on moral grounds). The wretched, quite involuntary tears undid it all. I was indubitably "crying."

Small boy, who seemed so tall and terrible, if you should ever read these words in your secure middle-age at Muswell Hill (for I cannot believe you born to chivalrous traditions) learn that you quite seriously humiliated a smaller child till she lay waking in the night and planning for herself appalling tortures that you were to witness, while acknowledging her pluck.

"I didn't cry, I didn't cry," I sobbed, night after night, in misery and fury. And I did not. My body cried in spite of me. I still maintain it, after all the years. It was my first experience, inarticulate but conscious, of the emotions as betrayers of the will.

CHAPTER II

THE next stage after my Irish experiences (which included singularly little of Ireland!) lasted a good long time. I was sent to join my sister at Clifton, where two sweet old Irish saints, who took in "Indian children" and brought them up in the fear of the Lord, had a small red-brick house, and lived in it a life of pure Christianity. Never, among all the creeds and lack of creeds that have confused my brain, have I come across such practical, literal and simple Christians. They took no thought for their own morrow; for the morrow of others they took much anxious thought. They knew no distinction of class. Their cook was their "sister in the Lord," and if it had struck them as incongruous that a sister of the house should be permanently in the kitchen, they would probably have invited her up to the drawing-room. They had among themselves a sort of community of goods that was regulated entirely by their own kind hearts. When my mother, as I said, was in distress for money, they came most simply to her rescue, paid her rent and paid my sister's school bills, and brought small dowdy offerings of clothes—and all so lovingly and openly, without the agonising beginnings of "delicacy," that nobody was humiliated. Instead of the patronising tone of benefactors, they showed a simple admiration, I believe, for my young mother's grace

and charm. My sister and I were favourites at their quiet "teas." What would a modern child think of those parties? We went in stuff "best frocks," our plain shoes in a bag. We sat down to the sternest fare of bread and butter, buns and stale sponge cakes. A parent always took the teapot-end, dispensing brownish milk, with "one lump each." If anyone was indecorous, guest or not, he or she was publicly reproved. An austere joke or two would usually be made. One little girl, whose name was Baker, was the subject of many such. The respectful smiles which hid her utter boredom did credit to her breeding: but breeding was compulsory among the Brethren—and none the worse for that.

Punishments were severe, but never cruel. My sister, eight years older than myself, was too tall for chastisement. My dear old ladies had a tender spot for me, and hated to chastise me; but a sterner, younger sister, still brown in the side-curls and indomitable of eye, would stay with them at intervals. Never did a visit of hers end without a "painful scene." This was *her* word for it, but should have been my own. To "Miss Ellen," I am convinced, the exercise was anything but painful. Her eye would light upon me, in my virtuous moods, with a certain speculation in it . . . "Wait, my beauty!" it implied. Her faith would usually bring its own reward. I would break out in some outrageous naughtiness. Miss Ellen would then wave away Miss Maggie and Miss Emily, both tearful semi-protestants. I would be conducted, kicking, to a bedroom. Miss

Ellen's brush—a sober one of strong, well-seasoned wood—would then be gripped in her right hand. Her vigorous left would hold me in position; and "Lie still till Miss Ellen whips ye!" would be the opening words of a one-sided conversation with a stinging sequel.

Miss Ellen meant no harm—and did none. I dimly understood that she had renounced all sports but the one, and that she kept the rules of that. There was no further malice when the castigation was over; and it was never worse than vigorous. The end was usually a warm and kindly hug on her part, and a sudden fit of real penitence on mine. Miss Ellen had a glistening eye. Her colouring was sanguine. Who knows what wrestlings of the soul subdued her to that black silk gown and stern white cap, while brown was in her side-curls . . .?

She was an arbiter of fashion in a "dim, religious" way. I can remember her mild sisters, sitting with slightly opened mouths before her, while she talked of Bath and what you saw there. Our legs came in for criticism.

"Not a white stocking to be seen on a child in Bath!" pronounced Miss Ellen.

My sister's legs and mine were cased in white, with bars across the ankles of a chocolate tendency. Miss Ellen "moved" among the Brethren, and the Brethren only: so that her sumptuary edicts had the Nihil Obstat stamped upon them. Our legs were white no longer.

Miss Maggie and Miss Emily were not brilliant people, but they were not fools. My father thought them utter fools. In reality, they were very nervous old

ladies, and they thought him appallingly "clever." He would try to suit his conversation to their simple minds, and they would think out subjects likely to interest his colossal one. Sheer fright would make Miss Maggie comment on everything he said before he said it.

"Coming in just now, I met a man," he would begin.

"Did ye, now!" would cry Miss Maggie.

"There'll be tigers in India?" Miss Emily would ask, before my father had taken a chair. He thought them less than half-witted, poor souls, and no wonder! I dimly felt that they were doing themselves less than justice. I understood it, for my father had the same effect on me.

How we dreaded them, those conscientious visits which the poor man — least fatherly of parents — paid at intervals to his little girls! He was quite happy then at Dover Castle. We two small girls, one five, the other twelve, were all that reminded the poor man, still young, and the pet of many women, that he had responsibilities. He would have sudden misgivings that we were growing up "little ignoramuses" and a visit would usually follow. He never took us to anything amusing — to do him justice, we should probably have only been allowed to go to it over the corpses of Miss Maggie and Miss Emily — but to dull, instructive things like lectures, where all the fun of the coloured slides was discounted by the knowledge that you would have to be intelligent about them afterwards. The talent for teaching that had made my reading such a joy was never applied to my maturing mind. I believe he thought the servile eagerness of our

attention to be genuine interest. All we hoped to do was to take in enough to be able to answer the inevitable question at the end. He had the suppressed irritability of manner of every unwilling teacher. This frightened us, and we stood stupidly, answering with over-readiness, like poor Miss Maggie. The stars, especially, were on his mind just then. He feared that we were being piously taught that they were "lesser lights," set in the sky for man's delectation: and he used to tell us bewildering facts about them, using all the objects on the dinner table to exemplify their movements. We watched, in paralysed respect, while he did things with his napkin ring. "This is the sun." Then, sharply, "Do you follow me?"

"Oh, yes, Papa!"

"Then — what did I say?"

"You said it was the sun."

"*What* was the sun? Good Heavens, are my children idiots?"

It was a painful time for all of us. On Monday he would give us each a shilling and flee back to Dover — the child most deeply relieved, it is very likely, of the three!

My sister was supposed to be "too big" for the tutelage of dear Miss Maggie and Miss Emily. She went each day to a school kept by a very stout and godly lady, twenty minutes' walk from where we lived. She was a demure child, with less diablerie in her whole body and soul than defiled my little finger, but she turned out to be a greater anxiety to the two old ladies than I with all

my naughtiness. I was the innocent cause of betraying her guilt.

"Why does Hessie talk on her fingers at the lobby window?" I once asked.

"Phwatt?" exclaimed both ladies simultaneously. The house "rose at me," so to speak. My interest quickened greatly.

"Well, she does," I said. Misgivings then awoke in me; but it was quite too late.

"Hwhen did ye see her do ut?" asked mild Miss Maggie, her face one agitated pucker.

"Oh, I don't know."

"Ye don't know? Why don't ye know?" half thundered mild Miss Emily.

"I don't know." The conversation languished.

The clue, it seems, had been the last one missing. A correspondence had been found, one-sided but quite damning, between my quiet little sister and at least two Boys!

Now, mixed with all gratitude for the love and care of years, I feel to this day resentment against those dear old silly women who might so easily have spoiled my sister's attitude for life towards one of the few great things where a right attitude matters supremely. Nothing, I know and knew, baby though I was then, was wrong in thought or word between poor Hessie and her little lovers. Hers was a funny, pretty flirtation of chocolate drops and penny bunches of violets, letters of candid admiration, often on the lady's side ("You have such lovely eyelashes!" ran one from her), wonderful moments when

Mrs. Blayne's school passed Dr. Ferguson's . . . it was all ridiculously innocent; and no one used to boys and girls would have wasted half a moment over it. The children never met alone at all. It was the mode for Old Ferguson's boys to fall in love with Old Blayne's girls. If the boys ever felt bored, they concealed it, and played the game. There was just the little touch of danger and of chance that gives all love-affairs a spice. A master might detect you when you gave the girl with the long yellow plait a letter, thanking her for "lemen drops," as the two crocodiles filed slowly past each other: or the boys' school might be taken in one direction and the girls' in another, as of course often happened, though not quite so often as if the mathematical master at Ferguson's had never met the head-girl at Blayne's. The head-girl was nearly twenty and soon leaving, and had her hair up. In those days, twenty was a grotesquely mature age to be: but the poor little head-girl had no home in England and was staying on as what was called a parlour-boarder." She was to be left until called for: and Ferguson's mathematical master could not afford as yet to call for her. Meanwhile, she was the half-conscious cause of a gravitation of Old Ferguson's school towards Old Blayne's in the choice of walks, and of the dire disgrace of my poor sister.

Hessie had large blue eyes of transparent truthfulness. She was a nice little girl, rather square and short-legged, with a skin that chapped in winter, but looked very sweet and pink in June. She had an endless vein

of sentiment, only equalled by her innocence. The two old ladies bewildered the poor child.

"Don't ye know that this is *sin?*" they asked her, tapping the poor little letter that began "My darling Queenie." Few things have looked less queen-like than poor stumpy Hessie, with her round comb, reddened nose and sodden eyelids. All her prettiness and pussy-cat demure small air was gone. She looked sulky and heavy and conscious of bloodguiltiness.

"Ye know ye could't *marry* thum!" said indiscreet Miss Emily.

I felt immeasurable important awe. Marry! Married people were grown up and you obeyed them . . . Had Hessie, then, been sought in marriage? One look at her innocent open mouth showed me that no such metamorphosis had taken place in Hessie. She still suggested chilblains and frocks that were "let down." Even Miss Maggie felt the absurdity of taking her so seriously. Her wrath had always a grim touch of humor under it. Miss Emily's was tearful, and quite naive.

"Ye'll not speak to your sister and ye'll not speak to Miss Emily or me!" pronounced Miss Maggie: and so it was, for days and days. The meals were awful for poor Hessie. I felt as righteous as the author of the Psalms. "As for me," I practically chanted, "I will do the thing which is right, and be pleasing unto the Lord." A mighty speculation hid itself below my righteousness. What was the fun of boys? The small

male Brethren that I played with were annoying creatures. They did not let me lead, as the small girls did. They broke my few and treasured toys and bent the covers of my "Pilgrim's Progress," and wanted to paint Apollyon red, when I had "felt" him blue and coloured him accordingly. They always proved the stronger in a tussle and thus hurt my pride. No, boys were lacking in allurement.

Still, my sister appeared to find them worth the awful punishment of silence. (Not for the keys of Heaven would I have remained silent for the inside of a week!) The thing was most oppressive; the quality of Miss Maggie's silence, in particular, was louder than any angry speech. Associated with the thin, hard line which in times of peace was her kind pinkish mouth, it was a weapon to conquer a far more stubborn foe than my poor sister. Hessie, as a rule, before the week was up, would dissolve into tears of hopeless misery, and sob so pitifully that the tender spinsters, barren in body only, mothers to the core, would join their tears to hers and incoherently forgive her.

In the middle of one such week of penance Mrs. Flower arrived. I give her real name. She was old then. She cannot now be old. A more joyous, sweet, adorable old lady, more demoralising or more sympathetic, has never won the hearts of an austere community, while breaking all its rules. No one was more benevolent than she on a tiny income. No one attended more devoutly every Meeting, or gave "tea-meetings" with more pious frequency. But the hand

that gave a child a tract would wrap a shilling in it, while the sweet old voice would whisper, "Sugar-plums!" So great an influence had this aged charmer on every living creature in its teens that, time after time, she was called in to admonish culprits. Each time she sided with the prisoner in the dock—but left him keen for righteousness. She arrived, her white curls bobbing round her soft and searching eyes, while Hessie stood arraigned before her judges.

"Oh, dear," she said, her lip falling like a child's, "not *crying*, little Hessie?"

"Hester has been a wicked girl," began Miss Maggie. "Stand there till I tell dear Mrs. Flower about ye!"

A paper bag of sugar plums came hastily from the depths of Mrs. Flower's personality.

"Well, well, well, Maggie, my child," she said, "we've all been wicked in our day."

Something like an expurgated wink came from the bright blue eyes. Miss Maggie, strangely softened by the "my child," half twinkled in reply.

"Hessie is sorry and her little head is aching," said the charmer; "let me feel"—and the soft wrinkled hand went tenderly to Hessie's puckered forehead. In a moment she was sobbing out her penitence, and soon we both consumed the sugar plums in unity and reinstatement, all the heavy silence gone. If any sweeter siren ever lived than that dear, divinely good and naughty, beautiful old lady, I have never heard of her.

It says a good deal for my sister that she did not grow up with a shameful view of sex. We were both

singularly unaffected (permanently) by our environment during those supposed impressionable years. I, for instance, would then spend my pocket money on ghastly small packets of tracts. I would stand at the corner of the Mall, a thoroughfare which then was Clifton's Bond Street; and as the frivolous came hurrying along to buy or sauntered along in pairs, philandering, I would modestly offer my wares — or gifts, for I would take no money for them. One tract I well remember. It caused me internal chuckles that the Brethren knew nothing of. It represented the Last Day, the Great White Throne, and the Maker of Heaven and Earth, in the form of an elderly gentleman in a shocking temper. To the right of Him an angel herded sheep. Their silly, bleating faces held a sanctified expression. To the left, some sprightly goats were capering with much *élan*, quite undismayed by their august surroundings. The title literally was, "Will father be a goat, Mother?" This innocent query was supposed to have agonised the mother and converted the father of the inquirer, aged seven. It was a very fruitful tract, I learned. I was doing the Lord's work in so circulating it.

The innocent Brethren fully believed, and without arrogance, that they held a mission to all Churchmen, and all the "slaves of formal creeds," as much as to atheists and agnostics. For the sake of that conviction and its burning and unselfish zeal, I have never yet repulsed the timid man with the sparse beard and the hiccoughs who edges along the seats of 'buses and murmurs

"Are you saved?" It is kind of him to care. After all, there is no other question so important to my welfare. If my doctor asks me questions of less import he expects a fee: and I do not answer him "That is between my body and God," Who made it, as He made my soul.

It is wonderful that I got no real snubs. Perhaps a certain piquancy of contrast between the gleam in my black and unregenerate eye and the nature of my wares amused the people. At any rate, this distribution was one of the few excitements of my dull but very happy childhood with the Brethren.

They were sometimes dour. They hated frills and feathers. They called originality impertinence and punished it. But they were true, and very pitiful, and they lived as if the world were Heaven's ante-room. Mr. Edmund Gosse has drawn an incomparable picture of them in "Father and Son." It is a sometimes gloomy picture. But "Laugh and the world laughs with you" need not mean that it loves you whilst it laughs. The two that it has, after all, the longest loved are a Man of Sorrows, and a Woman in whose stainless heart are seven swords.

CHAPTER III

THE first event that broke the current of my Clifton days was the departure of my sister for a boarding-school in Switzerland. It was kept by a good lady, once a Plymouth Sister, but vaguely enlarged along strictly Evangelical lines by some stirring experiences of life, having amongst other achievements eaten part of the first horse and the whole of the last rat consumed during the siege of Paris. She had a charitable eye for wealthy pupils whose parents knew not the Brethren so much as by name: but no “Papist”—no even moderately High Church girl—was ever taken in by her. She kept off controversy, went to Meeting, and sent her Church of England girls to Low Church services. Ex-temporary prayers, both night and morning, committed her to nothing but the pure Evangel. She was a kindly soul in many ways.

The gap left in the little red brick house by Hessie's leaving was soon filled. Minnie Draper filled it. She was not of the exalted class to which my sister and I were supposed by our simple-minded guardians to belong, and they held debates as to the possible contamination of “*lar p' teet*” by association with poor Minnie. She was of that dubious race which farmers class with gentlemen, and gentlemen with farmers. She talked Devon (very slightly) and she had a homely face, so different

from my own that I admired her among living things the most. Like many strong brunettes, I liked fair people best. The lank fair hair of Minnie became "golden" in my sight, her scared white eyebrows and the large pale eyes whose only beauty was their childhood seemed to me right fairy-like. Minnie has perhaps, in her later life, had admiration poured upon her, but hardly such as mine.

I cannot remember any intellectual certitude of self-confidence, or fixed convictions, such as distinguished the beautifully intelligent small heroines of books. I never dreamed of questioning the judgment of the powers that were. I doubt whether most children challenge adult judgment half so much as they are supposed to do. I fancy that they mostly wonder at curious discrepancies, without detecting the weakness that discrepancies imply. I know that when I was sent a hat with pale blue feathers by my mother's sister, Lady Broome, and saw Miss Maggie rip the feathers from it with an air of touching the accursed thing itself, I remarked in all simplicity,

"It's funny that Aunt Hetty didn't know how wicked feathers are, when she's Mamma's own sister!"

And I wondered why "impertinence" was spoken of in angry tones. I could be quite "impudent." But I was not so then.

At another time, this conversation took place between Miss Emily and me.

"Do you see better than you did when you were a little girl?"

" Better, is ut? No, dear."

" You *hear* better, though, don't you?"

" Indeed then, I do *not*. I'm deaf, dear! Ye'll not have noticed ut?"

" It's only your *thinking* that's better," I then said reflectively. Miss Emily stared rather angrily: Miss Maggie would probably have sent me to bed: but I was in utter good faith. I thought both old ladies " cleverer" than I was, because they were grown-up people, and I had no words for the colossal wisdom of " Papa." Him I considered next to none, except a worthy of whom I always thought as Tindle, wondering that his jovial and Dickens-like surname should connote so dull and difficult a person as he seemed at second-hand. My father spoke of him with bated breath, but at much length. For some reason, he represented all science and most knowledge to him.

Religion, in its outward forms, was, I regret, a sad exception to my general reverence. It seemed to me a solemn joke. I could hardly credit that the grown-ups quite believed in it. Perhaps an occasional false note in a visitor, or a touch of sanctimoniousness that suggested the augur who does not dare to wink, gave me the impression. At any rate, I was liable to be afflicted with unholy mirth at Meeting after Meeting. The authors of the Bible appeared to me such funny dogs that I would search the congregation's faces for the joyous grin too often spread upon my own. Then, perhaps, some text of haunting beauty would turn my thoughts to an intense melancholy. Over and over

again I would read "Revelation" and yearn to cry when I read that God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and that the City has no need of sun or moon nor any stars. Rhythm in words was my intoxicant from the day that I could read. Quite silly little scraps of verse have been my life's companions for the sake of the lilt that (I blush to admit) charms me as much in poetry as loftiness of thought. The thought must have its loveliness. It is the fall of the words that leaves me aching with delicious pain.

Second-rate jingles had their turn, at the beginning of my passion: they have even now a horrid fascination for me. The first that I remember was a hymn that opened with a delightful jerky swing.

"To Israel's land, when Israel sinned,
A band of Syrians came."

Nothing about it became it like its first two lines: but their lilt delighted me, and for their sake I roared it to its lame and impotent conclusion.

My personal religion meant the melting moments when emotional appeal of a type to reach a child was made. "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?" for instance, nearly broke my heart. I was quiet at Meeting for two Sundays when a personal application of it was driven home to me. Religion also meant that there were numbers of things one didn't do. It was a sort of sacred version of "good form." Religious people didn't dress up or read novels or dance or go to theatres. Finally, it meant a warm feeling of being loved and protected by a benign Son of God: and a chilly one of living under

the slight frown of His permanently annoyed Father. The practice of it meant long Meetings, full of human interest, where preacher and congregation frequently shed tears, and where you got surprises of several kinds: hymns with lots of tunes in them: and prayers that had great fervour but a certain monotony. "Givvus" seemed their leading note. "Givvus this. Givvus that" — all were things that we ought to have, but it sounded somehow grasping.

Extemporany prayer was supposed to be as far above prayers "pattered out of a book" as Heaven is far from Clifton. I had all the proper loathing of the Prayer Book, until one day I came across one. It opened at a sentence so beautiful that I, who already loved exquisite prose without knowing it, and had not been dulled with hearing this particular specimen at countless drowsy Evensongs, fairly gasped at it and took it to my heart, making it part of the queer bundle that I cherished and muttered over to myself in bed while Minnie slumbered. The unbelievably beautiful thing was this:

"To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

You, who may have heard it every week since you could walk, will have no idea of how it sounded to me. It has never really lost its magic.

The Prayer Book was in my Box of Books; and that was a Tree of Knowledge that my old-maid angels hedged around; but the Master of Knowledge, reversing things in Eden, seemed to sanction and to urge me on to

taste it. A niece of Miss Maggie and Miss Emily had once lived with them. Her fall had been the one perplexity of their simple lives. They could not doubt that she was good. She had lived with them too long: and doubting people's goodness was hardly possible to them in the concrete. In the abstract, they knew that all Church-goers were benighted, and all "play-actors" damned irrevocably. Shakespeare they may have pictured as detained in an intermediary state of some sort while schoolmasters urged his claims above; but I never heard them mention Shakespeare, and I am very sure they never read a line of him. The amazing fact was that their niece had married a man who was "worldly"; and not only that, but had left the Brethren herself, and had left them with a box to keep for her—the box, unknown to them, containing hidden treasure.

Minnie had gone for good before I found the box. The fallow years had made me strong in body, with a mind as hungry as a wolf. At this particular moment, a box of literary masterpieces was put in my way instead of the washy stuff or the garbage that I might have blundered on. The box stood just outside my bedroom door. After the early dinner I was always sent up to "lie down." The box was pointed out to me, and then forbidden. Neither sweet old lady would have dreamed of risking waking me by coming up the stairs; and, if she had, her creaking progress would have given me as many warnings as the stairs had treads. The servant, Fanny, knew (and more of her anon) but no one else. And Shakespeare grew to be my secret garden, my pas-

ture of delights. The child who first encounters him, all marked in sections, as a lesson in a class room, has been cheated of her birthright. The more magical magic—the Shelley spell—came later. Shakespeare was enough to start with for a starving child. I read him—how I read him! How I spouted him, till Fanny's pretty face came laughing round the door! And not one word of all the coarse, mysterious words that I would mispronounce ever suggested anything to stain the sheer delight. I can remember all that reading vividly. If there had been one gloating instant of unholy curiosity, one precocious and unlawful thrill, I should remember it. It never struck me to wonder much about the sin of all the ladies in the romantic plays who were misjudged by their lovers and their husbands. I did not wonder, for I thought I knew. I felt censorious as to their folly in letting it be thought that they were in love with people not their husbands, and being "so nice" (the Brethren knew but seven adjectives or so) to the same unlawful "people" that the husbands naturally mistook the state of their affections.

"I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips," I would intone in a voice as black as I could make Othello's. As there was no one to cry "Danger," I saw none. I am pretty sure that Scott is right. You need not expurgate things for a child; but let the things be big enough, and true.

In this connection of illicit knowledge, there is one episode that remains so clearly with me—I can feel the poignancy of it to this day—that it shall go down

here. It has objective interest too — at least I think so.

There was a monstrous family of cousins (monstrous only in its size) who lived within a longish walk of me, across the charming Durdham Downs. To be of such a family seemed to me to live in Paradise. They were a "party" in themselves, their handsome faces and tall, sturdy figures lining both sides of the long table as they sat at meat, their Scottish voices ringing down the garden when they played. Among so many, some were nearly men and women, others nearly babies. The father was a glorious old soldier, a little dourly pious, but the kindest of the brave, and courtly in his heart if not in his manner. The mother is one of the warmest memories of my life.

At first I rather stood in awe of her. She was a sort of taciturn but motherly Napoleon. She would sit silent, in an oak arm-chair, with chaos raging round her. Veritable skirls would hardly make her raise her fine grey eyes from book or knitting, so long as they were skirls of harmless riot. Let the note of pain or real anger but be there, and at once, above the tumult, her deep contralto voice with "Colin, Colin!" or "Children!" would cause, first silence, then a flood of explanation.

"Mother, I couldn't help it!"

"It was Charlie, Mum!"

But no more interest was aroused. The protest had been made, and instantly accepted. You were not asked to bore her with the details. It was really a mas-

terly exhibition in miniature of sheer moral force: for she was of the size of the smaller of her children, and I never saw her punish.

My own especial cousin was an adorable fat mite, a little younger than myself, but venerable to me on account of the strange lore that she collected from many brothers and from travel—for the handsome family had lived in many tents. My literary knowledge bored Jeanie but impressed her. Her own, and her queer tiny intellect, palpitated with actuality: and among the wonders that she told me there were “things.”

Oh, those pathetic “things”! A scheme of physiology might have been compiled from them to make the very angels laugh! Jeanie would round her mouth and great grey eyes, and tell me more and more. I heard it all with flattering amazement.

“Oh, Jeanie, is it really true?”

“Yes, Charlie says so!”

I drank it in—but feeling grave and awe-struck, as when they told of flying fishes, and the thing with woman’s hair that looks suddenly at you out of a calm sea. How the scandal got about I never knew. But one day to me entered Miss Maggie, her mild eyes blazing underneath her glasses, an angry flush upon her thin cheek bones. The anger was not all for me—Miss Maggie was no fool—but I could not tell that then.

“Hwhat’s this ye’ve been telling your cousin?” she began.

“Telling Jeanie? Why, nothing!” Jeanie had been

telling *me*—and very much so! I saw, however, in a flash, that this was precisely what I mustn't say; so I said nothing.

Well, it was rather painful. Miss Maggie spoke to me as if I had first built the Cities of the Plain, and then led to their destruction by my vices. Heaven would send burns or bears to close its accounts with such monsters as myself. She almost raved. The end was that I must seek the formidable Cousin Annie, Jeanie's mother, and make reparation by apology.

This was pretty bad. Never had I accosted Cousin Annie of my own free will. And now to accost her in disgrace, with an apology that was a lie—yet only half a lie, for had I not encouraged Jeanie to be physiological? I went in fear and trembling to the pretty house. One stern room—the General's "study" when he was at home—I never yet had entered. Now they showed me into it. A chair stood by the writing table, and Cousin Annie sat in the chair.

"I'm sorry I told Jeanie . . . things," I faltered.

There was a moment's silence—then a swoop. I was amazingly caught up in warm, strong arms, and held close and rocked like any baby.

"Poor little motherless *child!*" said Cousin Annie. If she said it once she said it seven times.

"Oh, I love you!" I said, and burst out crying. For it felt so *good*, so like the other children! I have had no mothering but those five warm minutes that I can remember in all my life. "The memory of the righteous

for a blessing." I would make her happier in Heaven if I could. She may know now that I never told her Jeanie "things"; and the funny, funny little "things" that Jeanie told to me.

CHAPTER IV

I FEEL a certain remorse at having implied that I got no mothering from my dear old maids. Miss Maggie and Miss Emily had hearts of gold. They loved me much. Miss Ellen's hugs, after a castigation, had quite undoubted warmth. The difference is inevitable. It is perhaps described by saying that the caresses of the spinster and the barren wife *seek* where the mother's touches give. It is also the difference between the welcome of the hostess and the landlady; or between the vehement thin heat of the gas fire and the deep-bosomed warmth of coals. And oh, how different it felt! The poor thin arms and flat breast of dear affectionate Miss Maggie and her little arpeggio of nervous nightly kisses: and the warm shoulder and the round arms that held me close to it.

Of course I took a *Schwärmerie* for Cousin Annie. I could not see her often, for she lived too far away, and she gave small further sign of knowing I was near her when we went there. None the less, I lived on the feel of her, so to speak, for many months. I made innumerable pictures. A favourite one was most pathetic and complete. Colin, her handsomest boy, was to be with me on board a vessel doomed to sink. "Women and children to the boats" was sounded. Colin, trembling,

was to cede his place to me, being a man child, and greatly older. I, on the other hand, was not to take it. On the contrary, with a cry of "Give my love to Cousin Annie! Tell her I saved her boy," I was to plunge into the boiling sea. Colin . . . but at this point I would shed tears of admiration and self-pity and the tale would blur.

It was certainly lonely at Clifton before Minnie had come and after she had gone. Fanny would have been a great resource; but there were such things as social laws, and Fanny was "up against" them somehow when she talked to me. So my father tried to show me, on a conscientious visit. You did not "talk to the servants." To do him justice, a sounder reason than mere snobbery was probably in his mind. It is perhaps a very undesirable thing that a child should hear of certain facts of life from uneducated lips. Fanny had no desire, however, to enlighten youth. She was far too taken up with pretty Fanny. A more curious servant for such a household was never found. I do not think there was a scrap of vice about her; but she had the coquetry of a stage *soubrette*. The Brethren would no more have engaged a "fringe" than they would have engaged a cobra in their service; yet something strangely like the straight fringe of the day was to be seen on Fanny's forehead. I associate it now with a swift movement of her hand to her face whenever she was called or rung for, or heard the slow step of one of our old ladies coming nearer. She seemed to brush her bright eyes with her palm. In reality, I suppose she dismissed

the shameful adornment into limbo till the next free moment.

All of her was on a par with this. She had a touch of, not the meretricious but its country cousin, a sort of dewy naughtiness and sparkle that fascinated me. She took us all as such a joke.

"Listen to 'er—here's my old lady!" she would chuckle, as the "creak, creak" of Miss Emily would start upon the lowest stairs: and I would be convulsed at her look and tone as she fled from me—and would then, rather shamefacedly, realize that nothing funny had been said. When I was poring over Shakespeare and supposed to be asleep, I would see the bedroom door begin to show a little crack of daylight from the lobby window. The crack would widen, and a dancing eye come round the door.

"'Ow's that fellow gettin' on, Miss?"

"Who?"

"Ofello!"

This was Fanny's most exquisite Shakespearian jest. You think it feeble, because you did not hear her say it. No real comedian depends upon his words for his effect. I would feel irritated at the interruption and disgusted at the joke. Looking up crossly, I would see the pretty face watching, with the head on one side like a squirrel. I would smile reluctantly: and with a liquid chuckle peculiarly her own, Fanny would shut the door as softly as she had opened it, and slip down to the dim basement whence she emerged to tease me twenty times a day.

After my father's lecture, I tried honestly to get my intercourse with Fanny on to a proper footing. Never was any little snobbish child more easily routed.

"You see," I explained ruefully, "you're not in my rank, Fanny."

"Which is it, Miss? the cab-rank by the little red 'pub? I'll go there in a minute. We'll all be in it. Phl-l-lph!" and Fanny stamped and blew through blubbered lips like an ancient cab-horse.

"Oh, no, Fanny, but you know it's our *stations* that are different," I continued earnestly.

"Well, now, Miss, that's funny! You go and look on your little box and then I'll show you mine. You'll see a label on both of 'em. 'Paddington,' it says, as large as that—'Paddington.'"

"Yes, but . . . our *parents* are different, Fanny."

"Well, Miss Olive! It'd be funny if they wasn't. Fancy now, the Colonel comin' round *my* mother!" and Fanny went off into a sudden peal: "The Colonel" was probably quite accurately gauged by her.

"All our *relations* are different, Fanny dear."

"That's all the better, darlin'. We'll be able to marry each other."

All feeble—but all Fanny, and bewitching, nothing less. As she looked on the high window-seat, I have remembered her, down all the years. Fate, which has often married Cleopatra to a clergyman, and given her eight plain daughters, had sent Circe to "a good place" in the basement of a villa to cook tapioca and heat cocoa for two old maids in a dissenting community.

But for Fanny and Othello, I was really very lonely at this time. The cousins lived a long way off. Minnie was re-absorbed by Devon. The children of the Brethren were somehow never asked singly to play with me, though some lived pretty near. I would frequent their tea-parties in my maroon cashmere with the clean frilling in the neck; but there was no cheerful in-and-out. One little girl was popularly supposed to be specially my friend. I had probably had one enthusiastic moment over her, which was required to be permanent, after the mistaken manner of grown-ups, who will not understand that a child's favourite pudding becomes "that old thing again!" if you give it him twice running. Nelly Spenlove was a rat-like child, of nasty tastes. No real impropriety was known to her; but her turn of mind was like nothing I have since encountered except in giggling, stoutish matrons, impeccably virtuous, of the type that finds a sewer a facetious place. I am sure that Nelly has developed into some such lady, and listens to a City husband's funny stories with the same eager grin that she so often turned on me. I did not like her much, but I did not know then that I loathed her, and it never struck me to expostulate.

Nelly did not count for much; even she was only asked on Festivals, such as her birthday or my own. I finally disgusted her by reading her Hans Andersen, a book which someone in the outer world had sent to me. It nearly sent me melancholy-mad. Over and over again I would read its sad and lovely stories. I still think them among the most sorrowful literature of the world.

The way in which kindly creatures, trees and beasts and lovers, are endeared to you and then shown to you as suffering painful frustration and disappointment, is too much for the sensitive hearts of sentimental children. I suffered for the fir-tree that thought its life was starting, fresh and glorious, when it was taken out to be burnt in its withered age, quite unchildlike agonies, and the thrush that died of thirst half broke my heart. The parable behind the tales reached a dim meaning out to me: partly it was the tree and bird themselves I grieved for.

My memory of Clifton, like my imaginary picture of my birthplace, is on a tropically magnificent scale. I am afraid to go there, for fear of finding the Downs the merest patch, the precipice below the bridge an easy jump, the forest-like woods a shrubbery. . . . But that can hardly be. I remember the reviews that were pretty often held upon the Downs. There were sham fights, bands and cavalry attacks, and beautiful alarms in general. The open ground near what they then called "the sea-wall," because of a heart-thrilling, seldom-seen, silver streak on the remote horizon, must have been spacious to admit of these. How well I remember an old lady in a bath-chair with a freckled little niece who walked beside her! An officer's horse grew restive, and galloped away with the officer.

"It's coming near Auntie! It's coming near Auntie!" screamed the little girl.

To this day I blush to remember my inward prayer: "Oh, Lord, do let it!" It would have been a new and

rapturous thing in collisions: but it was not to be. Auntie, unruffled, lived for many years.

The only other salient feature of the Clifton days was Mrs. Liston.

Mrs. Liston was a real factor in my life. She descended on our quiet household like a grim beneficent angel. She was my dear old maids' ideal and secret dread. What Mrs. Liston loosed on earth Miss Maggie felt convinced was loosed in Heaven—though "loosing" was the verb that least applied to her. She had a sad, grim, high-bred face, a thin high nose and thin pale lips. Her figure was that of a girl and her dress that of an anchorite dressed by Russell & Allen. The strength of mind that allowed her to spend largely in some directions while condemning all expenditure in others was balanced by the eccentricities of some of her economies. She would burn her delicate fingers many times with spills rather than sacrifice one match: but her carriage horses and her coachman were the sleekest I have ever seen. She spent most of her large income wisely and very kindly, but without apparent joy in giving. Instead of the bowels of compassion of the primitive, she had an enlarged conscience. She would not kiss her gardener's chubby baby: but she would see that there was proper ventilation and a pure water supply for her gardener's cottage. Many a sentimental female, with an occasional penny and pat, has bought more love than Mrs. Liston with her well-spent thousands. Whether she needed love or not, one cannot tell. I often wondered. She possessed a husband whom

she seldom mentioned. I got the vague idea that he was something monstrous in iniquity, a sort of sacrilege on Mrs. Liston. It is quite likely that he was no worse than most; but she was better, in her grim, cold way. So far aloof did she hold herself from him that, when he got permission to revive a baronetcy in his family, and called himself henceforth Sir Frederick Lulham-Liston, she ignored the foolish title, to which there was no heir, and remained severely Mrs. Liston. Perhaps she scorned a baronetcy. Her forbears fought at Agincourt. She is one of the few examples I have ever met of race that showed itself in all the traditional Family Heraldic ways—the delicate high bridge to the long nose, the short upper lip, long hands, high instep, imperturbable cold voice, and stately carriage. She was so much the typical aristocrat that one would be prepared to hear that she emerged from pork-providing circles, after the manner in which actuality makes most tradition foolish.

She had had a child—one only. How it was that I have always had the mournful impression that this strange mother broke the child's spirit by well-meant severity until the child broke her heart in return by dying, I cannot tell. I do not think they said so. But always behind the cold grey eyes I seemed to read a hunger: and behind the stately figure to see a little humble following wraith. . . .

Mrs. Liston was an "old family friend." Hessie and Claude and I had "expectations" from her—or rather, our seniors had them for us. The great lady had from time to time let drop august commands concerning us.

Her invitations were a royal summons. She was a cross between the humble, pious Brethren and the dreaded "worldliness" of my mother's people. Miss Maggie and Miss Emily believed in her and trembled. I believed, but did not tremble much. There was some quiet fun to be got even out of one so august. I remember two occasions when my naïveté was not questioned by the lady, to my impish inward joy.

She was driving me about in her great dowdy carriage, with the horses that went slowly, being stout. Her coachman took us by a road that she thought not the right one, leading home. She leant forward to expostulate.

"Surely we may trust him?" I said softly.

Mrs. Liston fell back upon her cushions. I waited. Not for nothing had I bought and given tracts yellow and pink and blue: and sure enough it came.

"You have taught me a lesson, Olive," said the cold, didactic voice.

"I?"

The lovely humility of my upward look softened the frosty face a little. I had stirrings of a faint inadequate shame.

"Yes: when you said 'Surely we can trust him?' Now that is what we ought to say when life, etc."

It was a most successful "draw."

The other time concerned extemporary prayers. The formidable lady had a terrifying habit of making you pray aloud, morning and evening—to show how much you were in practice, I suppose. This afflicted both my

sense of decency and of reserve — for even an irreligious little scoffing girl has soul-reserves. I hit upon a charming way of stopping it.

“Oh, Lord!” I prayed, “have mercy on thy servant, Mrs. Liston. Cleanse her from her sins. Keep her feet in the right way. Keep illness from her. Reward her for her goodness. Lead her into Thy kingdom, Lord. May Mrs. Liston grow in grace —” here a chuckle from Fanny nearly upset me. I hastily appended the “Amen” which the household faintly echoed. When we rose from our knees I encountered a searching look. I don’t know what it saw: but that was the last time that “the child” was asked to lead in prayer.

She was a figure that loomed large for many years in my small cosmos. She has left it now: but memory has no clearer picture than her upright back and her impulsive face, and behind it the little piteous ghost that secretly, I still believe, she sometimes held in starving mother-arms denied to it in life.

CHAPTER V

THE years went smoothly by, happy in their lack of history. Then, one day, a wondrous morning dawned.

I was a little late for breakfast. A penny fine, the penny to go to that Dr. Barnardo who interfered vicariously with my marmalade in the morning and my cake at six-o'clock tea whenever my old ladies had been reading of his latest achievements in benevolence, was the usual custom when "the child" was late.

"Bother old Barny! He can have my penny—I don't care!" I thought on this particular morning. Meanwhile, I took its value out in a pennyworth of slight defiance, entering the room with a suggestion of the humming of a tune. The faces of Miss Maggie and Miss Emily arrested me.

"*Vooley-voo lui deer?*" inquired Miss Emily. To which Miss Maggie replied "*Pover p'teet!*"

This was drama. What was there to tell me?

"*Qu'est ce qu'il y a?*" I asked, to show that I too knew the tongues of mystery.

Miss Maggie rose to tearful but majestic English.

"Ye've got a stepmother," she said, and laid a mitten hand on mine. "The Colonel's married again!"

Of all conceivable thunderbolts . . . ! At first it hardly stunned me, for I had not taken it in. "Papa,"

except as a sort of visiting examiner, hardly touched my life at all. Two aspects of the thing dawned slowly on me.

"He wants ye to go to Wales and live with um," observed Miss Maggie. Both pairs of spectacles—hers from her wrinkled forehead, Miss Emily's twin lumi-naries from behind the urn—seemed to interrogate my heart.

Was I inconceivably callous? The notion of the change, even with "Papa" thrown in, outweighed the gratitude that should have made me hide my joy.

"Oh, *what fun!*" I cried.

The poor old ladies shook their curls in silence. Then I caught a murmur that transformed my thoughts.

"*Sar mare,*" had said Miss Maggie to Miss Emily.

"Her mother."

Yes, indeed. There was my lovely mother. . . . What should a child rightly feel, knowing her mother supplanted? I summoned the "right" feeling with a mighty effort.

"Oh, Mamma!" I cried, and burst into wild sobbing. The excitement of the moment helped me much.

This was a note that touched my dear old ladies to the core. Miss Maggie hustled off to get a globule (we were stout homeopaths at Clifton). Miss Emily surrounded me with scents of ancient dress-stuff and the clutch of bony, tender hands. Both ladies murmured agitated French and soothing Irish. I had made a hit. And if you think I had no genuine adoration and sore and secret jealousy for every memory of the pretty

mother I had never known, you have not been a child. It was only that these real feelings were not really uppermost: that I felt they ought to be: and (aided by a satisfactory gallery) did a little pulling at emotional strings.

Then came the wondrous days of preparation. There was the new trunk, the all but worldly hat, the frilling sewn in every dress, the country boots. There was good-bye to Fanny, laughing and very tearful: good-bye to Miss Maggie, grim and desolate: good-bye to Miss Emily, who wailed openly: to Mrs. Liston, who took a book, somewhat at random, from her decorous shelves, and inscribed her stately name upon the fly-leaf. It was a popular dissertation against the errors of the Church of Rome. In the blank ignorance of Clifton as to my stepmother's general nature, Mrs. Liston may have thought the book a bulwark.

The mystery about Papa's most sporting venture was its leading charm. As the train whirled through all the lovely land that lies between Clifton and South Wales, I made my pictures of the lady. They were coloured by my memories of Miss Wilmot and of Lady Hilda Something, and the mixture would not mix. Then, apart from Papa, there was the stepmother tradition, learnt from books. Even the publications of the Brethren did not entirely exclude the stepmother of fiction: but she was usually turned from her cruel ways by a godly stepchild with a tract. I had some qualms of semi-fear; but I had never yet been bullied, and started with the fearless courage of the petted child, even though the petting had been restrained, after the manner of the Brethren.

The reality was curiously different from the pictures. When the train slowed down into the tiny Welsh station, which looked like a pergola on the border of a hilly field, my father's face was the only one I saw. He looked more "country gentleman" as to dress than any M. F. H.: but the meticulously dapper soldier showed beneath it all: even in the baggy Norfolk jacket there was the suggestion of the treasured "waist." His cheeks were browned below his sunburnt Panama, and he looked well and rather handsome: but there was a strained expression in his eyes. The self-satisfaction had somehow gone out of them. It was the first time since my reading-lesson days that I had realised the tie of blood between us, and the sympathy that ought to go with it.

"Hullo, Papa!" I said, and hugged him warmly.

"Well, childie!" he returned, and kissed me with a sort of gratitude, not like the old-time condescension.

"My — your — the dog-cart is waiting," he said nervously. "Where is your luggage?"

The dog-cart! Had the old penurious days been altered, then? I followed Papa to the glories of the dog-cart: and in it sat a pretty, weary-looking girl. A kind of depressed vitality and restrained irritability were visible about her, even to me. She was like a hostess with good manners and a sick headache.

"So you are Olive!" she said. There was faint interest in her voice and look. If I had only known it, the look said "*Are* you going to be at all exciting? I suppose not!"

"We didn't keep her waiting?" asked my father ten-

derly. His rich tones sounded too rich, like thick gravy. His whole body spelt infatuation. He leaned forward and looked into her face. My stepmother gazed straight before her, and drove on without a word. Her husband sighed and turned half round to my back-seat, where I clung with a delighted precariousness when the pony picked its way up incredible hills: when it descended them again, I sat up with much nonchalance, and a great air of not holding on. Papa regarded me with a certain overflow of tenderness. Something had softened down his jauntiness. That was unmistakable. It did not escape a sharpish child that the "something" was not far from me, its impassive, graceful back showing a kind of listlessness even in its upright lines.

We drove along in semi-silence, my father asking occasional questions of me, as in duty bound. His wife never turned her head to listen, though an increased tension in her driving led me to think that she could hear my answers through the "clip clop" of Peter's little hoofs on the hard roads. My cramped position, after the long journey, began to tire me out. I was glad when we reached a gate, a little shrubbery, a round lawn with a rhododendron in the middle of it, and a small white house among some fine old trees.

"Here you are," said my stepmother. She did not say "we" which would have been more natural.

When we sat at luncheon, the scent of many flowers in my enraptured nostrils, I watched her face with interest. But for a defect here and there she would have been a lovely woman. She had a thick white skin with-

out a blemish. Her hair was of the colour of dark rust, thick, coarse and crinkly—most effective hair. Her eyes were technically fine: but their expression was so cold and listless that they did not charm you. Her slight figure and fair hands were perfect, and the white column of her throat: but her mouth was badly cut, and spoiled her for a beauty. It seemed as if the artificer had suddenly, perversely, marred his work. It was general exquisiteness, more than particular beauty, that impressed: the whiteness of her hand, with its great turquoise ring: the even tone of her grave voice, too grave for twenty-five: the way she moved—all made a slave of me. I had seen no such product among the Brethren. And thus I added to her burden: for a slave was what she wanted least of all things. She needed stimulus, not adulation. She was perishing with boredom

My poor father wearied her—one could not fail to see it—with his every look and word. The more he saw her bored, the more he bored her. All the love-lorn ladies of his sprightly past were well-avenged by his young wife. She lived in such a state of irritation at his slavishness, his eternal preoccupation with her, that it was all that she could do to keep her gentle coldness. My father hardly let her breathe, from the time she got up in the morning to the time she went to bed again. He hung on her every word. The words grew fewer and more morose and irritable day by day. He watched her face until it took on lines of suppressed exasperation that spoiled what beauty it had. He dogged her footsteps until dodging him became her leading occupation.

That she never screamed and struck him or went out of her senses was a greater testimony to her self-command than I knew then, though I saw well enough that we were boring her. Yes, "we," alas! for there is nothing so bone-selfish as infatuation: and infatuation, and not wholesome love, is what I too soon felt for the curious quiet girl who so disdained us.

The dreadful little tragedy in a tea-cup would begin at breakfast.

"Toast for my girlie?" poor Papa would murmur, his plumpish body abjectly bent forward.

"No, thanks," my stepmother would answer wearily.

"Eggy for her?"

Unhappy man! An idiot could have seen that the "little language" maddened her: and my father was no idiot. It is the torment of the hopeless lover that he must always alienate his love by his own act.

"No egg, thank you."

Sometimes the girl would slip away to gain a moment's freedom, and to breathe without our adulation. I would pursue her with fond cries of "Mollie, dear, where are you?" "Mollie" was a working substitute for the obviously inappropriate "Mother" or that day's "Mamma."

Once my poor Mollie turned upon me.

"For God's sake, let me *alone!*" she said.

I understood, though I was wounded. She saw that she had hurt me, and put out her lovely hand. I kissed it with an ecstasy that touched her through her boredom.

"Poor little Olive!" she said carelessly. "You'll have a bad time some day, child."

If I did not pursue her when she "got away," my father would undo the good of the short rest.

"Where has she been?"

"Oh . . . only to feed the fowls."

"Why wouldn't she let her Bunny feed them too?"

My parent's name was Bernard. "Bunny," in some incredible moment, had possibly been her version of it. How he married her I often marvelled. I know now. She had belonged to one of the many families where the women are stranded almost literally on desert islands, for want of either money or a man to take them off. She was of the *nouveaux pauvres*, whose place—and places—the *nouveaux riches* have taken. Her father had come into a property heavily mortgaged. He had then put what little he possessed of capital into one of the hopeless ventures that make so amazing an appeal to the breakfast-tables of country clergy and small squires. The venture came to grief after the first dividend. The father of Mollie had to let his shooting. His farms were let at miserable rents, for the land was all uphill, heart-breaking to a farmer: and finally he had to let the place and actually to take up his abode in a cottage that had been a keeper's lodge. The feeling that he could not entertain or even hunt made him avoid his neighbours. The consciousness of appallingly shabby clothes had the same effect on Mollie and her mother. Gradually, they dropped quite out of sight. The Vicar's wife would call at intervals. The farmers' wives would leave offerings of farm produce that began by being deferential tribute

and ended as faint patronage, expecting a return in social recognition.

In such a household, my father may have seemed no despicable way of escape. Mollie, at all events, accepted him. He had his pension, and a little income that did not stretch to many outside payments for his children, but made quite a creditable show in a Welsh village, where rents were tiny, and the air so mild that you could let your pony graze nearly the whole year round and save most of his feed.

There were some neighbours near our village. They gave tennis-teas, and garden-parties. Once or twice a year they even gave a dance. Some of the larger houses, that stood empty half the year, were filled with visitors from London during the other half. As permanent features of the social landscape in so isolated a place, "Colonel and Mrs. Latimer" would have been an acquisition. My poor little stepmother might have enjoyed her life, in spite of the oppressive adulation of her husband, but for the damning fact, far blacker than his uxoriousness, of his most savage jealousy.

I never knew of it at first. It did not seem unnatural to a child fresh from the quiet circles of the Brethren that there was no lively come-and-go in this house where the mistress was under twenty-five and good to see. Also, the country sights, sounds and scents intoxicated me. No Durdham Downs were equal to the Brecon hills, with their deserted slate quarries, real caves of mystery, which I explored, in company with a dear collie

who wore a ruff and a feather and ate plum-tart, the stones and all, and rang the bell and barked, and answered to the name of Keeper. He was *my* loving keeper, and a most efficient one. My parents were glad that I should take myself off with him as long as I would: so that I hardly realised at first the solitude of the ménage in the small white house.

It dawned on me one day when Mollie got a letter. She opened it and flushed: looked at my father as though she meant to speak to him: then, with a bitter little laugh, tossed him the letter.

"The same answer as usual, I suppose," she said, "*Mrs. Latimer regrets, etc.*"

My father read the letter with a deepening look of anger.

"Well, I don't see any object in our going out of our way to eat and drink the same things at some dull people's house that we can eat and drink at home in comfort!" he said irritably.

"No, I supposed you wouldn't." My stepmother left the breakfast table and wrote a quick little note. Her pen had the sound of suppressed exasperation that was her key-note generally.

Further light came later. I had driven into the nearest market town with Mollie. In its little streets we had met Captain Harding, a tall and sunburnt man on leave from India who had known my stepmother in her old county, in her prosperous childish days. He looked slightly bored and listless till he saw us.

"Hullo, Mrs. Latimer, what luck!" he said.

Mollie's face brightened at the sight of him. Her cold voice warmed a little.

"What are *you* doing?" she asked him.

"Boring myself badly. . . . Is this your little step-daughter? Look here! Why shouldn't we patronise Gilman's for tea and cream-buns?"

In those days it was still possible to throw a stone in any town without hitting a tea-place. Gilman's had a growing local fame, in that it had a room with chairs and mirrors and small tables in the rear of the sunny shop, where tea and delectables were on sale. More and more country folk of the gentler kind would take their tea at Gilman's when they drove into the market town.

Mollie hesitated.

"I should like it very much," she said — then glanced aside at me. Like a flash I seemed to read her thought.

"How can I tell her not to mention it at home? He is her father."

"Do let's go!" I murmured. "We can easily get back at tea-time, as we said, if we go home the shortest way, by Dickon's Lane"—a road forbidden to Peter's little hoofs, being supposed too dangerous, with its switch-back hills, when Mollie was in charge.

My stepmother suddenly became a girl.

"Come along!" she said, quite festively. We poured into the tea-shop, a chattering party of three.

Captain Harding plied me with buns all crammed with freshest cream. He paid no compliments to Mollie, but his warm and cordial voice and quietly admiring eyes, the way in which he waited on her plate and listened to

her every word, all acted like a stimulant upon the poor girl's spirits.

She fell a little silent as we were driving home. Suddenly, the restraint broke down, and she was telling me her dreary little tale.

"I oughtn't to say anything to you, I know," she said, "I never have before. But I don't know how to stand it any longer, Olive. I never see a soul. . . . Your father is so jealous that he won't know any one. When we first settled here the people called, and then a man or two came round and wanted me to ride, and so on. He got so furious that I soon saw it had to stop. I was freezing to them, to save him from being rude to them. Oh, I *oughtn't* to talk to you like this!"

"My dear, I knew before!" said I, with the ultra-elderly air of small girls of my age. "I've been so sorry for you, Mollie darling!"

My stepmother touched my cheek with her little hand in its driving-glove. Unfortunately, I at once warmed into over-responsiveness. Boredom settled on her, from association. As we drew nearer the white house, the dreary lines that made her ten years older marked her face again. However, a new link was forged between us. An occasional vent was given her. Very seldom did she speak to me, but when she did she left me proud and glowing: and, incidentally, with some sidelights upon matrimony which I pondered long.

CHAPTER VI

ONE summer night, when the moon was whitening the grass on the little round lawn until it seemed that snow was lying there, a strange disturbance filled the small white house.

"What's the matter?" I demanded, as quick footsteps passed my bedroom door, and wheels crunched sharply on the gravel underneath my window.

"Nothing, Miss Olive: go to sleep!"

It was the rosy housemaid who had answered me: but there was panic in her voice. I listened hard. A moan, heart-breaking in its agony, came from the room below me.

"It's Mollie, and they're hurting her!"

I rushed downstairs and burst into her room. Mollie lay face downwards on her bed. She bit into her pillow, holding it to her with arms that writhed.

"*Mollie!*" I cried, and flung myself beside her. A hand — her pretty hand — came out to me. I seized it, and it wrung my own until I nearly screamed. The awful moan came shuddering into the night again.

"Take her away," a man's voice said, but kindly. I was lifted up by the strange woman in the clean print dress who had arrived a day or two before — to sew, my stepmother had told me.

"It's all right, dear," she said in a matter-of-fact voice

that soothed me, "she won't be like this long. I know just how to make her well."

The kind woman got me to my room, patted and tucked me up, kissed my bewildered face and sped back to her patient. All that night, the piteous moans went on. They grew more and more weary and faint as the dark hours wore to the dawn. When the birds had been singing for some time and the sun making "jacks" on the ceiling through a hole in my venetians, a sudden shriek pealed out—another—then a great hush fell. Then came the thin vociferous claim of a new-born human soul that is only conscious of its new-born human body. That cry has been described a thousand times, and still it never fails to thrill the heart. To a listening child it was mystery's crown of mystery.

"Some little animal!" I said, aghast.

Some little animal indeed, I thought, as I looked down later on its age-old face. How horrible that this thing, so monkey-like, should lie in Mollie's arms, so near her pearly throat!

"Do you *like* it, Mollie?" I enquired. She laughed—a little weak, triumphant laugh.

"Well . . . I think we won't throw her away," she said.

"Her." It had a sex. It was a sort of woman. I tried to find respect for it in the recesses of my consciousness. That was a failure.

"Ugh!" I said.

"Oh, go away!" said Mollie: but she kissed her hand to me.

"Ugh," I soon learned, was by no means the last word to be said on the subject of Miss Clare Bellasis Latimer. She developed under my critical eye into a thing of lesser ugliness, of greater beauty, of positive beauty, of superlative beauty. She became the very babe of the "Bubbles" order of poster. The little row of lovely teeth, ending each side in a distracting dimple, the long thick lashes, and the curliness of the gold hair, when Clare was two years old, would have earned her a baby-prize in any susceptible part of England. Curiously enough, "she knew her gold hair's worth." She was a conceited little tyrant from the first. Perhaps she knew that she had worked a miracle. She had made Mollie happy.

Here at last was a creature that did not hang on her caresses, but made a favour of its own. Instead of jealously denying her all self-expression, it exacted it. It was not long before the baby's exactions and her mother's absorption exasperated my father. At first he had been inclined to plume himself on this autumnal fatherhood. Later, when the little group of two seemed always to exclude himself, he glowered, poor man! I shared his feelings to some small extent. The beauteous Clare had very little heart. Her mother had no love for her husband, no desire for his child. I have often thought that the utter coldness and self-seeking of the daughter came from that sad fact, and from no fault of Clare's.

After a time the question of a nurse cropped up.

"You never drive or garden with me now!" my father grumbled.

"How can I, with a baby on my hands?"

"I tell you every day that you can have a nurse."

"Why should Baby be left to a servant when I don't mind looking after her?"

"It needn't be a servant. Get one of those Mother's Help people, if you must do half the work yourself. Or get a decent governess, and let her help with Baby, and teach Olive. Olive must be thought of."

I was a convenient stalking-horse. My education, till that day, had been largely left to life; and life was at its most stagnant, in that small and desolate and inharmo-nious household.

Mollie gave in about the governess — privately, doubt-less, resolving that Olive and not Clare should reap most from the lady. My father sought her where he sought most things, in the catalogue of the aptly-named "Aux-ilary." Photographs would come by post, arousing hilarity that was a new note at that breakfast table. They were strange things in females that wished to educate me and give "occasional assistance" with my baby-sister! Some of them were demureness itself, quite up to "Brethren" standard. Others had a certain wistful coquetry. "Would I not cheer you up?" their piteous curls and their cheap laces seemed to ask. The search went on until one day a letter from Mollie's mother settled all our destinies.

"You know the Carterets?" it said. "The father's dead and the girls have to do something till the boys can help. There's very little money. How would it be if you took Enid? I haven't seen her since she was a child, but

there's good blood in her, and it seems indicated, rather."

So we "took" Enid: and whether we took her for better or worse it is difficult, even now, to tell. She was the weakest, silliest creature on God's earth: and she deflected our four lives — my father's, Mollie's, Clare's and mine.

Her arrival was the quaintest thing imaginable. Mollie and I drove in to meet her, in the inevitable blue serge and brown holland of country-life in summer. On that little funny platform, with its look of a pergola, alighted Regent Street plus Bond Street, plus, alas! Piccadilly after dark! A most amazing little lady came to meet us trippingly. Skirts were tied in around the knees in that day, much as they were a year or two ago: but never skirt looked quite like Enid Carteret's. That she could walk at all in that skirt, aided by those wondrous, high-heeled, patent leather shoes with the steel buckles, seemed a marvel. Her face was pretty, like a baby-doll's. The eyes were round and blue, the cheeks were round and pink — too pink — beneath their powder. The lips were red as sealing wax. The hair was yellow, not the "ripe corn" shade, which is a lovely sunburnt gold, but yellow like a buttercup. Some of it fell in the straight fringe of the day over the constricted little forehead, and much reposed in an immense "bun" on the white nape of the neck. A wondrous hat concealed the rest of it.

"Oh, *are* you Mrs. Latimer?" said my governess.
"I'm *so* glad to see you!"

She might have been a London hostess welcoming country cousins to her house.

Mollie was imperturbable. She paused deliberately for one instant. Then she said in her cool, gentle voice,

"I hope you're not too tired?"

"Well, I am, rather! Those dear trains of yours do crawl a *little*, don't they?"

"I suppose they do. Will you come with us?" and Mollie led the way out to our little cart. For me, I had not ceased, I fear, from staring at the vision.

All the way home, Miss Carteret put Mollie at her ease. Kindly she talked, to cover our embarrassment. She was appreciative in such a high degree of all our landscape that one felt it should at least get up and bow. Such lovely hills and bracken. Such lovely cottages. Oh, such a sweet white cow! Oh, such a sweet white gate! Mrs. Latimer must be very happy, living among such lovely things. And the dear little girl. Oh, we should all be *such* good friends!

My stepmother's answers were the greatest testimonial to her breeding that I had yet been shown. They were so repressively courteous, so lightly touched with ice, that they were completely lost upon her visitor. She felt, as afterwards I knew, that she had made an excellent impression.

When we got home, my father met us at the gate. His eyes first sought Mollie's, with the familiar dog-like gaze. Then they passed her and met — I cannot mince the matter — such an ogle, clear, direct and unashamed, from Miss Enid Carteret, that a transformation took place before our eyes. The humble lover disappeared. The dapper soldier, beloved of every governess, was re-

born. With a smart little twirl of his moustache-end, Papa went round and took Miss Carteret's hand.

"Let me help you down," he said, in the gay caressing voice that I had known before he had been cowed by Mollie's coldness.

"Oh, *thank* you!" said Miss Enid. There was quite a pretty play of hands and eyes and dainty steps and ankles clothed in openwork.

The transformation lasted. My father was another man. At tea, the talk was like no other talk that I had heard within those walls. Miss Carteret approved of our poor house.

"I *like* your little rooms," she said, as if we had apologised for them, "they are so *cosy*, even if they cramp you. And it's the people — isn't it? — that matter." This with a beautiful coy glance towards my father.

My governess, it even seemed, was musical. Now, this was a lack in Mollie that my father had genuinely regretted, at the height of his infatuation. He had been soaked in the Italian Opera tradition in a day, then already passed, when the Opera was *the* social function to attend. Verdi was his idol. "*Ah, che la morte*" melted him to tears. Other beloved songs were "*La ci darem la mano*," with its lilting refrain of "*Andiam, andiam insieme!*" and "*Il Balen*" — all of which had a sweet-ness and tenderness that was the (now underrated) quality of their undeniable defect of sickliness.

Miss Carteret's father, curiously, had had the self-same tastes. The two had sung duets.

"Oh, capital!" exclaimed my father. "Let us try this!" and soon the sweet baritone and the passable mezzo were mingling in impassioned adjurations. Mollie listened, with her usual calm detachment.

"Thank you. Do sing again," she said at intervals, but absently.

They sang again. Papa's enraptured breath stirred golden tendrils on Miss Carteret's brow as he bent over her. Their hands met when they "turned over." Their eyes met at the end of every song. Papa looked pink with pleasure. When she went to bed, he almost pranced to light her candle. And then I got my first bright gleam of insight into the way of a man with a maid. He came back slowly into the room, after a rich murmur of "Good night. Good night."

"A thoroughly third-rate little person," he remarked; "appalling form. Distinctly amusing, though! I don't think much of the 'good blood,' darling. But it's a fetching little person in its way."

"I suppose so," said my stepmother.

Poor Enid Carteret — silly little trivial creature, whom life broke on the wheel, as though she had had the fortitude of a St. Catherine! It is not for the great natures that the great facts — sin and sorrow, birth and death — are reserved. She brought upon herself the fate too big for her. She never left my father for an instant unattacked. Her blue eyes sought his brown ones with imploring looks. Her little hands touched his in handing tea-cups. She flattered him about his singing-voice until he took to "practising a little" with her at ten in

the morning! Clare was left more and more to her mother, so Mollie made no complaint. It was a relief to her to see her dog at other heels — though her relief was obviously contemptuous. I got off with half the lessons that Miss Carteret had threatened to bestow upon me, so the quaint pair had no enemies in me. My father, I am bound to say, showed better in his old familiar element, too long denied him. Contempt and servitude are no becoming states for dapper men of forty-odd, retired from bloodless militancy and innumerable petty conquests. My father *se laissait aimer* with the best grace in the world.

Enid grew more and more elated. She insisted on instructing me on "how to treat men." I had a schoolboy's attitude towards the "rot," but enough of a girl's curiosity to suffer her. She pitied me for what she called my swarthiness.

"A moderately good-looking fair girl gets much more admiration than a really handsome dark one," she would say.

"I suppose so," I would answer, with an irritated ruefulness.

"But it isn't only looks," continued Enid, "it's more the sort of *way* you have. Have you ever seen the Colonel when I give him a quick look sideways, just like this?"

I received the "quick look sideways" with an unimpassioned stare.

"No — do try it when I'm looking!" I besought her. I was inwardly both tickled and disgusted, but my man-

ner sounded impressed. Miss Carteret engaged to "try it" in my presence. That very day her talents got their chance. We met Papa as we were coming in.

"Tired?" he asked, in his tender baritone.

My governess smiled sweetly and said "no." Then she gave the famous sidelong look. My parent frowned a little nervous frown in my direction. I looked blank enough for Hanwell: whereupon his smallish eyes rolled gaily in response.

It was an appalling *milieu* for a little girl, in its essential vulgarity and lovelessness. The only redeeming spot in the whole house, where we joined on to the great love of the universe, was in Mollie's feeling for her child. The petty vice and vanity of Enid would have been thought by conventional people a harmless and amusing thing, compared with its more tragic sequel. For my part, looking back, I find that my first conception of my governess as a real woman, whom one might love and help and pity, dated from the day when, haggard and distraught with misery and fear, she clung to Mollie's knees and sobbed a sordid story, her trivial prettiness all gone.

"It is largely my own fault," said Mollie, who, not loving, could be just. "I will take you away with me and see you through. Olive must go to school."

"I am going to leave you," she told my father unemotionally. He, also, wept at her long-suffering knee.

"If you had ever given me a loving word!" he said, with some pathetic show of reason.

"I know," she said, "it isn't only this. The blunder started further back."

"How will you live?" my father groaned — a characteristic question.

"My cousin, Lucy Pemberton, is starting a private Nursing Home; she wants me to help her with the house-keeping side," said Mollie. "You must pay for Olive at a good school, Bernard. In any case she ought to go to one."

And so it was arranged. The beautiful, spoiled baby, and the woman, still a girl, whom life had treated none too gently, left my world for many, many, years. And I was duly sent to school, to the ugly, cleanly, kindly warren of children of all nations and cheerful Ursuline nuns that stands in a hideous village, half an hour from Brussels by the train. Thus had Enid Carteret, poor butterfly, broken up the wheel that crushed her and destroyed the pretty homestead that was never a home.

My parent saw me off at St. Katherine's Docks for Antwerp. He embraced me many times and looked forlorn.

"Mind you write to me!" he pleaded, searching in his pockets. Two coins came out — a florin and half a sovereign. He looked long and lovingly at both. Then the bell clanged for "visitors ashore." With an emotional gesture, he plunged both coins back into his pocket, gave me a convulsive squeeze and headed down the plank. I did not see him again until we both seemed much of the same age. He then spoke earnestly about my governess.

"I vow I never 'ruined' her, Olive!" he said. "I wouldn't have — not under Mollie's roof. She 'ruined' me!"

Remembering the "sidelook," I believed him.

CHAPTER VII

"*CŒUR de Marie et Joseph!*" said a deep bass voice in an amazing deep bass bellow.

"*Soyez notre réfuge!*" said twenty sleepy trebles.

I sat bolt upright in the linen-cupboard with one low shelf, no roof, and a curtain instead of a door, which was to be my bedroom for a year or so, and rubbed my eyes. It was not even daylight. What an outrage! The gas flared broadly on the whitewashed ceiling. And, what was worse, a man had obviously got into the dormitory!

The man came around, reciting rather threatening-sounding prayers. He punctuated his devotions by unmusical sharp rattles.

"*Je vous salue, Marie,*" and a long metallic shriek; "*pleine de grâce,*" and then another. He was coming my way. "*Le Seigneur est avec vous,*" he boomed at me, dragging my brass-ringed curtains smartly along their brazen rod with a practised jerk that no amount of usage brought me quite to suffer gladly.

"You should be standing in your dressing-gown and slippaires," he admonished me, in fairish English, disclosing himself surprisingly as a tiny nun, not quite as high as my ear.

I skipped adventurously from my linen-shelf and slipped into the slippers and the dressing-gown of shep-

herd's plaid that had confronted me all night long like a wraith from the hook on which it hung. Twenty girls in their early teens stood yawning in a row along the dormitory. Each held her day-clothes over one sleepy arm. I dived back into my cupboard and took my own from the chair that stood beside the shelf. The file of girls passed slowly from the room. There was no word of talk, and my advances to a rather pretty yellow pigtail just in front of me were met by a finger laid upon a disappointingly clumsy lip, and a good-natured Belgian grin. Silence, it seemed, except for prayer, was iron dormitory-law.

We filed across a corridor, and into a long room whose cheerful chatter was a welcome change. It was a vast room, crammed with girls. Basins and jugs and towels, basins, jugs and towels, confronted you by the dozen. It was like a huge restaurant set out with monstrous ware and Gargantuan table-napkins. The girls slipped off their dressing-gowns and twisted up their hair. They then began to wash: but to my consternation, not one of them unbuttoned her night-gown.

"Doesn't one do any more than this cat-lick?" I demanded of my neighbour.

"*Pleasee?*" said she.

I gave it up: and in an astonishingly short time my comb and brush emerged from an unknown drawer, my long black plait was tied with its black ribbon, my hideous shepherd's-plaid frock fastened and I stood in another row of girls, no longer half asleep. A big bell clanged.

"Breakfast. Hooray!" I thought — and said so, half aloud.

A jolly-looking girl looked round and smiled at me.

"Not a bit of it!" she said. "Mass first. Then breakfast."

"Mass!"

Visions of Miss Maggie and all Brethren, of Mrs. Liston and the Scarlet Woman, of sweet little Huguenot stories where good people were made into mince for loathing the wicked Mass, flooded my mind. Breakfast could wait, though I was murderously hungry. A great iniquity was to be exposed to my inquisitive eye.

We trooped, soft-footed, into the rather tawdry, very lovable convent chapel. Standing in two long lines all down the aisles, we all went suddenly down upon one knee. A sturdy impulse to refuse, and meet some dire and unknown penalty, just crossed my mind; but in that gentle place a small girl's knee seemed somehow to bend of itself. There was, of course, the hush that the Presence always carries with it. If that is just an ordinary silence, why did I notice it at once? I had never heard of tabernacles, except as tiresome bits of Jewish architecture; and never of the Prisoner of Love.

I found myself kneeling upon a chair with a low rush seat and a tall wooden back that had a little ledge upon its top for arms and books. Coughs and rustlings filled the silence without breaking it. Then a flash of green and gold came in, a server-boy in front of it. It was the aged convent priest, Monsieur l'Abbé.

Monsieur l'Abbé said daily Mass for us, and gave

Benediction. He also heard confessions every week. He had no hair to speak of and no teeth, and apparently no roof to his mouth. "*Dominus vobiscum*" in his poor voice, became a remarkable concatenation of mere vowel sounds. When he turned and made it straight at me I nearly jumped; but Monsieur l'Abbé knelt so humbly, and was so tender and adoring with his frail white bony hands and all he did with them, that he acquired dignity for me all through that incomprehensible first Mass of mine. Some few nuns made a choir. "Wicked? what nonsense!" I thought, as they sang the Agnus in their thin, sweet, pleading voices.

At last Monsieur l'Abbé looked straight at me (or so I thought) and sang something very queer and quavering. The nuns quavered back more briefly, and a general stir began amongst us all.

"What did he say just then?" I whispered to the girl in front of me, who had "English" written large all over her.

"He sang 'Go, the Mass is ended,'" she replied.

"And what did they sing back?"

"Oh, they said 'Thank God!'"

"How awfully funny!"

Katie didn't see that it was funny.

"They just thank Him for coming," she said in her sedate little matter-of-fact voice.

"Thank the priest? Oh, no, I see! But isn't He always there?"

"Not just like that. Didn't you see, when the server rang the bell?"

"You don't *really* think that He was in that . . . thing?"

"*You'd* never have believed He was in a poor woman's new-born baby," said Katie, who was clearly used to Protestants and primed with apologetics.

Then we stood once again in two long rows, knelt once again, turned our backs upon the patient Silence, and stole out into the corridor. Once there, we tramped with sturdy, hungry feet. Breakfast at last!

Breakfast turned out to be no dainty meal, but it was quite a cheerful one. There were great cups of coffee, with very little milk and no sugar (if you wanted sugar you provided it from home), great trays of bread and scrape and bread and treacle (treacle as black as ink), chatter everywhere, and cheerful lay attendants waiting on us. Katie was still beside me. I tried to draw her out again on the fascinating subject of the new religion, but she hesitated.

"We're not supposed to argue about it," she said at last, reluctantly.

Indeed, I soon found that most of the girls did very little arguing. The English, Protestants and Catholics alike, made a small coterie apart. The Belgian girls looked up to them and let them lead. The English had more pocket money, better clothes, neater figures and quicker wits, with some conspicuous exceptions. The Belgian girls were far more tender-hearted. There were few Germans and few French. The vast majority were of the country. The English girls stood out almost as if their skins had been a different colour from their

schoolfellows'. The national characteristics, as assessed by Continental critics, came out amusingly in their attitude towards the Belgians.

"Here, Elodie!" said Jessie Bell, a handsome girl, holding out ten centimes, "steal me some turnips like a good little Belgian thief, wilt thou?"

Elodie pocketed the insult and the coin and threw herself upon her stomach. She then wriggled, with much display of solid calves, through a gap in the hedge which separated our playground from a neighbouring turnip-field. She returned with three fat turnips, scraped the soil from them with an already grimy finger-nail, and gave them up to Jessie with a grin.

"Turnips are scrumptious!" remarked Jessie. "Ripping" had not ousted "scrumptious" as the universal adjective as yet.

"Whose are they?"

"Oh, some farmer's! He complains, I fancy, now and then. We say it is the Belgian girls: and so it is!"

"I think we ought to do our own dirty work," I said severely.

"Then you needn't have any turnip. You didn't get it. You didn't even pay for it."

"I'll get one when I want one, thanks."

There was some coldness, for some time, in Jessie's tone to me and mine to Jessie. Then my frequent impositions won her conviction that I wasn't a real prig, and the school tone broke down virtuous reluctance to damn my fellows' souls for the sake of my own appetite. I took to hiring Belgians like the rest.

In certain other ways the school tone was all right—or so I found it. I never heard a nasty joke or prurient anecdote, the whole time I was there. Charlotte Brontë's experience of the Belgian maiden-mind was curiously different from mine. I certainly recall one girl who would rouse laughter amongst the others by some secret gesture, then a mystery to me: but more than once I heard them say, "*Mais tais-toi donc, Clémence, c'est pas joli du tout!*" And once an older girl, *enfant de Marie*, said quite simply, "*Jésus ne l'aimerait pas, tu sais bien.*"

Their religion was wonderfully simple, practical, and straightforward. It was the Protestant faction, unaccustomed to the incense and so forth, that waxed hysterical over it. The Catholic girls, brought up among more or less beautiful accessories that they were in no danger of confusing with the great main issues, took their religion calmly. It was the difference between the *parvenu* and the man or woman born to name or riches.

I was not long in catching fire. A First Communion finished me. The little faces, veiled in white, the flowers, the sweet and wistful singing, all made their inevitable appeal. I demanded an audience with Reverend Mother.

"*Bien, mon enfant?*" said that lady briskly. She was a very handsome woman, with the face of a wit turned saint. I worshipped the idea of her. She was wise enough not to let it materialise overmuch with any of us, making rare appearances, and always on "occasions" more or less memorable.

"I wish to take the veil," I blurted out, my beautiful preamble all forgotten.

A suppressed convulsion passed over the face of Reverend Mother, but she answered me quite gravely.

"We will talk," she said, "but first of all — have you hunger, *ma petite*?"

Hunger? Of course I had! It let the tone down sadly: but I accepted the great slab of cake of heavenly richness and worked my way right through it. At every mouthful, my vocation subtly receded . . .

"When you asked to see me, I looked up your record and had a little talk with Mère Ursule," observed my reverend hostess. I had the grace to blush. If I had been a torment to any soul on earth, I had done my best to be one to *la Mère Ursule*.

"You keep the rules, *n'est ce pas?* The easy rules of the Convent?"

"Not always, Reverend Mother."

"Ah? And yet you aspire to a much stricter rule? Well, well!"

I felt a fool, and looked it. The interview was hardly shaping as I hoped. Reverend Mother showed no interest such as I had looked for in my lovely thoughts at Mass and Benediction, my carefully elaborated visions of the cloistered life. She saw my disappointment and was kind.

"We all want to fly before we can promenade ourselves," she said gently, putting a firm hand on my rather sulky shoulder. "If the good God wants you for one of His *religieuses* you will become one. Now go and be a fine English girl, a help and an example to us all."

She kissed my forehead and she blessed me and I went.

My eyes were full of tears and all my exaltations gone.
But tiny seeds of longing for well-doing had sprung up.
I tried for quite a week to be an example. My reputa-
tion for daring tripped me up. It has always been my
fatal weakness to live up—or down—to the expecta-
tion of the nearest crowd, hitching my star to a waggon.

Our nuns, as I remember them, were a rather won-
derful set of women. Reverend Mother was *grande dame*, if ever there existed one. So was merry Mère Aloysia, the daughter of a family of nobles, a handsome,
laughing woman, with a disconcerting dignity that snubbed you without words if you grew too familiar,
and an eye whose raillery made your neatest imaginary
flight sound just the silly lie it was, no more. Then
there was Mère Ursule, the permanently irascible, who
never once gave way to the irritated nerves all too
visible in her eyes and round her mouth, and all across
her puckered forehead. I imagine, at this lapse of time,
that Mère Ursule was a woman whose deep devotion
justified her vocation, but on whose nerves the noisy
and aggressive life of growing girls made a demand that
nearly killed her. I judge by the placidity of her
fine, ugly face when she had just finished a Retreat, and
had been with Quietness beyond our voices. All too
soon the lines would come again, the hunted look. The
fact that no child ever had a furious word or unjust
punishment from her, though not one loved and under-
stood and tried to help her, will surely count to her for
almost supernatural righteousness. She was next in
command to Reverend Mother. We saw a great deal

of Mère Ursule. We felt that she had no instinctive love for us, and we had none for her.

The girls were very average girls, some clever and some pretty, some very naughty, some half saints. The last were mostly Belgians and Children of Mary. I have associated blue ribbon ever since with general goodness, and not exclusively with drink or the absence of drink. The one prevailing fault was the fault of most cheap schools, I fancy — an amazing and most naïve snobbishness and worship of wealth.

Among the English, it was chiefly birth that counted. After I had been a week at the place, I was first apotheosised, and then discredited. The head of my father's family, who has a pretty well-known name, was mentioned.

"Perhaps he's some relation to Olive," giggled a little girl called Bunce. It was meant for a scathing witticism.

"Yes, he's Papa's first cousin," I replied.

Sensation in the English ranks ensued. Then the Bunce child half nervously remarked:

"If you're so grand, I wonder you come here!"

"Oh, they sent me here because it's cheap!" I answered readily. "My father's awfully poor."

"I thought you said he was a Colonel."

"So he is."

"Colonels are rich."

"My father would be glad to hear it! He's disgustingly hard-up. I couldn't have come here unless it was cheap, I can tell you that!"

For months I hovered between two appraisements. I had "called cousins" with the Bellasis-Latimers. (Poor Cousin Hugh, who hardly knew that I existed!) I had, on the other hand, acknowledged poverty—an unprecedented affair. As time went on, and my shepherd's-plaid atrocities of garments grew shabbier than most and were not replaced, and Cousin Hugh showed no signs of arriving for me in a coach and six, I took a sort of dubious half-way place between the girls to toady and the girls to condescend to. The snobbery never for one instant impressed me as anything but snobbery: but my desire to shine according to the local standard of light, however dim and low, led me to frantic efforts. I wrote to Hessie, who was still at school in Switzerland, and asked her wildly for the bangles, rings and brooches that she held in trust for me from our mother, whose small jewel-case was hers, to be divided later. Hessie, sturdy little uncontaminated Briton, answered, "Nonsense. You don't want things like that at school. You'd lose them. And you'd look bad form." I hated her: but showed the letter to the English girls, in proof of actual jewels, unattainable.

The Belgian girls were simple in their methods. "A present" was their fetich. One by one, they actually begged from me each single thing of all my meagre outfit not prescribed by rule. One had my little blotter with the picture-cover: another my scissors with the gilt handles: another my mother-of-pearl knife, and so on. They would set upon a certain girl for months and mildly bully her. Then she would have a hamper from her

home, and they would come round her, coaxing, till, half flattered, half resentful, she had shared it out. The English asked for little from you but prestige. It was very cheap and silly, but (who knows?) perhaps a useful hint and foretaste of the cheap and silly world outside the Convent gate.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO events disturbed my placid Convent years. Hessie grew up and left her school.

Hessie's inconvenient accession to woman's estate had an immediate effect upon my fortunes. She was to leave the highly superior Swiss-English school where special terms were given to my father for his dead wife's sake. There was no home, poor child, for her to come to; but she went to live with Mrs. Liston as her secretary—a dour but comfortable fate. Meanwhile, the special terms held good for me. My father wrote to Reverend Mother. The rumour then went forth "*Olive Latimaire va partir!*" A strong affection for me sprang like Jonah's gourd in every bosom. The nuns to whom I had been the greatest scourge were full of sympathy. The English girls seemed genuinely sorry. The Belgians were dissolved in tender tears. I had been with them without holidays or visits and with hardly a letter from home, for a time that seemed long to a shifting population of that age, and was peculiarly their own, in a way that the more prosperous girls, linked with the outside world, were not.

The change from a Convent of my Convent's kind to an English private school with "home life" traditions, and pupils chiefly of the Anglo-Indian, military class,

could hardly have been greater. At first, I grieve to state, I ran amuck. The liberty allowed us all seemed too tantalising for words unless we were to use it in some forbidden way. The trouble was to find one. Most ways seemed open to us. There were perhaps twelve boarders and a large day-school, which, being naturally almost entirely Swiss, hardly interested us. The boarders led a real home-life, except for the lessons in class. Some three or four big girls with their hair up had the use of a small private sitting-room. No lessons were given there, but it was called *la première classe*. Of these girls one, with the best intentions in the world, was to wreck my school-days.

Connie Dare was the most ordinary, round-faced, tidy, steady, good, industrious and utterly commonplace young person ever seen. Why she should have inspired me with a passion that dominated everything on earth for me; and why, having conceived this ridiculous infatuation, I should proceed to act in the worst possible way for inducing a return in kind, the foolishness of an exceptionally foolish little fool alone explains. To gain the love, or even the friendship, of Connie, you had better have been "sensible."

"Do try to be sensible!" was her catchword. It was small wonder. The poor girl must have suffered many things at my hot, clinging hands. She slept with me. Miss Henderson had thought out a plan by which each older girl played mother to a younger and less steady one. I had the painfully exciting joy of seeing my goddess counting out my washing, marking stockings for me,

showing me the way to make neat darns. You put your needle over one strand and under another, never missing one, or else your darn was not quite neat. Connie's whole life was like a neat, neat darn. If she has ever missed a strand, her conscience will not let her live to say so.

She was at my mercy, so shut in with me. I would wake up and leave my bed, gazing adoringly at her somewhat podgy features wrapped in sleep. Poor Connie, at the outset, would start up.

"What is the matter, Olive?"

"Nothing. But you were so quiet. I thought 'Supposing my darling were dead!'"

"Oh, Olive, do be sensible!"

The poor girl would turn round and go to sleep again. Quite satisfied with my effective anxiety (I had not in the least feared for Connie's life) I would return to bed and do the same.

At other times I asked to hold her hand.

"It can't hurt you," I used to say, "and it's all heaven to me. If I were to be asked if I wanted to go to heaven, I would say 'Not if I may hold my darling's hand.'"

"Oh, Olive, do, etc."

The hand that held poor Connie's would at last grow hot and clammy with sheer adoration, and then an anguish of indecision would arise in me. Should I be unselfish and put it down? Or masterfully rapturous, and keep on holding it? Connie had the indifference of a pillow. Her nerves were either wool or steel. Not once did I rouse a lively exasperation in her. Her plea

that I should be sensible was wholly conscientious and half automatic.

All this was silly enough, and bad for me. It led to worse. Connie was simplicity itself, and not in the least a snob. The demoralisation of my Belgian companions had left its traces on me. Connie, I firmly thought, would love me if I could impress her. The delusion that love can be earned by effort and by patience dies in most of us with our own death and not before. I felt convinced that when some glory happened to me, Connie would fall down and worship and see me as I was — no abject, sentimental little schoolgirl, but a sort of Romeo *cum* Paolo in petticoats.

Occasion came on devil's wings. An ancient aunt came out to me. She stayed at the modest Pension le Duc, being a soldier's widow on a meagre pension, with hardly any money of her own.

My first débâcle was over this same Pension. It must have been the Belgian memories. I blush (quite literally, I sometimes blush at nights) for what I did.

There was a very large and grand hotel quite near us. Sometimes a relative of some girl would stay there and invite her. This glory I determined should be mine. Poor Aunt Colquhoun could never have afforded such a palace. Nevertheless, I coaxed my Connie to see me to its door.

"I do wish I could take you in!" I sighed.

"Of course not," said Connie; "I hope you'll enjoy your tea. Good-bye."

Quite unimpressed, she turned away. I stole into the

open lounge, where English people sat about in long cane chairs. After a few moments spent in affected search for friends, I left the big hotel and sped me to the humble Pension. My kind aunt received me with the cosiest "English tea" and much affection. We had not much in common. Conversation flagged. At last she brought a book of photos out. She thought to interest me with stories of my forbears and still living (though in lofty ignorance of me) stray relatives. I listened to the stories, but had one idea, one only, in my miserable little snobbish head. If Connie could but see these Generals, these fine ladies in their presentation plumes, these K. C. B.'s that Aunt Colquhoun so casually called "your Uncle Henry" and "your cousin Madge"! Surely she then would love me. It is the quaintest logic, but it prevails elsewhere than in girls' schools.

"I suppose you couldn't just . . . lend me the album for a day or two?" I faltered.

"Oh, my dear child!" Kind Aunt Colquhoun was visibly embarrassed, "it is such a *very* large book; and—" she hesitated—"some of the photos could never be replaced if anything were to happen. Of course, I know you would be careful, dear, but . . ."

"Oh, it doesn't matter!" I said hastily: but I thirsted for that album irresistibly.

The gentle lady left the room to fetch some other likenesses to show me. I tried wildly to remove a specially imposing lady with a coronet from her setting. Not only did she stick, but the paper that edged her tore away. I turned in panic to another page. After all,

the lady was no relative; and the coronet, if you examined it, turned out to be a comb.

I found a lovely General further on. He was a little podgy; but he blazed with many medals. His photograph was tinted, and upon it, in my Aunt Colquhoun's thin writing, was inscribed, "My precious father."

"That's Grandpapa!" I reasoned. A girl has some small rights in her own grandfather. I slipped him from his setting. He almost ran to me, so smoothly did he come. At the risk of crumpling him, I crammed him in my small, hot pocket, and I sat on him.

Dear Aunt Colquhoun came back with miniatures. There was no glory in them. They were of my theoretic near and dear ones: but with their parted hair, and black silk gowns and huge gold brooches they seemed like housekeepers and all looked fully fifty. I shuddered at them. One dainty one, however, fired me. It showed a lovely laughing lady, bare of shoulder, ringleted. The frame was set with little stones. Upon the back a label said "The Lady Viola Templeton."

"Is she any relation?" I asked, devouring her daintiness with greedy eyes.

"Oh, no!" said Aunt Colquhoun with much simplicity, "your dear Aunt Harriet was once her governess, and left me the sweet little picture when she died."

Aunt Harriet — my father's eldest sister — eldest of that long family born to a poor Army chaplain! I remembered her but vaguely, as an austere poor relation, the one sister of my father that had not married into the Service. (For us there was but one "Service.") The

associations of the picture did not dazzle. But the lady! And . . . need one, after all, explain?

Covetous thought grew strong in me. I nearly choked. I put the pretty thing behind a monster flower-pot on the table, and talked volubly about the rest. My aunt was full of rapture at my interest. Tale after tale she told me then of dull Aunt Harriet and Great-aunt Emily. I listened with my heart behind the flower-pot and my hands a-tingle.

At the end she rose to clear away the little pile of frames and take them to her room. It was time for me to go. Would she detect that one was not among them? She did not. I seized it as she turned. One moment's agony; and then the Lady Viola was safe with Grandpapa in my iniquitous pocket.

All might still have been well; but I was doomed. A schoolgirl met me in the hall. I carried a small parcel. My aunt had given me a meagre, touching little offering from her kindly heart and narrow purse—a little pair of gloves, and a rather shoddy collar. I was not proud of either.

“Hullo!” the girl called out good-naturedly, “here’s Olive back with grapes of Eschol for her Adorable. *Why haven’t I an aunt?*”

Connie came out behind her from *la première classe*.

“Oh, Olive, but you shouldn’t have!” she said.

Here was a painful position.

“Oh!” said my evil genius, speaking with my idiot tongue, “*this isn’t what I have for you. I have the loveliest little frame—all set with real jewels.*”

"Nonsense," said Connie; but she glanced at me with curiosity.

I dragged the lovely miniature from its humiliating shelter, indecorously flattened against Grandpapa.

"There!" I said, with the nonchalance of intensest pride, "I'd better have the painting because it's — er — a relation. But the frame is for you. You can easily steam off the label at the back."

Connie of course turned to the picture's back.

"Lady Viola Templeton — how *very* funny!" she exclaimed — quite stirred, for her.

"Why is it funny?" I grew pale.

"Why, because she was Father's aunt!" said Connie. "We've got this very miniature at home — at least, a copy — but not in this sweet frame. *How* is she your relation, Olive?"

"I forget," I said, still frightened, "not so very near."

"I *must* ask Father!" Connie was impressed at last, but at coincidence, and not at me or at the glories of my blood and state. I had begun, some minutes earlier, to wish Lady Viola in — the Pension le Duc.

The remorse that comes of unsuccessful villainy is a particularly nasty brand. That night I thought of Aunt Colquhoun. Her gentle want of snobbery contrasted, even in my eyes, with my poor vulgar motives. "What is this pretence? Why does it master me?" I asked myself, in real mental pain. I seemed to be no real entity, to stand upon no real basis. The other girls seemed individuals, with a life and principles of their own. I was eternally preoccupied with seeming. Yet the self

that stood aside and scorned this seeming self was surely Me? I tossed in double worriment. Supposing that my aunt should never find me out? The little meanness of the theft would never then be punished. I should pass through life, the girl who robbed a kindly lady from a vulgar motive. Supposing that she did find out . . . ! I shuddered.

And of course she did. Her modest packing had included Lady Viola, well embedded among the thick and serviceable petticoats that died at the birth of the bicycle. Aunt Colquhoun feared to leave the miniatures in her empty little English house, so had brought them all with her. This special one, apart from associations, was the only real valuable. Naturally she missed it.

Next day about eleven in the morning, I was sent for.

"Your aunt is in the salon with Miss Henderson."

I marched with knocking knees and coldly oozing palms to meet my fate. Miss Henderson gazed strangely at me, and my aunt looked rather wild, her gentle bonnet slightly cocked.

"Olive, dear child, you can't have — quite by accident — taken away a miniature I showed you? One of a pretty woman in a frame with little stones?"

I put on a frank and gentlemanly air.

"I remember!" I said cordially. "Lady Viola Templeton, wasn't she? A friend of Aunt Harriet's?"

"Yes, a dear friend. Your aunt had been her governess," explained my relative with horrid frankness; "have you seen her, dear?"

Here was a hole indeed. A plan came quickly to my desperate mind.

"I don't *think* I can have packed her up with the lovely gloves and collar you gave me," I said, with much brow-wrinkling and cogitation. "I'll just go and see."

"I'll go with you, if Mrs. Colquhoun will excuse me," said Miss Henderson, who was no fool. She knew what the open-eyed "soul's awakening" look upon a school-girl's face betokened.

I made the best of a situation growing more diabolic every minute. Miss Henderson and I marched mutely to my doom. I drew aside for her to pass me on the threshold of my own and Connie's bedroom with a grace of deference that should have melted her. She walked straight to the mantelpiece: and there, in all her beauty of uncovered shoulders, smiled the unconscious but quite damning Lady Viola.

"Why, *that* must be the one!" I cried, with the joyous inflection of "Dr. Livingston, I presume?"

Miss Henderson, alas! was still no fool. She rang the bedroom bell. An English housemaid, one of our "home comforts," answered it.

"Just ask Miss Constance to come here to me."

All was over. I sat in dumbness and in misery. Poor Constance came, and showed unusual feeling. She was sure that Olive had not meant to steal. At the same time, she perforce destroyed my faintest chance of proving that Lady Viola had caught in my sleeve or slipped into my boot or insisted on accompanying me in any way but one. Miss Henderson was white with anger. She

had a very high ideal for her girls. The girls themselves, in all such ways, were of the fairly high type that regards certain offences as things not even within the pale of temptation. One did not spit upon the carpet: nor did one steal: and I had stolen.

Then began a month of torture, physical and mental, that may have been deserved, but was so cruel an experience that to this day I feel resentful. A caustic talking to that shook me once for all out of the silly, ugly snobbery that was devouring me would have been the making of me then. To treat me as primarily a thief, a person who willingly defrauds his brother, whereas my besetting weakness was the bestowal on my brother of everything of mine that he might happen to want, was to miss the point of me sadly as a sinner. Naturally enough, the minor facts of the case were not known to Miss Henderson. She knew little of my incredible passion for Connie, and nothing of my half-crazed efforts to impress her, and so gain her love. But she might have known. If she had played the mother to me for one hour, talked to me, drawn me out, heard, understood and counselled me, explained me to my goddess, and then inflicted the severest punishment that the school endured, she would have made a loving slave of me for all my schooldays. I might have shaken off the stuffy little obsession, the fresh air of kindly railly once let in upon it; and I would pretty certainly have worked at my exams to please her, like a giant. Exams were little trouble to me; and they were life to her.

What she did was this. She shut me in the isolation

room — a vast but comfortable apartment at the top of the house, where cases of measles, mumps, and bad sore throats were banished. For one month I was there, in solitary confinement, hearing the gay girls' voices far below me, seeing the daily "crocodiles," by dint of craning from my window, knowing with bitterness unspeakable that every girl was conscious of my shame and felt a wondering pity. "*Fancy stealing!*" Once or twice a week a confidential maid would take me for a walk. These walks were pleasant, for the maid, a sturdy Swiss of forty, was motherly and kind and inclined to take my sins in a less serious spirit than her mistress: but to get outside we had to go down through the house. There was always the chance of meeting one or more of the girls. Their delicate dodging of me as I passed them with my gaoler, their sympathetic looks, a little cold, when we met face to face, the frank curiosity of the younger and naughtier faction, all agonised me: but I longed for the sight and touch of Connie as marooned men long for a sail. At last it came. We met on the lower lobby.

"Oh, Connie, Connie, Connie!" I cried, clinging to her, sobbing my heart out on her embarrassed shoulder. Connie released herself a little quickly. Then she saw my convulsed face, with its almost adult pain, and she patted me and spoke.

"Oh, Olive!" she said, "if you only had been sensible!"

* * * * *

The month came to an end at last: I was summoned

before the governess of my prison. Coldly but kindly she asked me searching questions.

"You have thought over all that you have done?"

"Yes, Miss Henderson."

"You feel that, God helping you, you will never give way to such wickedness again?"

"I'm sure I'll never take things. I never wanted to take anything from any one. It was because—"

"Well, Olive?"

"Nothing, Miss Henderson."

"There are two alternatives before you—to go home to your father: he does not seem to find that particularly convenient." Tears of self-pity filled my eyes. "Or you can go to German Switzerland, and learn German with a charming family I know of, and help a little in the house. It is a châlet only, but they take in *pensionnaires* in summer time."

This sounded rather interesting.

"I should like to go," I said.

"If you go there, I shall have to warn the people of your—weakness," said Miss Henderson.

Tell them of Connie? I was startled.

"They may have to trust you with their boarders' valuables to some slight extent," said the cold voice. It is a fact that not until that moment had full realisation entered into my soul. The insult may have been deserved, from the woman's point of view: but the blood rushed into my face, my head went up, my eyes burned furiously upon her. I even took an unconsciously menacing step towards her chair.

She softened suddenly. Degradation and cowardice were what exasperated her. She was glad to see me angry. If we met now across the years, we could shake hands and meet each other's eyes: I should tell her that she had shown cruelty and stupidity and lack of humour: and we should be friends after the telling.

I went to the dear châlet on the side of the holy mountain: for holy it became to me at my first sight of it. I cannot enlarge upon its scenery and the effect it had upon my soul: but I am not the woman I might have been if the mountain had not breathed its message to me for those two happy years. There is nothing to tell of them. They passed: and the last of my childhood passed with them.

I hear the place is now as vulgar as most other places near it. I will never go to see.

"And, little town, thy streets for evermore shall silent be" for this one lover.

BOOK II
ADOLESCENCE

CHAPTER IX

I WAS grown up. I was seventeen. I was leaving Switzerland for home. It was a thrilling crisis, that. Home meant a small suburban house with my father, and with Hessie, who had now left Mrs. Liston and was to be a sort of guide-companion to my immaturity, and keep house for "Papa," hereinafter called "the Dad."

Hester was some years over twenty now. She well might have been thirty. Her fair face was pensive and her dress demure. The trail of Mrs. Liston was all over her, I thought: but I soon found that Hessie had repudiated the family Pope in her heart. She had some inner dream, that did not materialise in terms of tracts. In fact, the profound Evangelicalism of our poor Pontiff would have shrieked at the sight and smell of Hessie's church, St. Jude's. In spite of our strenuous up-bringing, Hessie went to Church and not to Meeting; and her special church, in those more timid days, was thought a very daring place indeed, with its audacious lights and vestments; and, on high festivals, its little pinch of incense. There was a suggestive niche just by the door that seemed to hint at stoups; and the chairs that might have been confessionals and were not had an air of conscious abnegation.

The Vicar was near eighty, and he jibbered at you. The senior curate quite made up for him. He accounted

for Hessie at first sight. He seemed at least as celibate as St. Paul; and his thick-set little wife with chilblains seemed somehow part of his celibate outfit. He was often seen with a mournful hand upon her shoulder. "I don't deny you, dear—I never will," he seemed to say. The children (there were three) he was exceedingly delicate about, a very slight expression of perplexity crossing his sensitive face at any enquiry made about them. It was a little as though one had said "Your liver, now—how is it?" to him. I sympathised. It is annoying to have your general make-up spoiled by the wrong background. The whole idea of curates, slippers, wives, and mothers' meetings jarred upon the priestliness of Mr. Harcourt. In these days we should call him "Father," and he would wear a ring to show his chastity—until abruptly overtaken by marriage. In those, we persisted in treating him upon the married curate basis. He suffered; but avenged himself.

There was probably no more blameless man in England than Hessie's Mr. Harcourt; but I have never met the soul-seducer type before or since in such perfection. He was a spiritual Minotaur, insatiable. The hearts and souls of maidens were his dinner, and he lunched on matrons up to forty. After that age they persisted in appearing, so to speak, upon the table, but he put them gently by.

By any process of elimination, it was difficult to tell what Mr. Harcourt was. To hear him speak about the English was a fine cosmopolitan thing. "As the good English fondly think," he often said, with ever so slight a

suggestion of a pretty foreign shrug. The respectable, again, he was always amusing about. "Respectable people will tell you . . ." he would say, and smile confidentially at his slightly intrigued congregation, which consisted largely of a feminine Guild of Saint Something. "The ordinary marriage" he would mention (not in the pulpit, this) with a pitying severity that was hardly kind. His hearer's eye would dwell upon the three Miss Harcourts with some speculation. . . . He was puzzling.

Hessie found him adorable, in a high spiritual way. He did not flirt. You could not think of any vulgar verb and think of him. His strong suit was a sort of proposal of elopement after death. In this life you just thought about him all the time; and in the life everlasting you achieved a sort of marriage with him. It was not long before I discovered that my dear ingenuous Hessie considered herself somehow booked for a kind of spiritual honeymoon that would begin on Resurrection Day and, lacking the usual conductments to satiety, never end at all. It was not a robust prospect to satisfy a healthy girl like Hessie, with her nice pink cheeks, and it did not satisfy her, but it excited her. I could see her blue eyes deepen and her forehead get a look of strain in contemplation of it. The ordinary young woman, whose dreams comprised a trousseau and a baby, was an object of compassion to her, but of envy, too. The thing was probably harmless, and it woke a touch of idealism and imagination in my little sober sister that would perhaps have never germinated but for Mr. Harcourt; but it had one effect that might not have been harmless. It closed

up Hessie's warm and normal heart against more human swains.

Hessie was of the highly usual type of fairly pretty girl that is perhaps the easiest type of all to suit with a husband. She had no frightening qualities or disconcerting deficiencies. Above all, she made no exactions. Men would have liked her if she had shown she knew that they were there; but she lived for dreamy little services, conducted by Mr. Harcourt under his breath in the small, fat, grey church that looked, in its ivy, like a dowager in her winter furs. She and those members of the vagueish "Guild" whose avocations let them out in time were usually the only faithful present. She stooped to lesser joys in the shape of concerts and regattas; but when there was a dance I went without her. Ball-rooms gave no delicious faint and hectic chance of a thrilling meeting with her ghostly fiancé; but all other local sports he patronised and much adorned. One punt I well remember, all decorated with lanterns, rushes, and the water-iris, a charming sight, at a regatta. Mr. Harcourt paddled it along, his fine ascetic face a little conscious. Behind the decorations stole the blade of yet another paddle, back and forth. The paddler did not show, except her hands, with one large chilblain, which betrayed her as the temporal partner, according to the flesh, of Mr. Harcourt.

Hessie's affair attracted me, although I longed for more body and bones to it. I had, as yet, no matters of my own. The realisation of sex had been extraordinarily slow to dawn upon me.

I had looked critically upon myself one day, in a long glass. Certainly there seemed an indication of a grown-up outline! Something of a going-in, and something of a going-out—I felt a faint excitement for a moment. People, I knew, developed "figures"; but that I should have a real one was something new and strange.

Before my first blood-tasting I was virginal to the point of panic. My first dance was a private one. I should have gone to it in white. But white was "extravagant," and we had only twelve pounds a year to dress upon: so my kind Hessie made me up a little funny black dress, of a clumsy stuff called Russian net. It stuck out rather in wrong places. My neck was very thin. My hair, a real glory, would not "sit." Most women will remember how long it took their hair to acquire the habit of remaining "up" in safety and in shapeliness. Thus dressed, with cheap and squeaking shoes and a terror-stricken look, I was not the immediate and overwhelming success in a ball-room that I should have been in a novel. My air of freshness did not touch the heart of any jaded eligible, weary of the meretricious. Most of the males present were under thirty, and abhorred me. They fled past me to the girls with real dresses who knew what to say to them. I sat so close to the kind hostess that I almost sat upon her, humiliation and relief fighting hard in me. Her daughter was a tall and very popular young woman. I could see her bargaining with a distant male.

She pleaded with him. Would he dance with me? He looked towards me. He was baldish, rather kind: he had come late. I saw him yield the point, and bear benevo-

lently down upon me. My desire was towards him, but I feared him vehemently. My hostess felt a hot clutch on her wrist.

"Don't let her introduce him, Mrs. Mayhew!" I gabbled feverishly, "don't let her introduce him, will you? Don't let her intro—"

"Mr. Capel-Keene, Miss Latimer," said Rose Mayhew's pleasant voice. The deed was done. I swallowed down an absolute hiccup of alarm, and looked up with a kind of ghastly baring of my teeth that I hoped was like a smile.

"Shall we dance?" the baldish one said kindly.

"Let's!" I said, jerking to my feet. Then I felt a worse fool than before. What was it people said when they were asked to dance? It wasn't "Let's!"

The baldish one replied paternally "Come on, then!" with no signs of horror. After the first few turns, my spirits rose. I knocked him badly with my knees, I clutched his hand with more than amorous fierceness. I ground his toes beneath my cheapish shoes, and whenever he tried to steer me backwards I caught my heel in the hem of my Russian net. But he bore everything, and still he smiled, and life came surging over me. This was my first dance, my first low dress, and my first Man. Kind little Mr. Capel-Keene has never since inspired so sharp a rapture. My colour rose, my tongue got loose, my hair came partly down. . . . He asked me for another dance and gave me such a supper! It was a splendid victory.

I hastened home to Hessie.

"Did you like it, dear?" she said, the little motherly thing.

"*Like* it?" I said. "I can never tell you, Hessie, what it has been to me."

Hessie looked rather startled.

"Did you get lots of partners?"

"I didn't count," I answered with some haste, "but it was a wonderful evening."

The next day I went round and saw the Mayhews and enquired about my Mr. Capel-Keene until the hostess twinkled. He was a man with many children — my heart sank. They were all sons — it rose again a little: all at school — it fell away from Mr. Capel-Keene for good.

I then seized upon the rather astonished Rose, the hostess's daughter, and raved to her of dancing. Rose had filled her card for many years of dances. Mr. Capel-Keenes, I felt, were "no treat," to Rose. She could not understand my frenzy, or my sense of sisterhood in things delirious. I was like a man who has played one game of golf and got drunk with it. Dancing was evidently Life. I began to arrange my energies that dancing should be furthered.

Dress was the first great problem. To go dancing, shabby and shapeless, handicapped by fulnesses in the wrong places and ill-hanging skirts, was good, but not quite good enough. I cast about for remedies. A local girl, quite carelessly, then launched me on my life's besetting sin.

"Why don't you go to Timson's?" she asked casually,

"they make quite decently. They'll always put it down."

Put it down. The magnificent idea! You got whatever you most wanted and Timson put it down. I had literally never heard of credit in my life. It seemed to simplify the whole of one's finances. I was not quite such a fool as not to know that days of reckoning would follow days of "putting down": but one could easily save (out of twelve pounds a year!) and meanwhile, the great thing was to dance. So Timson took my measure, and let me choose his prettiest stuffs: and Hessie sighed and tried to scold, but walked all round me and admired instead. And then I heard of Walker's, where they dressed your hair for eighteen-pence; and on the night of my next dance a very different vision from the frenzied débutante appeared, and filled her card with little effort. A confident and joyous expression, a well-cut dress, and hair with a deep "water-wave" in it, induced by Mr. Walker, had worked marvels.

I soon grew exercised with "men." They touched the surfaces of all my life. It never occurred to me to connect them with the depths. They were as religion is to people who have grown up with it, and have never known conversion. Girls would talk to me, and I to them, on serious things like marriage; and we would contemplate man after man as a possible ring-giver, kudos-bringer, emergency-exit, or what not. As a human soul, able to frustrate or to fulfil our own, we never thought of him at all. As the beloved partner, sometimes we had a glimpse of him. It was all as gay and light and shallow

as a blue butterfly on a pink cabbage-rose. It is natural and pretty enough, this play-time on the edge of life. The danger is that a player may at any time step off into the whirl-pool — unprepared.

Some of us even wet our feet — a little. There were whispers of experimental thrills. . . . I had a terror of these, and an unconquerably romantic disposition. My flesh should thrill when my heart thrilled and not before. That I was looking eagerly for some convenient dummy on whom to bestow a heart in fine condition for thrilling, I was entirely unaware. I had not long to wait.

CHAPTER X

HE was a Connie Dare in trousers, with a rather charming face; and I endowed him heavily with myself and all my loveliest sentiments before he could turn round.

His name was Philip Harrold, and I met him at a party — a funny little party in a tiny house, kept by some harum-scarum artist-folk. For half the year, they took their walks at dusk and their meals in the bath-room, for fear of the Jews. Then they would sell some picture, and keep open house for the other half. There was never room for all their guests. The result was somehow quite delightful. We prized the scant drops of their lemonade as if it had been Imperial Tokay: and the genial over-crowding gave us the delights of a Bank Holiday without the shame. We even danced, in a dining-room like a cubicle: and we “dressed up” exhaustively.

It was a dressing-up occasion when I met my Philip. His chubbiness, and baby name of Philly, used by all his intimates, ought to have discouraged my earnest endeavour to find him a fine, herioc figure. I fixed my mind upon his Art. He tinkered cleverly enough at canvas, and he desired to paint my portrait.

“Oh, I say!” was the first undistinguished speech that won my heart. It was uttered at the sight of my hair,

which the hostess had taken down for purposes of tableaux.

"May I feel the weight of it?" he asked, with a rather engaging touch of timidity.

That was what people always said: but people, up to that day, had been female people only. It was a faintly thrilling moment when my mane was reverently lifted in the two hands of a Man, however chubby. I gave the thrill the help of a little rather laborious imagination.

"I would like to be buried in it," declared Philly, with some real rapture.

"It's not a cemetery, thank you," I returned. We laughed absurdly at the feeble joke, and drew together in the freemasonry of extreme youth and idiocy. For the rest of the evening, every game found us inseparable. The tableaux were good-naturedly arranged around us. Philly was pretty enough to play all Fairy Princes and emasculate heroes generally: and my hair was accepted in lieu of all demands for the decorative. In those days I was still too thin "for perfect beauty," as the novels used to say.

"I say, couldn't I see you home?" breathed Philly, in a corner, into my willing ear.

I hastily bit back "I'd love it!" and forced myself to say,

"My sister and I always go home together, thank you. It's quite near."

"Oh . . . ! Look here! If I get some one else to see your sister home?"

"She'd wonder why I didn't come with her," I sighed, relapsing towards frankness.

"Couldn't we start together and then just drop behind? Oh, do!"

I fervently desired it; and so it came to pass. This was my first shadow of an "affair," and I felt that Life, with its larger issues, was closing in upon me. We walked in thrilling contiguity. This must be love, I thought. His arm touched mine at nearly every step. I waited for great words to come. If he did not say any, I felt that I should have to say them myself. "Dressing-up," to the imaginative young, has a decentralising effect. It was still fairy-land I walked in: and the fattish boy I barely knew was still the Fairy Prince.

Philly felt the atmosphere. He was quick at elementary sympathies, for they were all he had.

"I suppose you'll go home and forget you've ever met me," he said sadly.

"Shall I?" I said.

"I suppose so. . . . I say! which window is your room? Will you show me when we get there?"

"Why?"

"I should like just to watch it all night long — and think of you brushing out your lovely hair behind it. Do you *mind* my thinking that?"

"I'm not a sort of Lorelei with insomnia!" I said, laughing, but feeling Juliet at least. "I don't spend all night brushing out my hair."

"I say you *are* clever!" was my admirer's next remark. "I should never have thought of that, you know."

"Thought of what?"

"Your being a What's-its-name with insomnia."

Pause.

"You wouldn't *mind* my watching your window, would you?"

"Why should I? I should be asleep."

A deep sigh came out of the dark. Then a young and very timid hand took hold of mine. I am ashamed to say that, taken by surprise, I gave it an impassioned squeeze, immediately regretted. Philly did not seem disgusted.

"I say," he breathed in the warm darkness, "you aren't . . . you aren't *engaged* to any one; or *are* you?"

"Not *engaged* exactly." Here was Life!

"How do you mean 'exactly'?"

"No, of course I'm not," I said with candour, "for one thing, I've only had my hair up just a month."

"Your lovely hair!" sighed Philly — which was a *cul-de-sac*. I led him gently backwards.

"Why do you want to know?"

"You'd say it was most awful cheek if I were to tell you."

"No, I shouldn't."

"Well . . . *sure* you won't mind?" I could have shaken him.

"I don't suppose so."

"You wouldn't be engaged to *me*. Oh, *darling!* would you?"

Here it was; the greatest moment of my life. How hard I tried to feel its greatness! A Man was asking me to be his Wife. I think I really knew, deep down, that

a boy was asking to be allowed to kiss me: but it was necessary for me to give the thing solemnity and beauty and not to be as other girls, who kissed and laughed. I had to kiss with prayer and fasting, to give the kiss what otherwise it lacked.

"We hardly know each other," I replied, in a carefully low tone of repressed emotion.

"I feel as if I'd known you all my life."

"How curious. So do I!"

Another pause.

"Then—*would* you be engaged to me? Oh, darling, do!"

"I . . . might." The pause that followed then was thrilling. A grotesque incident ended it. In the pitch darkness and a state of inexperience, even a kiss may not be achieved with much success. We bumped each other smartly with our chins and foreheads, and withdrew with gasps of pain.

Tears filled my eyes, partly caused by the excruciating contact, and partly by the spoiling of my Great Occasion. Never again could my first proposal and first kiss be offered me: and now their memory would always be grotesque. I hated life.

Philly had no such subtleties.

"Kiss me again!" he sighed, recovering. This time we did not absolutely strike each other. A warm and young and very affectionate embrace ensued. Philly's cheek smelt fragrant. I found later that he passionately tried to shave, and anointed himself with priceless unguents to the long-looked-for end.

"*You darling!*" he remarked, and we walked on, elated and consoled. It was perhaps not so delirious as my dreams: but it was Fun. There was no doubt as to that. And now to get rid of Philip so as to be able to talk about him. The telling of Hessie was perhaps the most exciting episode of the whole evening.

"*No!*" she cried, in the most gratifying manner, "*engaged!* How perfectly extraordinary!"

"Isn't it?" I said solemnly.

"Do tell me all he said!"

I told her some very beautiful things. She gazed at me in sympathy and awe.

"Oh, Olive, how *lovely!* and he *is* so handsome, too!"

For a girl of twenty-something, Hessie was most ingenuous. Her Mr. Harcourt (and, I had almost added, Mrs. Liston) had filled her horizon to the exclusion of other males. Her joy at the real corporate appearance of a suitor for me was so free from envy that I loved her—and offended her.

"Oh, Hessie, I wish you had some one *real!*" I exclaimed.

Hessie got transcendental and superior at once.

"It depends upon what you call '*real!*'" she said, coldly; "some of us think that what is of the spirit and immortal is the only *real love.*"

"Well, as it happens, immortality is exactly what Philly is most keen about," I began, resentfully. But even Hessie laughed a little at me then.

"Good night, dear, and be happy," she said, kissing me. I settled myself for a long rapturous think; and then it.

was daylight, and hot water, and one's breakfast, but quite exciting still.

The Dad should next have been consulted, but we had the rather sad impression strong upon us that you couldn't tell him anything. He lived so curiously far from us, though under the same roof. He came down very late, had breakfast in his study with his paper, went for interminable walks with his stick between his shoulders and under his arms behind, and made queer friends and ties that we knew nothing of. Hessie he treated with respect, and trusted with the housekeeping money and his mending. Myself he showed some interest in, and would try to detach me from Hessie and range me, as it were, on his side, though there was no overt division in our camp. I sometimes went with him upon his rambles, and was much embarrassed at this flow of confidence on delicate subjects, such as Mollie. The loss of her still rankled, though his abject love had died in her long absence. I fear she had unworthy substitutes; but neither of his children ever knew or asked. If I had that time over again, I would try to be "society, help and comfort" to my father.

Meanwhile, I did not tell him about Philly, but met that worthy in elaborate secrecy by the banks of streams, and in all the most poetic spots left to our suburb by already encroaching 'buses, trams, and jerry-builders. Fairly seldom did we meet inside a house; and that is what delivered us out of each other's hands. If we had had long days together under shelter, the mere contact of warm flesh with warm young flesh might have helped

on Nature's swindle. We might have grown to need each other physically so strongly as to imagine that we needed each other in any other way at all. It was when our minds were forced to meet that we found there was no spark to be struck out of that contact. The look of Philly, and the touch of his nice boyish hand: the idea of being "engaged" at seventeen: the horrid little ring with one discoloured turquoise that I absurdly wore in intimate regions of my undeveloped person; the kudos of his escort everywhere: and above all, the occasionally achieved embrace, and the imaginings of my fervent heart, these held me to the silly little compact.

I got the best of it, I know. Poor Philly must have suffered many things from my attempts to make him play my game. I felt frustrated half the time, both bodily and mentally. When you had a lover, he was full of lovely thoughts for you, and said them in most lovely language — not at all high-flown: that spoiled it: but in halting, deeply feeling accents that could thrill you. Now, with the most obvious "leads," Philly was bad at utterances of the strangled-emotional order.

"Are you tired?" I would say, half-way, perhaps, through some short tramp.

"*Tired? with you?*" was the right second move in this gambit.

"Just a bit," was Philly's chilling answer.

"Supposing we had never met each other!" was another "draw" of mine.

"It *would* have been beastly luck," Philly said, but absently. The ideal Philly, who was then his only rival,

disgusted me with Philly: for the ideal said, deep down in his throat, " You might as well suppose the sun had never risen. Why, we *had* to meet! You know it."

Or else I had some seething, big idea, probably taken straight from some chance book, but seeming my own offspring, and clamouring for birth. I would attack my lover with it.

" Philly, do you think God really means . . . ?" and so on.

Philly felt that God liked to be let alone to have His sleep out between matins one Sunday and matins the next; he was always rather shocked at my insisting on regarding Him as something to be spoken of on week days.

Our physical relation, when we had the chance of testing it, was not much more satisfactory to me. I expected from poor Philly hours and hours of one crescendo thrill, combined with the most delicate and reverential respect. Reams might be written about the average woman's ignorance of man the male. He nearly always disappoints her. When Philly broke away from my embraces with what looked like sheer impatience, I felt the humiliating frustration that is indescribably hard for the mind feminine to bear, carrying as it does a stigma with it, and the impossibility of protest: and when his ardour went beyond the regions of my own, he seemed to me at once a coarse and desecrating stranger. No, we were a misfit in every way — even, it may be, the primitive way of a man with a maid. I soon began to feel that somewhere my true

Fate was whispering to a negligible Philly, "Occupy till I come!"

Hessie's affair began to interest me again. By contrast with the prose of my "engagement" its dreamy transcendentalism rather charmed me. But satiety may come along a road where passion has not passed. Mr. Harcourt had tired of denying himself deliciously with Hessie, and had acquired another spiritual mate. She was a far prettier girl, I had to own, and had the piquancy that Hessie never had. Not making love to her must have been a good deal more exciting than not making love to my sedate little sister. The signs of her succession were quite clear. Down by the font, where without profanity the faintly secular might be discussed, it was now Jessie Fortescue who dallied with the handsome senior curate after Church. Looking immensely tall in his long cassock, he would lean one elbow on a pillar, and look down at her adoring eyes. Hessie, who had her pride, would hurry off with smiles.

Miss Fortescue came calling pretty often. I would draw her out on "girly" subjects, for Hessie's information. But it seemed that things like that were nothing to Miss Fortescue.

"Don't you think," she said, looking hard into her tea-cup, "that all the things the world calls love are just unreal? I should think the real love is of the spirit. It could never come to anything in *this* world. One couldn't ask it to."

"Of course, there's Mrs. Harcourt," I desired to say,

but gave Miss Jessie cake instead. When she had gone, my sister sat as quiet as a little stone.

"There'll be a *queue* outside that man on Resurrection Day," I ventured. "I should drop out if I were you, old Hessie!"

Hessie dropped out. Not altogether voluntarily, but still with some saved dignity, she dropped out. She had not been made for the rôle, but to give it up pained and bewildered her. She never heard her curate's name again without confused, inarticulate humiliation. She could not call the angels in as witnesses to a breach of mystic and immortal promise. Therefore she reverted to her own true type, and never henceforth had a thought or an emotion that could not be "obtained at any chemist's."

CHAPTER XI

PHILLY and I began to quarrel. Love affairs, however foolishly so-called, cannot stand still. They must go on—or backwards. Ours went back.

It all began about a book. I came across one that went to my head like wine. Philly was bored with extracts from it, imperfectly remembered, on our walks.

"Let's see the thing," he said at last, unwillingly.

"Oh, will you really read it? Then we can both talk about it!" I cried, delighted.

He read it.

"I suppose it's all right—the sort of stuff that women like," he said. "I must say, I want something to happen in a book myself."

"But happening needn't only be to people's bodies," I said with warmth if not with grammar, "lots of things happen to the people's spirits in the book."

"Oh, I daresay!" poor Philly answered crossly.

"Philly has nothing to do with my brain," I said that night to Hessie.

"Hasn't he, dear?" said Hessie placidly.

The next thing was a trifle subtler. My lover was a clever little artist in his way. Standing before his easel, his face expressed some thought, and his chubby body took on dignity. I liked him best at work. Also, I liked

to be his model. I was Italian girls at wells, with red handkerchiefs folded flat upon their heads, and pitchers (imaginatively deduced from bed-room ewers) standing on the handkerchiefs. I was Roman matrons, gipsies, and Cleopatra. I was sometimes Olive, in some pose that Philly liked: but here again his want of inner sympathy would show. He never wished to paint a picture that would represent the essential Me: but he often wished me to represent a different sort of person from myself, to make what he would think a better picture.

"Put your head a little round to the right, and then look up," he said.

"But, Philly, that's not comfy. I never did it in my life. You said you wanted this like *me!*"

"Well, do it now. I won't keep you at it long."

"But it won't be me when you've done it."

"It'll be a scrumptious picture, though!"

Sometimes the pictures needed a "real" model to complete them. My figure, approaching the definition of a line, "length without breadth," was hardly suitable for, say, the Roman matrons. Philly commanded no models outside his Art School; so he called in a fairly accurate memory and alert imagination, and added many bodies to my patient head. One of these well-meant additions affronted me. I was vexed because it was no fancy sketch, but added to a study of myself in proper person. The head was done while I was there. From memory, my fiancé had added on some "figure" draped in gauze—quite a good deal of figure: quite a little gauze.

"I had to imagine how your lines would go," he said

simply, all artist for the moment, "but of course I couldn't tell for certain."

So far so good. I knew all about Art, and that Art was not indecent, and that people were indecent if they thought it was. But Philly then went on and spoiled it all.

"Could I, darling?" he said, with a sudden reversion to our other relation: and he put an arm round me and tried to draw me close.

The picture was in front of us. That, and the out-of-place caress, somehow opened my eyes.

"Philly has nothing to do with my body," I declared that night — but this time to myself.

The absurd engagement would now have been broken off but for my lingering loyalty to some imaginary beauty in it. Philly was nothing; but he stood for love to me, failing a better representative. It seemed to make my elaborately beautiful conception of our relation into nonsense, if we just agreed that we were playmates — not lovers and not friends.

Two discoveries precipitated dissolution. Philly's brother came to stay with him. Philly was not too keen that I should meet this brother, a man quite twelve years older than himself, and manœuvred to keep us apart. But the harum-scarum family, at whose delightful house I first met Philly, had misgivings. They consulted Philly's brother.

"Do let me meet the other chickabiddy!" he implored them. They were rather glad to shelve their small responsibility. Philly was, or would be, quite a rich young

person. It would not be over-pleasant if his brother, who was his guardian too, should think they had perhaps entrapped him for a little friend without a penny.

"So this is Philly's lady-love," the brother said. "I really cannot wonder at him."

I felt quite young and "on approval." At that moment I was meekly Philly's bride: but not for long.

"He's just nineteen. How old are you? It can't be a delicate question yet!"

"Nineteen! He told me he was twenty!" I was furious with Philly. What are people in their teens?

The brother roared again.

"The little beggar! No, he's only just nineteen. And off he goes next week with me to Paris for a year or two, to learn to use a paint-brush. Two years before he shakes free from my clutches. I'm the wicked uncle, I can tell you!"

This genial, powerful person was appalling me. It seemed as though at any moment he could take poor Philly up and carry him to bed. The dignity of my romance was melting fast, and liberating me. Nineteen!

"He hasn't told you of the talented Miss Vivian?" went on my disillusioner.

"No." I was startled for the second time. Philly was so timid as a rule, so almost always "nice," that I had never sensed a predecessor.

"Ask him to tell you. Mustn't give the boy away quite *all* along the line. Ha-ha-ha!" the brother laughed. I hated him. Oh, what a brother! But . . . the talented Miss Vivian; and *nineteen!*

I sought out Philly : taxed him with the horrid combination. At the "nineteen" accusal, he blushed very red indeed ; but at Miss Vivian's name he simply smirked. I hated him for smirking.

"I think, as there has not been confidence between us," I began, with quiet grandeur, and fumbling round my collar-bones, "we might as well consider things are over. . . . Here's your ring."

But here, as Mr. Henry James had not yet said, it so evidently just quite beautifully wasn't.

The ring resisted me. I pulled again, detesting anti-climax, the Vivian-smirk still obviously defacing Philly. This time the string gave, and I had the empty success of removing it, the ring remaining safely but indecorously embedded in my *façade*.

"Supposing you jumped!" said Philly, with brutality.

I fled from him. That night by post, and registered (he lived five minutes off) he got his funny little ring, a three-penny bit with a pin to it, a photo of himself that looked the fatal nineteen, not a moment more, to my awakened and disgusted eye, and all his letters, which were scandalously few. We met quite once a day : but I would have relished a letter by every post — and answered every one of them. He received the packet in an injured silence. The dreadful brother whisked him off to town, en route for Paris ; and my engagement was at an ignominious end.

Then followed one of the dreariest times of my life — so vividly dreary, to use a contradiction in terms, that it

stands out among my memories. I had no career, no intellectual interests beyond the reading of stray books that came my way and were not often worth their bindings. I had tasted blood in the way of mildish sexual excitement, and was in the rather painful and humiliating state of fret that is well-known to many and many an outwardly contented girl who rarely will confess it. "Get something to do" is the sagest advice of the sages to such: but when the girl says "What?" it is not always easy to reply. Here I was, boarded and fed and provided for, and entitled to a military pension after my father's death and a half-share of a tiny income from our mother's father, besides vague and splendid expectations from Mrs. Liston. I was most imperfectly educated, French and German, with a strictly limited vocabulary, being about all that Miss Henderson's school and my dear Châlet folk had taught me. No trade and no profession gaped for me. I could have been a nursery governess, no more. Marriage seemed indicated in a way that it far less often seems indicated now. That I thought of dress and dances was as little frivolous *au fond* as a grocer's anxious thought for his shop-window. The real love had not yet brought its sword to "stab my spirit wide awake." I lived for conquest, with the sordidness that only laughing youth can make to look less ugly than the franker line of much the same profession.

My first dance, and its contrast with my second, had taught me some face-values. But window dressings cost much money. Timson, my whilom blessing, turned a curse and (figuratively) came to roost with me. I opened

his missives, more frequent far than Philly's, with a miserable heart.

"To making evening dress, blue net, and trimmed forget-me-nots, three guineas."

"To making evening dress, rose-coloured pongee, flounced écrù lace, three guineas."

Timson, whose hands had rubbed themselves together in his simulated raptures when I purchased, now stretched them out like claws and clutched at my insolvent body in my fevered dreams. His notes began to haunt me. Hessie took sympathetic fright.

"What shall we do to get eight pounds?"

We said it in our walks along the towing-path. We said it in our chairs beside the fire. There seemed no answer: but saying it was some relief. Dear Hessie, who had never owed a pound, was quite as full of care as I could be.

"Perhaps if Mrs. Liston—" she began.

"Imagine telling Mrs. Liston that you wanted money to pay for ball-dresses, that she'd think were devil's trapplings in themselves!"

"But if she's going to *leave* us anything!"

"I think I see us writing, 'Dear Mrs. Liston, it is reported that I have expectations from you. As you are unhappily in your usual unnecessarily robust health, do you think that a slight advance could be made me, before you gladden my young life by yielding yours.'"

"Oh, Olive! No, of course not" (my Hessie was a trifle literal). "I don't suppose we'd better think of Mrs. Liston."

"How would it do to advertise? Give me a minute and I'll write a beauty!"

Hessie gave me a minute, watching trustingly.

"Here it is. . . . 'Lady, impoverished entirely by her own fault, and entirely undeserving of help, wishes to divert the funds of the charitable from more meritorious cases, and invites help towards the settling of debts incurred by her for purely frivolous and even vicious reasons.' There! That would make *me* send my shilling, if I read it. We might put it in '*The Guardian*,' don't you think?"

"I know a real way," said Hessie, rousing; "you know those horrid snowball things that Mrs. Liston made us send, to help that mission place of hers in Melanesia?"

"The very thing! They rake in simply millions. Oh, Hessie, what a good idea! You shall have all there is, beyond my wretched debts, for thinking of it."

"No, we'll divide. What *shall* we say?" Hessie was quite warmed up.

"Let's think . . . 'Gentlewoman, in greatly reduced circumstances and urgently in need of small sum, would be most grateful if you would send threepence to Miss Latimer at above address' (we'll stick in our address) 'and send on this request to two more friends, desiring them to do the same, and to continue the chain in their turn.' How does that strike you?"

"Splendid!" said Hessie. "Oh, what *heaps* of letters the post'll have to bring us now!"

"Do you think the Dad or Emmeline will notice? That's a danger."

"I should think they'd often come by the first post, before the Dad is up: or by the five-o'clock one, when he's always out: and Emmeline doesn't really matter. She might say something to you or to me. She's terrified of him."

"Supposing every one does send the thing on, I don't see what's to stop it until every one in the world has had one sent him!"

"Oh, they wouldn't send them out of England," said Hessie practically, "and after *years* they'd find that they were sending to the same people over again, and then it would *have* to stop."

"But it might be simply millions before that!" We gazed upon each other. Visions of fraudulent millions, when you only wanted eight pounds odd, were rather daunting.

"Think of the *good* we might do with it," I said unctuously.

Hessie's nice rosy face cheered visibly. The gift of a new set of vestments to St. Jude's, which Mr. Harcourt would have to wear and recognise as Hessie's gift, perhaps possessed her. She still, at moments, lingered round the precincts of the *queue*. At all events, the Harcourt look was for a minute in her soft blue eyes.

We drew up the iniquitous appeal, and sent out twenty copies. If the snowball started from twenty quarters at once, we thought there would be greater expedition in the handling of the millions.

Two of the addressees ignored us. Fourteen sent us ninepence instead of threepence, explaining that they

drew the line at worrying their friends. They seemed to think the ninepence rather lavish, having no regard to the magnificent cumulative power of snowballs, and the frustration of our object which such cruel checks entailed. Four people, and four only, wrote with pleasantness and did as we had asked them. From the initial efforts of these affable ones an anaemic trickle of threepences came in — then stopped forever. We netted less than one pound sterling: and we had embarrassing enquiries to face whenever we met or heard from the four faithful, or the fourteen tepid, givers.

“Well, we haven’t gained much, but we haven’t *lost* anything,” sighed Hessie at the end, when the postman had obstinately delivered nothing but appeals for our false teeth and entreaties that we should change our laundry for the best part of a week.

“*Rien n’est perdu fors l’honneur*, in fact!”

“I suppose it *wasn’t* honourable!” said Hessie, looking startled.

“Now that it has paid so badly,” I confessed, “I don’t mind saying that it was about as dirty a trick as I ever hope to play.”

The momentary excitement over, with the hope of brilliantly successful fraud, I collapsed into profound melancholy. My cheeks grew thinner than before, my collar-bone stood out in high relief, I got a cough that shook me till I trembled, and kept all sleep from me: and all this, in the face of a healthy regular life and buoyant youth, because of the sudden cessation of a

stimulant to vanity, and some not too thrilling kisses!

I began, at mid-eighteen, to feel myself a failure. I talked it out with Hessie. "Why girls never marry" was our melancholy topic. No one at forty is ever so disconsolate and hopeless as youth in its short periods of experiencing neglect. Philly had frightened off the local males. I did not care to go to dances and collect some more, not having frocks to wear. Timson could just be kept from suing me; but I dare not order more blue nets or rose pink pongees under his hungry frown. It is a fact that if some cause or ardent missioner had caught me then, my whole life could easily have been deflected. A vital interest was what I craved with all my heart.

To eat our wholesome beef and rice, to walk in the fresh humid air along the towing-path, to talk to me of nearly nothing from our breakfast to our bedtime, seemed quite enough for Hessie. The Harcourt influence withdrawn, she was a highly normal, placid girl. She bloomed as I decayed. She had a gentle half-smile always hovering around her rather pretty mouth. I had my "famished wolf" expression on, at that time, pretty constantly. The consequence was that when a man and possible Perseus dawned upon our skies, Hessie was his Andromeda and not her sister.

I did not really want him; but I wanted him to want me, at the start. When, to my most conceited wonder, he settled down to fall in love with Hessie, and she blossomed into tremulous prettiness for his sake, my chagrin

melted into excited sympathy. Here was a real man and not a boy: an engagement that would end in grown-up marriage, with no horrid brother to destroy it.

Marriage, indeed, was obviously the only end for Hessie. She could hardly have been any man's Egeria: and in any less reputable relation she was unthinkable. She would have given it an air of such decorum that the omission of a ceremony would soon have seemed a silly oversight.

Her suitor was a conscientious bully of a man—a classical master from Hailey house. His name was Edward Cole. He had a "house," it seemed; a wife was clearly what it had a right to expect. He was well informed to the verge of miracle: but all his knowledge seemed somehow nothing that united him to the great sum of things. It was less like the digested meal that goes to build the system up than the grocer's parcel, all arranged in seemly packets. He had about him so many pounds of history: but the human beings who had sinned and suffered to provide him with his tabulated dates had no ounce of message for his heart. He could tell you the period of every pillar in Life's Cathedral; but the love and faith that built them did not stir him, and the dream that floated down the long, dim aisles vanished before his hand-sewn British boots. He was good sturdy Church of England, with a strong responsive tongue, in place of a soul that could respond. Hessie and I would go to Church with him—not to St. Jude's; to cheerful, packed St. Andrew's that smells of nothing worse than eau-de-Cologne and good Protestant seal-

skin. "Edward" was a source of joy to me in Church. If the singing ever sounded weak, he would suddenly reinforce it with a startling access of energy.

"They grin — *like* — a — *dog*," he would bellow, with sudden disapproval, "and go *abou* — wow — *wout* the city!"

It was an extraordinarily ironical thing, to my mind, to hear him say firmly that he believed in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

"Do you?" I thought, "how much do the things invisible worry you? Don't you want the approximate date of the making of Heaven?"

He bullied Hessie and she worshipped him. I saw that it would be an excellent marriage. There is quite a good deal of well-meant pity wasted on the subjects of mild tyranny. To be well under some one with the general qualities of the Albert Memorial, to have neither money, talent nor conviction with which to fight him, a sincere admiration for him, and no desires beyond his bed and board, is one of the least wearing fates for any woman. Hessie prostrated herself to the inevitable rather than bowed to it. There was no need for her to take a single step again on her own initiative, as long as she lived: and she never did. Mr. Cole's children had the air of being entirely his own suggestions: and his sisters, all of the very best type of Englishwoman, with projecting teeth, stood over her and brought them up.

CHAPTER XII

"COME for a tramp with me along the river," said my father.

"I want to talk to you about Mollie," he began, as soon as we had passed the noisy boat-house with their half-unclothed, thin cockneys.

I did not care overmuch for this talk on Mollies and Enids. The desire to reverence my erratic but lovable parent, and not be, willy-nilly, the confidante of his recreations, was always strong upon me.

"She wants to come here and live with us," he continued, astonishingly.

"To come *here!*!" I had not imagined such a thing as that.

"Yes, and to bring young Clare. You see, she thinks you ought to have a woman in the house, now that Hes-sie's married that . . . *bookcase* of hers." There was no liking lost between the Dad and his decorous son-in-law.

Dear conscientious Mollie! I loved her for the thought, and warmed to the idea of her graceful, fastidious presence in our curious household. Mollie and I had always liked each other. How would she meet the husband who had so adored her? How did he feel towards her now? I stole a glance at him. He looked disconsolate. A vision of Mollie's latest successor rose

before me. I had stumbled on a carte-de-visite of a lady with a large fair fringe, and a large fair form, half in and half out of a black velvet bodice. Enid, I feared, had been at the top of a descending scale, reaching sadly low notes as the poor Dad's neat moustaches grizzled. Should one warn Mollie—or let her come unwarned? Curiosity and interest and memories of affection made me beg for her to come.

"I'd like to see Clare again," I pleaded, "and it would be lovely to have Mollie to take me out. Let's see . . . I'm eighteen now. She must be still quite youngish—a jolly chaperon. Oh, let's have Mollie home!"

The Dad agreed—partly, I fear, because it was hard to see how he could bar his door against a blameless legal wife and child if they chose to use the knocker. That Mollie should condescend to come back much surprised me. I did not know how dreary life could look to a woman, separated from her husband, more or less dependent on a cousin, working a little desperately, if in outward comfort, for precarious bread.

Mollie, accordingly, arrived. My body buzzed about, the day before, and my brain buzzed all the night. There was Hessie's room to get in order for her. The Dad, with somewhat shamefaced eyes, relieved me from a doubt upon this subject which embarrassed me. It was purely as his housekeeper and his child's mother and my chaperon that Mollie was returning. Clare was to share my room. Remembering her as the lovely baby whose faults were as pretty, at that age, as virtues, I yearned for Clare. Between her baby tantrums, I re-

membered she had clung to me. I had that facile liking for the sight and touch of pretty children that is quite unlike the real mother-love and often mistaken for it. I prepared her little bed beside my own with something of a thrill.

After the material preparations came the fever of mental adjustments. I could not quite see Mollie, older, with an indifferent husband, instead of an adoring doormat. Would she be sympathetic over Philly and his like? I thought she would. I went to our smart suburban station, and waited in front of a blaze of irrelevant geraniums, with a heart that throbbed quite hard against my jacket. The coat and skirt were still unthought of. I wore (if any one should care to know) a striped drab mohair skirt and a smart black military jacket, frogged with braid. A small hat tilted itself forward on my nose. That was the angle of the year. My hair was "done in basket plaits," and wound all round and round my head behind as flat as it would go. It looked a little like an open blackberry tart.

The train steamed in. A crowd trooped out of it. No one looked much like Mollie. Suddenly, a really cruel pinch upon my arm made me wheel round with half a startled cry. There stood a tallish little girl, with a repellent, but amazingly handsome face. Clare, of course: and Mollie was behind her.

Mollie was changed—changed in a way that years could not have changed her by themselves. Her russet hair was actually cut short. She wore a serviceable boat-shaped hat. Her jacket was severe. Her tie and

collar were a man's, and just above her jacket showed a bit of horse-cloth waistcoat. Her face was much the same—a trifle lined, a trifle faded, but not much of either: only the rather clumsy mouth, her weak point always, closed far more grimly than it used to close. I wondered what had happened to poor Mollie.

She gave me a long and steady look, as she took my hand. She did not kiss me at the station. I had thought she would not. The grave reserve of her, at all events, was unimpaired. Like all impulsive, too-effusive natures, I could feel its charm.

Clare did not give us any chance of mutual knowledge. That annoyed me: but the child relieved us of all possible awkwardness. She chattered without ceasing in a strangely grown-up way. She was like a confident, vivacious woman. I felt her curiously level with myself in age, and her beauty drew my eyes perpetually. I wondered why it had so little charm for me. I now think the reason to have been the absence of all good or aspiration to good in the face. Evil has always seemed to me a dull and negative thing, the absence of a light, rather than a lurid fire. It is the fight of the striving soul, shown in the eyes, that attracts me—or the achieved peace after the fight. A face that merely waits on petty appetites is no face to me, and its possessor no person.

As I watched Clare, I felt her mother watching me.

"What do you think of her?" she asked me, when we were at last alone.

"She is extraordinarily handsome, isn't she?"

"Yes, that's the one thing Clare is not a disappointment in: and even that is not all gain."

The voice was very bitter. I looked up at Mollie.

"You will see for yourself," she said sadly; "she is born without love. She has emotions that will always serve her turn, and make her seem as loving as you like."

"Perhaps she'll be happier that way."

"Happier than you? Quite likely," answered Mollie, with a little reminiscent smile; "you'll always tear yourself to smaller tatters than you tear the other person. . . By the way, that's what I want to hear. Have there been other persons, Olive? You've been home a year."

My stepmother, by confiding in me a real worry before she had been ten minutes in the house, had suddenly brought out some quality in me that made me older. By its light, the Philly business looked quite infantile.

"Oh,—sort of others!" I said loftily. "They don't amount to much; *boys*, and that sort of thing."

Mollie's mouth twitched a little.

"Poor boys. Tell me about them," she said kindly: and, curled upon her bed, I told her.

She understood at once. She helped me out whenever I was puzzled for a word. She was infinitely kinder than old memories of her. Great joy arose in me.

"It *is* going to be jolly, having you!" I sighed. "What times we shall have."

Then, before I could stop it, my glance fell on Mollie's manly *coiffure*. It had quite a charm of its own, since the hair had a crisp little longing to curl, like the hair

of the delicious heroes of novelettes, and since the head that it grew on was of the fascinating shape that one associates with mediæval Florentine page-boys. Still, in that age, when the Simple Life and Garden Cities were still in the long-suffering womb of time, it would have needed some nerve to accompany my stepmother to evening functions.

"It'll grow in no time," Mollie said in answer to my ill-bred glance; "it grows as fast as I can cut it."

"Why . . . ?" I began.

"Why did I cut it? Well, partly for a practical reason, and partly for a symbol."

Mollie had changed. In the old days, she never talked like that. Perhaps she had no audience then.

"Tell me," I said.

"When is your father coming in?"

"I don't suppose till dinner . . . He rather quails, I fancy, at the idea of meeting you."

Mollie ignored my last words.

"Well," she began. I settled down to listen. Should I hold her hand and stroke it while she talked? I am not really a "born gusher": but I often find that physical contact leads to mental contact too. The hand looked small and lonely: but it had a kind of independent air that kept me off. I played with a little strap upon her coat instead. Mollie wore no engaging dingle-dangles.

"Well, . . . I started helping Lucy in that Nursing Home of hers. You've heard about it. First, she just wanted some one who could keep accounts and do the shopping, interview the patients' relations"—no one

spoke then of people's "people"—"and make herself generally presentable. She was the Matron, and saw to the nurses, and the patients only. All that time, I dressed myself as nicely as I could, and didn't cut my hair—"

"Your lovely hair!" I said.

"—because it didn't happen to get in my way. It was an asset. I am a very practical person."

"Yes, Mollie?"

"But later on it did get in my way. The Nursing Home cost more than it ever paid. We pondered over things for weeks. Then we decided that we'd try an ordinary boarding-house. We flattered ourselves we weren't ordinary people."

"I should think not!"

"Perhaps if we *had* been the whole thing would have gone off better. We got boarders, one or two, at first; the dusty-looking ladies with a little pension and a married daughter in India—"

"I know! I've seen them at my Châlet."

"—and then we got some men. They were mostly very young and very old. The young ones wanted everything so cheap that there was very little profit. They hadn't much to give, poor boys! The old ones . . . well, they paid more, but they wanted twice as much."

"Poor Mollie, what a life for you!"

"That wasn't all." My stepmother looked down at me. "I wonder how much this girl knows of life," her troubled eyes said plainly.

"Of course it wasn't. They all fell in love with you."

"The young ones did. That didn't matter much. They only bought me little screwed-up miseries of London flowers and put them on my plate, and scowled at one another and got red whenever I spoke to them. The old men were much worse."

"Did they fall in love too?"

"No. They *made* love. There's all the difference, Olive."

"Yes, I know." I felt as if I knew.

"I got so sick of it." Mollie jumped up and strode about the bedroom. With her short hair and her manish dress and her slight limbs, she looked a boy, until you saw the shadows on her face.

"You don't know what it is," she said. "Olive, if you marry, stay beside your husband. Not to be free, and not to be protected—it's a ghastly thing. They think you game—fair game, that's the expression. And it's no good taking your stand as if you were a man, just out to earn a living, with your sex not counting for the moment. At least, it's no use while you dress in pretty clothes and do your hair becomingly. And I don't blame them. There's a novel by a man called Meredith. It's called 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.' There's a girl in it, and a young boy's family talk as if she'd entrapped him. Some one defends her. 'She did everything she could to keep him off,' they say—or something like that. (No one could talk as this Mr. Meredith writes.) 'She didn't cut her hair off!' some one answers. I saw the force of that. I tried to have it both ways for a long

time — to be attractive, without attracting in that hateful way. Then I made a clean sweep. It's the only practical thing. I cut my hair like this. I sent my pretty dresses to a wardrobe-lady, and I paid my dressmaker up to date and went out and found a lady's tailor: and ever since I've been a sort of woman-man. . . . It frightens them."

"Poor Mollie, I can quite imagine how you felt! But you left it, after all. (I'm glad you did.)"

"I left it because I'd longed for years to leave it, and had no excuse. Then, when I heard of Hester's marriage, I felt (quite honestly) that some one ought to look after little Olive: and — I thought of Clare."

"Yes, Clare! How lovely she is, Mollie!"

"Yes," Mollie looked at me, "she's not precisely built to frighten off elderly Lotharios. Any home with a man in it is better than none, Olive — even if he's only a scarecrow to keep off the other birds of prey."

"Poor Papa!" I said, reverting from association to the old name for "the Dad."

"I'm sorry," said Mollie, "I didn't mean to speak like that to you. It isn't personal exactly, what I feel. It's for women in general. They're pampered, numbers of them, and that's bad: but let them get just round the corner from the *bon-bon* shop and they find — a pack of wolves. They can have *bon-bons* still: but they must first throw to the wolves the best things that they have."

"But there are good men, Mollie? I've never met a wolf."

"Good men? Why, thousands! They're looking

after their own women: their own women take good care they don't look after *us!* 'Go back to your husband,' they say. I agree with them. That's why I'm here."

"I suppose it's just nature, and there's no way out? Between ourselves, a *wolf* is my most pressing need at present! I can't find one. I had a sort of wolflet — but he's gone away."

Mollie laughed.

"Perhaps you'll find a *bon-bon* bearer without fangs," she said; "it's rather sad to think that if you don't you may be as clever and as pretty as you like, and you'll be just a failure."

"Why should I be? There must be more in any woman than the side that eats sweets and is eaten by wolves."

I felt affronted.

"That's just it. I want you to feel that," said Mollie; "that notion, that every woman has to find some sort of man to keep her before she is allowed to count at all, and must stay with him when he is loathsome to her — it has made me think, I tell you, Olive!"

"What's the way out?" I persisted.

"*Work*, of course. Do you imagine there's anything in your mere sex or mine that makes us not able to work, like anybody else! And yet there's nothing but governessing that any one would give you. And governessing isn't honest work unless you have two quite unusual gifts — something to teach, and the power of teaching it."

Mollie had evidently talked this out before. Her tongue was fluent and her cheeks and eyes shone fire.

"Some girls, just here and there, of our class, turn hospital nurse, I know. More power to them! And others throw their caste away and go into a shop. But there they have the wolves all round them, I believe. And anyway, I don't think much of milliners' shops. They're places where you're wheedled into paying more than you can afford, for ugly, vulgar things."

"What can one do, then, if one doesn't go into a hospital? I don't suppose there's room for *all* of us in hospitals!"

"All of you? Most of you are on the look-out for a wolf, as you candidly put it! But there isn't room for all the rest; quite true. What's wanted is a training. Every girl, the same as every boy, should have a training in some trade or art or some profession. . . . You've heard of women's colleges?"

"Yes," I said dubiously. At that time most of us had heard of "woman's rights," and "blue-stockings." They were spoken of in much the same tones as the country vicar's wife employs when she speaks of militant suffragettes.

"Well, they don't teach you everything in the world, of course, any more than men's colleges do: but they're a step in the right direction. Did they teach you *anything* at school, Olive? I learned nothing whatsoever from *my* governesses."

"I can speak French," I said, "and at the Convent they showed me how to make the loveliest landscapes out of human hair!"

"Exactly. Well, very few people will pay you to

speak French, if you can't teach it thoroughly. And I don't suppose there's a long-felt want for landscapes in hair. What an atrocity!"

"They were quite lovely," I said; "I did one of the Convent itself, with all its forty-seven windows."

"Silly, *silly* waste of time and eyesight!" Mollie was decidedly strong-minded.

"Do you know," she said, "women are forming clubs? There's one—I never knew of it until I lived in London—that's called the 'Pioneers.' I'd like to take you to their lectures. . . ."

Then a step came faltering along the passage. The Dad shamefacedly came into the room. Mollie grew scarlet and grew pale again.

"Well, how are you?" she asked, in a rather strained, but quite composed, small voice. Husband and wife shook hands.

Then suddenly the gentleman in Mollie's husband, that made us all forget the man in him that was not gentle, made itself heard.

"I am glad to welcome you, my dear," he said, and kissed the nervous hand. The tears came into Mollie's eyes. I left them, the strange pair, together.

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER my illuminating talk with her mother I went up to my own bedroom, and there found my small half-sister studying my various photographs.

"Do tell me," she said, wheeling round, "is this one of your boys?"

It was my solitary "boy"—a passably good likeness of the vanished Philly. From an equal, I should not have resented the question; but from this small child, whom I had meant to mother, and accompanied by her curiously knowing look, I somehow did not like it.

"It's a boy I know," I said repressively.

"Tell me about it!" this with exaggerated "coax" thrown into the voice.

"There's nothing to tell!"

"Oh!" said my little sister.

"Do you think *my* hair would suit me, done like that?" she asked me next, gazing with approbation at my "basket-plaits."

"It's miles prettier as it is," I said. And indeed it was most pretty. It hung all over the child's shoulders, past her waist, and shone like gold and bronze and copper, as the sunlight searched it.

"It *is* rather spiffing!" said Clare. "Mamma's old gentlemen adored it!"

I began to understand that Mollie had left her boarding-house "partly because of Clare."

"Papa's come in," I said to her.

"I'm longing to see Daddy!" said his daughter.

"Wonder how he likes *us* coming to stay!"

Clare was making me feel thirty-eight instead of eighteen. Was I to be a counteracting influence to all this? Or to win her unchildlike affections by my sympathy? I felt vicarious throes of parenthood.

"Come down and see him," I said lamely.

Clare gave a little shrug and laugh, then came demurely down the stairs to Mollie's room. The Dad looked up as we came in. Something of the kind, real-father look, that I remembered from the Irish days when I learned reading from him, came into his face as he saw both his children—the gipsy-like and coltish elder, the seraphic younger—come towards him.

"By George!" he breathed, and looked at Mollie; "she will break a heart or two, that child."

Mollie nodded, but she did not show the pride that ordinary mothers would have shown. Clare was obviously the most problematic of poor Mollie's many problems. Conceived in weary aversion, she had grown up prematurely, and without the principle of love. All her mother's fondness in her infancy was not able to rouse one echo in her baby-heart. To set against this, she was almost ominously amiable. You felt that she could not be roused to a generous anger. She had not even that share of the adult virtue of self-respect that could feel insult. If ever immature child was mature cynic, Clare was one.

We settled down with little friction. A daily govern-

ess, severely plain and spectacled, came every morning to teach Clare and take her for a walk. Mollie and my father seemed on terms of almost affectionate indifference. He kept to his old habits. He came down at twelve, or thereabouts, breakfasted by himself in the small room we called his study; went for interminable rambles all the afternoon; tea'd no one could quite say where; and came in to the family dinner debonair and sociable, compared with his long silences in Hessie's day. Hessie and he seemed curiously unable to breathe the same air with comfort: though a chance word of his once told me that she was perhaps the one person in the world for whom he had unqualified respect where moral character was concerned. Her brain he simply pitied and despised.

Mollie came out with me to local parties. Till her thick hair grew, she wore a little quaint mob-cap which suited her. It was beginning to be the age of amber beads, mob-caps, mittens, high-waisted gowns, and sun-flowers in your garden and your vases.

"You said you cut it for a practical reason, as well as for a symbol," I asked Mollie, "what was the practical reason?"

"Why do men cut theirs?" said she. "To save themselves time and trouble! Why things should be obviously sensible when a man does them, and ridiculous when it's a woman, I really fail to see!" Mollie was truculent at times. Her gentleness had slightly suffered, and her sense of humour. What should not have suffered, in a life like hers?

"I suppose it would be a pity if there was *no* one pretty left?" I hazarded.

"Don't fret," said Mollie, grimly, "the harem isn't empty yet"—which I thought hardly fair. One might cultivate an independent and objective beauty for its own sake, and I said so.

"Watch women when there's no man about," she said; "the spinsters at our boarding-house, and their lace collars, directly a male appeared! While we were only women they sat down as they were."

"They used to wear black beady frocks at dinner at the Châlet."

"Yes, I know those as well—a tiny bit transparent, weren't they, to show collar-bones?"

"Yes! nearly always."

"There's nothing like the modesty of scraggy women. '*Rien à déclarer*,' one boarder used to call it."

"Was she plump?"

"Of course."

Decidedly my Mollie had turned "nasty."

"I should think you'd breathe again, now Clare has left all that," I said.

"She hasn't left it," said her mother; "she's brought it all with her. Clare is appallingly vulgar. She gravitated quite naturally to the tenth-rate people. So much for blood!"

"We don't know yet what she'll be like."

"Heredity is nonsense!" said poor Mollie. "You think your child knows certain things by instinct. You never dream of telling her in so many words not to do and

say and think the things that you never imagine will come near her mind: and you find her doing them all. You think *you* knew it all by instinct. You didn't. Your environment was different. That is all."

I resolved that Clare's future environment should undo her past, if possible. There were some charming children in our suburb. Most suburbs hold all sorts. The majors and colonels with their kindly, faded wives, who live unobtrusively in the houses that do not have to be "one minute's walk from the railway station" because of black-bagged owners, are often the salt of the earth. Most of our friends were poorish; but in a suburb where more wealth meant more push and brisker trade, poverty was a sort of distinction. The City folk were magnanimous and recognised it. To get Miss Cassilis in her invariable black evening dress of three years back—even to get Miss Olive Latimer in unwomanly rags—meant more to them than the presence of fuzzy Gladys Keating with her thousands and a footman to take her home. I thought of some dear little brave impecunious Robbins and gentle little Annes as playfellows for Clare.

Amongst my slightly—"superior" thoughts about my sister, something sub-conscious was ashamed in me. I dragged it out.

"Mollie, you know—" I tried to tell her.

"What do I know?"

"Well . . . do you know? I was expelled from school—for *stealing*, Mollie!"

Mollie looked grave enough.

"That's very bad," she said, "but tell me."

I told her, with an incoherent flood of apologetics.

"You see," I finished, "it wasn't anything to do with *taking* things. I never meant to take them. I wanted just to show the miniature to Connie Dare—the girl I worshipped so—and then I got let in for giving her a present, and, before I knew, I'd offered her the miniature. . . . You see how it all came about? *Don't* you see, Mollie?"

"Yes, in a way, I see," said Mollie, "but I don't like what I see. The real excuse for all that mass of weakness is the fact that you were just a child. I should hope you wouldn't do that sort of thing, now you're grown up, for *any* reason?"

"I can't imagine it," I said quite truthfully, "but, is it *very* immoral of me? I *cannot* feel that property's so sacred! It seems to me it doesn't matter much—not *frightfully*. I'd so much rather somebody took something of mine and used it than—well, gave me an unkind look, say, if I happened to be fond of her. I suppose I'm a sort of natural socialist, and feel that all property ought to be held in common," I wound up complacently.

Mollie did not look at all impressed with me.

"It's just that kind of self-deception that makes criminals," she said, quite coldly.

"Oh, come!" I wished I hadn't spoken.

"Have you ever met a criminal?" she asked.

"I don't believe I have." I fished conscientiously for criminals in the backwaters of my memory.

"Well, I have—more than one," said Mollie, "and they were not ferocious creatures with prognathous jaws at all. They were complacent people who were 'afraid they couldn't see the awful harm' of their particular sin. Don't you understand that the moral side you're numb upon is just the side where sin attacks you? I'm not talking goody talk. I mean it practically. If you're deaf of the left ear, it's no good smiling in the traffic and saying, 'I'm afraid I'm not conscious of these wonderful carriages and omnibuses you brag about on the left of me!' You'll get knocked down all the same."

"Eloquent illustration!" I replied, with the cheap pertness of resentment.

"Poor Olive!" said my stepmother, "you didn't bargain for a moral lecture. But . . . *I'm right there*, childie, if I was never right in all my life before. Just you run straight, straight, *straight!* Stealing and lying are stealing and lying, and not pretty peculiarities of any one's. Who was it said that the people most urgently wanted were not people with genius, but people who could be trusted with small sums of money?"

"Hadn't you better lock the silver up?" I asked, still huffy.

Mollie ignored this foolishness.

"Tell me about your debts," she said.

I was startled.

"How did you know I was in debt? I never told you."

"I suspected it," said Mollie; "perhaps I can help you if you tell me."

"Well . . . Hessie lent me two pounds of her trousseau-money, so I only owe about four-pounds-ten: but it worries me."

"Hessie lent it to you? Then Hessie was not in debt?"

"No, she never went to dances. That was why."

"She was more honourable — *that* was why!"

"*Mollie!* you're down on me to-day. Don't do it. This is ancient history now. Besides, I can't look decent on twelve pounds."

"Is that all your father gives you?"

"Yes. It's not enough."

"It isn't. I shall see that you get twenty: and I'll pay your debts. But you must never have a single thing put down in future."

"Oh, Mollie!" I almost wept in my relief. "I give you my word of hon —"

"No, please!" said Mollie, "do your best, that's all."

I hugged her and then left her, my vanity most salutarily wounded, and my heart rejoiced. I never thought of asking how my stepmother could afford to help me. It was not until long after that I found out that both the increase of my allowance and the four-pounds-ten came out of some small savings, made in the years of Mollie's bondage to her boarding-house.

Free from debt, I turned my thoughts to revelry again. Insidious notices of dances beset our letter-box. The subscription-dance was just beginning to supersede the private one. People had not yet discovered that a dinner at a goodly restaurant was far less heavy, in two

senses, than perpetual functions in the same Victorian dining-room: but they did realise that "turning your whole house out" to give a dance was considerably more vexatious than just taking your party to a ball-room at all times ready for you. We had a small hotel near by that boasted a large empty room. It gradually became the centre of all dancing. I was considered to be providentially favoured, living within a stone's throw of its revels. No need for "Morgan's flies"—unreliable vehicles that undertook too much and ended by failing every one.

Aided by Timson, into whose good graces I had leapt again with Mollie's cheque, I made a presentable appearance with my distinguished-looking Mollie as a chaperon. Partners flocked in with gratifying readiness. I enjoyed the small success: but . . . had I *grown*, in my retreat-time? I found them all insipid. Mollie, perhaps, with her breath of a stern world beyond the ball-room, her outlook on at least one phase of the realities, had influenced my mind already.

There were two kinds of partners, I discovered—hardly more than two. One kind was affable, but indifferent. It held you very loosely, talked perfunctorily, laughed heartily at your answer before you had made it, hurried you to refreshments, fed you conscientiously, gazed over your head with the pleasantest of smiles, and tore back to the ball-room with you at the first bar of the next waltz, depositing you with a nice bow and pretty murmur of some sort. This kind inspired me with a longing to surprise it for a moment—make it attend, if

only for an instant, to the human entity in contact with it. I speculated often as to what would happen if I confronted it with some startling human fact that touched the depths. I pictured the affable, correct young face, its horror-stricken change, the naked reality that would leap into the eyes, the appalled opening of the smiling mouth above the choky collar.

“Your mother has been murdered.”

“Did you know that I had small-pox?”

I never carried out this bright idea.

The other kind of partner was different. He was “*not quite*,” we all agreed: and he was on the increase. He held you closer than you liked — a little. Perhaps he spread a large warm hand between your shoulder-blades, which made you feel a trifle sick. He looked into your face when you were dancing when he could, and pressed your hand (quite gently) when you spoke to him, to show you that he heard. He always took you away from the ball-room before your dance with him was at an end, and generally said, “Where can we be cosy?” assuming that you *wanted* to be cosy with him. He often tried to make you cut the dance that followed his. He sat a little close to you, and did things like buttoning your glove, and fanning you caressingly, and touching the flowers you wore, and asking about your ornaments. He was not dangerous at all and just stopped short of being quite offensive. He was as personal as the other kind was the reverse: but it was the wrong way of being personal: and it lumped you all together, just as the other kind kept you all at the same

distance. Directly you had left him, you would see him with another partner, fanning her and talking to her of her flowers and of her dress and ornaments. Some primitive, susceptible young girls would thrill at him—on which a mild flirtatiousness ensued. I found him boring, and a little caddish. (We never talked of “bounders” in those days.) I felt that if the real girl in me had interested even one of these promiscuous ones, he would have found response enough. To respond to something real was my fierce desire. It was impossible to find reality in either of these ball-room types.

And then, into this sterility, there flowed a sweet and bitter spring. Into a world of sham emotions there pierced a burning reality. My negligible, trivial sexual disturbances, my little sordid matrimonial ambitions, my whole cheap, silly outlook on dances, frocks and partners, vanished as if a curtain had rung down upon them all.

Quaintly, this cataclysm started with little Mr. Damer. He was a nice, precise, clean little man, whom our suburb stigmatised as “gentlemanly.” When you heard his name you always heard his adjective. It followed him, like some small decorous dog.

“Do you like little Damer?”

“Oh, well . . . he’s a very gentlemanly little man.”

The spring that held my nineteenth birthday was in swing. Little Mr. Damer hired a boat for most of it. The boat cost money, and he had not very much. He asked a friend to share it with him. The friend paid half, and only came at intervals from his City school where he taught mathematics: so that gentlemanly Mr.

Damer got the best of the bargain. This irked his generous soul: and in return he filled the boat on Saturdays with all the local fair that he could find. He would go round and advertise his friend, pathetically insistent on his charms.

"I think you'd really like my friend, Miss Latimer," he pleaded. "He is one of the most intelligent, delightful fellows that I've ever met."

"I'm sure I should," I said perfunctorily. "Intelligent" should have attracted me. Perhaps, unconsciously, I felt as Thackeray felt when he heard Brown's testimonial to his social status. ("Very good of Mr. Brown: but—how does Brown know?")

"He's not the ordinary man you meet round here," said little Damer earnestly, "that's why I thought of asking *you* if you would honour the boat. He takes a little knowing—"

"You sound as if you wanted to let him furnished!" I interrupted, with the rather silly pertness that our suburb encouraged and called my "brightness."

"Perhaps I shall be called upon to *give him away*," suggested little Damer, with respectful archness and a blush. He tried quite hard to talk like other "river-men"; but their rather dreadful blend of gallantry and humour did not come smoothly to his "gentlemanly" tongue.

"I'll come on Wednesday with much joy," I said benignantly. A picnic had been arranged and would shortly take place upon a pretty island two miles up the stream. The little host trotted away delighted.

The day came, and I felt a languid interest only. The specially recommended have a handicap to start with. However, others would be there. I thought of one of these—a fairly comely, sympathetic youth, who had declared *vieux rose* to be my colour. I put on a sunburnt shady hat. The hat had an old-rose scarf for trimming. The tan and rose of it were repeated in my face. I felt pleased with myself. I was still too thin, but I undulated slightly everywhere, my hair was very black, and my eyes were black and danced. I set out jauntily.

The boat-loads were drawn up beside some willows. A tall but slightly slouching figure rose from one of them. It towered above me and held out a large, kind, helping hand.

"You're coming into *my* boat?" said Mr. Damer's friend.

We stood a moment absurdly, hand-in-hand. The question took on a sudden extraordinary seriousness. I looked up.

The dear face, the dark face . . . I stepped into my lover's boat, in the spring-time of the world.

CHAPTER XIV

THREE had been quite a number of engagements in our suburb. The river is a perennial matchmaker. Some half-dozen among my companions already were given in marriage. I had watched their demeanour before this climax. Without exception, it had seemed a mildly triumphal progress for the girl. She had exulted in the ring and the possession of a fiancé, made the most of his looks and his prospects, talked a good deal about the house they were to have and what presents could be expected from his family and hers; and, for the rest, had speedily settled down into normality, with the pleasant addition of an escort to be counted upon for all occasions. It had not seemed to shake the world for any of these girls. Above all, what gentle excitement it had brought them seemed entirely pleasurable.

To me, love brought not peace but a sword. There was almost unbearable joy: but there were terrors upon terrors. Nothing so placid as "happiness" connotes came near us. When we did not make each other's bliss we made each other's agony. These are big words, but not exaggerations.

Outsiders were unpleasant, but they did not count.

"You might have chosen a fellow who knew when he needed shaving," said my dapper father scathingly; "in my day they called them 'ushers' when they taught in schools — except the few great Public Schools, of course."

"He *is* rather a pronounced brunette about the chin towards evening," I admitted; "we'll see what we can do about it: and I'm sure he won't mind your calling him an usher if you want to."

"His *name* is not quite what I should have chosen for you," said gentle Hessie, in a letter; "I can't imagine my Olive 'Mrs. Joseph Wilks.' Still, dearest, if you feel that he is *the* man for you, Edward and I would not *think*," etc.

"No, it isn't precisely a crusading name," I wrote, "thank Edward very much for overlooking it."

"Do you really think you'll manage as a poor man's wife?" asked Mollie gloomily.

"About as badly as any one ever managed, I should think!"

"You may be cheerful at the prospect. That's because you haven't tried it."

"I couldn't, darling, before I was asked."

"I have," said Mollie, serious still, "at least, I've tried the poverty. It wasn't always pretty, Olive."

"Mollie, I'm not a fool. I daresay I shall hate that part."

"And yet you'll go into it with your eyes open."

"You might as well say 'To-morrow will be foggy and yet you're going to let it come.' "

"No one is going to *make* you marry him."

"Oh, yes! Two people are — Olive and Joe."

"Oh, well!" Mollie relented. After all, she would, I verily believe, have felt some disappointment if I had let her teach me caution.

"If he is a *thoroughly good man*," wrote Mrs. Liston,
"God will bless your union."

"Thank you so much for giving me the message," I wrote back, with most imprudent flippancy, "but no thoroughly good man would want to marry *me*."

"Darling child," wrote, in a shaky hand, sweet old Miss Maggie, "it seems so strange to think of you, who were our little Olive, going to be a married lady. Remember to obey your dear husband in all things, and to keep yourselves unspotted from the world."

I answered *that*, not flipantly, but with a tear.

"This Whelks," most peevishly wrote Lady Broome, my mother's sister — Aunt Hetty, whose blue feathers, sent to me on a hat, had scandalised the Brethren, "what has he to settle on you?"

What indeed?

Some of it was unpleasant: but I heard it in a sort of dream. My solitude was always tortured with living over our last interview, his and mine, or longing for the next. Had I disappointed him? Was it spoilt for ever, all the miracle? I had not answered as he hoped. I had seen strangeness in his look. He had begun to find me out. How was it possible that this thing of wonder should keep living, when its life depended on a creature like myself? Sordid, selfish, shallow, not even beautiful . . . it was impossible I should not fail him: and if I failed him, brain and the will to live would go. I could foresee it all, the failure and the awful emptiness. I could not eat or sleep with this black mood upon me. Then would come some letter, warm with adoration. I

would kiss it with desperate lips, babble to it with broken, grateful words, hold it, weeping, tight, tight to my breast . . . And I had seen my girl-friends smirk when they received their lovers' cheerful letters. I had even been shown small flattering extracts, and had looked forward to showing some, one fair day, in my turn!

Sometimes, but very rarely, it would be the other way. I would feel some descent in him. This was not half so agonising. In fact, it held a sort of comfort: there seemed less of a chasm to be bridged between his deserts and mine. Yet it was terrible. I would never let it last. A very little pondering, when he had gone, brought back the glamour.

At other times, a strange physical flatness, the highly natural result of reaction from hours of fevered longing, would appall me. If I felt jaded now, what should I feel when possession had taken off for ever that razor edge of painful rapture at his touch? This cloud was not a frequent one.

It is obvious that this engagement has robbed me, for the moment, of the slightest spark of humour. In return, it had woke giant sincerities in me: and, in life's utter irony, I found that I must hide them, if I was to keep what was my very breath.

Joe, left alone, would, man-like, have had far fewer agonies. His sense of humour and proportion was less conquerable than mine. But, worked upon by all my moods, he suffered extraordinarily. Hatred can never torture so exquisitely as love. I soon infected him. Our life became a strain that almost killed us. It nearly all

sprang from one fact. We were, marvellously, one another's counterpart. He was myself made masculine, with infinitely greater "grit" and gifted with a perfect honesty. I was perishing to be as honest, to give up the last miserable rag of pose—and it was he who would not let me, for he would not see me as I was—of like passions with himself. We were too near of kin to marry—and far too near of kin to live apart. This, and the bewildering fumes of vehement physical desire, were responsible for the almost intolerable *Sturm und Drang* of our engagement.

Take at random one of our summer afternoons together on the river, which must have seemed ideal and idyllic to the sympathetic lookers-on.

Joe was waiting for me at the boat-house. (I am quite aware that I have neither introduced him conventionally nor described him at all.)

"We struck a cheerful note," as the reviewers say, to start with.

"I want a name for you and me," I announced, when the boat was well under weigh.

"We've got one—a jolly ugly one," said Joe. "We're Mrs. and Mr. Joseph Wilks—or very near it."

"That's what people think we are," I said. "What are we really?"

"Blest if I know!" Joe ruminated; "we can't be Petrarch and Laura, because she married some one else, and I never manage sonnets well. And we're not Paolo and Francesca because there'll never be a day when we shall 'read no more.' And we might be Anthony and

Cleopatra, only there's no Cæsar in the background—"

"How do you know?" I asked, with the doubtful riverside coquetry that I was always forgetting to avoid with Joe. "Perhaps there are crowds of Cæsars!"

Joe's face changed.

"If I did know," he said, icily, "you should immediately have your choice of a more euphonious surname."

Stormy pause.

"Why will a woman always imagine that the suggestion of herself in the arms of other men is attractive to a man who cares for her? It only sickens him—that's all."

"Oh, dear! I never thought of people's arms!"

I made my voice sound small and piteous, in the way that charms a lover and exasperates the laity. Joe melted to it.

"I know, carina. But you'll never try to make me jealous, will you? It's the cheapest dodge—the only thing to make me feel differently about you."

"Never," I said, devoutly—and that small first cloud, no larger than a man's frown, passed.

"To return," I said, "to names—we need a name to call each other. It mustn't be sawney, or we shall want to laugh. But it must be the *same* name, to show that we are the same Wilk altogether—'the twin halves of one perfect whole.'"

"Whelks, your Aunt's inspiration, would be rather nice."

"No, it mustn't be definitely facetious. How would

'Welkin' do? I've always wondered what the Welkin was. It might as well be us."

"I believe it's the air — the sky," said Joe.

"I don't. I think it's a sort of valley. Anyhow, it rings. Let's be the Welkin — a collective noun."

"All right. When I say Welkin I'll mean that it's the sky; and you shall mean the valley, which is me. That's a rather appropriate arrangement."

"Oh, *is* it?" (Too well I knew he thought so.) "It seems to me you are going to honour and obey me, as well as — the other thing." I have never talked to him of "love" since learning from him what it meant.

"Oh, I believe *you're* going to obey, aren't you?"

"Could you make me? It would be fun!" I looked at his strong wrists with a curiously primitive thrill. The most complex of us may be also the most primitive — only we taste our own primitiveness, roll it, as it were, upon the tongue. It gave me a deliberate pleasure to think of myself at Joe's mercy.

Without caution I expressed something of this. That has been my bane, the fatal need for self-expression.

"Women are idiots and don't know what they miss," I said; "any one can go her own way if she likes, of course. You're not supposed to lock her up: but I should think the humiliation of giving in to your man's strength was about the fiercest thrill to be got out of things."

Joe was looking curiously at me, not altogether pleased.

"I know what you mean," he said, "but I hope

you don't yourself. It trenches on things that you would never think of."

"Oh, wouldn't I?" I thought. By instinct, and by rumour, I knew more than Joe imagined. Instinctively, to please him, I looked puzzled, and all was well. I burned to be myself with my lover. It seemed that I must always entertain that hitherto only occasional visitor, my best self.

"The Kingdom of Hell is within us, not only the Kingdom of Heaven," I said to myself; "I wish love were strong enough to know it, and stay with us still."

Meanwhile the few words on the dangerous subject had aroused a side of me that was just then at its least subordinate. I longed for the embrace that the publicity of our meeting had denied us. I watched Joe as he sculled — his strong throat, the emotional touch about the lips. . . . There was a small backwater further up the stream. We always made for it. Sometimes it was occupied already. I felt that if that were so to-day I could not bear it. We drew near. Our willow leaned its sentimental branches over an empty place of softly flowing water, green from its shade.

I steered straight past the place of secret joy.

"Where are you going?" Joe had noticed, then!

"Oh, do you want us to tie up?"

I was learning well the small hypocrisies of sex. No one would have thought that my heart was beating till it nearly made my breath give out and come in gasps, so madly did I long for that sweet nook, and those strong arms to close upon me. Perhaps my eyes told more than

I quite knew. Joe glanced at me and his took fire at once.

"Yes, I think I want us to tie up," he said, in the voice I liked to hear, though I knew that it was not the voice of my one lover but of Everywoman's.

We tied up, and he came beside me in the stern. I met his lips with fire that startled him. It woke such answering fire that, for the moment, I was happy, up to the limit of such happiness. Even then, secret mental undercurrents were disturbing us. We drew apart.

I felt my usual dread. Had I given too freely? It seemed to me the worst of all the cruelties of love, this eternal having to withhold.

"If I mustn't love you like this, I shall die," I found myself saying brokenly.

"You are glorious," said Joe, as brokenly; "it's because it's all white fire to you that you don't understand. I can't explain a man to you. For God's sake, go on loving me."

Again that intolerable pedestal of difference.

"My life hasn't been like yours." He laboured to explain. "That's why I want this not — not even to remind me of — those others."

"I expect I feel the same as they did," I said, with some genuine innocence, this time.

"Good God!" said Joe. He stooped and took the hem of my dress in his hand and kissed it.

However undeserved, I felt that this was sweet: but it changed the atmosphere of our green hiding-place. Joe took a book that he had brought me from the pocket of his blazer. I hungered still for kisses and felt frustrated.

Then my brain caught fire, my senses went to sleep, and (an hour later) we left the backwater considerably more placidly than we had entered it.

We sculled up stream still further, and had tea at a little hotel boat-house where we often went. The associations of this place were hilarious. We never had a mood there or a misery. This tea was jovial and repaired the strain, first sensuous, then emotional, then mental, of the afternoon. We talked about the house that we should have.

"We can't get decent furniture for years," said Joe.

"I'll tell you what we'll do!" I said. "It's no good trying to have good things, and I loathe those cheap artistic things — don't you? So let's get the very ugliest things in London, *dirt* cheap, so that no one can possibly think that they're our own culchawed taste! Then it'll be so interesting replacing them. Each time you get some extra money for a 'pup' or an article, we'll give away one hideous thing and get a jolly one."

"That's a notion," Joe agreed. We pursued this bright idea with the extremely facile laughter of people of our age and circumstance.

"A tin alarm clock for the drawing-room."

"Drawing-room, indeed! If you get a bed-sitting-room without a lodger, you'll be lucky, young woman! This Whelks isn't going to settle a *drawing-room* upon you!"

"A deal table with a magenta cloth."

"A black horse-hair sofa. You'll have to lie all over it to hide it when we have Lady Broomes to call."

"A black japanned coal-scuttle with wild roses painted on it."

"Two of those green and red carpet-chairs that fold and pinch your finger off."

"A penny ink-bottle and two penny penholders."

"Stationery — *very* cheap. You know the kind that servants write on. You can read all the words through the envelope, and the pen makes holes in the paper."

"A lamp with a glass receiver and a frosted shade."

"No, that'll look as if we meant it. Two tallow candles in tin candlesticks."

"Darling, you shall have the most hideous home in London if I live!"

We laughed consumedly, and ate enormously, spreading jam on the top of our butter and cream on the top of our jam.

"We'll have to live on cats' meat when we're married," Joe remarked in justification.

After tea, we left the boat, and wandered in some pretty fields and little copses near the towing-path. A peaceful, quite companionable mood was on us now. Also (prosaically) we were slightly comatose from so much food and laughter. We talked desultorily of nothings and felt a truce, not of God but of the blood, between our troubled spirits.

Then came the home-going in the twilight, and with it one of those adventures of the spirit that are remembered when what the world calls real things are long forgotten.

There is a great talk of Nature and her detachment and of the pathetic fallacy. Most of us, with childish,

obscure association of ideas and hopes, have searched the sky for the face of our Father—and have not seen His face: but once in the years the twilight seems to answer. It is as if some mother leaned down and whispered "I am here," to her small grieving child.

This evening was a magic one. The want of sound or movement helped the magic. For one strange moment, water and sky and trees all held their breath beneath the touch of God. We had laid down the sculls. The boat was drifting, and we guided it with paddles. I caught the wonder-moment, and my heart gave out an answer that was like a cry.

Oh, if my lover saw it too! That was too much to ask. His paddling ceased when mine did. I knew that if I turned and saw him fill his pipe, or search for matches in his pocket, I should want to weep because we could not share each other's vision but had to be blind in turn for ever. I sat breathlessly waiting, but without hope, for the fusing of the all but perfect earthly with this sudden, this tender divinity that had fallen on the world.

And then God sent me what I waited for.

"He *is* Love, isn't He?" said Joe.

"Oh, my own soul, how could I hide from you?" I cried, but not aloud, "Where could I go?"

CHAPTER XV

IF the day could have ended there, it would have been well and beautiful. But it did not end there: and as it is typical of all the days that came before our marriage, I give it all, and do not stop at what should be the climax.

After the wonderful moment when the twilight had whispered the same word to both of us, there was the inevitable fear of bathos. Self-conscious creatures that we were, we dreaded to speak. Anything that we could say would be a drop. We cringed from the banality of any drop. In a silence at first exquisite, then, as the transcendental vanished from us, half intolerable, we paddled down stream in the fading light.

A cockney boat-load, yelling a chorus, came unsteadily towards us. Their progress looked most drunken, but was merely the result of shocking steersmanship and genuine hilarity. I half envied them the apparent simplicity of their emotions.

"Oh, the girls!" (they yelled).

"And the boys,

"Oh, the boys

"And the girls,

"You will find them together

"In all sorts of weather

"*They go—*" (sounds as of two smacking kisses)

"*Yes they go—*" (as before)

"*Yes, the boys*

"*And the girls*

"*And the girls*

"*And the boys*

"*For the boys are in love with the girls and the girls are—*

"*The girls are in love with the boys!*"

That was all it came to, after all! We both smiled, with a delightful sense of broken tension.

"Brutes!" I murmured.

"Poor devils!" murmured Joe.

Why we should have pitied them or thought them brutal I can't say. They were young, and their women were with them, and the twilight had told them secrets too, and they had broken out into songs of love. If they had been young pagans in old Greece, and had worn vine leaves instead of bowler hats, we should have seen their beauty, as I, so far less arrogant for the years, can see it now.

At all events, they had done our job for us. Bathos does not sting when you are not the cause of it yourself. We talked quite naturally as we paddled to the boathouse; and as, under cover of the warm dusk (the year was growing older), we strolled home arm-in-arm, the nearness awoke nothing but a sense of comfort and of cameraderie.

At dinner the talk turned upon a book that charmed my father. I do not know how long it had been written,

but he had only just then come across it. It was a foolish, shallow, self-complacent thing, by one "Colonel" Ingersoll, and called "The Mistakes of Moses." All manner of Old Testament anecdotes were handled in an excessively facetious way. It showed the barbarity of letting bears eat little children in revenge for a prophet's wounded vanity; the impossibility of Jonah's certainly unusual maritime experiences, and so on. It is worth noting that, since that not so far-off day, no one is found to take these episodes as matters of faith, or to trouble to deride them; but at that time an attack on Old Testament "verbal inspiration" was still considered an attack on Christianity.

My father grew exceedingly hilarious over his "Colonel." I joined in, with rising mirth and spirits—another reaction, perhaps, induced by finding myself among the safe commonplace after the many-sided strain of the afternoon. I did not direct my fatally sparkling sallies at my lover: but I was acutely conscious of his presence—showing off, in fact. After a time, the queer bond between us spoke insistently. I looked at Joe in a panic. He was too obviously disgusted and amazed.

We had not stayed among our bears and whales. That was the trouble. The egregious Ingersoll had left them, and we had gone beyond him in our joy at our own wit, my parent and I: and we had ended by trampling, joyously-hoofed, on lovely mysteries: and I had driven from my lover's mind for ever the memory of our twilight vision, not yet two hours faded, and left instead the vulgar image of a coarse blasphemer—so I thought. My "bright"

talk stopped as if I had been stabbed dead. My father never noticed. Jape after jape and happy thought in the mild blasphemy line flowed from his joyous lips.

Mollie had noticed my sudden silence and Joe's look, and tried to ebb the tide. Failing, she turned to him (he always liked her) and began to talk in her low level tones. I sat excluded from the two, bracketed with that other who continued to offend their taste.

Dinner became a torment to me. Soon after it was over, it was time for Joe's train home. We dined as late as possible on these summer nights. Always before he left, by tacit consent of our elders, we had a stroll among the bracken in the public Deer Park on which our little house abutted.

To-night we strolled in silence. No human being was in sight. The dusk was all around us. It should have made a lover's paradise. My heart was heavy as lead. I exaggerated enormously the alienation of Joe. He had already, under the hour's influence, half forgotten the dreadful dinner talk. He was no prig, and knew me well for no genuine blasphemer. His arm stole round me as we stood.

"Don't touch me!" I said, passionately. "You know I've spoiled it all!"

He guessed at once what I was speaking of.

"You mean the Ingersoll nonsense?" he said. "It did jar a bit. But it seemed to cheer the Field-Marshal considerably."

"I know . . . but after that time on the river, only so lately, doesn't it *show* how I shall spoil it always? If I

didn't, I expect you'd have to! We're not allowed to keep it, I tell you! . . . Joe!"

"Well?" As always, the pain in my voice had woke its answer — selfish that I was!

"I want to end it now — before we really spoil it badly."

"How do you mean?" Joe stiffened, waiting tensely.

"Why, look at all the hundreds and hundreds who've begun like us, with such ideas about their life, and they all end by spoiling it!"

"How do we know? we only see the outside of them."

"Oh, we know! Look at the way they talk of one another! I don't know which I hate the most — the ones who snarl and snap, or whine about each other, or the 'good old girl' kind of tone, or the Missus, with the perambulator in the hall. Not one of them has kept the magic. It would *show*. It does in lovers."

"We should remember it," said Joe.

"The only consolation to me would be that we forgot it," I said, miserably; "it would be sorrow's crown of sorrow then, and no mistake. Oh, do let's have the *sense* to leave it now! Why should we be such special creations, more than any one else? You *know* we'll only spoil it. If you go now and never come back, nothing in this world or the next will ever take us from each other, as the Missus business would! Oh, don't you *see*?"

"I see," said Joe, with an edge of anger in his voice, "that you have never understood in the faintest degree what I *do* feel for you. That being so, I don't think

there's much good in talking. I will certainly relieve you of myself, and not come back, as you say."

Oh, tragedy! Oh, comedy! Oh, youth!

"Good-bye," I said, with a gasp. This was the time for a convulsive embrace. Joe (oh, bathos!) raised his hat (remember, he was only twenty-three) and stalked towards the Park gate. I turned towards the house and made his farewells for him. Then I hastened to my bedroom, to enjoy a little agony at leisure.

"*Gone!*" I said, sitting on my bed. Then the funniness of such a word in connection with Joe came over me. The frustrated agony vanished. I even smiled.

"As if Joe could leave me!"

I mused fondly.

Then a sound turned my little comedy to terror. I heard the whistle of a train. Supposing — just supposing — that he had taken me at my word. Supposing that he found I really did not understand. All the novels, with their misunderstandings and marriages of pique and — and suicides — came thronging to my brain. I was a fool, I know, but I was not nineteen.

I seized a hat and jacket from a peg. I fled down-stairs, and out into the night. The train Joe always went by had not gone, I knew. Now Heaven send he had not caught some great, officious, lumbering earlier train! I tore into the station, breathless.

Oh, thank Heaven indeed! There was the tall, familiar figure, with its slouch. It wheeled to meet me. Silently, I slipped my hand inside its arm. We walked

to the murk mystery of the platform's end. No soul was near us.

"Oh, you'll never go!" I said and clung to him.

"I never will. I never will," said Joe, and clung to me. "I nearly did," he added — and believed it.

"I don't believe we'll spoil it," I said later, when Joe's last train had steamed its raucous way to London without costing us a passing thought, "let's make a vow."

"Let's," said Joe, who would just then have made anything you like.

"We will defy the inevitable bathos of life. Say that after me — no, slowly."

"You have the loveliest eyes in all the world, and I can't see them; and we will defy the inevitable bathos of life."

"Yes, but — do you understand the nature of an oath? A vow mixed up with a falsehood will be easily broken. A chain is as strong as its weakest link."

"*You* do not understand the nature of a falsehood. Never mind. (I wish I could see them.)"

"Listen. If you grow fat and bald and respectable, and call me 'old girl,' I promise to remember what we *really* are, under all that."

"And if you have a lovely transformation and tight-lace to make your waist nineteen inches when it wants to be forty, I promise to remember what *you* really are under all *that!*"

"I'm practising already. Under your vulgar facetiousness, I am remembering that there's some glimmer-

ing of understanding of what I mean . . . Joe—aren't we really afraid of the 'petty dust'?"

"I don't think we need be." Joe had the inestimable gift of stopping fooling when you stopped.

"You see," he said, "all the things have dignity really — respectability has, for instance. We don't want to be disreputable. It's silly and it's dull. And perambulators have — any amount. And you couldn't be anything ordinary to me if you tried. We needn't worry if the Brown-Joneses sometimes feel the same. Perhaps they've got 'it' too."

"And if I'm blasphemous and vulgar and shallow and giggling and deceitful and vain? You'll just look closer and you'll say 'It's my woman and she loves me, body and soul'?"

"Oh, what a voice you have! no woman ever had it. Say that again, 'She loves me.'"

"No, I can't say it. But you will?"

"You *know* I will. And don't you think you'll have to do all that for *me*? My God, it's much more likely!"

"You? You shall run away with every pretty woman you see, and beat me every Saturday night, and give me two pounds a year for dress and ask for the change, and grow a beard and a bow-window and take the plate round every Sunday, and betray widows and orphans who've trusted you, and knock down old blind women and steal their dog, and break my heart and sell the pieces to the dustman, and I'll still be — what I said."

"Say it now!"

"I'll say it—on our wedding-day. . . . No, we must go. And where you're going, Heaven knows!"

"I'll get a room all right. It wouldn't kill me to walk back to town, if that's all! But what about you? Will Lady Mollie be angry?"

Mollie was.

"Where have you been?" she asked sternly.

"She saw me off," said Joe, with lameness.

"But you're *not* off," said Mollie. Still, she smiled. She never could resist Joe long. When he had gone to hire a room at some riverside hotel affected by the missers of last trains, she turned to me.

"*Never* go out in that shop-girl hole-and-corner way again!" she said. But she kissed me kindly.

So ended this variegated day. I have given it at its full length, because it is the history in a nutshell of a whole year of my life, and that a spiritually, mentally, bodily, important one to me.

CHAPTER XVI

OF course we were not always at high tension, though our general state was tense. Sometimes hilarity reigned long. Outsiders made our farce for us, as we, no doubt, made theirs for them.

Aunt Hetty summoned me to luncheon.

This had only happened once since I had left the Châlet. On that occasion, Hessie was the object of interest. It was the week of her engagement to her book-case.

Aunt Hettie was dissatisfied with Edward Cole, regarded as a *parti*. Regarded as an almost ludicrously "decent" match for a portionless and never brilliant Hessie, she had no grounds for vehement disapproval. A family (he was a *real* Cole), an income ("quite a thousand") a most presentable and starched appearance, an intimacy with the "best people" (largely obtained by the castigation of two generations of their males) and a general acquaintance with the right thing to say and the right pronouncement of proper names (Edward would probably have alluded to Sinjen the Baptist) all had impressed my reluctant aunt with the conviction that, though not good enough for dear Mary's daughter, Mr. Cole was almost a chance for poor Bernard's.

My poor Joe was quite another matter. Here at last Aunt Hettie felt quite certain. She did an artful and effective thing. She collected from the ranks of those

relatives who consistently ignored us a Cousin Kathleen, fair and beautiful, and as carefully bred as the best bulldog, who was on the verge of a match of matches. Having set us at each other, and watched us shake hands with an uneasy mutual wonder as to whether we should kiss to prove our kinship, she then glanced at Kathleen and smiled; at me—and sighed deeply. Then, with a mournful hand upon my shoulder and not Kathleen's ("Thy need is greater than hers" implied) she led us into the dining-room.

The talk at luncheon (why do we all pretend that we say "luncheon" when we obviously say "lunch"?) was the most crudely artistic thing in talks that I ever hope to hear. Aunt Hettie might as well have started quite candidly with "Look on this picture and on that." The devil entered into me, and I played up to her beyond her wildest fears.

"Yes, Kathleen darling," she began " (Kathleen was telling me about *her* wedding, Olive. Both you little cousins are to have weddings the same year, you know. So nice. . . .) It is to be at St. George's, I suppose?"

"Well, no," said Kathleen, in her cold, sweet voice, "Mamma thinks that St. George's is a little *vieux jeu*, it's been so overdone. We thought of our own Church—St. Mark's, North Audley Street. It's nice and near, for one thing, and one has to think of that. There'll be so very many people: and it takes a long time getting them to the house. Of course a good many will come in their own carriages, but *quite* a number won't" (with a re-

assuring smile at me) "and you *know* how long it takes, sending backwards and forwards."

"Of course," Aunt Hetty said, with fondest sympathy. "And you, Olive?" she continued, "where will you be married, dear?"

"Well, it's going to be either at the little red Baptist Chapel near our house," I said, "or else at a *very* nice little registry office up in town. The registrar's Joe's cousin."

This was really *un peu trop fort*: but Aunt Hetty took it like a bird. She coloured violently, and choked down her reply. I stole a glance at Kathleen. Then I warmed for life to that chill maiden. She met my eye with deep and complete comprehension. It was a look as good as any chuckle; and it at once gave place to utter gravity. Our eyes held each other while our souls shook hands: and then our mutual Aunt regained her nerve.

The thing was done, she felt. No worse could possibly ensue. It would be well to draw me out and show me, once for all, the gulf that I was putting between myself and my own blood—that blood which had proved to be so much thinner than water in all the intervals between the family marriages and deaths.

"I see," she said, trying to keep the anger from her courteous voice, "your fiancé—what is his name, dear? I'm ashamed to say that I've forgotten. These—er—uncommon names. . . ."

"His name? Oh, Whelks," I said, with a sentimental inflection. "I think it's rather sweet," I added fondly.

Something like a convulsive ripple passed across my cousin's face.

Aunt Hetty knew quite well that Joe's name was not really Whelks. She fixed me with a quick, uneasy look; but went on questioning. It was Kathleen's turn.

"I meant to ask you, dear, *is* Mr. Cuthbertson any relation to Sir Deighton Cuthbertson, Papa's old friend?"

"Yes, he's his son, Aunt Hetty. Didn't you know?" said Kathleen demurely. We both knew that Aunt Hetty knew.

"Where do your husband's people *come from*, Olive?" was the next attack.

"Oh, they're still *there*," I said, "they live at Putney — two such *pretty* rooms, quite near the 'buses."

I did not dare meet Kathleen's eye this time.

"Sir Deighton *used* to have a lovely place in Devonshire," suggested Aunt Hetty.

"Oh, yes, *he's* 'still there,'" said my cousin. "You must come and stay, Olive, will you?" she added suddenly. The faint blush as she said my Christian name quite finished me. I fell in love with Kathleen, and for life.

This rather surprised our Aunt.

"Poor little Olive will have other things to do," she said, a little hastily, "a household to look after. It will take her time."

"Ah, yes, indeed," I sighed, "my day will be very full. No time to grizzle," I added brightly, pulling myself together. "There'll be the meals to cook, and the room to clean (we mean to begin in a bed-sitting-room near

Euston) and the door to answer. And then too, there'll be the marketing. I mustn't bring in the wrong bits of meat. I know how you find out. You poke. If you find your finger leaves a dent—"

"Have some more grapes, dear," said Aunt Hetty almost wildly. Her plan had worked too well. I should have felt compunction, but for the fact that I knew I was not really humiliating her before her other niece, who understood: and the other fact that her own plan of humiliating one guest by means of another seemed a caddish thing to me.

It was a curious thing, this naïveté of snobbery in a woman like Aunt Hetty. She did not stop at the quite justifiable wish that her kindred should have comforts and culture and refinements in their lives. She had the genuine love of titles and display that is very seldom found among her kind. Her own infinitesimal title gave her real joy. Her husband was unavoidably knighted for having helped to cause the Indian Mutiny. He was a vacuous, good-looking ex-soldier, and, to do him justice, he put no social value on his title. Most of his contemporaries indeed, had one just like it. But his wife could have sung her "*Nunc Dimittis*" on the day when her cook first said "My Lady." No infant lisping ever drew such rapture from her breast.

The carriage came for pretty Kathleen.

"May I drive you somewhere?" she said eagerly.

Aunt Hetty longed to rend me or to plead with me in private: but there was no keeping me from this new cousin.

"Oh, do, if it isn't trouble to you!" I exclaimed, "I don't care *where* I go!"

"Come home with me," said Kathleen. "Mamma will simply love you."

I embraced the rather disconcerted Aunt with perfunctory haste, and hurried out: but a soft cry from her recalled me. She stood there and she opened her arms to me.

"God bless you, dear," said worldly Aunt Hetty, and she kissed me as my dead mother might have done, "you are my sister's living, breathing image. We loved each other. Go, dear."

I went, and, this time, soberly.

"You *were* a naughty girl!" said Kathleen, her eyes dancing.

"I know. I was a perfect beast."

"It was dreadful, the way she tried (poor dear!), to set us up against each other. But you know she's very proud of you — and I don't wonder! She wanted you to do so very well. And I expect you have."

"Not in her sense," I said. "It's not so bad as I made out, of course! But it's nearer that kind of thing than your kind of thing, Kathleen!"

"How plucky! Is he . . . splendid, Olive?"

"He's not altogether repulsive, to my humble taste."

"How proud of him you are! Your voice sounds proud. It did at lunch. When may I see him?"

"When will you?"

We made plans, and we made fixtures. And the world and "Mamma" (who was out when we arrived) were

too strong for Kathleen's golden heart and golden head. I literally never saw her again. I heard from her. I believed in her entirely. But her orbit was her orbit and my own was mine. They did not clash. They could not meet. I follow still her life, so brilliant yet so commonplace, through all its different phases: and she—she never hears of mine.

Aunt Hetty's plan failed—but not entirely. Her words and attitude had sent my heart on waves of loyalty to Joe, and his fortunes, or his lack of them. My cousin's daintiness was quite another thing. The river girls were "smart" and most correct. I was both "smart" and picturesque myself, even at my shabbiest, which was shabby indeed. But none of us were quite like Kathleen. I found myself first recalling her burnished hair and then her lily-like hand, its delicate rings, the diamond in her little ear, the cobweb lace at her fair throat, the graceful fall of soft pink feathers in her hat, her voice with its great sweetness, and its pure inflections. . . . The voice comforted me, for there I stood an equal. Whatever had been taken of our birthright, we Latimers had voices with organ-changes in them that could suddenly bring tears. I could not command mine at will: but when I felt deeply my voice became my very soul articulate. All the rest, that Kathleen had and I had not, woke envy in me. This was my cousin, of my blood. How could there be a gulf between us? I brooded half resentfully on Kathleen.

Next day, when I met Joe, I looked at him with criticism. It is a well-known experience that after cham-

pioning the absent we feel entitled to be a little nasty to them when they appear. Being unconscious of our hidden sword-point they usually walk straight upon it. Joe did so. He had not shaved.

"I wish you'd think of just one thing I've asked you," I said crossly.

"What one thing? I'm generally thinking of one person."

I put dalliance sternly by.

"You know it isn't nice for me when you come down with a horrid navy-blue chin and things."

"I know. I *am* so sorry! It was a choice to-day between stopping to get shaved or catching the 1.20. I missed my lunch as well. I couldn't bear to think of her meeting an empty train."

"'Empty' is good." I thawed a little. "You shall have a dog-biscuit and all the milk the cat has left. But Welkin *dear*, why can't you shave *yourself*?"

"I'm frightened: and men look such asses, shaving. But I will."

For the moment he placated me. But soon we got on dangerous ground. We talked of where we were to live.

Now, Joe had the common-sense attitude towards localities in London that a stranger from New Zealand would probably begin with. A roomy house near Finsbury Park, with gardens and much elbow-room, would seem an acquisition to an intelligent stranger, and a bijou box in Curzon Street where the servants asphyxiated and the cat must go unswung would be repudiated by him

at a rent of fifty pounds a year. Joe cared less than the cat what address was on his writing paper and his cards. I (little snob) cared vehemently. Our ideals clashed.

Flats had hardly started. There were some dreary blocks that called themselves Hyde Park but stood off Edgware Road. The million trim warrens with their "arty" little rabbit-holes were yet unborn. "Unfurnished rooms with attendance" were our objective.

"Let's go and look at some," I said.

"We will," said Joe, "but what about localities? Where my people live is nice and open, don't you think?"

Joe's people lived near Highgate.

"Oh, very," I said quickly, "but it's a little far. I thought —"

"Far from what?" asked Joe.

"Oh, I don't know! The Park and things."

"We could ride our hacks down in half an hour and still have plenty of time in the Row before breakfast," said Joe, with what I felt to be heavy sarcasm.

"No, but the shops and — people, Joe!"

"There are excellent people, fresh, good condition, legs and arms complete, in Highgate, I assure you!"

"Oh, I *know*." I hated Joe in this mood. "I don't know anything of Highgate," I finished, lamely.

"I should have thought that was an inducement. You'll have explorer's bliss, as well as the bliss of marrying Me!"

"Explorers don't want to *settle* at the North Pole," I answered rashly.

Joe looked a little worried.

"Darling — I can't pay the rent in a fashionable neighbourhood," he said; "that much is certain."

"You goose, of course not. But let's take our pick of slums. We have them everywhere to choose from."

"I don't know why it's clever to call the highest open ground in London, with the roomiest houses, slum," said Joe, still restive.

"Welkin, *stop* it! Highgate is next door but one to Heaven. I'm not up to it. Hear me while I talk of Houndsditch. . . . What about Earl's Court?"

"With that great flaring, vulgar Exhibition?"

I felt abashed. The exhibition, newly started ("the Healtheries," they called it) was considered quite a place of joy by riverites. We went in fours and wandered under "fairy lights" and said repeatedly, "It's really like the Continent," and drank vile British coffee with the chill on at its little tables with a naughty air. Londoners were not so full of "pleasures" then.

"Well, then," I plunged into "desirable localities."

"If you want Parks," said Joe, "Battersea Park is the prettiest I know."

"Or Finsbury," I said with irony.

"Finsbury isn't bad," said Joe, "but the flowers are jolly in Battersea."

"I give it up!" I said with dormant hysteria. "Your kingdom is not of this world and mine is — that's quite clear! A park is a yellow park to you. Any good working park will do."

"What is it to you, you little Funny?"

"Why, a *cachet*. Didn't you know I was a snob? And

you won't even be a snob by marriage, I'm afraid. Don't you realise that I'm thinking of Aunt Hetty looking out Highgate on the map and talking of 'poor Olive?'"

"She'll do that anyhow. Why should we mind what vulgar women think?"

Now, I myself thought Aunt Hetty vulgar in her ideals. To hear a Wilks of Highgate call her so—even the Wilks of my most inner heart—affronted me. I thought of my Aunt's graceful dress and drawing-room, her pretty voice and daintiness in general. A vision of Joe's family, its faintly cockney accent, the genial obesity of its elders, and its superior, lecture-attending, pince-nez'd younger members rose before me.

"We're obviously both marrying beneath us," I said, with an acid smile. The blessed irrelevance of tea, the maid and Mollie stopped the fray: but it left little worrying scars, mild though it had been. There was a difference in Joe's outlook, on this one point only of social matters and appearances, that would never fuse with mine. I knew my own to be inferior in the eyes of Heaven, which irritated me all the more: for the eyes of Kathleen and Aunt Hetty, for the moment, filled my horizon, shutting out the great and humorous Benignancies who look on Bayswater despising Bloomsbury, and, let us hope, feel pity for them both.

CHAPTER XVII

MY wedding-day.

The Dad had drawn the line at paying for weddings, and thought trousseaux silly nonsense; so I just walked to Church, most unconventionally hand-in-hand with the very bridegroom (a detail that would have almost nullified the subsequent ceremony in Aunt Hetty's eyes). Mollie, and not the Dad, who eschewed Churches, or Edward, whom I eschewed in *loco parentis*, gave me away. A festive crowd of uninvited riverites turned up in Church. It was a bright day in October. Joe looked dreadfully neat and shaven. As I stood beside him, perfect love had cast out fear. It was less a realised rapture than an absolutely natural sense of peace and fitness, that standing beside Joe to be told that he would stand beside me always. I tried to flog myself to feel excited (actually one's *wedding* going on, and nothing doing in the emotional line!). It was no good. I found myself complacently imagining the back view of myself in the pretty autumn frock that Mollie had given me, and thinking how black my coils of hair must look under the graceful hat with autumn-tinted feathers. Then the clergyman's voice changed a little, and he asked the mighty questions.

Yes. Joe and I were unanimous. We would do all those things for one another. Even through the pledg-

ing I felt hilariously content, with no sense of responsibility at all. How often, later, did I wish to recapture a far more careful rapture! Nature blurs your 'awful moments. She puts a touch of frost and sunshine into morning air, and your lungs fill with the exhilarating blend until you want to dance and sing. Then civilisation and religion pull you into buildings and put solemn words into your mouth: and you say them, singing still at heart, and pushing off consideration until later.

I was hugged and kissed at the Church door by all my river friends, and in the vestry by my Mollie and my Hessie. Hessie was very tearful and pink-nosed but proud still of her book-case.

"Oh, Olive darling!" she cried, and quite sincerely, "if you are only half as happy as I am!"

Later, with a pretty air of condescension,

"Both Papa's daughters have married schoolmasters!" she exclaimed.

This, in the circumstances, was handsome. But I said rather pertly that her Edward belonged to the Old School, and then felt sorry. Edward intermeddled not. Why should one sneer, this day of days?

I went upstairs to say good-bye to my exemplary parent. We had ten minutes left before our train.

"Hullo, Colonel!" I remarked to his well-shaped aquiline nose, that seemed to penetrate the bedclothes.

The eyes above it looked a little moist and moved.

"Well, childie!" said the nice baritone. It recalled some tender days. I am glad to think that the hug which

we exchanged, the Dad and I, was not so wildly unlike what fathers and girls in real homes exchange on wedding-days.

"You shall come to stay in the New Cut," I said with gaiety, waving a valedictory hand from his bedroom door. Who knows to what remorses and desolations I left the ageing man, who had at last got rid of all his children but the one who would not love him, because love was not in her for any one. I have not spoken much of Clare, but she was there, the one completely lovely object in the Church, and the one being whose parting kiss was cold and whose last words were of herself.

"It is stupid, your not having bridesmaids!" was my little sister's valediction.

We had no official honeymoon. We had decided that to go home together was adventure great enough for one occasion. "Home" was two rooms, fair-sized and not too hideously furnished, in a quiet street in Bloomsbury, not far from the big school where Joe gave lessons. The point was this same nearness, which would allow him to lunch at home.

It was great fun, the first lunch Mrs. Joseph Wilks had ever ordered. We devoured it under the intermittently benignant gaze of a landlady whom we imagined to have no suspicions concerning us. "My wife always . . ." was the beginning of most of Joe's requests to her. After lunch, sunshine and sparkle still held the outer air. We went into it and pranced round Russell Square, keeping step with the Wedding March. Joe whistled Mendelssohn's under his breath and wildly out of tune. I ex-

ecuted Wagner's à *bouche fermée*. Bom — bom — pom — pom. We strutted proudly.

"We are Wilkses," I said, "both. Irrecoverably."

"Not at all," said Joe; "I could divorce you any day. You haven't kept a single one of all your vows. You haven't served me worth a cent. As for obeying, the landlady looked sorry for me when she see the look you give me just because I up and told you to bring along your fur for fear o' ketchin' cold —"

"Welkin," I said, "the luggage *did* look new! And there was a *tab* sticking out of my fur — I remember it now — from the shop. She must guess!"

"Let us go back and quarrel before her!" said Joe.

We fell a little silent and went back. After tea, sitting in the firelight on the hearth-rug, something of the solemnity that had escaped us at the altar stole upon our spirits. Our hands soberly clasped, we looked into the fire and made God promises in our hearts. Even the greedy dinner that we devoured at the Holborn Restaurant, and the humours of "Sweet Lavender," that we subsequently saw from Upper Circle seats at Terry's, did not vulgarise that undercurrent. And, in the hansom coming home, to lean against that dear big shoulder and think "mine for always" was the warmest comfort that my life had ever longed and waited for. . . . It may seem absurd that a most passionately loved male person should convey the mother-feeling to his mate. But after Cousin Annie's blessed kindness years ago, no mother-warmth had come my way so satisfactory as the feel of Joe and his kind awkward hands, and the glow in his brown eyes, and his

queer bitter smile that creased his face into such misleading cynical wrinkles. It was good to have a fellow lunatic, a tender mother, a stimulating comrade-mind, and a most fiery lover, all in one. The world was very good.

BOOK III
MARRIAGE

CHAPTER XVIII

AT first the world got better every day. We had the let-out-of-school sensations of most very young married couples. A fortnight's holiday—and no one with the right to tell us it was time that we got up, or time that we ate something, or what was the right kind of thing to eat, or that we ought to be going out on such a lovely day, and not spoiling our appetites for meals by roasting quite so many chestnuts. At first we idled and were irregular out of defiance. In the course of the fortnight, however, we grew conscientious about it. Truth to tell, it would just then have been something of a relief if a kind, strict person had stood over us and ordered us about. We were getting tired of slackness, as most wholesome boys and girls do tire of it if let alone. Still, feeling that now or never was our chance, we firmly stayed in bed with novels and had our breakfast brought to us, sat up till all hours over an extravagant fire, put off even the unpacking and arranging of our wedding presents—played *flâneur*, in fact, so thoroughly that we were both looking forward with the keenest zest to Joe's first day at school. We held each other's hands at meals on the last day of irksome freedom with something of the feelings with which one sees a dear one off at Waterloo. She is a darling, and how sweet she looks. . . . Will her

train never start? We wave until it turns the bend at last — then the relieved bee-line for home.

We both read one another's energetic hearts like printed books, but played up to the idea that shades of prison-houses were about to fall upon us.

"After all, there'll be the Christmas holidays," said Joe with a hypocritical sigh.

"No," I rejoined with splendid firmness. "There'll never be another time like this. We should grow into Capuans."

"Mad-capuans," said Joe, holding a chestnut to my mouth. "But you're quite right. We must just be thankful we've had this."

"Oh, rather! . . . Joe! what fun it'll be, you coming home to lunch!"

"It won't be bad to see some of the men again," said Joe, relapsing into sincerity.

"No, will it? You must often bring them home."

Joe stiffened instantaneously.

"You don't 'bring home' married men older than yourself, who happen to have homes of their own."

"Oh, sorry! But Marjoribanks isn't married."

"Marjoribanks is not a man I would care to introduce to you at all."

Poor Marjoribanks took on a lurid light in my imagination. He keeps it to this day. I never plumbed his guilty secret. I saw him once. He was a little like a hare.

"The Waltons are going to call. You'll like them. And the Head's wife will. You'll loathe her. But you'd

better knock your head three times upon the ground each time she speaks. It's good for trade."

"My neck shall be her footstool. What's that like? Oh, I know! 'My bield shall be thy boo — oo — sum.' What's anybody's bield?"

"There's an indelicate question!" said Joe, who didn't know. "I think you'll like the Waltons," he repeated.

"What are they like?"

"She's awfully pretty. She's quite young. I often used to go there until you began to monopolise me. . . . *Don't*, you little brute! remind me to get it cut. . . . She's a splendid all-round little thing. Rides, and all that, when they're at her country place. She's got one. And in town does all the towny things. She's the best little hostess I know —"

"Not so much 'little,' please. Or is the poor lady under-sized?"

"*Rather* not. She has the loveliest figure."

"Welkin, your tone is not the tone that an anxious wife likes to hear in a husband of two weeks."

"I'm not the husband of *two* anything. But you're right to be anxious. Wait until you see her."

"How much is vitriol a pint? And what's *he* like?"

"Who?"

"Hasn't she a sort of husband?"

"Oh, *Walton!* Oh, he's all right!"

"That describes him to me as if I'd seen the man."

"Well I haven't measured his nose —"

("Or noticed his figure?")

— but he's a decent fellow enough — rather too much

a carpet knight for me. He sings and so on. She plays for him—divinely. She sometimes plays at concerts. I've never seen such an all-round—”

“Her sphere sounds quite complete. What does he sing?”

“Who? Walton? Oh, songs! The usual things.”

“What does she play?”

“Well—Bach, a good deal, and Brahms when she's in the mood: and she's very good at Wagner. She knows the best things off by heart. And Chopin—I never knew what Chopin was until I heard her play him to me in the twilight once. They have a balcony. I sat and listened.”

“Where was he?”

“Who?” said the Welkin, badly jarred. “Oh, *Walton!* I forget.”

The great day dawned. We rose with exaggerated alacrity, came in to breakfast quite ten minutes before the needful time, and sat taciturn and business-like before our bacon as if we had never met the silly couple who held hands at meals. I brushed Joe's shoulder down and handed him his hat, and felt more married than Queen Victoria. I then went out on to our microscopic balcony and waved to him. He turned to see if I were there. The old Eve overcame me and I made him my most appalling “face.” It caught the gaze of a sheep-like old gentleman opposite, and I retired in some confusion.

The Coming Home to Lunch was the next step in the day's excitement. I provided French rolls, balls of butter, a cream cheese, sardines, sponge-cakes and lemonade.

This school-girl feast was my idea of sustenance for a male in very wearing brain-work.

He tarried in his coming. The day was very bright—early November, but still kissed by autumn's sun. I put on a little set of furs and hastened out to meet him. My feet would dance in spite of me. If people stared I slowed them down: but the dancing started when they looked away again. As I came round a quiet corner, I heard a voice that hummed, all out of tune.

“Bom—Pom—Pom—Pom!”

It was the Welkin—and the Lohengrin Wedding March! I captured him, and we hied home together and fell upon our first official lunch—all but the lemonade.

“I am a married man, and more than twelve,” he said.
“Take away that bubble!”

He drank water.

For months it was idyllic. I set out all our wedding presents till the room (never a bad or very tasteless one) looked really home-like. We hired a piano by the month, in case the divinely all-round Mrs. Walton should come and play Chopin to us. She came. And Mr. Walton came. And I hung enraptured on his golden tenor while Joe sat gazing at his wife. They were both quite charming, and they gave the most delectable small dinners and invited us.

Aunt Hetty, too, showed white all through. She came to see me in her one-horse brougham, and took an hour to do it, having told her coachman that we lived “a little further than Kings Cross.” (We were ten minutes’ walk

from Oxford Circus.) She added, "I fancy it is near Hampstead."

I put my best foot foremost, that great day. The prettiest dress, the most copious flowers, the most succulent cakes from the Anglo-Austrian café were there to show Aunt Hetties that you did not sneer at Wilkses when they were married to each other. Beyond sighing a few times, and gazing at me moistly, and asking at the door for Mrs. Welk, Aunt Hetty furled her gentle claws in gentler fur. She kissed me with emotion when we parted. Joe did not come before she left. It was as well. There is a natural antagonism between the best in-laws. They are our strained relations.

Then gradually — most gradually — as winter passed, and spring stole into Bloomsbury, hidden under daffodils in dusty baskets, something languished in us both. We wilted. We grew dull. It was an awful tragedy. We never talked it out, and down: so it grew bigger every day between us, and pushed us from each other.

It was not in common-sense that a tense year like that of our engagement, and a blissful half-year like our married time should have no flat reaction; or that the fêting of a bride should not give place to the taking for granted of a young matron: or that two hundred and fifty a year should run to many pleasures: or that a practical absence of exercise (Bloomsbury is not inviting) after an outdoor life should make no difference: or that sardines and lemonade should nourish: or that the air that crawled in from New Oxford Street should have invigorating power. But none of this occurred to us.

Joe still came home to lunch, but the capital letters had shrunk. I got it ready with more languor every day. Sometimes I had not thought of anything to eat. Some heel of cheese, some bone, some almost empty jar of jam or potted meat, with bread that the increasing warmth was turning stale and water turning tepid, were all my poor Joe had to fit himself for all that toil of his. I had no more myself: but I had developed a distaste for food, and Joe was never over-conscious of it. What vexed us both was our great awful flatness. Could it have come to this already? Could two people, made for each other if ever man and woman were so made, drawn together by a quite uncanny bond, so soon feel so *épuisés*? We put it down to the essential hollowness of joy and cruelty of fate. *No* happiness, most obviously, could last.

The causes were quite simple. Damon would have sickened of Pythias, David have cut Jonathan's acquaintance, and Dante have yawned in the face of Beatrice in our circumstances.

I thought it was satiety, and it began to break my heart. Joe gave no sign of "taking notice," but he obviously found it harder every day to pretend that there was nothing to ignore. I found afterwards that in both our silly souls, deep down, there rang that one quite hopeless phrase, "the desire of their hearts and leanness withal." "While there's hope there's life," I thought, feebly pleased with the inversion. What was there left to hope for now? That was the way of things. You got your *alter ego* and you shared his life: and

you exhausted him and he exhausted you: and there was no more zest in going on.

One dreary day, my woe took words, and caused a storm that cleared the air. It was a really hot day towards Whitsuntide. Our streets already smelled of straw and woodblocks and warm horses, as the streets smell later in the year. The shops where I did marketing in Lamb's Conduit Street looked repulsive. Meat was a horrid thought, vegetables were dejected, fruit was dusty. I picked out some small kickshaws (not an ounce of nourishment to a pound of them) and trailea languidly home. Turning them over to the landlady ("Bring these up for lunch, please") I climbed wearily to our floor, and sank, still gloved and hatted, on the sofa. Tears began to run down slowly. It was grief without a definite cause: there was no poignancy in it, no luxury of emotion. It was the most purely physical wretchedness.

Then Joe came in to lunch. Poor Joe, his face changed when he saw my dolour. It lost its rather strained expression of goodwill toward me.

"What's the matter?" he said anxiously, and knelt down by my chair. One arm went round me.

"Oh, it's all nothing! And it's everything," I sobbed. "*Why* did we go and marry and spoil things? I *knew* we should!"

Joe did not seem surprised or hurt—or so I thought. The notion made me worse. For weeks the poor boy probably had suffered, not having the heart to tell me that he felt that we had failed.

"You little silly!" he said, tightening his hold, but not with much conviction.

"You *know* we've spoilt it!" I continued passionately; "how different we used to be together—and now this . . ." I sobbed more unrestrainedly, and felt a sudden relief. "This," after all—a kind arm round one, close, a kind, concerned face near one's own . . . I sniffed, already half-consoled.

As always happened, I had simply passed my grieving on to Joe.

"If you're a little donkey you'll make me a worse one," he said huskily. I looked at him and found his brown eyes full of tears. It is a feminine superstition that "a strong man's tears" are such rare and fearful wild fowl.

All the same, I was impressed and stricken with remorse.

"Oh, *Welkin*, what a discontented *beast* you've got!" I cried and hugged him vehemently. "There's nothing wrong at all. I just want beating;" and I really did, I think.

Joe was not comforted.

"It's dull and dreadful for you," he said miserably; "I oughtn't to have taken you and stuck you in these dingy rooms and left you alone with nothing to do. Wouldn't you—would you like a *cat*?" He looked up brightly at his own suggestion. We both suddenly burst out laughing; then wiped our eyes, and sat down to tackle our depressing lunch.

"So long as this fact is clearly understood," I re-

marked in course of it, "that if we are a little flat at times with one another, we should be absolutely *flounders* with any one else . . . ?"

"I should think so — pancakes," said my husband.

"Then we are only part of the eternal vanity of human wishes and not a dismal misfit — and I don't mind."

"Exactly. Misfit, indeed! To think of you up and saying that to Me!"

We recovered some of our old gaiety; but it was rather like the suspiciously bright gleams upon a day that has a torrent of rain waiting for you in a minute — and I felt it to be so.

When Joe had gone, after a special and very comforting embrace and a whisper that was almost worth the whole unhappiness, I sat down to make resolutions for a fresh start.

"None of our capital is spent," I reflected, "we have merely lost a little interest. That is a neat way of putting it. I'll try it on Joe."

But Mollie arrived and I tried it on her instead. She came in quite suddenly, being up from the river for shopping. I thought her extraordinarily handsome and young, away from her formal environment. A closer look told me that happiness had changed her. Mollie and happiness! I marvelled.

"Have you come into a fortune?" I enquired.

"That's exactly what I've done — or father has!" said Mollie astonishingly.

"*Mollie!* do tell me!"

She told me, and I forgot my shadowy woe in listening.

The roads all round her father's place were reddish where you kicked up dust. The red was iron. She had always known it. But now a company was formed, a mine was being opened. All in a twinkle prosperity had come to Mollie's dreary parents, and she shared their joy.

"I mean to take you both to dinner on the strength of it," she said, "and then we're going to a theatre *en prince*."

"Mollie, how *heavenly!* And I was so depressed!"

"I saw you were! The waning of the honeymoon?"

"Oh, I suppose so! It is cheek, wanings and things daring to come to people like Joe and me! I never thought they would."

"They needn't really," said Mollie; "tell me all about it. First of all — what sort of food do you both eat?"

"Oh, anything!"

"I can imagine what that means. What did you have for lunch to-day, for instance?"

Shamefacedly, I told her.

"Exactly. And for dinner yesterday?"

The tale was much the same.

"What exercise do you take?"

"I go and meet Joe sometimes, and I do our shopping in Lamb's Conduit Street."

"Both not ten minutes off. What do you do all day?"

"Oh, nothing much! Yesterday I enamelled all that bookshelf."

"So I perceived as soon as I came in. The smell of paint in London lodgings on a sultry day, after a course of the wrong kind of food, no exercise and very little air . . . *Now do you see?*"

"Do you really think it's only that?"

"I *know* it." Mollie was consolingly emphatic.

"We don't seem to have anything to say to one another now. We used to talk and *talk*."

"And so you will again. The brain is tired in Joe's case and unstimulated in yours. Have you anything to read?"

"Oh, Joe has thousands of books. I've read all the ones that I should understand already."

"You're round the corner from Mudie's. I'll get you a subscription. And I'll make you out a list. I warn you, if you batten on nothing but sickly romances you'll get worse, not better . . . but I fancy you have literary taste. And now we'll go for a drive in a hansom. We'll make it take us round the Park. Put on your prettiest hat and come along!"

"Of all the good fairies!" I flew for my hat.

"It was time I took you in hand," said Mollie.

Our hansom had bells, and we jingled most gaily. It was too early for fashion by at least three hours, but quite pretty people were reading under trees or sauntering with dogs. The look of the crowds in Bloomsbury had, unconsciously to myself, done much to depress me. They had, and have, a kind of general stone-colour and

respectable dinge that is unique. It escapes the *gamenerie* of rags and Bohemianism on one hand, and all colour and grace on the other. My spirits rose high.

"I wish Joe were here!" I said repeatedly.

"That's all right," said Mollie, "your matrimonial woes are bearable, I fancy!"

Before driving to the lodgings we alighted at a famous pastrycook's. Mollie stood me an ice of celestial properties and proportions. She then invested in some dainty cakes, not over rich, but delicate, and packed in a light box — how different from the crumby bags from my good baker's!

"Joe's tea," she remarked, and I rejoiced. The conspiracy to cheer up Joe was mutely hatched between us.

The very sight of Mollie cheered him. He came in, hot and tired, a wilting bunch of flowers in his hand — a sort of postscript, I divined, to our small "scene."

Then I saw a side of my stepmother that surprised me. She came out, not as sympathetic background to our happiness, as she had always been, but as a charmer, if not actually a rival. She challenged Joe at every turn, flattered him adroitly, sparkled at him affectionately, and roused him eventually to a really brisk engagement with her, half argument and half flirtation. The dust and heat and weariness were all forgotten. Plied with good tea and delicate cakes, sparkled at by an attractive woman, adored by a remorseful bride, Joe threw off the last shadow of a cloud.

"You're coming down to stay with me!" she ended

by announcing, "and I mean to hire a skiff, a punt, and a canoe for a month. You two can renew your youth like the eagle, all the Whitsun holidays. You'll be an acquisition, Joe. There are so few men down all day, in our good suburb. They'll give picnics round you. You'll be a sort of Sultan. And Olive will be enormously envied. All her girl friends are longing to see the bride."

We felt a mild excitement at the prospect of this fêting. Mollie had a tonic action on us.

"Now we're going to dress ourselves like gods," she announced at six o'clock.

"Are you asking us to the gallery, then?"

"No, indeed. Stalled oxen we're to be, for once. You don't strike iron every day."

"But Mollie, lamb—you haven't got an evening dress up here!"

"Oh, haven't I? It's sitting in your hall . . . oh, thank you, Joe!" for Joe had disappeared. He soon returned, a little suit-case in his hand.

Mollie had brought an evening dress indeed. I hardly knew her in her silky turquoise gauze, a turquoise comb in her brown hair, turquoises in her little ears and round her sweet white throat and on her arms. The virile Mollie of the crop and coat had given place to something very far more seductive. I began to understand now why the crop and coat had been so useful and protective. My stepmother, released from the presence of her husband, the spectre of poverty and the semi-parental responsibility toward myself that she had

now relegated to Joe, showed as a most charming woman.

The dinner was a huge success. We went to a cheerful restaurant not far from our theatre, so as to dawdle if we wished. Mollie, after rousing my interest in Joe by competition, now set herself to do the same for me. Adroitly she suggested envious attention on the part of the other diners. Certainly, my tongue let loose, my spirits risen to fever height, my cheeks and eyes testifying to the same, my hair done cleverly, my prettiest evening frock on, I was at my best, and did occasionally focus glances, in the way my vanity adored, upon our table. Joe scowled at the suggestion and began to hand me salt and fill my glass with the relentless ardour of the jealous. We were all three happy.

At the theatre the magic of our relation came entirely back. Joe would not leave us for a smoke between the acts. Under my opera cloak his hand held my arm. Mollie talked serenely to us. The play was emotional without being depressing. The whole evening had worked like a charm. I went back in a dream. Joe saw our good fairy off at Waterloo. I waited for him in the soft, warm, late spring night. The world was good again. The world was thrilling when I heard his step, so ardent in the quickening darkness.

“Now, have we spoiled it? Now?”

CHAPTER XIX

“**Y**OU *were* a goddess from the machine, and no mistake!” I said to Mollie. “All the same I don’t think we ought to be dependent on people coming with a pair of bellows! I thought we’d lit a good fire that would last.”

“So you had,” said Mollie. “The bellows blew away a little dust — that’s all.”

I took my hat off to my pet quotation, but still felt vaguely less than satisfied.

“It makes the essential at the mercy of the non-essential, somehow. It makes the physical seem the most important thing.”

“Not a bit of it. It was only the physical that was flagging — the nerves and spirits of you both. A table may be *all* wood right through: but you polish up the surface when the surface gets a little tarnished.”

“Little Mother William! ‘What made you so awful clever?’”

“Life, I suppose. Compulsory education.”

“Poor little Mollie!” Now that I was made free of the Married Woman’s enclosure, I did not feel that Mollie was so much my senior. I felt that she was a poor little Christian who had no Joseph Wilks. But the subject we were on was troubling me.

“They talk of the soul,” I said, “but a touch of

laughing gas and your soul does nothing for you. A piece of bone that presses on the skull can change a man to a criminal lunatic. Things he drinks can change him to a beast. We *are* at the mercy of the body, whatever you may say!"

" You mustn't be a Manichean," replied Mollie; " poor matter isn't evil. It's true you can't divorce it from the spirit. 'Whom God hath joined together —'"

" That's just it! *Oughtn't* they to be divorced?"

" Where would you begin? Matter is the expression of spirit. If a man wants to show the spirit of respect, he removes his material hat from his material head. Think of the absurdity of showing affection by a kiss, if matter is a separate thing! Take people's eyes. You really *see* the union there of your antagonists."

" What about the 'flesh warreth against the spirit'? St. Paul knew!"

" The flesh isn't necessarily just the body," contended Mollie; " suppose I have to walk some mighty distance to save some one's life! I get dead tired, and the flesh says, 'Rest, and let them die!' The spirit says, 'No, you don't!' The gallant little body, too tired for words, jogs on again and—I get there. Why, sometimes the flesh is the body's enemy even more than the spirit's! It tells the body to lie still and warm and get enervated in a bed: or to stick indoors over a fire and get a headache: or to eat things that will make it ill. The flesh *is* the devil, really, I expect: and the body's a servant who may take service with the flesh or with the spirit—the Devil or God—as it chooses."

" You reconcile me to my mortal coil," I said, " but all the same it tangles my immortal one. I feel it doing it!"

I was quite soon to watch that duel in a way I had not thought of.

I had never seen Joe with other girls. He professed to hate the species, in spite of having married into it. " You can't talk to them, and you mustn't kiss them," he vulgarly remarked. While we were engaged, he grudged a moment that was not spent with me alone. My prettiest friends were interlopers then. Now that he had domesticated his preoccupation, he looked on them " as one who awakes." They looked on him as one who attracts. I felt a vicarious vanity over the attraction. It was not every girl of under twenty who had a young and lovable and accessible husband to show from morning till night—one, too, who could manage a boat and had a boat to manage. Mollie had been as good as her word. We were the complacent temporary possessors of a double-sculler, a punt, and a sentimental-looking Canadian canoe. Sometimes we went off alone in the punt with books and a packet of fruit. More often—and increasingly often—we filled it with girls, who punted at Joe, talked at him, sang 'Sweet and Low' at him as we came home in the gathering dusk, and sat by him on the cushions on all occasions when the fancy took me to show off my punting—down-stream, where the minimum of effort commanded the maximum of effect.

Most of the girls were harmless and sweet, and

honestly were fond of me, being quite guileless in their open admiration for Joe and appreciation of "Olive's luck." One girl was of different stuff from the others.

I had known her for years, and she had imposed a kind of intimacy of propinquity upon me. I have always been weak in repelling intimacies. My companions are small indication of my taste in companionship. I find it harder still to keep off confidences. A kind of uneasy acquiescence with what one dislikes often passes for sympathy. I had listened, before my engagement, to much confidential talk from Ida Rowan.

She was a tall girl, built like a real goddess. The foolish fashion of the day made her aim at suggesting an hour-glass rather than anything Olympian; but the rich bust and full hips were recalcitrant. We all tight-laced. How we would row and walk, with waists at eighteen inches, is a marvel. I, in my almost childish slimness, seldom felt irked. Poor Ida, with her soft amplitudes, must have endured indeed. The absurdly small circumference of her central regions only accentuated her youthful opulence. She had a mass of brown hair that made her head look rather large: her lips were very red and full and usually a little parted. Her colour, rather high, would come and go in an engaging manner, though it hinted at a florid middle-age. Her eyes were her most noticeable feature. They were large and blue and rather prominent. Above all, they were profoundly, exceptionally self-conscious. In talking to a male, Ida was never for one instant known to let him ignore her sex. Her figure whispered of it

without ceasing. In some way it was as conscious as her eyes: but these fairly clamoured. The blue in them would deepen if a man's eyes met them. They would change, indescribably, with a kind of subjugated look that would have made its appeal to the male in St. Anthony. Ida was the sort of girl who is rarely seen, at dances, in the ball-room. She was of those who begin early to savour of small thrills and hunger for stronger ones. There were few enterprising dance partners, on her own showing, who had not had their fill of those pretty, but slightly coarse red lips of hers. Ida insisted on living these delights again with me. I listened, vaguely stirred, but definitely disgusted at their lovelessness and utter promiscuity.

"Oh, Ida, little pig-dog! You didn't even like him! You said yourself he was a cad."

"I know. I never meant to let him kiss me. *Really* I didn't, Olive! But he simply made me. He put his hand under my chin and turned my face round and held me like that for ages and ages and just kissed me—all the time they played 'A Wandering Minstrel I' for the ninth waltz!"

"Why did you *let* him, if you didn't even like him?"

"I don't know!" said poor Ida. I believe she did not.

She would have been a harmless little animal type in a community where codes of honour and morals in general were animal like herself. Amongst decent young couples she was something of a firebrand. The girls who had been bosom friends with Ida, rather

against their wills in many cases, dropped her when the deeper things of love and life had shown her to them in the right perspective. Their latent disgust, if they were "nice" (and most of them were "nice") broke into flame when her distinctly coarse little thumb endeavoured to plumb the mysteries.

I was worse than most of them at choking off the undesirable. To this day I listen to a story that has uncleanness for its only point with my face wreathed in smiles, and disgust cold in my heart. Consequently Ida was not shown her place for good and all, after a talk she had with me soon after we arrived.

"Now, ducky," she began, tucking her too soft arm in mine, "begin at the beginning, and tell me all about it!"

"What do you want to know?"

"All about *marriage*, of course!"

"Well . . . there's nothing much to tell. In some ways it seems years and years since one was here and just went on the river. At other times I feel exactly the same as if I'd never gone away. Of course, there's housekeeping. It seems quite funny here to let Mollie order everything, after having to do all that oneself," I ended rather loftily.

Ida looked bored.

"Your husband's extraordinarily handsome," she said next.

I smiled complacently.

"Oh, do you think so?"

It was not a bad literal description of the Welkin. Ordinarily handsome he certainly was not, in the well-

groomed English way. In his slouch hat and flannels he committed the unpardonable sin of being picturesque, which is forbidden in this country to males over six and under sixty years of age.

"You *might* just tell me, Olive!" went on Ida.

"Tell you *what?*" but then I looked at her. Her face was unmistakable. Upon the full red mouth and in the always conscious eyes there was a leer of expectation. Leer is an ugly word; but Ida leered. I could not miss her meaning. I grew hot.

"Don't be a beast!" I said in a low voice.

"Oh, sorry!" Ida was used to these rebuffs. She changed the subject, and I followed her new lead. If I had taken the opportunity to drop her, every girl among my friends would have understood and asked no questions: but the line of no resistance was fatally my line. I suffered Ida: and she left me soon: she fastened on to Joe.

I suppose most women are struck at some time in their lives by the divorce of approval and susceptibility in their menkind. My first lesson in this was at the moment when my father, after turning the foolish little head of Enid Carteret till it nearly looked down her backbone, returned from her side to proclaim her "thoroughly third-rate," with what sequel one remembers. Something of the sort befell me now with Joe.

In the abstract, Joe was as sensitive as any woman to the shadow of the unclean. During our engagement, it was I who feared to profane the shrine, and he (unconsciously) who guarded it. But one may guard a holy

place one moment and disport oneself at ease the next in an unholy, where there is nothing to profane. Something of this took place with Joe and Ida.

He saw the poor girl's nature at the start.

"She's not a friend of yours, I hope?" he asked.

"No, not a friend of choice," I said; "I know her very well, of course."

"I thought she wouldn't be." He seemed relieved.

"We needn't have her at our river-shows," I said. "I thought you wouldn't like her, but I had to ask her yesterday. She came down with the Cassilis girls and said she'd see us off, and take a little walk along the towing-path. Of course that meant she had to come."

"Oh, poor girl!" Joe answered hastily, "one doesn't want to shut her out from things. One isn't such a prig as that!"

One wasn't.

One was, in fact, not too priggish to endure considerably more than the mere occasional society of the undesirable Ida. One sat and murmured to her in the dusk, sang an untuneful second to her throaty warble, lingeringly passed her things and lingeringly took them from her, lost one's gaze in her blue conscious eyes — behaved, in short, as though enamoured.

Ida did not flirt in speech. Your woman of flirtatious speeches, said out loud in company, is never dangerous. What Ida did was to invest the ordinary small change of life with meanings to thrill the pulses.

"Would you mind passing me the paddle, Mr. Wilks?" with one of her extraordinary looks, took on

a sensuous significance. Joe's dark eyes would light up at once in answer.

"Here it is," he would reply, in a strange voice that even trembled sometimes. And then the paddle would change hands with a slow motion that was a caress.

And I suffered it—and suffered, in the true sense, not at all. I have always had an unwomanly perception of the things that go in different niches. Ida was not encroaching on my territory at all. True, I had had unholy thoughts, at times, of encroaching upon Ida's. Joe's heavenly and exasperating reverence for me had induced what it assumed. As he grew more and more persuaded of my lily-nature, I played up more and more to his idea. I showed him gentle tenderness when I should like to have shown passion, till gradually the rôle became my true one. I saw myself as the dear Welkin saw me—a kind of crystal spirit who allowed a mortal, warm of breath, to dim its lustre from a little distance! Five minutes would have ended the illusion, but I feared to end it. I prized my pedestal as much as I deplored it.

And here was Joe, already giving some of that side of him that he thought too cheap to offer me to—Ida Rowan! It was amazing that I felt so philosophical. I had a deep inner security to help me—besides a shrewd sense that to allow myself the beginnings of jealousy would be to give the damsel the inestimable flavour of forbidden fruit. The orchard-owner has no greed of apples. His greed ceased when the prohibition ceased, with boyhood's passing. Joe had a slightly

guilty air at this time. He would watch me wistfully, and, when he saw me quite unharrowed, would probably conclude that I was far too crystalline to see what half "the river" saw—that Ida Rowan was in love with him, after the fashion of her "loves," and that he was enjoying it amazingly. Some smothered ardours, met by me with sweet and prim unconsciousness, were the gentle "wash" of the stream of his flirtation.

It did not annoy me, but it had another effect. It excited me strangely. I began unconsciously to long for some male Ida, only "nicer." How I was to reconcile his "niceness" with a passion for a British Matron I did not stop to think. Then Providence sent a mild diversion to distract me.

I strolled down to the boat-house once at six. We meant to take the punt out after tea and go a little way, tie up and read and lounge. I saw advancing towards me on the towing-path a figure that had made my heart beat in the prehistoric days, three years ago.

"Philly!" I cried, incredulously. Philly it was, indeed, but grown, matured and rather Frenchified. Philly had slightly longer hair. His tie had far more freedom. His garments had a looseness . . . It was before the days when the cream of the Quartier Latin ceased to express itself in fancy, and turned itself out like smart stockbrokers on their way to Church.

"Olive!" cried my late, or rather early, fiancé, "or should it be 'Madame'?"

"Madame, indeed!" I said, and we pump-handled in our pleasure, laughing foolishly in one another's

altered faces; for Philly found me altered, I could see. There was some faint and pardonable joy in letting that great brother (ugh!) perceive that the penniless peril, Olive Latimer, from whom he had removed his precious junior, was not still withering in singleness for Philly.

That worthy struck a daring note straight off. Paris had made a fearful dog of Philly.

"I say, you know," he began, "it's been a blow to me, coming back and finding you married!"

I was young enough to feel that here was a Situation.

"I expect you bore up well," I answered.

"I don't know that I did." Philly looked down at me. In the three years he had added to his stature. Twenty-two is not negligible like nineteen. I even felt a pleasurable tremor under Philly's would-be conquering gaze.

"I say, you know," he next remarked, "you've grown most awfully pretty. You're not so—so distinctly slender as you were."

"Not so ghastly thin," I amended, cheerfully, "no; I'm glad I've fulfilled the sweet promise of my girlhood in your eyes."

"By Jove, you have!" Philly seemed inclined to take me seriously. A shadow of the old boredom crossed our meeting. Philly had never known when I was laughing.

"Tell me about Paris!" I pleaded. Paris was Philly's legitimate "pull." Neither Joe nor I had been to Paris, and I fear that we had the idea of it as a naughty stone romance in yellow covers that is shared by all our countrymen who live at home at ease.

"Oh, Paris!" said Philly, indifferently. "Ah, *Paris*," he added in a different tone, suddenly realising a fore-gone advantage.

Had Philly always been so crude? I drew him on.

"I suppose it's the wickedest place . . . ?" I sighed.

"Wicked? I shouldn't like to tell you," said Philly impressively; "ever seen a Paris model?"

"Often — on stands. Twelve and a half guineas."

Philly stared.

"I meant an *artist's* model," he explained, with coldness.

"Oh, I see," I answered humbly. "No, I've never seen a French one. Are they . . . awful?"

"Awful? I shouldn't like to tell you. Living here —"

"I live in London. Never mind. Tell me how awful models are."

"Well there was one," poor Philly racked a not-inventive brain, "she had black hair and yellow eyes, and she smoked opium cigarettes all day. Fact."

"Didn't it interfere rather with the posing?"

"Her name was Désirée," said Philly, searching my face for horror.

"Rather a pretty name," I said kindly, with my married-woman air; "what did the poor thing do besides the opium cigarettes?"

Philly was a sort of gentleman, so he drew the line at active calumny of poor Mademoiselle Désirée, who, if she existed at all, was probably a good, hard-working little soul enough. He changed his ground.

"The cafés, too!" he said. The ellipsis was impressive.

"What's the matter with the cafés?"

"Open all night. I shouldn't like to tell you—a girl like you."

"Mrs. Joseph Wilks since last October," I murmured.

"I say!" said Philly, dropping his Paris with relief. "You haven't done as prettily in names as if you'd married me!"

"No, I've often thought of that," I said, with much hypocrisy and flattering regret. Before we reached the boat-house, Philly felt himself Don Juan indeed. Paris, models and cafés and all (with, as I knew, a sturdy elder brother at the purse strings) receded before this "life" that he was seeing. Philly was, he already felt quite certain, something of a peril to the Welkin's wife.

"I suppose I mustn't come and call?" he asked, his rather podgy hand enclosing mine. Paris had not thinned down Philly.

"Why not?" I nearly said, but, remembering my rôle—

"Perhaps we'd better not," I sighed.

With long looks of unutterable renouncement we parted at the boat-house. I chuckled as I entered its attractive dusk. A dim form stirred in its remotest corner.

"Mrs. Latimer's punt?" I asked. "I want the cushions, please."

The dim form sprang to its feet, and disclosed itself as two, and in a horrid state of fluster. One of the two was my dishonoured Welkin. The other was the amor-

ous Ida. Joe looked ashamed, poor Joe! But Ida would have convicted any one of anything. No jury would have left its box to consider the verdict. "Guilty" was written in her horror-stricken eye, the laboured breathing of her ample form ("Is *every one* fat?" I thought, with the disgust of the too-thin woman) — all over her! Like Porphyria's lover, I found a thing to do.

"Oh, here you are!" I said. "You lazy things, not getting the punt ready."

"It is ready," they vociferated, with horrid glibness, "it's *all* ready, dear. It's nice and ready. We got it ready. Here it is — *quite* ready."

"It seems to be ready," I said, with what the novels would call "dryness." Joe gave a sudden chuckle — then looked, alarmed, at me. I have seen exactly the same expression on the face of a dog who has forgotten for the moment that he was in disgrace and "jumped up on" one.

I did not twinkle back. I was unconscious, not forgiving. It suited me. As if a magic lantern had thrown my two companions' thoughts upon a sheet, I read them.

"She actually never noticed. Oh, thank Heaven! Well, she *must* be . . ." so thought Ida.

"She wouldn't dream. . . . My little darling! What a skunk I am!" thought Joe. "I'm sorry she came in, though! No, I'm not."

As soon as we were off I started on my plan.

"The strangest thing has happened, Joe!" (I never called him Welkin before outsiders.)

"What has happened?" Joe was all painful affability, exactly like the dog.

"I've met — you'll never guess!"

"Then tell me, dear."

"I've met my dear old Philly! *You* remember Philly, Ida? I very nearly married him. He *has* so grown! He's studied art in Paris all this time."

The punt, manipulated by my husband, thrashed upstream as if a shark were just behind and trying to board us.

"How nice!" said Ida feebly. Being a woman, with the profound cleverness on all sex-questions that the otherwise stupid woman often possesses, she saw at once what I was driving at. To do her justice, she tried to play up to it.

"He *was* a handsome boy!" she said. "We were all jealous when he fell in love with you! You never saw him, did you, Mr. Wilks?"

"Never," said Joe. "I never want to," said his punt-pole, stabbing the river bed as though it were plump Philly's yielding body.

"We had a lovely talk about old times," I prattled; "he walked with me along the towing-path. That's why I turned up rather late. He's coming to see us, Joe!"

"Oh, yes," said Joe, in a voice that positively squeaked. When Joe is irritated, his voice goes up four notes, and grates, like a boy's when it is breaking.

I gave them Philly over tea, a little Philly at the wash-

ing-up, and coming back, I obviously dreamed of Philly. My chin upon my hand, I lay and smiled inanely at the sunset.

Ida and all her lures were as though they had never been. Almost pushing the poor girl, in place of his usual tender "handing out" of her, Joe hurried me out of ear-shot.

"Look here," he began, his voice in several keys at once; "I don't know what your object is in dwelling on this man. You had your choice. You married me. I told you once that if you made me jealous. . . . And you promised. You can't forget all that, as soon as this."

"Welkin," I said, "*look at me!*"

I faced him rather gravely, in the sunset light. He suddenly remembered.

"So you saw," he said. His face changed a little.

"Yes, I saw. It didn't hurt me. That's not mine, all that. But it'll hurt *her*, Welkin—and hurt you."

"You are a little saint," said Joe, as I expected. We went home very soberly, and very close together, body and spirit. And if Joe had had the faintest idea that a decided longing for some Ida-like dalliance of my own, that should not touch his holy land, any more than his touched mine, was uppermost in my "saintly" mind, the pedestal would have been knocked from under me, and I should have been standing on firm ground—much lower down, and consequently safer.

CHAPTER XX

AND then some strange things happened. Joe left off schoolmastering and became a Higher Journalist.

He got to know an Editor and sent him in an article. The Editor said the office-boy wrapped up things every day in articles like that: only he put it very nicely; he wrote that pressure on his space—that symptom peculiar to the editorial physique—prevented him from printing the sort of stuff he really liked. Joe then took pains and wrote a rather brilliant article. It wasn't political; but it brought in the name of a political opponent of the Editor, under a thin disguise, and was very clever and nasty about him. The Editor printed it, and sent Joe "Adultery or Arson?" by Vavasour Baskerville, for review. (Those were the days when publishers asked but one question—"Canst thou minister to a mind diseased?" If you said "Yes," they said "Come on, then!") Vavasour obviously had "a comb at the back of his head," as Stevenson puts it, but she made Joe blush. He reviewed her at the length of three quarters of a column. The Editor cut her down to two hundred words: and, in a month's time Joe got three and six pence for her, beside eighteenpence for the book from a second-hand dealer. Joe asked the Editor to dinner. He was a nice, unpretentious person, whom you could

invite to dinner in your lodgings. I sat on the floor at his feet and looked up at him in obvious adoration from nine o'clock till nearly twelve. The Editor asked Joe to lunch. Joe quoted things the Editor had written, over the soup. At the cheese, the Editor asked Joe to look in — say on Wednesday — for jobs that might be going. Joe sighed and said he was a slave of the birch-rod. The Editor grew keen at opposition and said, "But, my dear fellow, as a leader-writer . . ."

"I've never written leaders," said Joe, holding back, though he wanted to throw his napkin in the air.

"No, but you could. That skit of yours on Eugene Chapelvalley. . . . Besides we're going in for general subject leaderettes. Just articles, the sort of thing you could prepare at home, in case we wanted nothing violently topical from you. What do you say?"

Joe relapsed into indecent honesty.

"Do you mean that it would be permanent, and I could *live* on it?" he asked. "I get two-fifty at my school. But I shall get four hundred if I stay, and I have—ties, as you know."

The thought of "ties" recalled me, in a primrose pongee frock, to the editorial mind's eye.

"I think," replied the Editor, "that you need not regret giving up two hundred and fifty a year with a chance of four hundred. We shall not take up all your time, and there is more than one department you could work for. Reviewing, now. . . . And I could give you Introductions."

So it was decided. Joe came home rather scared, but

already all but using the editorial plural. We both quite honestly felt Mr. Carruthers to be a sort of God. He wasn't that: but he was a Christian and a gentleman and a beautiful scholar, and he treated his staff as if they were the same—which, mostly, they were not. He had the name of getting hold of more brilliant beginners than any other man in London. As soon as they were made, they got bribed off. There was a scarcity of cash on his fastidious paper. He was a speculator in "futures." Joe, in the long run, would be well worth twice the three hundred a year or so that Carruthers meant to press into his 'prentice hand.

Joe took up the work with such enthusiasm that he became a proverb in the office. His colleagues grumbled at the way he made the pace: but his vitality impressed them, and they liked him and he them. Soon another paper gave him work, with the full connivance and approval of Carruthers. Before the year was out, he was on the reviewing staff of three papers, and leader-writer for two. They were, fortunately, a weekly and an evening paper. The "grind" of the morning paper leader-writer was never Joe's. We found our income quite four hundred pounds. Life grew exciting. Joe had found the work that he could do the best: and I had found a set of London friends who much delighted me.

These were Joe's journalistic colleagues, and stray men whom he picked up for their shining merits. They were all clever. Nearly all were young. Quite all were sweet and kind to me. It was a happy time. I entertained them at my badly managed little dinners, where

the conversation filled all gaps and covered all deficiencies.

The talk was much of "shop," of course. The shop of the Higher Journalism is redeemingly literary. Many of the men were novelists. Some were playwrights too, in embryo. They caught at an idea as gulls at falling fish. I had ideas in plenty, and they caught them from me, showing me afterwards with glee the thing in print.

"Look here! That's really yours, you know. *You* ought to have the cheque. It's good to be old Joe! I don't suppose he thinks of a single thing himself."

"He's too much occupied with thinking of a married one," I would perhaps reply, causing Joe's brows to knit themselves a little. Anything provocative or rallying in me was a red rag to Joe. The social class of his new friends was not of a kind wildly above the river-men. Their minds and souls were mountain-leagues above them. The river badinage went down quite well with them: but it had to have more than the river-brain behind it.

These good boys had mostly dowdy wives in suburbs when they had wives at all, except for some few gilded youths from Oxford, who were journalists *pour rire*. The wives of these attracted me, but led me into wasting money. Their furs and pretty houses shook my deep contentment. The shabby men are rich and famous now — or some of them. Their womenkind may shop in Bond Street if they choose. None of them, then, would probably have cared if I had gone in real

rags. But I must needs imagine that my dresses were a factor in our gay companionship: and my dresses were a disappearing quantity.

What to do? I could not ask poor Mollie. She had just sent Clare to Cheltenham with her father's help. Joe had already given me a fair allowance. He was extravagant and open-handed. Although our income was so much more colossal than at the start, it did not seem to run to much more ready money. All the entertaining, tiny though it was in scale, ran away with what was extra. Then I had my great idea.

Mrs. Walton, who had as much to dress upon as we had to pay all expenses, had an account at a big draper's in High Street, Kensington. "It's some way out," she said, "but then they *are* so cheap!"

"How do you have an account there — before they know you?" I enquired.

"Oh . . . you just give a reference or two, then have the things put down," she said; "they generally send in a 'cheque will oblige' notice when you've had fifteen pounds or so on credit. I pay mine every quarter."

Fifteen pounds! I should not need as much as that at once, I thought. If I could get the odds and ends I wanted, and that "mounted up" so, without paying . . . ! I remembered Timson and my former woes; but things were different now. I had a secret feeling that with Joe, even impecuniously, behind me, things were gloriously different.

"I think of starting an account at Harding's," I said, very casually, "could I give your name as one of my

references? Lady Broome w^dould do for the other—or Joe's Bank." My heart quaked as I waited.

"Oh, certainly!" said Mrs. Walton, a trifle coldly.

"Not if you mind at all," I said.

"Of course I don't!" This time she sounded cordial.

I could hardly sit my visit out, so full of desire was I towards Harding and his joys. I left at half-past five; an hour or so before the shops would shut—but I had a longish way to go. I took a hansom all the way.

Harding's made the descent to Avernus perilously smooth. They verified my referees' addresses, asked for a Bank and tradesman in addition; then let me loose on tea-gowns, opera cloaks, blouses (then a novelty and all the rage), fur trimmings, gaudy scarves, graceful skirts with little trains. . . .

I shopped with the cautiousness which the new gambler shows in his first stake. When I went home, with all the dainty odds and ends I coveted (or, rather, with the expectation of them: Harding's, still cautious, was tenderly insistent on "sending") my new account was three pounds only.

Of course, it was the tiresomely inevitable "thin end," which pushed itself, thicker and farther every moment, under my solvency and peace of mind. A dress charmingly "done up" demands outdoor accessories. A day "get up" requires a corresponding evening one. This rather good, if ageing, hat is worth a brightening feather: that becoming blouse makes the old skirt looked faded.

The thing went on until the fifteen pounds was nearly reached. I tried to push away the horror from my brain

by exulting in the smartness of my sinful body. Certainly Joe's friends seemed pleasanter than ever. I was more effective. It was really because to look my best has always made me talk my best. They did not notice clothes; though one of them did once remark, about a blouse of smouldering orange.

"That's a good bit of colour!"

Then, before Harding's moved at all, the heavens moved, and smote me. So I felt.

I think it was the shamed and miserable feeling that I was so inadequate to all life's greatest moments that made me take the certainty that I was going to have a child in such a way as I took that wonderful certainty.

I had read novel after novel in which the heroine came out with shy, transfigured eyes, and hid them on her husband's shoulder with a most beautiful murmur about the wonderful joy that was coming to them both. One side of me appreciated this transcendental attitude. Love made manifest should seem, and is, a miracle. The child of the supremely right two people, drawing its life from both: the ultimate word of human love made flesh: a human soul, all but created by oneself—I understood and felt it all, but intellectually. What my emotions, to my shame, were saying all the time was, "Oh, how horrid! Oh, no, don't let it happen! Oh, how horrible!"

It was always the villainess in the novels who felt like that. I sympathised with her profoundly. After all, leaving the other side alone as quite lovely and under-

stood, it was a little silly to talk as if it was a wonderful thing to do what every other female creature, from empresses to rabbits, was doing all the time! They told me there were too many people in the country. Competition was so bitter, all from that. And then you put another in, and you're supposed to have done wonders!

Joe, too, and his money! If we were hard-up now, what should we be with babies? Think of a perambulator in the narrow hall! What a picture that called up at once of squalor! I should never be able to go bustling about, washing and making things to keep it dainty. At that very moment, I should have been sitting down to hem some "microscopic garment" which I should cover with a handkerchief and a little blush when Joe came in. I felt that I hated the virtuous expectant lady of the novels.

Then my "things"—the pretty things that once were Harding's and that Harding's meant to have the value of, and soon! I should not be able to use them. They might as well go back. I had run myself and Joe into bad debt for nothing. And now innumerable other things would soon be wanted. ("Oh, Heaven, take this baby of Yours back!")

The thought of It (the little bore!) with bright blue eyes quite obviously of Heaven, made me smile and soften. Common-sense came back and jerked the chain. "How can it have blue eyes, when you and Joe have brown?"

Then there was our walking tour. I was a wonder-

ful walker for a woman, and Joe and I had planned a walk through Devon and Cornwall in the summer holidays, winding up with a visit to the Waltons' country-house.

And now I should have to sit at home, bored and (probably) feeling ill; certainly looking hideous. Joe would be bored as well. I should be off the lines for ever of the lovers of the open road and gipsy love and sunshine. Bottles, perambulators, babies, bibs — these were to be my life for years and years — and I was only twenty! All the dullest women in the world would "take an interest" in me now. We would have nice long talks about teething and measles and rashes. Joe's men-friends need not come to me for notions any more. I should have none, except on patent foods and ventilated bottles.

I was getting half hysterical in my passionate egotism. I felt that: and wired to my invaluable mentor, Mollie.

Mollie arrived, a little anxious. She listened with much patience to my news and all my feelings on the subject.

"Of course," she said, "our cases are so different. When my one baby came, it was the first thing in my life that brought me real joy. You're not like that. You have had joy in marriage."

"Oh, *don't* say 'have had'!" I implored her miserably, "we've not been married for a year! You talk as if it were all over. And it is. It can't be quite the same again."

"It will be sweeter," said Mollie, earnestly, "trust

Joe enough for that. Besides, why shouldn't it, you goose! Imagine a tiny Joe, that nobody in the world could have put there but you and he!"

A tiny Joe certainly suggested something rather nice to have. I smiled. Then clouds came down again and changed that toddling brown-eyed charmer with the curls into the usual yelling, teething infant of my avoidance.

"Of course it may be quite a duck some day," I said, "but don't you see how it will have changed everything long before that? Babies are all alike when they're quite small: and women are all alike when they have babies. I shall talk of flannels and dill-water and bassinettes. Oh, *damn!*!"

Young women very seldom swore in the late nineteenth century. My damn (it was my first) impressed poor Mollie. She felt helpless. She could not prevent the advent of the dreaded one; nor, apparently, bring its mother to her senses.

"I tell you what!" I said, "I shouldn't a bit mind being its father!"

Mollie laughed.

"I mean it, Mollie! Male *and* female created He me. I wish it could be worked. The fathers have the nicest side of it. People think it rather grand of them to have the thing at all; and nobody expects them to talk about its teething and look after bottles and things; and they just work for it and scheme for it and stand about in the background and look at it, and pretend not to care for it much, and call it 'the little blackguard' and nobody minds. If we were going on a journey, now! No one

would expect Joe to have a baby in the carriage with him. ‘I’ll go smoking, dear,’ he’d say and people would nod their heads. But Joe isn’t a tenth part as fidgeted by babies in a train as I am! And if I went in another carriage because of one, I should be thought unnatural.”

“ You *are* a bit unnatural in some ways,” said Mollie.

“ Well, I can’t help it. Nature makes varieties of us, and we pretend she doesn’t. Oh, Mollie, it’s so seldom I may be as honest as I burn to be! May I be really honest with you—now, and all my life? You always understand.”

“ I don’t think I understand everything, or like quite all I do,” said Mollie, “ but you may be honest, by all means. I shouldn’t like to think you weren’t; and it would be a relief to you.”

“ Relief? Well, I should think so! I’ve never had a single soul. . . . If my own mother had lived, I might have told her everything—I don’t know, though! You’re nearer my own age, and yet you’re wise. It’s easy, telling you.”

“ Surely, surely you can tell Joe!”

“ That’s just exactly what I can’t. I’d simply love to. He has his own idea of me. If I upset it, I may get relief myself, but bang goes his idea and his ideal and (possibly) bang would go his happiness as well. I don’t dare risk it.”

“ I should have said that honesty was best,” said Mollie. “ I don’t think I’ve been wilfully dishonest with a soul.”

“ I don’t believe you have. Perhaps you’ve never

cared enough to be much tempted. And yet you care tremendously for Clare. (*Let me be coarse and do a little trampling!*) Haven't you ever deceived her, just a little?"

Mollie thought a moment.

"Perhaps a very little, now and then," she said, "but I think it was a pity. . . . What sort of things can't you confide in Joe?"

"Well, at the very start, if you're really going to be my little Mother Confessor," I replied, settling myself at Mollie's feet upon a cushion, "when we were engaged, I often felt as if I was the man. I wanted much more . . . much more love than Joe would show me. He thought I wouldn't have liked it, and I knew that he wouldn't — at least, he would have been quite shocked that *I* did. Oh, *do* you understand? It sounds involved and rather nasty, but it isn't really! I only mean that I wanted to drop the maidenly business and do the manny part of making love. I wanted to say 'No, I won't let you go for the next hour!' instead of simpering 'Now you must really let me go!'"

"I think I understand. It hasn't come my way," said Mollie. "I don't think I should feel quite that way if it did: perhaps more women do than we imagine, though!"

"I'm almost sure they do! They never like to say so. I expect we've taken up a handful of characteristics at the start that suited the primitive woman when she was highly specialised as female — and we've labelled them 'womanly' and got done with it for ever. . . .

Anyway, that's how I felt with Joe—how I feel now, for the matter of that, though I get more 'maidenly' every day, in spite of being married. He seems to make me, by expecting me to be like that. And then he can't help feeling things for other women: and I shall end by feeling them for other men, whom I shan't mind shocking!"

"Olive! draw the line *somewhere*."

"Oh, I expect I shall draw lines all right! I only mean that—yes, I think I mean that if any one could realise me as a sort of smallish *man* I'd get on better."

"Not much of the man about *you*!" said Mollie, touching my slightly elaborate hair and the laces of my frock.

"I didn't say there wasn't a lot of the woman in me. There is in heaps of men! Besides, my clothes and things are only means to the end of getting me the kind of thing I like. It's male as well as female to have vanity. The peacock, not the pea-hen, spreads its tail! Our men aren't driven to spread theirs. They can pick and choose without tail-spreading. Too many pea-hens!"

"The kind of thing you like," said Mollie; "do you want admiration, then?"

"Yes, please. Lots. It keeps Joe keener and me happier with him. If husbands only understood that simple rule of married life!"

"I'm getting many useful hints," said Mollie in her level voice.

"Oh, Mollie, don't be 'off' me! I've got into that silly way of talking. . . . Where were we?"

"We were suggesting that you were a smallish man."

"I'm sure I am. That's why this baby's so grotesque. What will Joe say, I wonder?"

"You haven't told him, Olive!"

"Not yet. You see—now, here's another thing you won't agree with. It'll make our marriage frightfully regular and proper! Have you read Thomas Hardy much? We love him. Well, he makes a peasant who feels just like that. . . . Apart from which I don't know how Joe will take it. In the novels, the unworthy husband says 'Oh, what a bore!' and the wife is cut to the heart and goes into the house and weeps bitterly. Or else he's more beautiful about it than she is herself, and says 'My dear, my dear!' as if he had never thought of such a thing before: and they go indoors and swim in tenderness and have an awful reverence for one another. And when the housemaid has one, we send her off without a character!"

"Olive, you'll be sorry if you vulgarise *too* much."

"I know. I'm sorry now. But Mollie! not the half has been told you."

"Well, tell away."

"I've got a lot of clothes—on credit. I can't pay for them. And now I shan't be able even to wear them!"

Mollie looked annoyed this time in earnest.

"I might help with that," she said, forcing her voice to cordiality.

"No, I wasn't hinting. I'm confessing. The good confessor is bound to forget what his penitent tells him — and absolutely bound not to act on it. . . . Then there's another thing — only a grumble-cause this time! Joe and I meant to go for a walking tour, a lovely, healthy, monogamous, beautiful, bracing walking tour, this summer. *That's off.* . . . And I shall look a guy, and have to shut out all our writing boys. I shall be bored without them. Joe will be bored without them. We shall then each think the other is the bore: and you won't even be able to take us out and feed us. I shall have 'fancies' for the most awful things, and sit at home devouring them. It will make you ill to see me."

Mollie began to laugh at last.

"Goose of geese," she said, "Joe will adore you more than he ever has. Your men-friends will think you a sort of piquant angel (all men are sentimental over young mothers and children), and it will be the jolliest toy you ever had, and you're quite clever enough to keep its bottles for private consumption. And I'll get you a wonderful tea-gown, and start you free of debt. No, don't talk nonsense!" she said, a little sharply, as I made my weak, enraptured protest, "how could you pay it off yourself? You'll want the money for the child. As for the walking tour, have it next year instead. I'll look after Little Joe or Young Joanna. You'll feel new-born yourself when it's all over. It's quite worth it, just to feel that lovely freedom. And you won't look hideous. Many women's faces are their very prettiest just then. Now, what more 'grumble causes' have you?"

"Only one more, little mother, little angel. I feel an awful beast at feeling as I do. I'd give anything — or almost anything — to feel the right, nice, lovely things. Oh, Mollie, why does God take me and give me Joe and babies? They're things so much too fine and good for *my* wretched human nature's daily food! A scavenger and a skunk would be too good for me! And I have to live up to Joe, and (perhaps) Joanna, and be looked up to by *them*. It's irony!"

"Well, here comes Joe, at any rate," said Mollie; "now live up to him while I go out and do some shopping."

Joe came gladly in on seeing Mollie.

"Why just off?" he asked, with disappointment.

"Back directly," said she laconically; "Olive has news to tell you."

"Oh, Welkin, Welkin!" I began. "We're going to be real married Wilkses, with a married sort of baby — and all that sort of thing."

Joe did not say "My dear, my dear!" or "What a bore!"

He said, for which may Heaven bless him all his life, "You — *poor* — *little* — *darling*! What a grown-up thing for you! Do you feel ill at all? and do you mind?"

Reaction set in then and I began to laugh — a little wildly. Then I wept, with more and more of dismalness.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?"

Joe was like a woman — tender, like my cousin Annie, as he rocked me.

I longed to say, "I am too vain, too selfish, too fond of admiration, too sensual, too cowardly, to bear your child."

I said instead, "I don't feel worthy. Oh, I don't feel worthy!"

True enough, God knows! but that was not the reason for my tears. The lie that was half a truth succeeded.

"*You* not worthy!" said Joe, "good God! What about me, then? If one of its parents can save its little soul, perhaps the other doesn't matter. 'I'll be the Daddy on't:' but you'll have to be the—the real things it wants."

CHAPTER XXI

NEXT morning, and for many mornings, Mollie's cheerful prophecies and Joe's new tenderness and sympathy caused the Interloper, or the prospect of him, to be faced by me with resignation — even excitement. For Joe produced a mighty sum, considering our income, and told me to betake myself to shops and buy what I should need. In spite of my recent claims to virility, I felt distinct exhilaration at the handling of the identical "microscopic garments" I had jeered at. At any rate they were absurd: and absurdity is always bearable, and generally lovable. Anything so quaint and tiny need not be a bore, if only people would not make it so.

For years I had had secret drawings towards babies: and invariably their loved ones, well-intentioned, had alienated me. Often I had established mute relations with some flirting toddler in a train or 'bus — a delicious affair of shy, sly looks and little smiles and transparent ruses and affectations. Then would come along a parent, and detect us. The thing was always spoiled at once.

"Aha! He sees the lady! Kiss the lady, Charlie!
Give the pretty lady a *nice* kiss!"

Premature osculation, forced upon us, outraged delicacy in us both. We mutually retired with great precipitation.

Or else some lovely eyes of a two-year-old mystic would attract me. Its mother would notice my absorption. She would immediately remark,

"Just look what great fat legs he's got:"

Two rather gross and most material and sometimes crooked limbs, exhibited, would quite undo the gaze of the sweet eyes. I have turned away, disgusted, all my life.

A squeamishness, indeed, to be disgusted by baby's limbs, the pride of femininity! On their own plane, they had their charms for me.

"Imagine, if some one looked into our eyes and thought 'How lovely!'" I remarked to Mollie, "and we said at once, 'Oh, but you should see my legs!' It's just the same, to me. It's outraging the infants. And the same with kisses. Every horrible old bearded man or great fat woman with a cold may kiss a baby and its mother will be pleased."

"The baby won't," said Mollie, "and it has a way of signifying the same in a decided manner."

"Then you feel snubbed to death. I never risk it; but the mothers make them kiss me."

"Little Joe shall be the great exception."

"Shan't he, just! He shall do as he really feels — be treated with respect and not made cheap. And he shall have a lovely time. He's not to suffer for not having the ordinary mother. I mean to let him have the sort of toys he really wants — not silly things we think he ought to want. I've seen a hundred babies happy with their mother's work-baskets. They wind the reels

and fit the things into their sockets and take them out again. 'I shan't snatch the basket from Joanna and give her a silly woolly lamb-thing instead."

" You seem to have a number of theories."

Mollie looked pleased.

" Well . . . they're not only mine," I had to admit; " among the men who come here there's a man with notions on everything under the sun. He's going to be a great big writer and an Influence. You'll see."

(The world saw: and he was.)

" Has he a baby?"

" I have no idea. I shouldn't think so. But he has theories on everything under the sun and lots of things above it. He's writing such a book. . . ."

" How old is he?" asked Mollie.

" Oh, he's in love with another woman!" I returned obliquely, and satisfied my Mentor.

Days went by, and cheerfulness began to fade. Not having undergone the thing before, I had no idea how entirely physical and temporary the mental conditions of it were. When I passed into a dismal zone of feeling miserable, disinclined for food or exercise, my face emaciated, my hair "gone dusty-looking," the worst of what I feared seemed full upon me. I treated Joe to fits of silent sulks, not hostile to himself, but full of a cowardly giving-in to wretchedness. Poor Joe tried manfully to cheer me up. Instead of cheering me, he depressed himself. We two were in more piteous plight than when our Mollie dug us out before. Marriage and babies had "spoiled it all" indeed — or so we felt.

Then Joe took suddenly a turn towards cheerfulness. Some secret source of things delectable appeared to be within his reach. He came home sometimes rather late for tea, with vagueish murmurs. Some Saturdays were taken up mysteriously. He always had a fund of loving patience and good spirits that had effect on me. I read him like a book and felt some thankfulness that he could escape so.

"We needn't *both* have a baby!" I had told him.

"Darling! I hope we are to. (Don't look disgusted. I know you hate that kind of joke.)"

"I mean, you needn't sit at home, and have it too. If there's anywhere to go to, go!"

Like the centurion's docile underlings, Joe "went." I thought it out with languor. It might be Mrs. Walton; but that lady had a certain gift of arm's-length sympathy that was immensely effective in bringing swains sighing to her feet, but was not "feeding," so to speak, to happy but temporarily disconsolate husbands. It was probably Ida Rowan again. Waterloo was only half-an-hour from Ida: and Joe was barely half-an-hour from Waterloo.

I hardly cared. I had enough unselfishness to wish Joe out of my misery-zone. That I could lose him was unthinkable. A qualm of conscience now and then assailed me. Was I demoralising the Welkin?

His sister had once asked me to make him smoke a little less. I then had brushed my hair back from my forehead, put on blue serge with a stiff collar, and marched upon him with a wifely lecture and a hand

upon his cherished pipe. Joe had appreciated the *mise-en-scène*.

"The voice is the voice of Olive," he remarked, "but the forehead and the words are the forehead and words of Agnes. Now that you have stripped your brow and cleared your conscience, I will have a little extra smoke, to prove my manly independence."

"Oh, Welkin, this is wickedness!" I pleaded. "You're making me a Bad Wife to you!"

"My dear child," Joe had said, with much conviction, "it's never what a woman *says* that influences men. It's what she *is*. If you go on just being you, a pipe or two won't hurt me."

Would an Ida or two hurt him? That was the question.

"Let him tire of her," I told myself, "and just wait till that little bore arrives! Then Mrs. Joseph Wilks arises in her glory to fascinate the world, and takes off Joe from fifty Idas!"

To this day, I do not know whether I was a fool or a philosopher to act as I did—or to forbear from acting.

One day, the weather being perfect, I arose in mighty spirits. The misery-zone had been safely passed. I did not realise that it had passed. I simply forgot that it had ever been. I came down singing and in record time and dressed as well as I knew how. Joe brightened to the change.

I felt the confidence of twenty wives. Joe had a breakfast hilarious enough to pay for many miserable

meals, and went off to his paper half enchanted. He came back earlier than usual, with a sheaf of flowers. All tea-time through, I flirted with him.

After tea, he suddenly felt silent. Confession was impending. I felt it, in each vibration of the air.

"Olive," he said at last, on a high, husky note, "would it upset you — make you ill at all — if I were to tell you something?"

"About Ida Rowan? No, it wouldn't."

"How in the world . . . !" And Joe looked really startled.

"Welkin, do you think I've lived with you for twice ten tedious months (not quite) for nothing? You were bored to death till Ida struck you. I don't wonder!"

"She didn't *strike* me, darling!"

After the manner of the absolved, the penitent was cheering over-fast. I had destroyed his moment for him. It struck me that I was genuinely rather degrading him. He would never realise that I could understand that Idas were negligible things. He truly wished to "keep to me only" in the most material sense as well as in the deeper. That being so, I must not drag him down. I knew the beauty of that ideal — had passionately desired it for us both. Perhaps I was too proud to weep over the spilling of enchanted wine. The human heart is complex. At all events, Joe should be given back his repentant mood.

"You know," I began, very gravely, "nothing would be easier than to forgive you anything. *Tout comprendre.* . . ."

"But you *don't* understand — you can't!" he groaned.
As ever, that annoyed me.

"Don't I act as if I did?" I asked impatiently, "am I wailing round your neck, imagining that you don't love me any more? I am the bread and wine of life to you. Idas are your . . . *apéritifs!*"

My beautiful resolve had badly given way. I looked at Joe with nervousness. He knitted his brow for one instant. Then his indomitable conviction returned.

"Of course you understand from the outside," he said; "there's hardly anything you couldn't. But I mean — the whole thing would be so impossible to you that you can hardly put yourself in my place if you try — thank Heaven!"

No good at all! However, it put me back in the rôle most useful to him.

"Well, I partially understand, and entirely forgive," I said, "but you must bear a little boredom, darling, for the sake of your immortal soul, and not fly to Idas and things again."

"I should think not!" said Joe, so fervently that I had a shrewd suspicion that his *apéritif* had bored him badly in the end, and that my sudden recovery of spirits had occurred at the psychological moment.

Then began a period which may be described as the sprightly-unsightly-zone. I felt in blooming health, and full of cheerfulness. We took short walks at dusk, and talk was never flagging; I began to feel the utter peace of mind of the happily married. My dependence upon Joe endeared him to me in the mother way which I

had loved so on our wedding day. Those were days of a very wonderful sweetness.

I took to reading, too, just then — and entered on the second best inheritance of human beings. All my life I had thirsted for books and met too few, or met the wrong ones. Now, in my long, sweet leisure, I devoured the right ones, all Joe's favourites. *Sartor* was his beloved book of books. I did not fully understand it: but I thought I did, and truly loved it. Just after my first reading of it, Froude's remarkable collections of letters and scandals about Carlyle and his Jeanie came out. We got each volume as it appeared, and perhaps no two in London knew more and talked more keenly of those other two in Chelsea than we talked for many weeks.

After a long course of Carlyle (I weakened at his "Frederick") I passed on to other authors. Joe re-read them, to keep pace with me. We began to be companions in a land that we had only skirted, up to then. I even tried my hand at writing leaderettes, and Joe made use of more than one, and got some verse of mine into his weekly. Life was most excellent: and Little Joe should have a giant intellect.

"All this ought to be good for him!" I often said. I now regarded him with much complacency.

About that time a river-friend came up to live in town. She had been married some six years, and had spent them in the steady production of male and female children, with intervals for their refreshment.

I had respected and avoided her till now, when she

took on something of the fascination of the girl with an interesting brother. She was concerned with things I wished to hear about. I asked her in to tea with me, the Welkin banished.

"Tell me all about your babies, especially the first one."

She told me dreary things of rashes, careless nurses, unhygienic bottles, glands, and teethings.

"At one time we quite thought Willy would grow crooked. . . . May's teeth have never come quite well. . . . Eddy is tiresome with his food. . . ."

Her brood had looked the typical healthy family. I did not know that she was the typical vicarious hypochondriac, whose offspring were just strong enough to survive her anxious care of them. She left me much depressed. I had not quite done with her.

"Can you lend me a smallish-sized child, temporarily in good health, for the afternoon?" I asked.

She looked a little frightened.

"I don't want it for Irish stew!" I said, "I want to see if it's 'such a companion.' People always tell me children are 'such companions.' I want to see."

"I might leave May," my friend said doubtfully.

"That's the one whose teeth have never come. I think I'd rather have Eddy."

"Eddy is troublesome about his food."

"Oh, well, if he doesn't like what I give him he needn't have it," I said airily. His mother looked distressed and rather huffy.

"I might leave Eddy for a *little*, and join you both

at tea," she said, still doubtfully; "you'll find a child a little tiring, just at first."

I did.

Eddie arrived. He had a look about him that attracted. I could not, with the best of wills, imagine him to be at all like the future Little Joe. He had a podgy sort of snub-nosed little face, with an engaging impudence about it. Little Joe was fated to a dark picturesqueness.

"Now, give Mrs. Wilks—" began his mother. I knew that gambit.

"It's too early for a nice kiss yet," I said with haste; "we haven't known each other quite five minutes. It's hardly decent."

"You always *were* amusing," said my friend, which crushed me for the moment, unintentionally; "I will leave Eddie here till four o'clock."

Eddie and I, now tête-à-tête, looked blankly at each other. I was paralysed by my ignorance of his mental stratum. Should one play "Peep-bo," and take him on one's knee? Or would an off-hand adult treatment be acceptable? I had a benevolent wish to entertain the child, and a decided terror of making an extraordinary fool of myself in his eyes.

Eddie saw my panic, and his fled.

"Can you play ball?" he asked, and came quite close, with menace in his eye.

"Yes, rather! Do you want to play it?"

"Have you got a ball?"

"I don't believe I have."

"Well, we can't, then!" He looked at me with obvious scorn.

"I don't know about that," I said with spirit, "why shouldn't we use an orange? The one who drops it fewest times shall eat it afterwards."

Eddie looked stern still, but contemplative. I fetched an orange from the sideboard in the dining-room.

"Now you stand dere, and I'll stand 'ere," said Eddie.

"All right; throw very gently, ducky."

Eddy threw with all his might vaguely in my direction. The orange knocked a vase down, broke it, and poured the water from it over everything.

"I don't think we'd better play ball, after all," I said; "what else is there that we could do?"

"I dwopped it fewest times. I'll eat it," announced Eddie.

"Good idea!" I gave him up the orange, with a lump of sugar. If he did not much prefer that vulgar way of dealing with it to a fruit-knife and plate treatment, he was a little gentleman and no true boy. Apparently he did prefer it.

"Mummy *will* be cwooss," he said with great enjoyment.

"Why?" I felt much alarmed.

"Not allowed oranges," said Eddie complacently.

"Oh, why not?"

"Fatal," said Eddie, curtly.

I laughed, and much offended him.

"Fatal means kill you," he explained.

"Darling, I'm certain it won't kill you. Perhaps if you had *two* . . . ?"

Eddie's eyes gleamed, but he evidently regarded me as a maniac with a convenient form of mania. He had "two."

After that, conversation flagged. His mind seemed non-consecutive.

"Why 'aven't you 'air like my Mummy?" he demanded.

"The inscrutable decree of Providence," I murmured.

"What?"

"I don't quite know, to tell you the truth."

Eddie looked bored.

"'Ow do slugs 'ave little slugs?" he next enquired.

"You only laughs all de time," he said with injury and justice.

He was adorable, and if I might have cuddled him, and laughed at him without fear of his wrath, I should have quite enjoyed his visit; but he struggled from me, and I sensitively shrank from him at once; and my laughter seemed to mortify the mite. I hailed his mother with much rapture.

"Has he been a good companion?" she asked, not without malice.

"Oh, rather!" I bragged back. I watched them both at tea. She had no fear of Eddie or his feelings. She pulled him straight, and banged his little shoulders when he stooped, and took away the jam that he was spreading, and said, "Don't do *that*, Eddie!" every minute; and he never resented her, or resisted her, or even

seemed as bored as I had made him feel. When he said a funny or a darling thing, his mother mostly snubbed him. When he was simply tedious, and repeated all the things that she kept prompting him to say, she found him a comedian of first rank, and kept collecting forced, appreciative smiles from me. Then she removed her infant, and mine came — that very night!

I falsified the novels once again. I did not "hover between life and death." I felt weak, but almost normal, after some few hours, of which my nurse's description as "a good time" seemed to me the most humorous thing that man or woman had said yet. When she had uttered it she thought my life in danger; for I laughed until I nearly fainted.

Joe came in and behaved like a Newfoundland dog. He flopped about and whined and gambolled (metaphorically) and licked my hands. I clung to him, still laughing, rather weakly.

"Shall I bring him in?" asked Nurse at the open door.

"He is in," I replied.

"I meant the baby!" said my Nurse.

"Good Lord!" said Joe, "I forgot there was a baby!"

CHAPTER XXII

WE were always forgetting it — and it never seemed to mind a bit. If people had let us alone with it we should have been all quite happy; but they never did let us alone.

I felt like a boy out of school, or a bird out of a cage, being up and about and free again. As soon as Joe and I had forgotten for a moment that we were irrevocably married, with a baby, the giant nurse would come along and sober us. She never seemed to hear us laughing without marching in procession straight upon us. She contrived processional effects by throwing open a door with one hand, then pausing for an instant, and then pacing in with Baby for a banner, very slowly.

"I thought you'd like to hold him for a minute while I wring out some of my little daygowns," she would say. She always talked of "my long flannels," and "my feeders" till Joe and I grew half hysterical.

We both would guiltily drop fooling and advance upon the baby, which would yawn in our faces. We would in trepidation then transfer it from her solid-feeling arm to our uncertain clutch. Its head would wobble, do what you would. This alarmed Joe excessively at first. Still, when the morsel cuddled down in his big hands, he generally began to look most beautiful — a sort of male Madonna by Rembrandt — whereupon the nurse would

usually remark, "Remember, he's only lately had his bottle," and dispel the poetry at once.

Joe's sister came to stay. She was a spinster, and almost indelicately maternal. She kept my life a terror from morning until night. A message would come from her while I was dressing for some rare occasion of festivity at night.

"Could you just come and look at Baby? His breathing seems to *me* to be strange! *You* may not be alarmed."

If, as occasionally happened, I stole in to the nursery to have a private flirtation with my son, who knew me very early, I would most likely meet Joe's sister on emerging.

"*That's* right!" she would remark, "*I like* to see you take an interest in the darling."

I would then keep away for days.

The worst of all was when we went to houses. People who had hitherto regarded Joe and me as a huge joke, considered in the light of sober matrimony (our joint age was 44) now took a tone as if my youth had passed and the sum of life's achievements had been added up for me. Nine mothers out of ten feel just the same, most probably. I, on the contrary, felt the baby my superior and senior—a sort of kindly but exacting little Judge, who knew me to be much inferior to his High Priestess, Nurse. Privately, he was something very different; but no one knew of that beyond ourselves. He could not tell and I would not. The people took the tone I always dreaded. They deluged me with ques-

tions, all the women, not one of whom I competently answered.

"*Those* aren't the real things about my baby," I reflected. I felt much as I might have felt if people had asked me all about Joe's gums and whether his arms and legs were "that nice mottled colour" when they heard I had a husband. The baby wasn't a dull Real Baby, except to them. He was a sort of Little Joe, with personality and dignity and (really early) beauty. My respect for his privacy was shocked by all his kind enquirers.

The men-folk hurt my vanity, which, I fear, was worse. They assumed that I must be enwrapped in domesticity — every spark of diablerie extinguished. Their good-natured efforts to "talk Baby" nearly made me cry.

"Joe, let's go back and drown that Baby!" I implored him, after one such evening of misplaced sympathy.

Joe looked doubtful.

"I expect we'd better keep him," he decided.

"It's all very well for you! They don't 'little father' you all over the place. You're still Joe, if you *have* a silly baby. I'm not Olive any more. I'm something's mother. *Me!*"

"All right, we'll drown it," answered Joe, who still looked rather doubtful. He credited me with secret infatuation, and thus kept his ideal undisturbed. Nothing but my murder of it could have shaken him.

Joe's sister met us on the landing.

"Oh, I'm glad you're home!" she said; "do speak to

Gwendolen yourself! The mistress *ought* to do these things. *I have no voice at all—*"

Gwendolen was the solemn and diminutive maid who trundled Baby up and down the nearest Square. We had not let her name be changed, for joy in it. She was as steady as Old Time, the eldest of a string of ten, each one of whom, she truthfully declared, was "reared" by her, "Mother being bad with her leg."

"What's wrong with Gwendolen?"

"I'm almost sure she *runs* with the perambulator. I met her to-day, quite out of breath, and Baby looked very white—"

I went into the nursery with impatience. The Baby lay there, broad awake, and staring at his night-light.

"*You* little . . ." I began, and knelt down and shook my fist at him.

He gave the absurdest thing in crooked, toothless smiles and tried to jump.

"You *dinky-dinky-doo-dum-DAY!*" I heard myself remarking, like any mother-body of them all.

I found him very fetching when they let me find him so; but I could not pretend that he filled all my thoughts. It was no good watching him all day long and planning that he should be an Admiral or an Ambassador, when he probably would want to be a cat's-meat-man and make a fool of me. I cast about for spoils for my long-empty net. My first spoil was my cousin, Roland Broome.

Roly was hardly quite my cousin, being only Aunt Hetty's nephew by marriage. He had been all his grown-up years in India and we had hardly met before. He

hailed me with enthusiasm at a dullish lunch. Aunt Hetty, since Joe's gradual accession to less impecuniosity and a pretty half-house (which I have not yet mentioned) in the place of dingy "rooms," had warmed to us remarkably. I often lunched there now.

Roly did not "rub in" any babies. On the contrary, he put me on a pedestal, apparently, as something that you did not meet on every week-day. The pedestal was different from Joe's, and I felt less totter upon it.

"I suppose you wouldn't come and tea with me?" he pleaded. "I have the dearest little Flat and my old housekeeper would make us such a tea! Do come, dear little Cousin Olive! I've known you all your life, you know! You kissed me when you were ten—the day before I went to India first."

I did not remember the embrace, but I felt mildly disposed to partake of tea in his Flat. I did not confide in Joe as to this last. I arrayed myself in mauve silk-muslin, with a shady hat of violets, and I sought Majuba Mansions with a pleasant sense of delicate wrong-doing.

My cousin opened his Flat door to me himself.

"I hope you don't mind, darling," he said anxiously: "my little maid's gone out. She had to help her mother, poor child. Her mother's an old friend of mine—my charwoman. The dearest soul you ever knew. You're *certain* you don't mind?"

"Of course not!" I replied. It was hard to say anything else, with Roly talking like a district visitor, though a thought of his "old housekeeper" myth just crossed my mind. He led the way into a pretty room. It was

a bed and sitting-room combined. I looked a little startled.

"I never use the horrid drawing-room," said Roly, "this one is so much cosier. My mother loves this one. I told her ladies would be horrified. She just said, 'This lady isn't,' and sat down upon my bed. It's just as comfy as a sofa. Try it, dear. But perhaps I ought not to expect you to sit upon my bed. I'll try and bring the other arm-chair from the room next door."

"Oh, nonsense!" I said, naturally, sitting on his bed.

"I'll just begin to set the tea a-going," said my cousin, taking no more notice of me. He bustled gently with a pretty tea-pot and some china. I sat far back upon his bed and swung my feet.

"Oh, darling!" exclaimed Roly, catching sight of them, "I wonder if you'd mind . . . Oh, no, I mustn't ask you."

"What's the matter now?" He looked quite worried.

"Your lovely little shoes . . . My maid is *so* particular about my silly quilt. If I might slip them off? The room's quite warm. You're sure you wouldn't mind?"

"Oh, sorry!" I looked down. A little patch of brown was certainly in evidence upon the snowy Irish linen quilt with its embroideries. My cousin did not wait for further leave.

"It doesn't matter one brass farthing!" he assured me, slipping off my shoes. He did it with such deftness that suspicions dawned upon me.

"Roly, you've taken off no end of people's shoes!" I said; "you understand the patent knot and everything!"

"Yes, darling," he said, absent-mindedly, fondling my feet in his warm hand, "I'm afraid I'm very unconventional. But *you* know how maids fidget! They have such dreary lives, poor little souls! One hates to give them extra trouble."

He held my feet in both his hands, and stroked them gently. His thoughts were evidently far from me, with hard-worked servants and their troubled lot.

"How kind you are!" I said. He seemed just like a motherly young woman.

"You little dear, to think so!" he said, leaning forward and kissing my cheek, but softly, like a brother. "No one could ever be unkind to you. If a man meets a little girl like you, he wants to keep her from all harm — just as I hold your little feet quite safely in my hand." He bent and kissed my insteps.

This was all very well; but I began to realise that Roly had made astounding progress since I entered. I had not had the most remote intention of penetrating into his bedroom, seating myself on his bed, and allowing him to remove my shoes and hold my feet and kiss them — and my cheek. And yet he looked so almost lady-like! I tried to change the atmosphere with subtlety.

"My baby has such darling little feet," I said.

Roly did not turn pale and vanish in a smell of sulphur.

"Tell me about your baby," he said tenderly; "has he sweet eyes like you? Your eyes are like two little shrines. You have the purest little face." He kissed my eyes, with gravest reverence.

"Do make the tea!" I said uneasily.

"Oh, darling, I am worrying you!" He sprang up, much distressed.

"Oh, not at all!" I said, relieved, "but I'm just longing for my tea."

"I'll make it as soon as this thing boils—the very instant!"

Roly was all solicitude. He did deft things with caddies and old silver servers and a pretty copper kettle.

"You ought to be a woman," I said thoughtlessly. My cousin's eyes just flickered, underneath their languid lids.

"I never should be good enough," he said, with gentle gravity; "women don't realise how heavenly they seem to men. Now, dear, I think it's boiling. . . . No, I'll bring it to you. Please don't move."

He brought me tea and muffins and small dainty cakes.

"Have you everything, darling?"

"Yes, it's quite lovely. But—Roly?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Ought you to say those things so often?"

"What things, my pet?"

"Why 'darlings' and things!"

"I *am* so sorry! Did you mind? You know my sister Kate?"

"I saw her once." I felt a brute, he looked so gently sad. I tried to think what I had heard of Kate. Could she have died?

"I think I got into the way with her," he said, "we al-

ways called each other little loving names. She lived with me, you know, for years."

"Oh, poor old Roly!" Kate was evidently dead. I looked at her devoted brother with compunction.

"An artist ought to paint you as Our Lady of Compassion," said my cousin. "If women only knew how lovely thoughts and feelings suit them, they would never show us others."

"I suppose you've met some awful women?" I said eagerly.

"No, I'm afraid I find it hard to think evil of a woman," he said gently, and I felt abashed; "they have been angels to me, Olive—angels!"

His eyes looked rapt; his arm stole gently round me.

"When a sweet, good, lovely woman shows a man affection," he said dreamily, "it makes him feel that he can never forfeit her trust. . . . Won't you take off your hat, my darling?"

"No, I won't," I said, a little shortly, "and I don't want you to put your arm round me, if you don't mind."

"Oh, was I hurting you? I'm *sorry*, darling." Roly looked agonised. He took his arm away in haste.

"Don't be a humbug, Roly." By this time even I had gauged my gentle cousin's methods.

Roly looked pained and puzzled. There was just a little pause.

"That is a splendid man you've married," he then told me.

"Yes, he is," I said, with coldness, "and he'd hate my being here."

Roly got up in consternation.

"My dear, why not have told me that?" he said.
"Perhaps I'd better see him and explain. I'll take you home at once. Where are your little gloves?" He searched the room.

I was a shade dismayed. I wanted much more tea; and Roly's fell intentions were apparently the offspring of my unclean mind. I stayed. He settled down, quite quickly reassured.

"A husband who loves you is a wonderful thing," he said.

"Thank you!" said I.

"Any husband would love *you*, of course. But I sometimes think that women don't quite understand the beauty of what men give them. Never be cruel to your husband, Olive!"

"I'll try to remember," I said huffily. Roly was really . . .! No woman likes to have her husband recommended to her by other men. It hurts her vanity and lowers his pride.

"It is your gentle, lovely kindness that is so beautiful in you," said Roly. "You have the sweet look in your eyes that mother-women have."

"*That's* a bad shot, at any rate!" I laughed, "for I'm about as much a 'mother-woman' as your tea-pot."

"Never run down the mother-woman, dear," said Roly gravely, "they are a man's ideal of the highest." He seated himself close to me.

"When did you take Holy Orders?" I asked pertly.

"And don't make fun of sacred things, my darling.

You are a sacred thing to me yourself — as sacred as my mother."

" You talk a lot about Aunt Joan, but you don't treat her at all as you do me!" I said.

" Indeed, indeed, I do!" cried Roly, earnestly; " when she is tired, she lets me stroke her wrists like this . . . It rests her." He stroked mine, pushing my sleeve up gently. Then he kissed my arm.

" Does Aunt Joan like that, too?"

" Well, dear, you see, she's old enough to be my mother!"

" *Isn't* she your mother?"

" Yes, darling."

" Roly . . . you confuse my very soul! What are you driving at?"

" Nothing at all — except to make my little lovely cousin happy: and she's that already."

" Yes, she certainly is. Oh, Roly, *don't!*" for, with a touch of serious ardour, my extraordinary cousin had kissed my cheek again — very near my lips. A curious faint pang of pleasure stirred in me. I did not make so real a resistance as before. A shamed remembrance of poor Ida crossed my mind when Roly turned my face to his with gentle violence and kissed me softly on the lips. I actually allowed it, to my own surprise. Then I slid off the bed with much decision.

" After *that* I will go, thank you!" I tried hard for my lost dignity: but my hands shook as I laced up my shoes.

Roly was very clever.

"Now you will never forgive me," he said, brokenly. "I knew I should lose everything! The intense desire to kiss you is my one excuse. It's little enough to give — but far too much for me to expect. Go home and hate me all your life!"

This super-tragedy acted as it was meant to act.

"I shan't be so serious as all that," I said; "it was quite my own fault, and I ought to have seen from the start. I shall know another time."

"You'll never come again?"

"Well — rather not!"

"In that case I will have another," said my cousin calmly.

"Not from me," I said, eluding him with some adroitness and reaching his small hall-door before him. I slipped through, down the stairs, and waved victoriously to him. He did not look too disconcerted. He kissed his hand with airy grace and disappeared — carrying with him, I could not but feel, the honours of war.

On my way home, I felt a-tingle, just at first, with conscience-deadening emotions. Later, to do me justice, I put myself in sackcloth, with ashes under my hat.

"Nothing will make you quite the same again," I told myself, with fierce contempt. "You've let that . . . that comedian . . . feel that he has scored off *Joe* — a little! You can never wipe that out."

"Don't be so serious!" said half of me.

"Don't be so gross!" retorted Conscience.

"I wasn't prepared," urged half of me.

" You let yourself enjoy it," answered Conscience.

" I shall know better all my life!" I urged.

" See that you *act* more decently, that's all," said Conscience.

CHAPTER XXIII

A LITTLE experience is a dangerous thing. It is useful to know that your enemy has a war canoe, but the knowledge will not prepare you for his ironclad.

I felt myself now armed for any sex-fray, after Roly's insidious if hardly fiery wooing. One had to be upon one's guard, not only against "intentions" from the apparently innocuous, but against unexpected inclinations in oneself. I had had vague desires for Ida-dalliance, but was not quite prepared to let them crystallise. Where the danger lay was in my playing round the subject, courting its atmosphere and, above all, almost ignoring its danger. That anything could put Joe second in my thoughts for half a moment was unthinkable. I was like a man who does not mean to drink a glass of brandy but likes to see a glass of brandy on the table.

Then awakening came so drastically that I shall not forget its lesson till I die. I put down all that happened, in no spirit of salacity, but as an honest warning. She that standeth is insulted if you bid her take heed lest she fall: but if she see the scar where you have slipped, she can but listen.

One of Joe's literary friends had lately married. He was an extremely brilliant youth, whose University had hoped great things of him, which journalism stepped in

and claimed instead. His bride was the astounding bride of most such men. She had no thought that was not ready-made. The first approach to spontaneity made her stare. Her husband radiated humanity. She bristled with conventions. His manners were the perfect manners of entire simplicity of attitude, which constantly goes with a complex intelligence. Hers were machine-made, and you did not dare to strain them. He took all social things much as he took the task of breathing. She was bewildered and resentful if you did not offer her the precise openings that were expected of you.

She inspired in me the same evil desires that were suggested by my wooden partners at the dances. I burned to see her under genuine emotion. I could have poured the contents of her neat copper kettle over her nice clean hands and felt repaid for all my calls on her if she had fallen to the occasion with an unpremeditated profanity.

The two were as radiantly happy as your misfits always are at first. Later, a baby comes, and they are happier still. Later again, another woman comes, and one of them is happier than ever.

The Lesters were at the first stage of their mis-mating and Mrs. Lester called on me with rigid regularity, her movements still unhampered by the exigencies of the second stage. I owed her now a long neglected call. Not for all the wealth of the Indies would she have called on me "out of her turn." To drop her was to drop Jim Lester, which would have been a real loss.

I called. She lived in Streatham. The slowest train that ever stopped at stations and between them took me

there in time for tea. It was her blameless Day. I usually had met two Streatham aunts upon her Day. Their bonnets greeted me as I came in; but upon the hall table there had lain a shining virile hat.

Its owner was the first thing that I saw. It was not hard to see him. He seemed to fill the room; and yet he moved about in it as deftly as a salesman in a china shop.

"I'm a *bona-fide* traveller," I began, with gaily outstretched hand, "give me to drink."

The stranger had inspired me to forget in whose house I was.

"Quite well, thank you," said my hostess, and then blushed vermillion, having just realised that I had not said "How do you do?" It was a horrid moment.

"Let me dispense for you!" The male approached the tea-table and broke the silly tension.

Mrs. Lester handed him my tea-cup with relief.

"Mr. Clive-Somers, Mrs. Wilks," she said.

We meant to bow, but suddenly shook hands.

"Where did your *bona-fide* travels start from?" He sat down by me. The Aunts and Mrs. Lester remained silent for an awe-struck instant; then they began to be feverish about all the things that no one gives a thought to and most folks spend a stream of words upon.

"They started from near Oxford street; but it's so long ago that I've forgotten!"

"Like the man who took a child's ticket —"

"On the South Eastern, and said he was a child when he started? Yes."

"I'm so sorry! It's an awful sign of age to offer people chestnuts."

"It was frightfully rude of me."

"Not half so bad as some of one's friends, who hear one through, and then say lovingly, 'I always liked that story.' One feels twice the ass."

"Mrs. Wilks," enquired my hostess, "won't you have some bread-and-butter?"

"Thank you. I have some of your delicious cake."

"Biscuits?" she enquired inflexibly, "tea-cake, chocolate wafers, buttered toast?"

It was like a waiter's recitation of his menu.

"No, thank you very much."

"Another cup of tea?"

"I have some, thank you."

"Mr. Clive-Somers! One more cup."

He rose with resignation and a murmur and stood beside her table, leaving me forlorn. I turned to the nearest aunt. She was a mild lady who could be induced to contradict herself almost as often as she spoke.

"It's nice and warm in here!" I began.

"Beautifully warm, yes."

"It's quite chilly outside. One feels the difference, coming into a room. Sometimes it's dangerous. But your niece never over-heats her rooms. This is splendidly cool."

"Very nice and cool. Oh, very."

"The days are getting shorter," I said next. The aunt began to have a high opinion of me.

"Yes, indeed!" she said with cordiality, "much shorter."

"Yet it's wonderful how long it still keeps light!"

"It is. Wonderful." Her voice was rather doubtful.

"For instance, yesterday I couldn't see to read at five, and the day before I didn't light the lamps till quite half-past. I suppose we get a few minutes more of daylight every day—if it's *only* a few minutes."

"I suppose we must." The aunt was reassured that I was not making daring statements. I was being a pleasant, intelligent young woman and she liked me. Her kind face signified the same, and I began to warm to her. And then the empty chair the other side of me was filled again.

"Do you know Mr. Lester?" said Clive-Somers. There was the faintest emphasis on "Mr."

"Oh, yes!" I answered, "he's our friend. We know him very well."

"So he is ours." We both felt that our presence was explained. Neither by word or look did we commit the horrid sin of criticising the lady whose cake, tea cake, chocolate wafers, biscuits, bread-and-butter and buttered toast were still with us; but we understood. Pity and love for Jim were in our hearts.

Mr. Clive-Somers had said "ours." Then he was married? But of course. He looked quite forty, and unostentatiously prosperous from his well-cut hair down to his hand-sewn boots. (Too many of Joe's friends

had barbers who seemed to favour the pudding-basin ideal. You cut off all you did not want, outside the basin's rim.)

"I think I met your husband once at Jim's," he said; "your name is Mrs. Wilks, I think our hostess told me?"

"It is. It takes some living down. I have an idea of changing it to D'Arcy Lyonsesse. *Yours* is a pretty name!"

A river man would certainly have said, "It's too late, worse luck! to ask you to change it for mine." I could feel some sublimation of the phrase just touching my companion's brain and falling back rejected.

"A name becomes a person to one very soon," he said; "try any one at names: you'll be surprised to find which ones they love and hate. It's nearly always for personal reasons—not for the sound of the name at all. For instance, Magdalen never suggests a penitent saint with lovely hair to me. It suggests—what do you think? A spinster with a bright red nose and spectacles! She was a sort of cousin and she stayed with us. I didn't see the humour of her name. I just thought, 'This is what Magdalens are like!'"

"I know," I laughed. "'What's in a name?' is really true."

"Most sayings are—especially truisms. Have you lived long enough to see the copy-book headings all come true one after another? I suppose not."

"I don't quite know. Is twenty-one long enough?"

"Are you only that?"

"Not quite that. I come into my estates in October." I meant this as a little joke, but Mr. Clive-Somers looked quite serious. It struck me then that the idea of "estates" was not a facetious impossibility outside the impecunious world of Wilkses.

"Where are they?" he asked in all good faith.

"Just at the foot of the Mountains of the Moon," I said, "close to the Lake of Dreams. My nearest town is El Dorado, in the Never-Never land."

Clive-Somers did not answer and looked strangely at me.

"Have you ever recited to music?" he then asked.

"No. Why?"

"You have the very voice for it. I should like to hear you say those words again—to music. Don't people tell you what your voice is sometimes like?"

"One person has."

"Two people have," he said, a little eagerly; "it's a voice that would bring tears to the eyes of a whole audience when they least expected it. It laughs and talks and then it suddenly takes such a note . . . I beg your pardon!"

"Oh, but I like it. You sound as if you meant it. I'm glad I have it; but it's not much good to British matrons with the name of Wilks."

"Indeed it is. At least, you say 'much *good*': it ought to wheedle a bird off a bough for you."

"But I have no use for a bird. We have a cat."

"A nice one?" He had recovered from my voice at last.

"A very nice reserved one. *Very* snubby. Whenever I kiss it, it washes the place immediately."

The river-man would certainly not have missed this opening. I felt a little vexed at blundering perpetually upon these rather vulgar "leads." Clive-Somers passed it over, as I hoped.

"Cats *are* snubby!" he remarked. "That's why we count their favours more than dogs. Dogs are worth ten of most cats, any day; but they're too facile."

"Isn't it funny?" I said, "no one can talk of cats without mentioning dogs! It's like Dickens and Thackeray. I always imagine those two avoiding each other in Heaven. They aren't in the least comparable, but every one compares them."

"That's quite true. I never thought of it. Some people that we couple do belong. Browning suggests Meredith and Wagner and Watts. And I suppose Swan deliberately selected Edgar . . ."

"Poor Mr. Abel didn't choose Miss Kelly!" I laughed. "Their novels are only alike in their sales. It's compromising for them both—and they can't marry."

"*What* a book they'd have!" said my companion, and we laughed, a little heartily for Streatham teas.

Mrs. Lester and the Aunts rose at us, and stood embracing clinging.

"So very glad, dear Aunties. You must come again." Clearly it was more than time to go.

I rose with slight embarrassment. I seemed to know Clive-Somers as well as if we had been twin cherries on

one stalk: and now we should probably not meet again for months—if ever.

He, of course, rose too.

"I'll escort Mrs. Wilks to her train," he said, with much *sang-froid*, "if she'll allow me. Please say all sorts of things to Jim for me."

Mrs. Lester shook hands with an even chillier clasp than when I came. I hate a hand that feels like a slice of cold meat slid into your palm. Nothing in her drawing-room became her like our leaving of it.

"How is your wife?" she asked, obviously as a faint reproach to one of us and a delicate warning to the other.

"Very well indeed, thank you," he replied, with affability; "she hopes to have the pleasure of calling on you herself as soon as she comes back from the North."

We found ourselves in an immense long street, imperfectly lighted. It had not looked so lengthy in the daylight.

"This is the original long lane that has no turning," said Clive-Somers.

"That's what they say of Harley Street."

"Oh . . . I hoped you would think I'd made it up!"

We laughed and made our way towards the main road, guided by grinding sounds of trams.

"Have you any absolute craving for trains?" he asked, eyeing a crawling hansom nearing us.

"I can control it," I replied demurely.

"Have you a nervous dread of hansoms?"

"It might be conquered."

"Do you think our long and tried acquaintance would warrant me in driving you to town?"

"Any friend of Mrs. Lester's . . ." We both laughed.

I felt in a fairly harmless but excited mood. I knew that I should do far better to go meekly home by train and not "make myself cheap" by letting a stranger drive me in the intimacy of a hansom. But the drive pictured itself as a light-hearted and sparkling adventure. The station, now in sight, looked dingy prose itself. A rau-
cous shriek came from it.

Clive-Somers put up his stick. He told the cabman something and got in after me. We started off at a good pace. The hansom horse had bells, which much exhilarated me. I tried to think that a Russian prince was eloping with me.

"What did you tell our cabman?"

"I said, 'The Mountains of the Moon,' and he said, 'Too far for my horse.'"

"This is a mad journey. Fancy passing Brixton! It's because I had a touch of the sun when I was small."

"That *just* explains you!"

I was disappointed.

"That is the *banal* thing that every one has always said."

"Good Heavens! I don't mean anything so obvious — oh, that's worse!"

This time I laughed.

"Seriously," he said, "it does explain the difference.

There's a touch of warmth and colour — in your eyes and voice and handshake, in the way you walk and sit and stand, the way you think . . . That's what it comes from — the touch of the sun. The sun once kissed you, and you can't be English any more. The instant you came in at that dreary door, I felt it. Sun-child! Why hasn't Phœbus got a proper feminine?"

"What about Phœbe?"

"Don't! We had a housemaid who was always drinking cocoa and saying gloomily, '*More work!*' She was Phœbe."

Again that plural. A tiny silence fell between us. As if the thought had crossed his mind as well he suddenly observed:

"I *should* like you to meet my wife!"

"I should love to."

It was gratifying: and it promised further meetings: but it took a little of the magic from our journey to the Mountains of the Moon. Still, it showed that my "cheapness" had not been too fatally cheap. We jingled on.

"Have you ever been to tea at the Marlborough?"

The Marlborough was one of the very first "mixed" clubs in London.

"No, I'd like to see it."

"Well, my wife and I belong. Let me see — on Thursday, could you come?" He took a small engagement book in crocodile and silver from his pocket.

"I'll ask my wife," he said; "she may not be engaged." Some faint inflection in his voice apprised me

subtly that her freedom was not quite essential to his plan. I brightened up; and then my pride took fire. I should either meet that wife, and soon, or perish in the attempt.

We talked at intervals, but not continuously. The sense of his near presence was astonishingly restful, and yet agitating, too. My metaphorical heart felt joyful and uplifted; and my physical one beat rather loud and quickly. Without a word of love-making, this stranger, who felt so near my life, was drinking up my individuality and enjoying it.

We got to town at last. He dropped me at the northern end of Bond Street, "by request," and I took myself eastward. Hessie, to my surprise, was waiting for me.

"Oh, Olive, *dear!*" she said. "How nice to see you! I thought you'd never come."

"I've been to pay a duty call," I said; "some of Joe's friends — in Streatham. I thought I'd never get home."

Edward would have sent a chaperon with St. Francis, when he went to see St. Clare, and Hessie was entirely Mrs. Edward, the female of his species. Therefore I did not, as I would have done when we were girls, confide in her about my radiant stranger. She had not long to stay in town. At any other time, I should have felt the shortness of our interview; but now I longed for her to go and leave me to my thoughts: and my thoughts, for the first time since I had met with Joe, did not include him even once.

CHAPTER XXIV

ONE glory is there of the sun and one of the moon
and one of the stars. I had seen many social types
in my short day, owing to the sudden shiftings of my
milieu. At Clifton, my first real memory, the Brethren
were of every class. Mrs. Liston was pure aristocrat.
So was beautiful old Mrs. Flower, whose friends would
now and then by force restore her to the world that she
had left. So were some others of that queer but on the
whole heavenly band. A young dressmaker, on the other
hand, was a most valued Sister, whom we all were proud
to know. "Miss Goldie is coming," in a note inviting
friends to tea, was an equivalent inducement to splendid
inscriptions such as "to meet the Prince and Princess"
on invitations more formal and considerably less satis-
factory: for you really did meet Miss Goldie, and you
never "meet" the Prince.

Later, the people down in Wales who called upon the
Dad and Mollie, though they seldom came, because of all
the foolish jealousy, impressed me then as being very
glorious. They certainly had social points; but their
minds, and all the words I ever heard from them, were
very dull indeed.

Later, again, there were the relatives of my school-
fellows at Miss Henderson's, as well as my own occa-
sional soldier uncles and aunts who descended from In-
dia on our varied domiciles. All these were pleasant

folk with good addresses and nice voices, easy manners and simple hearts. In the river suburb, too, there were charming old Judges and Admirals to be found if you looked for them. They were not in evidence like the occasional river-man and all-pervasive river-girl; but they were there if you knew where to find them, and if they wanted to be found.

Joe's writing set were far more interesting than any of these "service" families, who, one and all, had a certain barrenness of intellect that was surprising in people who had travelled much and mixed with many different social worlds. The writing folk had charmed me at the outset. They charmed me still. Their shibboleths were mine by instant adaptation. Their minds delighted and their talk amused me. Their souls and brains were wide awake and vigorous: their physique — the reverse.

It must be confessed that, on the face of them, they were a fairly seedy-looking lot, our literary friends! We did not take them on presentability-terms. In fact, a shade of affectation of the opposite clung to us all. "Smartness" was thought a far worse pitfall than a touch of the sloven. Some lingering memory of the Byronic ideal still tainted our young poets and affected their ties and their back-hair.

Clive-Somers had the glories of united constellations. He had the whimsical intelligence of our best "writing boys," the charm and breeding of my soldier uncles, and a superb physique, well-grown, well-groomed, that was itself a joy. It is seldom useful to describe a face. Its charm proverbially eludes description. He had a blunt

and English fairness, touched with grey, and most expressive eyes. His manner, with no suggestion whatever of the *double entente* about it, yet made you sure that there were thrilling worlds below this world of easy manners, and thrilling conversations going on behind the easy talk. Without a hint of making love, he more than made it. You felt his nearness like a touch. His look was like a touch. So was his voice. It is all indescribable, of course. Fascination; personality; the words are both in constant use, and have small power to show one anything: but fascination, personality, are what Clive-Somers had.

The days dragged on till Thursday. I tried to fix my mind on both my Joes. The little one was the easier one just then. My big Joe gave me qualms of anticipatory remorse: for I knew well that I was going to tea, come wife come none, at the Marlborough Club on Thursday — and that I should not tell him so.

Hitherto, I had reluctantly deceived the Welkin for his own sake. Now I reluctantly deceived him for my own. He would not understand at all my flutter of wings that the long advent of Little Joe had clipped. He would not sympathise with my etherealised version of his Ida episode. Joe, of course, would have known at once the danger of the thing. I did not tell myself that fact. I told myself that the Wise Wife is philosophical about her husband's doings and reserved about her own. Why worry Joe? I meant no real harm.

It was now autumn and the days had little creeping claws that nipped you while the sun shone on deceitfully.

My mind turned eagerly to furs. The clever husband pricks up wary ears when his wife plunges with feverish suddenness at her wardrobe, and begins renewing. The placid woman wears for months what the first dawning of a love-affair, like the first sun of spring, reveals to her as shabby beyond words.

I looked, disgusted, at my wardrobe. Could I run to furs? Winter would come and I should need a hat. If I should get it now . . . and furs—a set of furs.

Furs quite obsessed me. Harding's, whom Mollie's cheque had reassured, beset me with insidious catalogues.

"Furs at summer prices," said Harding's catalogue, "splendid skins. Buy now, before the winter rush."

There were pictures. Exquisite women, eight feet every one, coquettled with the "splendid skins." They looked at you with archness over furry shoulders.

The coat and skirt, the natural mate and follower of the blouse, was now the rage. I looked upon black satin coats and skirts, with cream lace blouses, silky furs, and picture hats with soft white feathers tipped with black, until I fell. The thought of Thursday drew me to the catalogue. The catalogue then pushed me into Harding's. Harding's absorbed me for two hours, and then expelled me, radiant but half remorseful, with all the black and white sweet fripperies, including white kid gloves and a becoming white lace veil, packed for the sending, to be "delivered before Thursday without fail."

Then Thursday came—and there was Joe at home with sharp lumbago!

Of all the *contretemps*—or was it Providence?

I was torn between my pity for the groaning invalid, my frantic irritation with the stars that had made him groan that day for the first time in our acquaintance, and my sheer terror at a linseed poultice—for that old-fashioned remedy, hall-mark of the respectable housewife, was Joe's fixed idea.

We had been brought up with a certain striking simplicity in the medicinal line, which was, to put it briefly, the principle of no medicine. "Lie down or go out for a walk" was my father's recipe for all incipient ills, and, I must admit, they remained incipient always. Hessie and I had tramped off colds and "throats" and slept off pains and headaches all our lives. And now a linseed-poultice—the sort of thing that one had always heard of, like agricultural depression or trouble in the Balkans—was to materialise under my eyes; under, too, my most incompetent supervision.

I kept talking with much animation on a variety of subjects, hoping to get Joe interested. If I could draw him into argument he would forget his linseed and possibly his lumbago. All would be well again and (I was optimistic here beyond my real hopes) I still could tea at the Marlborough Club and meet Clive-Somers (and, of course, his wife).

But lumbago was sharper than my sharpened tongue. Joe groaned a little louder.

"Could Gwendolen just buy a little linseed?" he inquired pathetically.

"Of course!" I said, in best domestic manner. "I was just going to send her."

"How much linseed should I get, M'm, please, M'm?" inquired Gwendolen.

"I should think about three shillings' worth," I said, as to the manner born.

Gwendolen staggered back under a load of linseed that would have poulticed a horse every day for a month. It looked a little more than we should need, Joe assuring me that the agonizing area occupied a square the size of half a playing-card.

"A basin, Gwendolen," I said, as one having authority, "*and* hot water!"

Gwendolen brought forth both, and a clean handkerchief of Joe's.

"Now!" I remarked in a cheerful surgical manner.

I plunged the linseed into boiling water. So far, all went as merry as a marriage-bell. I tried to take it out again. . . . Sucking my scalded fingers, I demanded a tablespoon.

I then ladled out some dripping linseed on to the spotless handkerchief. The handkerchief, soaked through, presented a dismally wet appearance. I approached Joe with it, but he shrank before me.

"It'll make me in a horrid mess, darling. Ought it to be so wet?"

"Oh, no, I'm going to wring it out!"

I wrung it out. The handkerchief and I at once became a revolting mass of oil.

"I had no idea the old man had so much blood in

him," I murmured, which served my purpose by making Joe laugh in spite of his half-playing-card.

Gwendolen, who had been hovering, now interposed in pity.

"Mother doesn't use s'much *water*," she said. "Mother puts in just a little seed and only m'istens it, like. She doesn't use s'much *water*."

"Just fetch me another handkerchief," I said, listening with much avidity, but with an irritated air of "Will the child kill me with her innocent talk?"

Gwendolen returned. A little seed was "m'istened" in a little water and ladled into the second handkerchief. Gwendolen reluctantly retired at the dictates of modesty; and Joe was poulticed most triumphantly.

"There's nothing easier," I said. "I quite forgot one ought to use less water."

Joe twinkled and stopped groaning.

"Do you feel lovely now?" I asked deceitfully.

"Quite, for the moment."

"I wonder if I could send a wire!"

"Who to?" said Joe. Few literary men talk grammar. They keep it all for writing.

"Mrs. Clive-Somers," I replied with light indifference. "She wanted me to tea at the Marlborough to-day."

"What do you know of the Clive-Somers?" inquired Joe, much astonished.

"Oh, they were there the other day—at Mrs. Lester's. Didn't I tell you?"

"Clive-Somers has been awfully good to Jim. I'm always hearing of him. His father-in-law, old Lord

Strathcowan, may buy that Scotch review I told you of. We all are keen to know Clive-Somers! I met him once — nice looking fellow. Don't suppose he'd remember me. By-the-way, I hope you didn't call her *Mrs.* Clive-Somers."

"No, I didn't," I said truthfully, "but why?"

"Because she's Lady Alice. The old man's a belted Earl."

"Oh . . ." I digested this. "I think I'll only put 'Clive-Somers' on the wire."

"Why wire at all? You'd better go."

"Oh, Welkin! with you moaning on a bed of pain!"

"My dear child, '*you* needn't sit at home and have it, too!' as you yourself remarked on a historic occasion!"

"Oh, do you think you'd really manage? I'd be very quick." My heart beat high and fast.

"Of course I should. It's nearly four. You'd better dress."

I hugged him with repressed remorse and joy and fled up to my room. Black satin coat and skirt and white lace blouse, black silky furs and snowy gloves, the big black hat with long white feathers tipped with black, neat patent, high-heeled shoes, and black silk stockings; then the new lace veil and a complete effect that looked like Paris — so I hoped. I tried it on the Welkin.

"Shall I do?" I asked; and felt a foul betrayer at his answer.

A humble 'bus to Piccadilly. Then a saunter up the pavement. One was early. Also, it was some satisfac-

tion to test the quality of people's glances. . . . A spray of lilies-of-the-valley, 'bought at Isaacs', completed my self-confidence.

"Mr. Clive-Somers, *please!*!" intoned the Marlborough page.

A tall form rose from a sequestered corner lit by shaded lamps.

"How nice of you!" Clive-Somers said.

I cast a glance at the small table, set with pretty cups. Yes, there were three. I hardly knew if that were well or not.

"I half expect my wife—but only half," he said, interpreting the glance. "She wants to come and hopes to—but we're not to wait. Now, what shall we have for tea?"

"Bread and butter?" I recited, "toast, tea-cakes, biscuits, cake or chocolate wafers?"

"Poor Mrs. Lester!" We both laughed. Then came enchanted food, and quite enchanted hours, for it was nearly seven before I jumped up abruptly.

"What is the matter? You're not going yet?"

"'Yet?' It's three hours since I came! and I have a lumbago-man at home."

"What's a lumbago-man? A sort of lumber-man? And why do you measure your life by the clock?"

"I don't. At least, I do. We all do. It's my husband."

"The clock is your husband?"

"The lumbago-man. He has lumbago."

"Poor man, how wretched! Tell him I know it well.

And have I kept his ministering angel all this time? I'm sorry. At least, I ought to be!"

"So ought I!" He smiled, pleased at my implication.

"Have you ever seen the Temple?" he asked abruptly, holding my hand a moment as we stood saying good-bye.

"Never the inside; no."

"I have some chambers there. I'd like to show you round. When do you think you could tea with me there? Next Monday? Do!"

There was a faint half-hidden eagerness this time. His eyes were shining and his hand on mine tightened, but very slightly.

I hesitated — and was lost.

"Thank you. I'd like to," I replied in rather off-hand tones and went home in a whirl of many thoughts.

"Well, what was Lady Alice like?" asked Joe. "They say she's rather beauteous."

It saddened me to hear it: but I had to carry off the situation.

"Oh, she *never* came!" I said, with disappointment writ upon me; "it was sickening! I might just as well have stayed and scalded both of us!"

"Poor little thing! What did you do, then?"

"Oh, just waited. He was there — her husband — and he talked and gave me tea. I waited till the last minute. He was rather vexed, I think. I hope I didn't show too much that *I* was!"

This was protesting just a shade too much. I had for-

gotten that Joe knew Clive-Somers; and knew me.

"I fancy you bore up," he said, with dryness.

"Oh, he's very nice! but I wanted to get to know her — better," I added hastily, and hoped that I should meet the lady before Joe discovered that I had not done so yet.

I went upstairs to take off my fine feathers, and sat upon my bed and tried to think.

Still not a word had passed between us that approached love-making. But who needs words when any words will do? When nearness is a thrill and tones can thrill and every moment is a thrill? I knew by this time that the primrose path was dangerous. This was no negligible Ida. What I did not know and would not have believed, was the extent of the danger.

I hated having virtually lied to Joe.

"Doesn't that show," said Conscience, "that the thing is wrong from first to last?"

"But I would gladly tell the truth — if he would understand."

"Understand what? That you could leave him when he was in pain because you were quite wild to get away and see another man? That you could run up bills for finery so that another man should like to look at you . . . ?"

But Conscience blundered here. She set me thinking of those looks. How they had dwelt upon my eyes, my hair, my lips when I was talking, each movement of my hand! How I had felt them, like a fiery touch, that yet was soothing, too!

I pulled myself together.

"This is simply silly and disgraceful," I remarked to my reflection in the glass. "Go down and scald your own beloved Welkin; and write and say you cannot come on Monday."

I then remembered with relief that this extreme of virtue was impracticable, since I did not know an address beyond the Marlborough Club, where correspondence might be dangerously accessible to the beauteous Lady Alice. However, Joe should be well poulticed—and he was, until he howled to be neglected.

CHAPTER XXV

M^ONDAY morning came, and with it a small note that said, "If the outside steps of the Temple Station suit you as a rendezvous, shall we meet there? It might puzzle you to find my Chambers by yourself. By the way, I expect the Temple is 'no treat' to your husband: but if he *should* care to come, we shall be delighted to show him round as well."

The last sentence puzzled and disturbed me. Then it occurred to me that Clive-Somers was being prudent, in case I shared my correspondence with my spouse. I decided to ignore the tardy inclusion of Joe, and to consider the "we" a royal plural.

So, of course, it proved.

Joe had recovered from lumbago. Sun poured upon the street and justified white feathers. Frost tinged the air with freshness, justifying furs. I found myself too early at the Temple stairs. Here was humiliation! I retreated to the bottom of the inside steps and loitered so suspiciously that I had some trouble in convincing sundry authorities that I had really given up a ticket.

Half-past four at last! I loitered till a train came in, to give a colour to my coming — then leisurely went up the outer steps. There stood Clive-Somers, still with that smothered eagerness about him that gave my senses a warning that my brain would not accept.

"That's right," he said, and took my hand disarmingly, with simple friendliness. A certain panic passed from me as we turned through the charming Temple ways. He talked, and showed me things: and when I mounted to his eyrie, the many doors with names upon them reassured me, counteracting the sweet peril of solitude.

"Here's the little den!" he said; "it's not so bad when once you get there, is it?"

"It's the loveliest room I've ever seen!" I naively exclaimed.

It certainly was charming. Walls and carpet were a dim grey-green. The curtains, chairs, and sofa were of deep old-rose — a dark and faded tint, with lovely dusky pinks that were half orange in it. The drawings and the autotypes upon the walls were framed alike in narrow black. Black satin cushions lay about; and a floor cushion by the fire was black.

"The fire is only gas," Clive-Somers said, "but I don't think you'll get a headache. It's a kind that hasn't many fumes."

An old teak table, low and spread with lace, stood by the fire. A tall green jar of hot-house roses stood upon it, and some dainty cups and silver.

He wheeled a lounge chair forward.

"Now we'll be cosy! Shall I make the tea? The kettle's boiling. I've been here since lunch."

He made the tea as deftly as my cousin. A memory of that quaint encounter crossed my mind.

"That was nothing to this. Be careful," said my senses.

But they seemed, as time went on, to have no cause to warn me. I half resented my security. My host talked on of many things. Whenever we were talking, everything seemed safe and rather flat. There was, for once, no sense of pleasant undercurrents. . . . One might have thought, who heard us, that both were playing for safety. When a pause fell, I always grew alarmed and broke it.

Talk at last grew forced and I fell silent. Desperately I searched for topics. All the thrill of talking to this man had left me. He had withdrawn—switched off the magnetism. I felt cold, and almost ready for tears. The strain and the reaction had been great.

Then he looked steadily at me. I felt his eyes. There was no serpent fascination there. Their overpowering force was purely male.

“Don’t!” broke involuntarily from me.

“Don’t what?” he answered softly, kneeling down by me.

I did not speak, but looked up in his changing eyes. A look came into them—a sort of spark—that I had never seen before. Here was the real enemy, that no feeble Phillies or half-playful Rolies had prepared me for, any more than familiarity with a collie prepares a child to meet a wolf. I tried to rise from my low chair, but strong arms closed tight round me.

I loved my husband—more than loved him. I had only seen Clive-Somers twice before. Yet I was on fire with longing for his kiss, with full instinctive knowledge (I know now) of much that it might mean.

He gathered me close—closer—kept me waiting: then kissed me, kissed me . . .

“ You belong to me, you sun-child. I swore you should. *Do* you belong to me?”

“ No; let me go!”

“ Let you go!” He laughed a little.

“ Do you want to go?” he whispered.

“ Yes.”

“ Now do you?” He held me to his heart. Its beats poured fire into my veins.

“ Do you?”

“ No.”

His arms began to tremble and his voice grew hoarse.

“ You beautiful . . . You darling! Kiss me . . .”

An urgent double knock sounded upon the outer door. Clive-Somers started up.

“ A telegram,” he said disgustedly; “ I must just take it, sweet.”

A cool, familiar voice asked calmly, “ Is Mrs. Wilks with you?”

Mollie. Good God! I sat up, and with trembling fingers put my hat on straighter, feverishly drew on one of my gloves and poured myself out more tea.

Mollie came in.

“ You’ve quite forgotten that I promised to fetch you,” she said, and kissed me coolly. “ I’m afraid I must take her straight away, Mr. Clive-Somers. We’ve no more time to lose. She’s coming out with me to-night, and we must dress.”

“ You know each other?” I said stupidly.

"Yes, we know each other," Mollie said. She looked straight at my host with her direct clear eyes. He looked back in no hang-dog way, but with a full confession in his own.

"Yes, you know me. Do not judge me," the look said.

"Don't see us out," said Mollie with abruptness. She did not seem to see his hand. I too was slipping out in shamefaced schoolgirl fashion; but he stopped me and determinedly took my hand in his. He held it in a reassuring way that somehow gave me back normality.

"I shall write to you if I may," he said quite openly, "good-bye."

"Mollie! It's like a story book! How did you know? What brought you there — just then?"

"It *was* 'just then'? I thought so! . . . Are you too cold to sit a little on the Embankment?"

"No, no." We sat. "*How* did you know?"

"Well, first of all, you make a bad *intrigante*. This was on your dressing-table, open. I knew the hand, only too well — and I deliberately read it."

"How did you know his rooms?"

"I have been there before — to meet his wife. She didn't come."

"Why did you follow me?"

"Because I had been there — before . . . Olive, what mad foolery are you going to play with next? That man is one of the few really dangerous men I have ever met. Most men called dangerous are not, except to fools. You must needs hit upon the one who is."

"I know. I believe I knew all along, and that was

half the charm. It's no good, Mollie! I'm a beast. And Joe considers me a saint. It's really quite a farcical position."

"Nonsense, you're not a beast. You're considerably more innocent than you imagine, as a matter of fact!" said Mollie surprisingly. "But you're an idiot to play with fire. Do you love Joe or don't you?"

"I fancy I have some faint regard for Joe."

"Well, then, give up all this excitement business for his sake. You'll spoil the real thing for both of you."

"Joe has had his — distractions."

"Joe can take care of himself. You can't. Besides, if I talked to him, I'd say the same. You may know that milk is better than absinthe — but absinthe may make you disinclined for milk. It's an insipid comparison — but you quite understand!"

"Of course. I know. You're a little Solomon, Mollie. But, in cold blood, one's Solomon oneself, you see!"

"Well, keep your silly blood cold, then! Don't put it on the hob! 'Lead me into temptation but deliver me from evil' appears to be your motto."

"I believe it is! You're right, of course. I'll keep away from — things. But I was not prepared — at first."

"Of course you weren't! You look upon yourself as a sort of interesting *grande amoureuse* with an irresistible temperament. You're not. You get it out of novels. You've had no experience. The realities of 'great amorousness' would soon disgust you. Your Philly per-

son couldn't teach you anything — and Joe wouldn't. You're curious, that's all: and so you go too near, when any normal woman would get burnt. You're not cold-blooded. I don't mean that you are!"

I pondered all this information, rather ruefully, with secret reservations, but with the burning interest that one gives to all analyses of one's important self.

"You may be right," I said, "but — Mollie! *grande amoureuse* or *petit âne*, I could do with a bit more world and flesh and devil, you know!"

"So could I!" said Mollie unexpectedly. It struck me suddenly that Mollie was still young — quite young as married women went in London, even then. It struck me, too, how bare her life had been.

"I am an egoistic beast!" I said; "I'm not fit to touch the hem of your macintosh, Mollie, lamb. But I'll really try."

"Do, dear!" said Mollie softly. "You don't know what you've got. Not every marriage is like yours and Joe's. You don't know half how rare it is. *Don't* go and spoil it!"

"I won't. I really won't. Oh, Mollie, you did save me! Think of Joe. A man I hardly knew . . ."

"Put all away. It's part of the petty dust," said Mollie. "We'll go home."

Joe met us on the threshold.

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!" he said, "there's news!"

"What sort of news?"

"Eldorado news. Great news. Positions! Fame! Wealth beyond the dreams of avarice."

"Tell us at once!"

"Assistant-editorship. Likelihood of eventual editorship. Best evening paper. Five hundred a year. Extra work, say two."

"Oh, *Welkin!*" We all hugged each other and hugged Little Joe, and danced an indecorous Eastern dance of triumph. I suddenly caught Mollie's eye. I knew what it implied.

"You might have slunk home, guilty and ashamed, to find this happiness."

"*Deo gratias!*" I said fervently, within my heart.

I could not wait for Clive-Somers to write. I wrote to him first.

"I must just tell you this," I put; "it was wickeder of me than any one, because I care so for my husband."

His letter did not cross mine, as I feared, but answered it.

"Sun-child," he wrote, "I understand, and ask you to forgive me. If you could see your own sweet eyes you would. 'A touch of the sun,' that's all. Life will be warmer for it. As you have told me—what you have told me—I will tell you something, too. My wife is sun and moon and stars to me: but men are—what a sun-child does not know. Forgive me if you can. 'And if we meet at any time again' (say, on the Mountains of the Moon) let me just kiss your pretty hand—not for remembrance: for forgetfulness."

I could not hate him after all: and he had taught me much.



"What luck! What *luck!*!" Joe kept repeating, all day long.

"I call it the reward of modest merit."

"Merit! Good heavens! Not much merit about me! You have to do the merit-business in this happy home. Doesn't she, Incubus?" Incubus was his only child.

"Welkin," I said, with desperation, "don't say that—or think it. I'm a despicable character. I mean it. I don't show it to you much because it would break you up. But, before God, I am . . .! I'm in debt, for one thing."

"Are you? Well, that's queer! For I am too! We can both manage, with this blessed rise."

"Then . . . you know when Mrs. Liston was so ill, and you said you hoped she'd die and leave us things?"

"Yes, I remember. But don't rub it in. I know it shocked you."

"Well, it didn't. I wanted her to—very much!"

"Did you? *Abservo te.* Now she may live, poor soul!"

"I'm eaten up with vanity." I was cautiously feeling my way to semi-revelation. The selfish relief of full confession was out of the question. It would injure too many of us.

"Quite right, too! I'd be vain like a shot if I were the beauteous Mrs. Joseph Wilks, with a gifted husband and such nice soft eyes!"

Joe was intoxicated with frivolous exaltation over his assistant editorship. I felt it to be now or never: and reluctantly decided for "never."

"It's no good. He must have his pretty lie!" I said to Mollie.

"Make it a lovely truth!" said Mollie. "Yes, you can."

"I'll try. I swear I'll try; my wild oats are all sown." Mollie forestalled a twentieth century wit.

"Be thankful they were only garden oats," she said.

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